

New Road Baptist Church, Oxford

“A Protestant Catholic Church of Christ”

At each anniversary service the congregation of New Road listens again to the words of the church covenant of 1780. We do not do this out of a reverence for the past for its own sake but because it is a document that speaks of scripture-based acceptance of people from a range of Christian traditions. (The full text of the covenant and other information about the church can be found at www.newroad.org.uk.) The people worshipping at New Road come from diverse traditions and come from all over the world. The church building is located in Bonn Square at the heart of the university city of Oxford. The congregation of young and old includes residents from the city, students and tourists. Sunday worship is the focus of the church's activities, there is one service at 10:30am.

Membership and congregation

There are currently 83 members of whom about 20 live away from Oxford. The Sunday congregation numbers between 50 and 90. There are people and families who have been members for many years, sometimes for generations. The presence of the ancient University of Oxford and younger Oxford Brookes University has a significant impact on the make up of the membership and the congregation; numbers fluctuate during the year, from one year to another and people coming into membership often stay a few years before moving on. There is a significant number of people with formal theological training within the congregation.

The age profile of the core church community is approximately as follows:

under 20 years (excluding undergraduates):	10
undergraduates	10
20 to 40:	20
40 – 60:	20
60 – 70:	20
over 70:	15

History

The church has a long history stretching back to the 17th century. In the 18th and 19th centuries New Road was responsible for planting a number of Sunday Schools and chapels in the Oxford area and beyond. This can still be seen in close ties with some of these congregations today.

The 20th century saw a lot of development of the centre of the city which, significantly, continues today.

Early in this development the church took the decision to stay in the centre with the opportunities and challenges that position brings. Consequently, the church premises were redeveloped in 1982 around the beautiful chapel. The new building also has two halls, kitchen facilities, numerous offices, a “coffee house” (not currently used commercially) and a one-bedroomed flat. The premises are much used (see below) and, together with rent from some local shops owned by the church, provide a commercial income for the church. There are plans to redevelop Bonn Square on which the church stands. Discussions are continuing with Oxford City Council about the best way to work together on this exciting scheme. The project and its implications are expected to play a significant part in the thoughts and prayers of the church over the next few years.

The locality

The immediate area is dominated by city centre shops, offices and places providing food, drink or entertainment. Few of the local residents attend New Road and the number of families with children living within walking distance is quite small; a majority of the congregation travels in to the city by car or bus. Parking is expensive in the city centre. Our “new parish” consists of newly developed one and two-bedroomed flats, many only a year or two old, on the Castle redevelopment. We have welcomed this and started to leaflet the flats.

Oxford University has a large impact on the city and the church continues to benefit from close links with Regent's Park College which is a few minutes' walk from the church.

Worship and church life

Innovative and relevant preaching, normally based on lectionary bible readings, has been at the heart of the worship. There is a printed order of service and the junior church groups follow the same themes as the rest of the congregation. Services are held each Sunday morning at 10.30. Congregational singing has been led by the organ and by a music group. This has allowed a wide variety of hymns and worship songs to be used in a variety of styles. Use has been made of other media, such as laptops connected to the church data projector, to lead prayer and to present ideas to the congregation. This has had its clearest expression in the Café Services which have been held once each university term since 2002. We value the participation of everyone in worship, including the youngest members of the congregation.

The chapel is opened by our paid warden and a team of volunteers each working day so that people in the centre of the city have a place they can come for a welcome and quiet reflection. This has gathered momentum and can become a very busy time. On Tuesday and Thursday this ministry has been augmented by “Body and Soul”, a short service of readings and prayers open to all at lunchtime.

The midweek evening meeting for teaching, a shared meal and worship is called Church on Thursday. This has a varied programme and is held in the church coffee house.

New Roots is a strong group of people in their 20s and 30s meeting for fun and fellowship.

Extensive use of the church premises by a variety of groups is facilitated by the church warden. These include Alcoholics Anonymous groups, the Oxford Industrial Chaplaincy and a job club for the unemployed.

Links with other churches

The ecumenical group Churches Together in Central Oxford is active and New Road is represented on its committee. In addition to this, the central Oxford free churches (New Road, St Columbas URC and Wesley Memorial Methodist) work together organising joint services and an annual pulpit exchange. There is an active “Faith in Action” group with members from these churches and St Michael at the Northgate (Anglican). Together they contribute actively to the work of Christian Aid in the city centre and reflect the desire of the churches to work within the city for social justice.

The Oxford cluster of Baptist Churches has held events, mostly Sunday evening services, and is currently exploring other ways of working together.

The New Road Church building is currently being shared with two other Christian fellowships. The Living Word Fellowship, under the leadership of Pastor Memory Tapfumaneyi, meets on Sunday afternoon and the Shammah Baptist Church (Portuguese speaking) meets on Sunday evening.

Looking to the future

We are starting to make contact with many people from our “new parish” of flats within walking distance. There is opportunity to do more.

The plans for Bonn Square, on which the church stands, are radical and offer opportunities for the church as well as challenges. Negotiation continues with the council over the management of church-owned land. When the project is complete, the church will have a much more open aspect which will bring greater visibility and accessibility to the people of the city.

We value the breadth of approach brought by the members of the church and many of them have links with other organisations. We seek to support them in the work they do.

We continue to be challenged by the many diverse opportunities that our city centre location brings. Some of these are: the students that worship at New Road; our conversations with St Andrews Bookshop who want a city centre presence; the homeless people at our gate. Life at New Road is both exciting and varied.

The ministry we need

We are seeking a minister who will foster and further develop participatory worship for all ages. We are proud of our open, ecumenical heritage and want to build on it. We are looking for someone who will go with us as we seek the will of God for this church in the future.

Practical matters

The manse (See photograph)

4 bedroomed detached house in desirable north Oxford with major road and rail links to all parts of the country.

Terms of settlement

The church is flexible about terms of appointment, based around the standard terms recommended by the Baptist Union. The basic stipend has traditionally been above the standard stipend recommended by the Union and the church has endeavoured to ensure that its real value is maintained relative to earnings nationally. In addition to a manse, car expenses are payable at the approved rates, and the church encourages the minister to take advantage of opportunities to grow through funding study materials and attendance at conferences and seminars.

Local schools

Cotteslowe Primary and Wolvercote Primary are both within 1km.

The Cherwell Secondary school is within 1 mile.

All three schools are well-respected locally, places at Cherwell are impossible to get for anyone outside the catchment.