

# **A HISTORY OF VICTORIA CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH**

## **Introduction**

Let me take you back to a Victorian seaside town with a population of around 2,500 residents. The town was served by a newly built railway line which brought summer visitors to bathe in the Irish Sea. There was no electricity, no gas and no running water. Many of the town's present landmarks had not been built - there was no Tower, no piers, no tramway and no Winter Gardens. The town, of course, is Blackpool and the year is 1849; the year Victoria Congregational Church was opened.

To give a complete and comprehensive history of our church is not easy. Previous histories have recorded that the material available is too limited. The earliest surviving minute books only go back to 1930. Therefore, it is something far more modest we are attempting in this booklet - a brief summary of the church's first one hundred and fifty years, its past events and characters. The information we have of the church's past is sufficient to reveal a glimpse of her part in the religious life of Blackpool during the last one hundred and fifty years. It is a rich heritage in which we have every reason to be proud and from which we can draw inspiration for the work of the present.

If this brief summary of the story of Victoria Congregational Church serves to encourage and inspire the church's present members and friends, the writing of it will be more than justified. We hope that it will prove interesting, both to our own members and friends, and to those who happen to read it in time to come.

***Mark Thompson***

## **Congregationalism**

It has been said that congregationalism began in the time of Jesus. This has been shown because the two things the church really needs is a leader (Christ) and a group of people who believe in Him and worship Him. At the time of Jesus there were these two things: Christ and a group of people. These little groups of people would meet together and talk about what He had said and about Jesus Himself. So it can be said that these groups of people were the first congregational churches.

Soon after His death these groups spread to Asia Minor, Greece and to other lands surrounding Palestine. The groups gathered together as Paul spread the "Good News" of Jesus Christ. These people said they felt the presence of God in Jesus. Therefore, Jesus' words were true, "Where two or three come together in my name, I am there with them."

Soon the groups became larger and the members agreed to each do a certain job when it was asked of them. Some became deacons, and others bishops, for example.

Eventually the early church and its simplicity disappeared. The people began not to put their trust entirely in the Spirit of God but partly in the machinery and organisation of the church. Firstly, because of their organised way, they were looked on as Presbyterian. Secondly, where they elected a bishop, they were marked as being Episcopal.

Many rules were laid down from the end of the first century. The Church became more and more organised. From being just a group of people who believed, they had rules and jobs and orders. These included, to become a member of the church, you had to be baptised, and the baptism had to be performed by someone in authority. A person had authority only if he had been ordained with the "laying on of hands" by a bishop.

This process went on until the Reformation, the church taking its course through wealth, unreality and decay, until the beginning of the sixteenth century. It was at this time that congregationalism came back to the fore.

When the Bible was translated into English the people realised the unimportance of all the

organisation within the Church. This resulted in people beginning to worship God as they believed the Bible showed them.

There have been, almost all the time in the Church's history, churches which could be called congregational; but the word was never used. That came when Robert Browne clearly stated the ideas and principles of congregationalism. He spent some time teaching with Robert Harrison. Soon these two formed a church of Christian believers. Their service of worship gave all members a right to speak. Browne was put in prison for this preaching. When he was released he wrote books about congregationalism. The main one was "A treatise of reformation without tarrying for anie."

In 1662 the Act of Uniformity was passed which required all services to be conducted in line with the Book of Common Prayer. This resulted in some two thousand clergymen of the Church of England surrendering their livings in the established church to establish free independent worship with small groups of believers. After many years and many struggles the Act of Toleration was passed in 1689 which allowed congregational churches, "Independent Churches" as they were commonly known at that time, to worship in their customs without breaking the law.

In 1831 Congregational churches realised that their independence did not mean isolationism. A meeting was held at the Congregational Library in London on 13<sup>th</sup> May 1831 which brought the churches together to form the Congregational Union of England and Wales.

In 1972 many Congregational churches in England and Wales elected to join with the Presbyterian Churches to form the United Reformed Church. Victoria's members considered the proposal at a church meeting in 1971 and unanimously rejected any loss of independence, the creation of a more rigid hierarchy and the preclusion of ordinary church members from participation in the sacraments of the church. Not one member voted in favour of the proposal! Several hundred churches did not join the URC and they now form several groupings. A meeting was held on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1972 in the Congregational Memorial Hall in London, followed by an Assembly at Westminster Chapel, where a declaration of commitment to continuing independence was signed, forming the Congregational Federation, of which our church is a member. By remaining Congregational these churches were asserting the belief that all people should be free under God to worship Him, as they believed right. God, through the Holy Spirit, could speak to the church through any person, and there was no restriction through human appointment of authority.

The first President of Congregational Federation was Viscountess Stansgate, mother of Tony Benn MP, and the newly formed body brought together a diverse group of around 200 churches. Today, the Federation unites over 300 affiliated churches throughout England, Wales & Scotland; over 40 of these are in the North West Area, whose inaugural meeting of representatives was held at Victoria in April 1972. Each local church continues to be fully independent and is self-governed by its members, with God's guidance, through the church meeting.

### **Humble Beginnings**

Congregationalism in Blackpool was originated by a number of itinerant preachers who frequently came to the "summer resort for sea-bathing", as it was described over a hundred and fifty years ago, from places as far afield as Poulton and Elswick! The earliest records show that non-conformist meetings were being held in 1763 at the farm of one Robert Fisher in Marton.

One of the most industrious of these visiting evangelists was a Mr Joseph Speakman of Poulton. His efforts resulted in the creation of a fellowship of worshippers who met at a place called Nickson's Barn. This barn was situated at the corner of Market Street and Lane Ends Street (now Church Street).

When we think of this beginning in a barn it is easy to recall the story of a beginning in another barn, in Bethlehem, nearly two thousand years ago!

It was in March 1824, that the first minister for the Blackpool congregation was appointed. The

Rev James Wayman tells us that "Nonconformists were looked down upon with ill-disguised contempt in those days. Dissent was considered an impertinence." Nevertheless, by the year 1825 Congregationalism had obtained such a foothold that it became necessary to erect a chapel to house its adherents.

There was very strong opposition to the establishment of this Congregational place of worship. Attempts had been made to obtain a site for it nearer to what is now the promenade. But the Anglicans of those days saw to it that no prominent site would be available. So the first Bethesda Chapel was erected on the only piece of ground that the early pioneers of Congregationalism could obtain. The site was bought from the Bonny family for the sum of £15 6s. The foundation stone of this first purpose-built place of worship in Blackpool was laid in 1825. In July of the following year the building was completed and opened by Rev Dr Raffles of Liverpool. It was situated, in what was then an out of the way place known as Bonny's Lane, on the corner of Kent and Bethesda Roads.

The following years witnessed the beginnings of Blackpool's remarkable growth. In 1846 the first railway to Blackpool was laid, and with the railway there came increasing numbers of visitors, and also residents and business people to accommodate them.

It was not long after the opening of the railway that the little Bethesda Chapel was unable to contain all the visitors who, very different from so many of those who visit Blackpool nowadays, considered it their duty to go to church on Sundays.

There was also another difficulty. The approaches to Bethesda were so bad – becoming muddy pools after the slightest shower of rain – that only the most ardent worshippers would make their way to the little chapel on their holiday Sundays.

So the need for a more adequate and a more conveniently situated place of worship for the growing number of Congregationalists, who were coming to Blackpool from all parts of Lancashire, became urgent. This need was one of the factors that led to the erection of the Victoria Street Church.

It is important, however, that we should note that there was another factor behind the establishment of this new place of worship. A hundred and fifty years ago there was a religious revival stirring the churches of Lancashire. It was known as "The Great Bible Movement " and was characterised by a renewed zeal for spreading the Gospel. The Congregational Year Book for 1850 declares that Victoria Congregational Church was one of the fruits of this religious revival.

In 1846, the Victoria Street site was bought by Mr James Dilworth of Manchester from Rev William Thornber, Vicar of St John's Church. In August of the same year an appeal was made to the people of Blackpool and visitors for subscriptions to build a Congregational chapel in the centre of the town. Mr. Henry Banks gave £10, other recorded subscriptions were:

Richard Banks	£5	Eldest son of Henry Banks
John Cocker	£5	Son-in-law of Henry Banks & father of William Henry Cocker
Esau Carter	£5	Blackpool's 2nd postmaster
Samuel Moreton Peto	£10 10s	Railway contractor

In March of 1849 Thomas Eccles Shorrocks of Darwen, who had subscribed £100, laid the foundation stone for Victoria Street Chapel. The architect Edward Walters of Manchester had designed the building. On September 13th 1849, the new chapel was opened in Victoria Street. Initially it had no minister and was greatly helped in these early days by Rev R M Griffiths of Kirkham after he retired to Blackpool.

The new church had a promising beginning. Between two and three hundred worshippers would be found within its doors on Sundays and the Sunday school could boast of fifty scholars. After

Victoria Street was opened, the original Bethesda Chapel became disused and was later used periodically by the local Methodists.

Documents held in Blackpool Library's archive show the church's balance sheet for its second year, September 1850 to September 1851, it reads as follows:

### **Income**

Balance in hand at September 1850	£ 22 11s 11½d
Cash from pew rents	£ 97 0s 6d
Collections	£ 77 12s 1d
Collections for incidental expenses	<u>£ 4 14s 3d</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b><u>£201 18s 11½d</u></b>

### **Expenditure**

Pulpit supply	£107 3s
Incidentals	£ 54 4s 7d
Balance in hand at September 1851	<u>£ 40 9s 4½d</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b><u>£201 18s 11½d</u></b>

### **Victoria's Ministers**

**Rev John Noall** was appointed as Victoria's first minister, three years after the church opened. His ministry was not a success and in fact caused serious difficulties between himself and a limited section of his congregation. Much of the trouble centred around Rev Noall's aim to gain a BA degree from London University. This caused great offence, which was added to when the minister wore his bachelor's gown in the pulpit – a move that was denounced as "flat popery". As a result some members would attend the church only for the opening to show strangers to their pews and then leave to spend the time of worship elsewhere. Such friction was created that a number of members resigned and started meetings in a room on Talbot Road – this congregation was to form the nucleus of Union Baptist Church. A notice was read after the morning service on two occasions to convene a meeting to deprive Rev Noall of his charge. Some even went so far as to parade three effigies of the principle opponents, suspended on a gibbet, through the streets of the town, and then burnt them on the beach. Consequently, Rev Noall resigned in 1861, when the church had dwindled to some dozen members.

This gallant dozen continued to meet in the church for worship, but they were wondering whether it was worthwhile carrying on. On more than one Sunday they discussed the question of whether they should close the doors. But it must have been that there was one or more than one optimistic soul in that company and he or she urged them to continue to meet, expressing the conviction that God would bless their endeavours, for they carried on and kept the doors open. For two years the faithful few continued to attend, and then called a Minister to take charge.

**Rev Richard Raby Redman** began his ministry in 1863 with a mere 14 members. Under his charge they began to gather strength again and, before his death in 1865, the numbers had increased considerably. A simple memorial tablet on the right hand side of the church in Victoria Street told of the regard in which he was held by his people.

**Rev James Wayman** followed – a man richly gifted and utterly devoted to his church. It is impossible to do justice to this man within the compass of this brief history. He was a great servant of Jesus Christ. It is he, more than any other, who is responsible for the contribution which Victoria made to early Congregationalism in Blackpool.

He attracted huge crowds, filling the church to capacity. He was a fine orator and poet and a leading figure in political and progressive movements. He gave lectures in inland towns, showing lantern slides of Blackpool. James Wayman, together with Rev Samuel Pilling of Union Baptist Church on Abingdon Street, formed "The Blackpool Times" in 1877. In the 1880's they also won a competition (£25 prize) to produce the first Corporation Guide to Blackpool. In 1880, Victoria still

owed £150-£200 from the building of the church. Rev Wayman suggested that a Ladies' sale of work be organised to help to pay off the debt.

Under his leadership the first schoolroom was built, and also the Manse alongside the chapel. For the first 21 years of the church's life, Sunday School classes had been held in the church gallery. James Wayman was a man of missionary zeal, possessing a strong desire to spread Congregationalism all over a rapidly growing Blackpool. It was through his influence Victoria Street undertook the work that is so distinguishing a feature of its history – that of mothering and nursing other Congregational causes in the town. James Wayman was largely responsible, in 1885, for securing the site on which the Alexandra Road United Reformed Church now stands. Victoria wholly paid for the erection of a "tin tabernacle" on the site. In 1887 Rev Wayman was elected as Chairman of the Lancashire Congregational Union at its annual assembly in Rochdale.

Before the arrival of Victoria Street's Jubilee Year, James Wayman had resigned his charge. On his retirement from Victoria, he was presented with cheques to the value of £294 16s. James Wayman died in 1899.

**Rev William Evans**, who was affectionately dubbed "The vicar of Bank Hey" by Blackpool's citizens, took over the ministry after James Wayman resigned his charge. He was described by Allen Clarke in "The Story of Blackpool" as a breezy, good-humoured preacher and was popular with all denominations. The church could not have been placed in better hands. Pews were filled with families from all parts of Blackpool and summer visitors swelled the congregation to the limits of the building's capacity. Under his care the Church thrived and was an influential factor in the Centre of the town.

The approach of the Church's Jubilee year led to meetings to consider how this event could be celebrated. There were several projects in the mind of the people at that time. One was the establishing of a new church in the rapidly growing region of the North Shore. In the year 1896 the Church had appointed a committee to look for a suitable site in that district. When the site, on Warley Road, was secured one project for the celebration of the Jubilee was decided upon – the founding of a Church in the North Shore.

Another project that was being entertained at this time was that of helping a new congregation that was in its infancy at Bispham. Considerable help had been given to the Sunday school and now the need for a place of worship was urgent. A plot was bought on Cavendish Road, still the site of Bispham United Reformed Church.

The sum of £2,096 was promised by Victoria's members for these Jubilee projects. What a vigorous and energetic Church Victoria Street must have been in those days!

At the same time also the Church had it upon its conscience that the Bethesda congregation and Sunday school needed new and more adequate buildings to ensure its continuance. The foundation stones of the new Bethesda chapel were laid at a service on 13<sup>th</sup> September 1899 in Bethesda Square and a bottle containing an order of service and some Jubilee records from Victoria were buried at the same time. This bottle and its contents were unearthed during the demolition of the building in 1971, when Bethesda moved to Grasmere Road. The records show that at the stone-laying the hymns "O God, Our Help in Ages Past" and "Jesus Shall Reign Where're the Sun" were sung.

We have not the space to tell the story of the care which Victoria Street exercised over Bethesda for many years. It must suffice to state that for nearly 50 years Bethesda was Victoria Street's special care, the Church being a kind of mission under our Church's wing. The stronger Church gave generously of its resources during all that time to ensure the continuance of Bethesda's work and withdrew its support only when the Church became strong enough to look after itself.

During the Jubilee some renovation work was undertaken at the Victoria Street premises which was "not an inspiring ecclesiastical building" – so said the writer of an article in the Evening

Gazette some years later. Indeed William Evans himself described the church as having "a Queen Anne front and a Mary Anne back"!

Records of membership for this period show a huge growing membership, as follows:

<b><u>Year</u></b>	<b><u>No. of members</u></b>
1893	215
1894	238
1895	249
1896	289
1898	321
1899	330
1901	325
1902	345
1903	381
1904	383
1906	311

Rev William Evans left Blackpool to take charge of Salford Central Mission in 1907.

**Rev Gamble Walker** succeeded Rev Evans and was a brilliant preacher. Once again the pews were full. The need for more adequate Sunday School premises had been a pressing one for some time and under Gamble Walker's leadership the work of providing the new school was begun. Foundations for these were laid on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1912. Costing around £3,731, only £94 remained to be raised by the opening date in 1913.

The minute book relating to this phase in the Church's history tells of the devoted labours of minister and people to secure the money necessary for the new buildings. That same book, too, reveals that Gamble Walker was not only a brilliant preacher but also a wise leader. In 1914 Rev Walker resigned the pastorate.

**Rev Fred Hibbert** began his ministry in May 1915. He came from Blackburn, where he had exercised a fruitful ministry. He was a popular figure – eloquent, democratic and tolerant. He held on to good attendance that had gathered under Gamble Walker for the greater part of his ministry, but the "recession" was beginning. There was a general drift away from religion and congregations were declining everywhere with the secularisation of the country's life. For the first time in many years Victoria Street began to experience difficulties from falling attendance and a diminishing income.

**Rev Martin Austin MA** followed Rev Fred Hibbert in 1931. He led the church through a very difficult period. Blackpool had changed and was now a very different town than the one in which Victoria was first established, given almost completely to the business of holidays and entertainment - Sundays included! A review of a service at Victoria Street led by Rev Austin was published in the Gazette in 1934. Mr Austin was described as quiet, thoughtful and scholarly and he preached an earnest evangelical sermon – what the old non-conformists would have called preaching the gospel. The writer also comments that "the singing has always been a strong point in the services at Victoria" with "singing of the congregation in hymns that were very familiar to tunes that everybody knew" – this part of Victoria's heritage certainly still lives on!

Under Rev Austin's leadership, Victoria was experimental in its form of worship - he introduced a new style of services using a series of talking pictures produced by the Religious Film Society which attracted good audiences. He also held lectures in the Tower which featured many famous people, including Randolph Churchill (Sir Winston Churchill's son). These occasions were talked about for many years afterwards. During this time Victoria held a fortnightly service at which the most famous preachers of the day could be heard. In fact there was an unusual clause in the trust deed of the church to the effect that the resident minister should vacate the pulpit in July, August

and September in order that it could be occupied by eminent preachers! Over the years this practice was discontinued so that the resident minister was at home when the holiday crowds came.

With the arrival of the Second World War, in 1939, Mr Austin decided to leave the pastorate and join the forces as a chaplain. With his departure the Church found itself facing serious difficulties. Its young people were leaving for the various branches of the forces, there were few prospects of finding a new minister in the immediate future. At this time a substantial part of the Sunday School premises were taken over to provide a canteen for servicemen stationed locally which meant that the Church's activities were severely curtailed.

**Rev Thomas Duncan**, the RAF chaplain in the town, helped Victoria during this period without a full time minister. Mr. Duncan did what he could to assist the Church in this difficult time, but his services were necessarily limited by the demands of his own charge.

**Rev John Midgley** accepted a call to the pastorate of Victoria in 1942. Rev T T James, Moderator & Secretary of the Lancashire Congregational Union inducted him on Monday 14th December. Initially life within the church was difficult but through his ministry the church began to regain its strength and confidence. He was particularly good with children, despite having no children of his own. During his charge there were between 60 & 70 children regularly attending the Sunday School. At the time of his departure from the pastorate in 1947, to Hope Congregational Church in Wigan, Victoria was back on its feet again and looking forward to a brighter future. Rev Midgley was later to return to Blackpool, as minister of the White Church at Fairhaven, from where he retired. He visited Victoria many times in later years to take services and was present at the induction of Rev James Ross Keillor. Although Mr Midgley died some years ago, Mrs Midgley still lives in the Blackpool area.

**Rev David Harries** commenced his ministry in December 1948 after a brief vacancy. His first task was to lead Victoria's Centenary Celebrations, which took place in September of 1949. The then Secretary of the Congregational Union of England & Wales, Rev Leslie Cooke, led the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary services. Rev H S Stanley, Moderator of the Lancashire Congregational Union, led a further thanksgiving service on the following Wednesday. At this time Victoria had a highly acclaimed, prize-winning choir under the leadership of Mr Harry Wrigley, organist and choirmaster. The choir performed the concerts "Merrie England" and "Elijah" to celebrate the Centenary, with Miss Mabel Rostron taking the contralto parts. A Pageant was also given by the Sunday School. The church set up a Centenary fund to help to pay for renovations to the church buildings; the target was £1000. David Harries resigned from the pastorate in 1954.

**Rev Arthur Eynon Davies**, having moved from Union Church, Colwyn Bay, was inducted into Victoria's ministry on 4th November 1954 by Rev Howard S Stanley. He was born in 1900, the son of a Congregational minister, and educated at Aberdare County School, University College, Cardiff and Memorial College, Brecon. Mr Davies originally wished to become a doctor but finances would not permit it. A Manchester minister, Alex Homes, preached at a healing service, which interested Mr Davies greatly, so much so that he held healing sessions on a weekly basis for many years after. Subscriptions from these meetings helped Mr Davies to buy a motor scooter, which he used to allow greater mobility in his pastoral visiting. During Rev Eynon Davies' ministry Victoria moved for the first time in its history, to the former Methodist premises on Newton Drive. The move, after four years of worshipping in the Victoria Street Sunday School because the church was unsafe, was almost entirely due to Mr Davies. The church's present location is a memorial to Mr Davies efforts.

During the re-opening & rededication service on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1968, he spoke of Victoria merely being "transplanted", confident that the church would thrive in greener pastures. In October 1972, the church meeting decided unanimously, as the sale of the premises at Victoria Street was now complete, that the deeds of the Manse (2 Breck Road) should be given to Mr & Mrs Davies as a token of the church's appreciation for their devotion and service to Victoria. In July 1973, Mr & Mrs Davies decided that they wished to retire to South Wales, ending the longest

ministry in Victoria's history. Mr Davies preached his last services on 28<sup>th</sup> October 1973. Tragically, Mr Davies died a few years later after a period of ill health.

**Rev Dr James Ross Keillor MTh**, formerly of the Community Congregational Church, Birstall, near Leeds, was inducted into the pastorate by Rev Elsie Chamberlain, President of the Congregational Federation, on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1974. Dr Keillor had studied theology at St Andrews and Amsterdam Universities and at the St John's-Bethel Seminary in New York. After an assistantship in Aberdeen, his first church was at Grangemouth in Scotland. From here he went as minister to the English Reformed Church in Amsterdam and then to Keene Valley Congregational church in New York. On his return to Britain, Dr Keillor acted as a locum chaplain to Quarrier's Homes, Bridge-of-Weir, Renfrewshire and wrote the Centenary history of William Quarrier, "The Power I Pledge". During the Second World War, Dr Keillor served as a combatant with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Black Watch where Field Marshall Montgomery made him a Captain and he was mentioned in despatches. He became acting chaplain to his Battalion during the Battle of El Alamein when the padre was wounded, a role which he continued to the end of the war.

He began his ministry at Victoria on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> January 1974 and quickly became one of Victoria's most popular ministers. Despite his qualifications and background, he became known and loved as "Jamie" by members and friends of the church. By the end of 1975, Victoria's membership had risen to 130, from 87 at the start of 1974. During his ministry the church bought a new manse, 46 Forest Gate. At the church, the sanctuary was altered considerably from its typically Methodist layout. This gave much greater space at both the front and rear of the church.

His ministry placed equal emphasis on the whole church family with the young people becoming involved in worship with monthly family services. His motto, which was on the noticeboard in Newton Drive, and has recently been added above the church door was "Within these walls let no one be a stranger".

On Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> May 1977 he was inducted to the Presidency of the Congregational Federation at the 146<sup>th</sup> Congregational Assembly which was held at the Free Trade Hall in Manchester. Many members of the church, young and old, travelled to Manchester for the event.

Sadly, after a period of illness, Dr Keillor died on 10<sup>th</sup> February 1978 at the age of 60. His funeral service was conducted by Rev Elsie Chamberlain at Victoria; the church was full to capacity. In his memory the church decided that a piece of waste ground at the side of the Sunday School be turned into a memorial garden. The idea for a church garden was one of Jamie's last ideas for communal service, intended as a venue for social functions and services. Mr Leslie Morrison and Mr Albert Priestley dedicated the garden on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> July 1978.

**Mr Leslie Morrison** was taken under the wing of Dr Keillor during his ministry and commenced his early studies for the ministry at Victoria in 1976. Leslie was born in Glasgow and spent part of his childhood at Quarrier's Homes, where Dr Keillor met him. Later he was a student at Gordonstoun School and went on to work in the Stock Exchange in Glasgow. When he decided to enter the ministry, he came to Blackpool to commence his studies with Dr Keillor. Following Dr Keillor's death the church decided to appoint Leslie as Student Pastor both to fill the vacant pastorate at Victoria and to give him valuable pastoral experience. On 2 September 1979, Leslie Morrison preached his last service as Student Pastor before leaving to continue his studies at Bristol Baptist College. Leslie was later ordained into the ministry at Victoria on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> September 1983 by Rev Kenneth Chambers before being inducted into the pastorate of Hutton Free Church in Essex.

**Rev Kenneth Chambers** commenced his ministry at Victoria one week after the departure of Leslie Morrison, on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1979. His induction into Victoria's pastorate took place on Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> October 1979 and was conducted by Rev Elsie Chamberlain. Mr Chambers was educated at Beeston Fields School near Nottingham and made his commitment as a Christian in a Boys' Brigade bible class. As a lay preacher at Lenton Abbey Congregational Church, he decided

to enter the ministry. He studied at Paton College and Nottingham University. Whilst at college he married the daughter of Rev J J Clarredge of Weymouth. Mr & Mrs Chambers first met in the courtyard of Westminster Chapel, London during the May Assembly of 1951 – the day Congregational Praise was first published. From college Mr Chambers went to Frodsham and then, in 1962, to Cheadle & Long Lane Congregational Churches, also in Cheshire. During his ministry, the church at Long Lane was redeveloped and the Cheadle church amalgamated with the local Methodists.

Mr & Mrs Chambers came to Victoria with their three teenage children. Jean was married by her father at Victoria in April 1983. This was the first time in Victoria's history that a daughter of the manse had been married in our church.

In June 1981, Granada Television chose to broadcast Victoria's morning service, which included a baptism, live on the ITV network. This service prompted many letters and telephone calls to Mr Chambers with compliments on the service. The inscription "Be Still & Know That I Am God" above the organ pipes seemed also to have a profound effect on many viewers. During the early part of Mr Chambers' ministry, significant modernisation was undertaken in the Sunday School premises. The old Primary Room was converted into a Church Lounge, where meetings could be held in comfort and the kitchen was expanded and relocated alongside the main hall. During his ministry at Victoria Mr Chambers adopted the motto "Victoria - A Church for Today & Tomorrow".

Mr & Mrs Chambers both devoted themselves to the pastoral side of their ministry, visiting the sick and housebound. During 1982 Rev Jim & Marcelle Chambers visited Victoria from New Zealand which strengthened Mr Chambers' involvement in the healing ministry. Services of healing took place on one Sunday evening of each month and were met with a good response. On 11<sup>th</sup> May 1985 Rev Kenneth Chambers was inducted as President of the Congregational Federation at the Assembly in Oldham. The following Easter, Victoria was host to the largest ever Congregational Federation Youth Conference with 150 young people visiting the church for a weekend of fun, fellowship and teaching. In October 1986, Mr Chambers resigned from the ministry of Victoria to accept a call to Union Church, Heathfield. He preached his final services on 20th December 1986. In 1994, Rev & Mrs Chambers retired from Heathfield to Weymouth, Mrs Chamber's home town. Mr Chambers continues to carry out pastoral duties for the Congregational Federation visiting retired ministers and their widows.

**Rev Leslie Morrison** returned to Victoria in 1987 with his wife, Nikki, after a brief period of vacancy. He was inducted into the pastorate by Pastor Graham Adams, Chairman of Council of the Congregational Federation, on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> May. Early within his ministry it became clear that the church premises had severe structural problems which would require considerable expenditure to rectify. After consideration of the options available, the church meeting passed a resolution that we should redevelop the buildings on the present site. Nearly twenty years earlier Victoria was "transplanted" through an act of faith of the congregation to the site on Newton Drive and the members did not consider any further move necessary. Plans were produced for a new church which would seat 120 with a hall and an adjacent flat development, the sale of the flats were planned to cover the development costs. On 5<sup>th</sup> October 1988, planning permission was granted by Blackpool Borough Council for the work to go ahead.

On 8th January 1989, the last services were held in old premises with demolition due to commence the following week. Whilst the new premises were being built, St Kentigern's Catholic Church allowed us to worship in their School Hall from where we could watch progress on the redevelopment. I can't help wondering what the early members who were opponents of Rev Noall would have thought of the church worshipping in Catholic premises!

A brief service was held on the building site on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1989 to lay the commemorative stone in the church entrance. The stone was laid by Mr Albert Priestley, a member and Deacon of Victoria who had served the church since moving to Blackpool in the 1940's and had been Church Secretary for almost 20 years, and Mrs Dorothy Flavill, a member and past Deacon of Victoria who had joined Victoria after the move to Newton Drive. The new premises were built using local

craftsmanship. The new church's most distinctive features are the windows which were designed by Miss S Doughty, a church member who is the retired Head of Art of Blackpool Collegiate High School. The designs were transformed into glass by a local glass company.

On Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> July 1990, the new church was rededicated by Rev Leslie Morrison to a fanfare of trumpets. At last, Victoria has a new building. Within 2½ years of our original step of faith, the members were worshipping in the new premises. However, all did not go smoothly with the financial side of the redevelopment. The sale of the flats proved extremely difficult due to economic conditions causing a fall in property values. This placed the church in extreme financial difficulties. With a great deal of help from the Congregational Federation, our trustees, the business, financial and legal problems of the development were resolved but only when the church had transferred the manse deeds to the bank to clear the remaining debt. Because of the financial impact of the development, the members decided that they could no longer support the service of a full time minister. Rev Leslie Morrison resigned from Victoria's pastorate in 1994 to accept a call from Duke Street Congregational Church, Leith near Edinburgh. He left the members of Victoria, although financially weakened by the development, with a new base from which to build the church for the future.

### **Victoria Today**

*"Time present and times past  
Are both perhaps present in time future  
And time future contained in time past."  
T S Eliot*

Over the past 150 years, an evolution has taken place to create Victoria Congregational Church as we now know it. The change of location after 119 years and the building of a new church after 138 were the two largest discrete changes. From its beginnings, in a Victorian town in its infancy, it now stands one mile inland, in a quiet suburb, on the edge of one of busiest seaside resorts in Europe.

From 1994 to the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 1999, Victoria had been without a full-time minister for the longest period in its history. Church affairs were conducted, in true Congregational manner, by the members with the guidance of the Deacons. Worship was conducted by a regular group of lay preachers and local retired ministers. This situation resulted in church services in a variety of styles. In 2001 Victoria commenced looking for regular ministry again and called Pastor Bryn Gowdridge to the pastorate. Bryn and his wife, Carol, originally from Leicestershire had lived in Blackpool for many years where he was involved in the ministry of a local Baptist church. Bryn was inducted on 27<sup>th</sup> October 2001 by Rev Kenneth Chambers, one of our past ministers. Under Bryn's leadership the church is being built up spiritually and is growing in numbers.

The church continues to have an active social life with a strong sense of community and love, a feeling which has been recognised by many visitors to the church.

The church has an active Ladies' Guild who meet weekly between September and April. The Social Group organise several activities for the church family throughout the year including a Christmas party, Harvest Supper and fund raising events. The Junior Church meet during the Sunday services, after joining the first part of worship and take part in All Age Worship which is now held on a regular basis. Our worship takes place each Sunday morning at 10:45am and a warm welcome is given to any visitors who care to join us. Refreshments are served in the hall after each service.

The finances of the fellowship are now much stronger with God's help and guidance. We eagerly pray that the transplanted tree of Victoria will continue to grow and evolve in the new millenium and will bear fruit as we seek to communicate the Good News of the gospel in a rapidly changing world. Who knows - Victoria's history of church planting may not be over yet!

## **Victoria - "A Tree Replanted"**

In June 1961, the headline of the Evening Gazette read: "The 112 year old Victoria Street Church to be demolished". The decision was made for safety reasons. Cracks had been found in the church structure and rain often poured into the building. Redevelopment plans were underway to replace the old site with a modern building on the same site – a first floor church with shops below. The developers, Laing, approached the church officials with their proposals, which included payment of £10,000 per year in rent to the church. Many members were opposed to the scheme as they did not want a church that was upstairs. The church went through a very difficult time with young and old divided as how best to rebuild or resite the church. Eventually, Blackpool Corporation stepped in and decided to redevelop the site completely, their idea was a temporary car park prior to town centre redevelopment. After several years as a car park on the site of the church, the area was redeveloped with the Hounds Hill Shopping Centre now standing on the site.

The last service in the old church was held on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1964 during which the Rev A Eynon Davies said: "The tree of Victoria Street needs transplanting into richer and more amenable soil, so that its story may be continued and written in a new and dedicated service elsewhere.". From this date, services continued to be held in the adjoining Sunday School as the main building was unsafe.

A plot of land was eventually purchased on the north side Newton Drive, near to Lakeway on which it was planned to build a new church, car park and ancillary buildings. The land was bought for £7,000 in 1964 but was very much opposed, and thought by some members to be unsuitable. These thoughts were confirmed in due course and the land was resold some five years later for the sum of £12,000. Because of this profit the church were faced with a crippling bill for £1,860 "Betterment Levy". Had they built even a small hut on the plot, the church would not have been charged this!

Finally, the church borrowed £12,000 and bought the former Newton Drive Methodist premises, built in 1909. The first service in the church was held on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1968. The Rev A Eynon Davies' re-opening service included the message: " We are transplanting our church, confident that we will enjoy a new lease of life in a residential area."

## **Acknowledgements**

In the preparation of this history, I would like to acknowledge the following sources of information:

1. Victoria Street Congregational Church, Centenary Celebrations 1849-1949.
2. Victoria Congregational Church, 1849 – 1984
3. Notes prepared by the late Mr Albert Priestley
4. Archives held by Blackpool Central Reference Library
5. Articles published by the West Lancashire Evening Gazette
6. History of the Fylde of Lancashire, John Porter 1876
7. The Story of Blackpool, Allen Clarke 1923
8. Blackpool's Progress, The Blackpool & Fylde Historical Society 1926 & 1990
9. Seven Golden Miles, Kathleen Eyre 1961
10. Bright & Breezy Blackpool, Catherine Rothwell 1991
11. Minutes of the Church, Deacons & Finance Meetings
12. Photographs and memorabilia loaned by members and friends of the church

## **A CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY OF VICTORIA CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH**

- 1593 John Greenwood, Henry Barrow and John Penry were imprisoned and executed at Tyburn for profession of a faith of sole obedience to the authority of God in Christ.
- 1649 Elswick Congregational Chapel opened.
- 1662 Around 2,000 Church of England clergy resign to form fellowships for free independent worship following the passing of the Act of Uniformity.
- 1689 The Act of Toleration was passed which recognised all of the various forms of dissent and gave non-conformists the entitlement to recognition amongst the other religious institutions of the country.
- 1715 A survey conducted by Dr Evans estimated that 43 Presbyterian and Independent (Congregational) congregations existed in Lancashire, attended by some 18,300 hearers.
- 1763 Non-conformist services are being held at the farm of Robert Fisher in Marton.
- 1808 The area's first Congregational Chapel is opened in Poulton.
- 1809 Congregational services in Nickson's Barn on corner of Market Street and Lane Ends Street (now Church Street) led by Mr Joseph Speakman of Poulton.
- 1811 Population census of Layton-cum-Warbreck tells us that there are 580 inhabitants.
- 1821 The first St. John's Church consecrated on 6<sup>th</sup> July by Dr Law, Bishop of Chester, as an episcopal chapel attached to Bispham.
- 1823 68 Independent (Congregational) Chapels were now known to exist within Lancashire.
- 1824 The Congregational fellowship in Blackpool appoint their first minister.
- 1825 Foundation stone of the first Bethesda Independent Chapel was laid.
- 1826 The chapel was opened by Rev Dr. Raffles of Liverpool, a past Chairman of the Congregational and Secretary of the Lancashire Congregational Union, on 6th July 1826. The site was on Bonny's Lane, in a field, on the corner of Kent and Bethesda Roads. The site was bought from the Bonny family for £15 6s.
- 1831 One hundred representatives from independent churches throughout the country met at the Congregational Library in London to form the Congregational Union of England and Wales.
- 1834 Bethel Chapel at Bispham is opened on the site of traffic island where Devonshire Road, Bispham Road and Red Bank Road meet.
- 1837 Rev William Thornber publishes his history of Blackpool. Dr John Cocker erects the Victoria Promenade (later known as the Crystal Palace) on Green Walk, which developed into Victoria Street.
- 1838 Victoria Street site sold by Mr. Henry Banks of the Lane Ends Hotel to Rev William Thornber, Vicar of St. John's Parish Church.
- 1841 Population of Layton-cum-Warbreck had increased to 1,968. A footnote to the census return states: ". . . the town of Blackpool contains 1,304 inhabitants including 590 visitors."
- 1844 Blackpool's first St John's Market was opened on Market Street.
- 1845 Rev William Thornber is forced to resign as Vicar of St. Johns Church.
- 1846 A branch railway line was opened from Poulton to Talbot Road on 29<sup>th</sup> April. Four days stay in

the Lane Ends Hotel would cost £4 1s.

- 1846 Victoria Street site bought by Mr James Dilworth of Manchester from Rev William Thornber, Vicar of St John's Parish Church.
- 1846 August - an appeal was made to the people of Blackpool and visitors for subscriptions to build a Congregational chapel in the centre of the town. Mr. Henry Banks gave £10, other subscriptions were:
- |                     |         |  |
|---------------------|---------|--|
| Richard Banks       | £5      | Eldest son of Henry Banks                                  |
| John Cocker         | £5      | Son-in-law of Henry Banks & father of William Henry Cocker |
| Esau Carter         | £5      | Blackpool's 2nd postmaster                                 |
| Samuel Moreton Peto | £10 10s | Railway contractor   |
- 1847 Congregational church founded in Fleetwood. Queen Victoria visits Fleetwood on her way from London to Scotland.
- 1849 March - foundation stone for Victoria Street Chapel laid by Thomas Eccles of Darwen, who had subscribed £100. Building designed by the architect Edward Walters of Manchester. September 13th - New Chapel opened in Victoria Street, helped by Rev R. M. Griffiths of Kirkham. Congregations average 200-300 worshipers and 50 members in the Sunday School. The original Bethesda Chapel becomes disused and is periodically used by the Methodists.
- 1850 Congregational Yearbook declares that Victoria Street was one the fruits of the religious revival known as "The Great Bible Movement". The First Anniversary meeting was held on Thursday 12th September at 11am, where the Rev Henry Allon of London preached. This was followed in the afternoon by a Social Tea Party at the Clifton Arms at the charge of 1s each. Rev Allon also conducted both services on the following Sunday.
- 1851 Census of inhabitants in Layton-cum-Warbreck, including Blackpool, gave the population of 2,503 and houses numbered 425. Church's balance sheet shows Victoria's main income for the year, £97 0s 6d, was from pew rents.
- 1852 Victoria appoints Rev John Noall as its first minister.
- 1854 The Local Board of Health provide the first gas lighting for the town.
- 1858 Dissatisfied members leave Victoria to start a church in Talbot Road. These members were to form the nucleus of Union Baptist Church which was built in Abingdon Street.
- 1860 Blackpool's first Baptist Church was opened in Abingdon Street on the site of the present Post Office.
- 1861 Rev John Noall B.A. resigned his charge as first minister of Victoria Street. Church membership had dropped to about a dozen members.
- 1862 On 27th June, the first pile was driven into the sand to commence the building of Blackpool's first pier - North Pier.
- 1863 Rev Richard Raby Redman called to minister to Victoria Street with only 14 members.
- 1864 The Fylde Waterworks Company supplies the town with running water. Blackpool's first lifeboat was launched.
- 1865 Rev Richard Raby Redman dies during his ministry at Victoria Street. Church membership has grown considerably.
- 1866 Rev James Wayman takes over the ministry at Victoria Street. Over the next few years the first Manse is built.
- 1870 Victoria builds its first Sunday School rooms, to the West of the church.

- 1875 The original Independent Chapel is now used again as a Congregational Church.
- 1876 Blackpool receives its Charter of Incorporation and becomes a borough. William Henry Cocker becomes the first Mayor of Blackpool.
- 1877 "Blackpool Times" founded by joint editors Rev James Wayman (Victoria Street Congregational Church) and Rev Samuel Pilling (Union Baptist Chapel, Abingdon Street, now site of Post Office).
- 1878 The Winter Gardens Pavillion was opened.
- 1880 The church still owed £150-200 from the building of the premises 31 years earlier. Rev Wayman proposed a Ladies sale of work to help pay off this debt.
- 1885 Rev Wayman secures for Victoria the site where Alexandra Road Congregational Church was to be built. Members of Victoria pay for the erection of a "tin tabernacle" on the site. The first rails of Blackpool's tramway system were laid.
- 1887 Rev James Wayman was elected as Chairman of the Lancashire Congregational Union at the annual assembly at Rochdale. Blackpool Borough Police Force established. The Congregational Church Hymnal was published.
- 1888 Rev James Wayman retires from his charge of Victoria Street before its Jubilee. The church presents him with cheques to the value of £294 16s. He is succeeded by Rev William Evans who was to be dubbed the "Vicar of Bank Hey".
- 1889 The original Opera House was opened adjacent to the Winter Gardens of 1878.
- 1891 Alexandra Road church founded by Victoria as a "tin tabernacle". The population census states that there were now 23,846 inhabitants in the young town of Blackpool. Foundation stone laid for Blackpool Tower.
- 1894 On Whit Monday, 14<sup>th</sup> May, Blackpool Tower was opened. The present Grand Theatre was opened and the first Victoria Hospital was opened on Whitegate Drive.
- 1896 Victoria Street forms a committee to look for a site in the district to establish a new church in North Shore to celebrate its Jubilee in three years time. Target is to raise £10,000 from donations. Church records show that the current membership stood at 289. Blackpool's famous Big Wheel was opened on 22nd August at the corner of Adelaide and Coronation Street.
- 1899 Rev James Wayman dies. Victoria Street celebrates its Jubilee. The members raise £2,096 in the Jubilee fund which was used to establish the Congregational Church on Warley Road in 1897, giving financial help to a new fellowship in Bispham who were in need of a place of worship, and the rebuilding of the Bethesda Church and Sunday School. A stone laying service was held on the afternoon of the Jubilee, 13th September 1899, on the site of the old Bethesda chapel.
- 1901 New Bethesda Chapel opened in Bethesda Square on 5<sup>th</sup> June, replacing the original building of 1825.
- 1904 Records show that Victoria Street Congregational Church now had 383 members.
- 1907 Rev William Evans resigns to take charge of the Salford Central Mission. He is replaced by Rev Gamble Walker.
- 1912 Foundations were laid for a new Sunday School on 9th August. The total cost of this project was £3,731.
- 1913 King George V & Queen Mary visit Blackpool on 8th July.
- 1914 Rev Gamble Walker resigns his pastorate.

- 1915 Rev Fred Hibbert takes over the ministry at Victoria Street in May after a move from Blackburn.
- 1916 The Congregational Hymnary was published.
- 1930 Bethesda offer to sell Victoria their manse (24 Cumberland Avenue) as the Victoria Street manse is rented out to Dr Harris.
- 1931 Rev Martin Austin MA takes over the pastorate from Rev Fred Hibbert. Victoria donates £35 to a fund to purchase a site to build a Congregational Church in Marton. The church buys a new manse in Breck Road.
- 1932 Church records detail the appointment of a Mr Duncan Milnes as "organ blower" for Sundays and special occasions.
- 1933 In May an order was placed with Abbott & Smith of Leeds to install a new organ at Victoria Street at a cost of £1135.
- 1936 Due to the church's poor financial position, the Deacons proposed a significant reduction in the minister's stipend.
- 1939 Sunday school buildings used by forces to provide a canteen for servicemen in the town. The Borough Surveyor's Department advises the church that the boiler house below the vestry be converted into an air raid shelter. Old hymn books are loaned for use at services being held in the new Stanley School at Marton.
- 1940 The church pays half of a court fine for a black out offence committed by the caretaker. Rev Martin Austin resigns to become a chaplain in the forces. Rev Thomas Duncan, a R.A.F. chaplain stationed in Blackpool, helps the church's ministry during these difficult years. It was decided to sell the manse, 6 Breck Road, to Springfield Road Baptist for the sum of £1150.
- 1941 The church draws up a list of fire watchers. Mr H Chadwick (Church Treasurer) leaves to join HM Forces, his position is filled by Mr L Greenwood. Glass communion glasses were unobtainable due to war time difficulties; china ones were purchased at a cost of 9s per dozen.
- 1942 Rev John W. Midgley called to the ministry at Victoria and is inducted on Monday 14<sup>th</sup> December. Between 60 & 70 children attended the Sunday School during his pastorate.
- 1943 A house rental is agreed for Rev & Mrs Midgley; 423 Lytham Road. Rev Thomas Duncan leaves Blackpool and is presented with a gift in recognition of his services to Victoria.
- 1944 Two pews were removed at the front of the sanctuary in order to accommodate a piano which was bought with money from a fund started by the choir.
- 1948 Rev John Midgley accepted the call to become minister of Hope Congregational Church in Wigan. He was later to return to the Fylde as minister of the White Church at Fairhaven, from where he retired in the late 1960's. He and his wife then made Blackpool their home.
- 1948 Rev David Harries becomes minister prior to the church's centenary.
- 1949 Victoria Street celebrates its centenary. The centenary service was conducted by Rev Leslie Cooke, Secretary of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, on 2nd October. The target for the centenary fund was £1,000.
- 1951 Congregational Praise was published at the May Assembly in London.
- 1954 Rev Arthur Eynon Davies from Union Church, Colwyn Bay, replaces Rev David Harries as minister. He is inducted on 4<sup>th</sup> November by Rev Howard S. Stanley. Mr Davies was born in 1900, the son of a Congregational minister.
- 1964 Victoria holds its last service in the Victoria Street Church in late March. For the next four

years services are held in the adjoining church hall.

- 1968 The last services in the Victoria Street Sunday School are held on Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> October. Victoria Street Congregational Church move to new premises in Newton Drive. The reopening and rededication service is held at the former Newton Drive Methodist premises on Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> October.
- 1971 Leaflets and an order of service relating to Victoria's Jubilee Celebrations found in a bottle beneath Bethesda Church during demolition of the premises.
- 1972 Victoria members decide to maintain their independence and truth to the Congregational tradition by opting not to join the United Reformed Church. The church, along with a several hundred others, joined the Congregational Federation which was founded by Viscountess Stansgate and others on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1972 at an Assembly held in Westminster Chapel.
- 1973 In October, Rev A. Eynon Davies retires to South Wales at the end of Victoria's longest ministry. The church gives Mr. & Mrs. Davies the deeds to the Manse as a token of their gratitude.
- 1974 On February 6<sup>th</sup>, Rev Dr. James Ross Keillor is inducted into the ministry of Victoria by Rev Elsie Chamberlain, having moved from the Community Congregational Church, Birstall, near Leeds.
- 1977 On Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> May, Jamie is inducted as President of the Congregational Federation at the May Meetings held at Manchester Free Trade Hall.
- 1978 Dr. Keillor dies on 10<sup>th</sup> February at the age of 60. Mr. Leslie Morrison helps to fill the gap in ministry temporarily before commencing college to finish his studies for the ministry. On Sunday 30 July, a service of dedication of the James Ross Keillor Memorial Garden is held.
- 1979 Leslie Morrison leaves Victoria on 2<sup>nd</sup> September to go to Bristol Baptist College to finish his training for the ministry. Rev Kenneth Chambers BA commenced his pastorate of Victoria on 9<sup>th</sup> September. His previous charges were two URC churches in Cheadle, Cheshire.
- 1981 In June, Granada Television broadcast Victoria's morning service, which included a baptism, live on the ITV network.
- 1982 Leslie Morrison is ordained into the ministry at Victoria by Rev Kenneth Chambers. He is then inducted into the pastorate of Hutton Free Church.
- 1985 On 11<sup>th</sup> May, Rev Chambers was inducted as President of the Congregational Federation at the Annual Assembly in Oldham.
- 1986 Rev Kenneth Chambers resigns his ministry to accept the call to Union Chapel, Heathfield.
- 1987 Rev Leslie Morrison is inducted as minister of Victoria by Pastor Graham Adams B.A. on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> May.
- 1988 Planning permission for the proposed redevelopment of the church premises was granted on 5<sup>th</sup> October.
- 1989 The last service in old building on Newton Drive is held on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> January; demolition commences within the following week. A service was held on the new church site on 2<sup>nd</sup> December at which the commemorative stone was laid by Mr Albert Priestley and Mrs Dorothy Flavill.
- 1991 The new church premises on the Newton Drive site are rededicated on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> July.
- 1993 Leslie Morrison resigns to take up the ministry at Duke Street Congregational Church, Leith.
- 1994 Victoria is without a full-time minister for the longest period in its history. Church affairs are conducted by the members with the guidance of the Deacons. Worship is conducted by a regular group of lay preachers and local retired ministers.

- 1999 Victoria celebrates its 150th Anniversary with a Flower Festival. The Anniversary celebration service is conducted on Sunday 12th September by Pastor Graham Adams, General Secretary of the Congregational Federation.
- 2001 Victoria calls Pastor Bryn Gowdridge to the ministry after a period of 8 years without a