

1998 – 2023

2023 is 150 years since the start of what is currently called Cliff Walk Church, officially Canning Town Evangelical Church. At the occasions of the 100th and 125th anniversaries, leaflets were produced to record something of God's work over the intervening years and this account looks back over the past 25 years (1998 to 2023) for that purpose.

Church wide issues

1999/2000 - Church members played an active part in a Newham-wide Christian celebration event to welcome in the new millennium under the heading "The Gathering".

2001 – Rev. Carl Palmer moved on to another church and so the church was led on an interim basis by a team of elected leaders, organised by Trevor Matthews, UEC Associate Minister. Bert Matthews, a previous Leading Minister, was called home by Jesus a few months before Carl left.

2001 - A midweek prayer gathering in a home in Portuguese had grown to the point the church decided to start a Sunday evening service in Portuguese.

2001 - Bill and Glenice MacMillan the missionaries we had supported for many years retired from Brazil and came to live in Canning Town, thereby being able to assist the Portuguese speaking work.

2004 – The church employed Wellington Robson, a Brazilian minister, with particular responsibility for developing the Portuguese speaking ministry.

2004 - The church leadership was reorganised so that leaders had particular responsibility for one of the 5 purposes of the church: worship, discipleship, fellowship, service and evangelism.

2006 – Rev. Jonathan Findlay was appointed as the Leading Minister to the church, having previously been a missionary in Africa and pastored a church in the Midlands.

2008 – Wellington Robson moved on from the church as it stated its commitment to continuing as one fellowship with one leadership and programme, showing each other and the world our unity in diversity.

2015 - Jonathan Findlay left the church. Leandro Merigio was appointed Pastor having been employed as church worker since 2014. In 2016 he commenced theological training at London School of Theology and was subsequently appointed a UEC Minister. The church has continued to elect on a 3 year cycle one leadership team drawn from both language groups.

2022 – Trevor Matthews retired from being part of the leadership, having served on it for 47 years.

The premises have been improved bit by bit with physical disability access and facilities added and improved heating and seating; a monitored alarm system has been installed but never required in earnest – although there have been a few false alarms. God continues to provide through the faithful giving of his people the finances to support the work.

Now let's look in more detail at areas of church life.

Worship

We have been blessed by this ministry being anchored by Steve Bond who over the past 25 years has trained many guitarists, young and not so young. So our worship times are led by different musicians using a range of songs from “old hymns” to ever changing new songs, rooted in God’s Word. Technology now has its own small “room” at the back of the chapel to support our worship and to enable live streaming of Sunday services so that those who cannot attend or are away can join with us. 2 or 3 times a year we swop our worship groups so that the evening group of Portuguese speakers leads the morning worship and the English speakers lead the evening. Just a foretaste of what heaven is going to be like.

Evangelism

Over the years we have used the building for a range of activities aimed at local people. As with all activities, it’s been important to review and sometimes stop those that are no longer serving their purpose. So at times we have run a Saturday cafe, carers and toddlers group, Christmas parties, Easter egg hunt and hosting homeless people overnight. Our twice yearly distribution of 30 tons of potatoes and carrots ended in 2008 but we now collect food for a local church based foodbank. We love doing things outdoors for the community so for most if not all of the last 25 years we have run BBQs and fun days, sung Christmas carols, and offered food, drink and prayer on the nearby street corners. Sunday services have been held outside, usually in the summer, but including at Christmas when we once hired a donkey to lead a procession and at Easter when we have acted out the Easter story in -2C. We enjoy inviting local groups to use the premises but always have church members present to shine the light of Christ. So over the years, community nurses, police, tenants associations etc have experienced our hospitality. In 2022, a film company used the church as their base to film a SpecSavers TV advert in Trinity Gardens.

Discipleship

We praise God that we have seen a steady stream of people being baptised, a mixture of people who have grown up in the church or come to faith through the witness of the church.

Each year we have a Bible verse and theme that are the focus of the preaching morning and evening, aimed at growing Christlike character and behaviour in each life.

Midweek groups focus on learning from Scripture and praying for one another. At the moment (October 2023) the Portuguese language group operates best in person and the English language group on zoom. Once a month, instead of separate groups, we meet physically all together at Cliff Walk to pray.

We have also learnt much from visiting speakers, including from Brazil, and also Carl Palmer running Walk Thru The Bible events.

Fellowship

All through this time we have continued with two habits that go back perhaps to the 1980s, and that deepen the togetherness of our spiritual lives: every year begins with a week of prayer in homes, on zoom and at the church, praying together in English and Portuguese for the year ahead; secondly, the first Sunday of each year are testimony services with people sharing what God has done in their lives over the past year. Such has been the desire to speak that these also now take place on the first Sunday in July. At times we have run events for married couples, trips to the seaside (sometimes linked with Bible teaching), picnics in parks, women’s conferences, men’s breakfasts and the Sunday services referred to above when we swop worship groups and preachers. If needed, we have translation into English/Portuguese provided from the front of the chapel.

Missions

We have continued to support a small number of missions/individuals with finance and prayer and enjoy immensely their visits. For more than 25 years we have supported Ian and Anne-Marie Prescott who have worked with OMF in Asia. Since Bill and Glenice retired from Brazil we have supported Maura Resende, working with children and women in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. The church’s link with zambesi mission began in 1948 with a visit to the church by the then General Secretary of the Malawian churches supported by the mission. In 2016 we were honoured to host 3 Malawian pastors, including the then General Secretary, and this resulted in a team of 7 from the church visiting Malawi in

2017, when we were blessed and able to serve and encourage our Malawian brothers and sisters. In 2021 one of our members visited the Ian and Ann-Marie whilst they were working in Vietnam. In the 2000s, a number of young people went on short term mission trips to Europe, Africa and Asia and worked on SU holidays in the UK. In 2010, David Bebb, one of the young people in the church attended a 2 year course at All Nations Christian College with a view to working amongst Muslim people. He was then supported by the church to serve in Birmingham for 4 years. We've held some great events to encourage support for missions e.g. talent nights and themed parties and we love decorating the chapel with flags from all our home countries. In 2018 a cookbook was produced of dishes from the congregation's home countries.

Children and young people

Although the days of Sunday Schools of 300 plus are long gone, the church has always loved children and young people and had dedicated space and activities to share with them the gospel. These have included holidays clubs, weekly clubs, residential trips and carers and toddlers groups. These have used names such as Jubilee and ABC toddlers groups, JfK (Jesus for kids), MAD (making a difference) Group and of course Light parties on 31st October each year. The need for workers means that currently we have groups as part of the church services and a weekly youth group. Having church members who worked in local schools has encouraged active links with schools and we have hosted many visits to Cliff Walk as a place of worship, to learn about the Easter and Christmas stories and on recent occasions to experience an acted out Christian wedding involving our pastor and his wife. We continue to work in partnership with the Newham wide groups, Youth for Christ and Faith in Schools (affiliated to Scripture Union).

Covid

No account written in 2023 would be complete without commenting on the impact of the Covid pandemic. We had a wedding of two church members planned for Saturday 21st March 2020. This turned out to be one of the last weddings held in Newham before the national lockdown was announced the following Monday. God blessed us with some young members who helped us get going using Facebook, zoom and YouTube to run services, with different people taking part and WhatsApp groups to keep in touch. When permitted, we were back at Cliff Walk with our masks and lots of ventilation. The new restrictions in early 2021 came and tragically two families in the church lost loved ones to the virus. When we restarted, we enjoyed singing our closing song and having refreshments outside and continued this as long as the weather permitted. A large banner was hung across the front of the church, alongside the empty cross saying, "Jesus is alive - Hope for everyone". We restarted our street outreach and found people more willing to stop and talk. Slowly we saw contacts coming again and indeed new people joining us too so that the congregation is now larger than before the pandemic. The main English-speaking Bible study during the week has continued on zoom with about twice the number attending than previously did.

So in 2023, who are we?

The church currently has 88 members, about 50% of whom have been baptised in the church. 4 of them have attended the church since birth. 66% were born in 14 countries outside the UK. The Sunday congregation across the 2 services varies a lot but averages 120 from even more countries. We love displaying around and outside the church the flags of our heritage countries. Most Sundays we see new people coming but the turnover of people in the neighbourhood is very high, due particularly to housing costs and job insecurity.

The future

At our testimony service in January 2023, many people spoke about how CWC was a family to them. Praise God for the fulfilment of what had been our theme in 1998, our 125th year – "a family filled with joy". A beautiful banner made at that time still hangs in the chapel. In this our 150th year, our theme is "We are not ashamed of the **gospel**". We thank God that in September we baptised 12 people in a paddling pool on the grass opposite the church witnessed by a congregation of over 150 who heard again the good news that brings salvation to everyone who believes.

TO GOD BE ALL THE GLORY!