

25 YEARS

Highfields Church cardiff



Highfields - 25 Years Old

The Story of Highfields from the Beginning

"Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations" - Psalm 90 v.1 "To God be the glory, great things he has done"

On Sunday evening the 29th of December 1985 some fifty folk squeezed into Margaret and Dorothy Jones' (both of who have now gone to glory) home for a simple service. Both the living room and dining room doors were lifted from their hinges to extend the accommodation which included the hall and stairs. Peter Gray (a former Elder also now in glory!) spoke from the hall and gave a short address on the word 'kept'. We could be described as 'shell shocked' after traumatic events leading to leaving Heath Evangelical Church. We did not move out to start a new work, but this by God's grace is what eventually happened as we prayed our way forward. Early meetings moved at an unbelievable pace and we were almost carried along by them. The following diary illustrates this.

29-12-85 Sunday evening service. Dorothy and Margaret Jones' home, 50 present, Peter Gray speaking. His theme was 'kept' and his words were prophetic - the Lord did indeed keep and bless us over the years.

30-12-85 Monday evening meeting. Peter and Marion Gray's home, 70 present.

31-12-85 Watchnight service at Glen Thomas' home in Cathays, Hefin Elias speaking.

05-01-86 First Sunday evening service in the University Hospital of Wales chapel.

06-01-86 Monday evening - a further meeting of 78 in Peter and Marion's home at which a resolution was passed unanimously by those present 'that the previous elders and deacons with us had the confidence and full support of the people to lead a new church work'.

08-01-86 Home bible study groups held at 4 locations.

09-01-86 First meeting of leaders.

12-01-86 First Sunday morning service was held in Highfields Centre with the evening service in the hospital chapel.

15-01-86 Men & Ladies Bible Studies

By 27-01-86, there was a congregation of about 100 with morning/evening services, monthly church meetings at Highfields Centre, home groups, young people meeting on Saturday evenings, Wednesday morning bible studies, and missionary prayer meetings on Monday mornings.

31-01-86 First fellowship meeting in Highfields Centre - at which the church was named 'Highfields Free Church'.

In early February 1986, finance and missionary committees were formed.

During April 1986, a draft constitution had been developed, charitable status obtained, and covenanted giving established.

From June '86 both morning and evening services were held at Highfields Centre.

So the church structure with the appointment of previous elders and deacons to lead the work was established on 6th January 1986. It was wonderful that the Sunday services in the hospital

chapel were also attended by patients, brought by us from the various wards, and there was almost a sense of sadness when both services were eventually moved to the Highfields Centre six months later.

It was a time in which the love and care shown, one to another, was quite extraordinary. Several of the original members have subsequently commented on the exceptional warmth of the fellowship at this time - there was a great sense of freedom and joy which attracted others. The Family was small and age was no barrier, so we did many things together, all ages - fellowship meals, bank holiday walks, weekends away including Pembrokeshire and Lindors in the Wye Valley.



Our activities were not divorced from the 'clients' of the Highfields Centre. A weekly Bible study was held for them and some were brought to our evening services from time to time - which for one person involved a round trip to Barry.

In September 1986, we began supporting Phil Jenkins, Liz Gwyther-Jones (now Liz Chalmers) and Anthony Gwyther-Jones (Liz's father) at Bible College. Phil and Liz eventually became missionaries and Anthony pastored churches in

Nailsea and Swansea.

At a Covenant Service on 30th September 1986, we recognised a members list of about 100, and were formally constituted as a church. An election of elders took place immediately afterwards in October 1986, resulting in the election of 5 Elders - Reg Hayes, Peter Gray, Adrian Evans, Hefin Elias and Elfed Harry.

Also in October 1986, 9 deacons were elected, 2 church pastoral workers and a pastoral coordinator.

During October 1986, one member wrote an appreciative letter to the Elders which included "... you committed yourselves to what is now obviously a miracle but in January was the aftermath of a disaster. God has been with us ..." Those were the unanimous sentiments at that time as we experienced the wonderful grace and goodness of God early on.

We rejoiced as Elaine Pike became the first convert in Highfields.

Early in 1987, we were considering church planting at Danescourt and began holding Sunday services for the Cartref residential home.

After the 20 months, in August 1987, Geraint Fielder was called to join Hefin Elias in the preaching ministry, as a fellow preaching elder. He and Mary thus became members at that time. We had experienced at an early stage the distinction between a church and a church building. The body of believers, the church, grew steadily but we continued with no building of our own,

even though we considered various potential properties, such as at Monthermer Road (just offered to rent Pierce Hall in a run-down state!), Aberdulais Crescent and Roath Park Methodist Church. Whilst keeping an eye out for buildings, we also looked outwards, with missionary zeal both locally and overseas. Church planting was considered at Danescourt, Thornhill and North Pentwyn.

Phil Jenkins studied Theology at Oxford University and graduated in 1988. He was considering working with AIM (Africa Inland Mission) but meanwhile did supply teaching and worked in the church part time amongst students - our first student worker! He joined the Pastoral Team in January 1989. In February 1989, Rachel Jenkins was baptized as an infant.

In June 1989, we commissioned for missionary service Elaine Pike and Linda Cole. Elaine and Linda worked with UCCF amongst students.

Phil Jenkins was inducted for service on 25th November 1989 and, with Cathie, sent as mission partners to serve with AIM in Namibia.

In May 1991, the church voted to proceed with the Thornhill Church plant and for the appointment of David Pepper as an assistant to the Ministry Team and working part time with the Thornhill plant. We still, of course have connections with David who is Director of Friends International. Adrian Evans (with Edwina) committed as an Elder to help with Thornhill and left Highfields.

We began discussions with Minster Church in 1992 who were keen to have links or perhaps merger with us, but this proceeded slowly as Hefin Elias felt led to stand down as an Elder. Trevor Evans and Tony Cort were elected as Elders in November 1992, so that the then Elders were Peter Gray, Geraint Fielder, Trevor Evans and Tony Cort. In July 1993, Rev Trevor Burke was appointed as a church worker to provide temporary assistance to the Ministry Team. In Autumn 1993, Peter Gray went to be with the Lord and Geraint Fielder sadly became ill, so the leadership of the church fell to Trevor and Tony assisted by Trevor Burke. We quickly recognised the need for a full-time worker but who would deign to join us with a diminished leadership? We had three months of significant activity, with a questionnaire to members, and searching for a person with appropriate leadership qualities. Early in 1994, we were led to write to Peter Baker tentatively enquiring whether he could be open to considering a call from the church. There followed numerous meetings and discussions and in the summer of 1994, the church unanimously voted in support of Peters appointment. He was inducted in October 1994. How amazing that Peter should move from a church of some 300-400 at Romford to Highfields, but such was the amazing call and leading of our God.



The church grew wonderfully under Peter's ministry and, commensurate with this during 1995, a change in the management at Highfields Centre made matters more difficult with increases in rent, and other issues. Consequently we began to look at various sites, including allotment land at Highfield Road plus Presbyterian Churches at Monthermer Road and Plasnewydd. We wrote to the lawyers for the denomination but there was no response!

John Kendal (now at Minster and lecturer at WEST) became an Elder and church worker responsible for pastoral, small groups and training in October 1995. At the same time, we set up an office at Minster Church and in November 1995, we set up a Project Team to consider premises.

In the early years of the church, with a relatively small expenditure on buildings we were able to devote over seventy percent of our income to support full time Christian workers both for their training and overseas missionary work. At one time we supported 14 such people from a membership of about 100. This historical position partly explains the high level of missionary support which continues in our church.

We might be forgiven for thinking that the focus on the need for our own buildings arrived with Peter Baker in 1994!! Peter, in early correspondence prior to his call to Highfields, wrote "...the current premises (referring to Highfields Centre in Allensbank Road) offer little room for anything but Sunday Services, but a real church (a ministry not a building) should be offering facilities on the same site for all its other activities plus outreach events ... Any congregation needs a place to call its own ..." He went on, "Certainly, multi-purpose, userfriendly buildings are the shape of things to come for a church that wants to be taken seriously by people today." That was in February 1994.

However, as indicated above, as early as February 1987, we began looking at available plots of land and disused churches. Various options were explored from time to time, including Monthermer Road, although the Presbyterian Church was only offering us the use of Pierce Hall on a hire basis - and it didn't even have lighting and heating! We had special prayer meetings in May 1992 seeking God's will regarding future buildings.

So we told Peter, in response to his missive, that we hadn't exactly done nothing as regards buildings, but that we were open to the Lord's leading. Peter joined us in November 1994. Within a year the congregation had risen to well over 200. Highfields Centre was no longer possible - we had outgrown it!

On 5th December 1995, we were advised by Highfields Centre that the fire limit was 200 but that 150 was preferred. We had by that time grown to congregations of about 230 and we had to try to limit numbers during the period leading up to Christmas, whilst seeking alternative accommodation. For a whole year we moved about the city, rather like nomads, pitching our tent in many different places. We hired halls in different parts of the Cyncoed/Penylan area, for our Sunday services, yet despite these precarious arrangements we continued to attract increasing numbers before eventually moving into the Monthermer Road buildings in 1997.

Almost simultaneously, in December 1995, and in God's providence, we were approached by the Presbyterian Church of Wales Denomination and asked if we would be interested in purchasing the buildings at Monthermer Road (Cathays Presbyterian Church of Wales). Subsequently, we negotiated the purchase of the Monthermer Road site for £80,000 payable over 5 years. It was a remarkable provision at just the right time, but we had to wait until December 1996 to exchange contracts because of problems of occupation by the sitting tenants of House No. 16. It is fair to say that some of us found the wait frustratingly difficult. Some too were unsure of the rightness of the proposal to buy such derelict, run down, and pigeon-infested buildings.

Meanwhile, having left Highfields Centre at the end of December 1995, we relocated to Cardiff High School. Almost immediately we had to move on - to Howardian Centre - and later from there to UWIC Cyncoed and UWIC Colchester Avenue. We also used UWIC Western Avenue on a couple of occasions and also the Roath Park Community Centre - we have never been a church to stand still and 1996 certainly epitomised that!!



Refurbishing the Monthermer Road buildings started in January 1997. The church buildings essentially comprised a hall, and a chapel, together with two connecting houses positioned between them. In the providence of God as it turned out, the year's delay in occupation, whilst hard to bear at the time being constantly on the move, did give us time to plan and work out what needed to be done to allow us to initially occupy the premises for Sunday worship etc. This

involved doing up the hall, new windows, new heating and electrics, new kitchen and new toilet block, plus a disabled toilet, all costing about £120,000. Much of the work was done by volunteer workparties for which many gave sacrificially of their time. We called this Phase 1. We held our first service on 6 June 1997 - a memorable occasion.



Once in, the Project Team considered various options for the remainder of the premises, and we had church meetings to discuss these options before deciding on the way ahead. The result of the planning and the construction is what you see today. The phased building work was as follows:

- Phase 2 - Commenced in November 1999 and completed in August 2000 by Turner Construction at a cost of £330,000. This involved constructing a floor at first floor level in the old Crwys Hall chapel with rooms downstairs, and refurbishment of the GF Room including first floor fire stairs and a baptistry upstairs.
- Phase 3 - This had to wait for completion of Phase 2. Until Phase 2 was completed, the houses were used for Sunday School etc. So when complete, the rooms in Phase 2 could be used for Sunday School and the houses vacated. Phase 3 saw their demolition and construction of the new foyer block. Work commenced in November 2001 and was completed in July 2002 - by Mitre Construction at a cost of around £250,000.
- Phase 4 - Simultaneously with Phase 3 was the refurbishment of the upstairs chapel, mostly done by volunteer members and friends, except for the electrics and heating work. The



work was timed to be completed at the same time as Phase 3 and our first Sunday service was held on 14 July 2002. The cost was in the region of £80,000

- Phase 5 - This phase involved the demolition of the Pierce Hall balcony and construction of the coffee lounge and small kitchen, with office and storeroom beneath. The work was carried on immediately after Phase 3, also by Mitre Construction with whom we had developed a close working relationship. The cost was around £100,000.
- Phase 6 - Work has been carried out recently (2003) by Capitol Stone to clean and repair the stonework and brickwork together with installing spikes to keep the pigeons away. This cost about £15,000.
- Subsequently, we added Simon's office in the stairwell making use of wasted space.

We give praise for the way the Lord has graciously provided for our financial needs in our near £1m building development.

- For the generous and sacrificial giving of members and friends.
- For the grants received from various trusts and bodies, especially £145,000 from Biffa through the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme.
- For professional gifts within the church that enabled us to carry out the design work and contract administration ourselves.

We also saw the providence of God during the construction of phase 2, a time when our faith was to be put to the test. In April 2000, about half way through the Phase 2 contract, we received a visit by the planning enforcement office of the Local Authority, who told us that the work had to stop because the building had been listed by Cadw. In fact, it had been listed



2 days before, but the details of the listing were by this time out-of-date since the inside of the hall had been gutted of all ornamental and historical items! After some negotiation, we were told that we could carry on inside but not to change anything outside. New windows were on order but it seemed that these would be redundant. This listing had serious implications for the remainder of the development as planned because it placed in jeopardy the construction of the foyer.

Was God's work to be thwarted by man? The church was called to prayer - to pray for 'unlisting', even though this was never heard of and was asking for the seemingly impossible. But with God all things are possible. Eventually, some 6 weeks later at the end of May, a meeting/inspection was arranged with Cadw (with the help of Councillors and Assembly Members) - within one hour of the meeting, we were phoned and advised that the building had been un-listed. We were free to complete Phase 2 as planned and to proceed with the remainder of the development. To God be the glory - He had answered our prayers with a miracle.

It is truly an amazing story of God's faithfulness, evidenced by spiritual and numerical growth, in a work which at its inception was never envisaged or planned. We were simply led by God from one step to the next. As the buildings were refurbished and developed, so we grew to fill them!

Since the completion of our wonderful buildings in 2003, we have not exactly stood still! Numerically, we have grown even more and moved from one morning service to two. We have managed to help Minster and Llanishen churches to get back on their feet, and planted a church at Trevethin, Pontypool with Dai & Michelle Hankey. We have become a 24/7 church with activities in the buildings at all times of day and almost night! The building refurbishment was designed so that each space was multi functional and could be used for different purposes and used in and for the community. Consequently we have, since 2003, been able to focus on outreaching to the community around us. We have had the Blood Transfusion Service with us (one lady eventually becoming a Christian after first coming in to give blood, seeing a Christianity Explored poster and coming along), birthday parties held by local residents, music concerts,



use as a polling station, holiday bible clubs for children etc. etc. In terms of community outreach, we have for a few years contributed to a 'paradise run' for providing food/clothing for the homeless and showing the love of Christ to the disadvantaged in the city.

The Dalton Street lunch club is a relatively recent initiative, presented to us by the local authority which owns a community building just along the road from the church and which has invited us to be responsible for it over a 3 year period. We employ 3 ladies who are responsible for the provision of lunches, mostly for the elderly in the area. It has been a joy to see this ministry develop and grow and provide opportunities for Gospel witness.

The staff profile has steadily increased since the appointment of Peter Baker, so that now we employ 3 ministers as preaching elders, a children/schools worker, a youth worker, a student worker, office manager, and 2 caretakers. In addition we have been running a Ministry Apprentice (MA) training programme for those seeking to know the Lord's will for their lives, and currently we are employing two MAs.

We have also developed the Network Training Course, held on Tuesdays, for those considering future Christian ministry - Phil Jenkins has been responsible for this since its inception a few years ago.

Mission, including cross cultural mission has been a priority and strength of the church ever since we sent several missionaries to the 'fields' early in the life of the church. Currently we are supporting 5 units (married couples and singles) cross culturally and 5 units working in the UK, including workers with UCCF, Christian Medical Fellowship, and Navigators.

At home, the ministry amongst international students has developed through Rowland Hughes (working with Friends International) and a large volunteer team. We praise God for the internationals who have come to know the Lord through this work.

In the words of Joseph Hart, "We'll praise Him for all that is past, and trust Him for all that's to come." Now, unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. (Jude 1:24, 25).