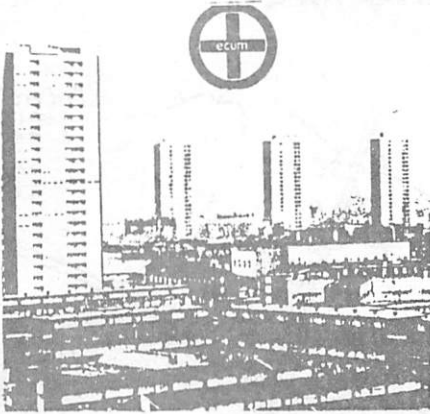


WEST HAM CHRISTIANS : 1984



Bygone Years

Until 1850 West Ham was still only a village. After that date there was an enormous increase in population. The population was 62,919 in 1871; and 267,358 in 1901. Industries and residential areas grew because of the building of the railway and the Victoria Dock. By 1901 West Ham had become a great seaport and manufacturing town.

The Daily News Survey of church attendance in London (1903) commented that ALL the churches had failed to reach the common working people. In West Ham churchgoing was slightly above the average with one person in every five attending church. 32% were C of E, 56% were Free Church and 12% were RC. However, most of West Ham's churchgoers were from middle class areas (as they then were) of Forest Gate and Upton Park. In the working class parts of the borough, such as Canning Town and Custom House very few people went to church.

MISSIONS

The churches founded many new Missions and settlements in West Ham. Besides preaching, they set up welfare schemes to tackle the problems caused by unemployment, poverty, bad housing and population expansion. They started schools, youth and sports clubs, Sunday schools, womens meetings, social work, medical work, housing programmes, leisure centres, hostel provision and unemployment relief. Large numbers of people attended the activities organised by the missions. But only a few joined the Church, or became very active in spreading the gospel. Many people thought of Christianity mainly as a hobby, particularly for women and children.

The early years of the century saw the rise of the Labour movement in which West Ham played a leading part. However the Churches in general opposed socialism, and were seen by ordinary people to be on the side of the bosses, and the establishment.

Most clergy and many voluntary helpers came into the area from public school and university backgrounds, and often found it hard to relate to local people.

POST-WAR

The Blitz and the post war slum clearance programmes changed the face of the area. The old terraced streets were replaced by tower blocks and maisonettes. Many families, particularly Christians, moved to the outer suburbs and the New Towns. The old community spirit was destroyed. People no longer knew their neighbours and no longer had the relatives just round the corner. The population fell to 157,367 in 1961. Smaller congregations, could no longer support themselves. Many Anglican and Free Churches were forced to close or merge. People often felt the Church was deserting them.

Other problems have hit the area since the war. For example 24,498 jobs were lost in the Canning Town / North Woolwich area in the 1970s while only 2,824 jobs had been gained. The biggest loss has been the Royal Docks, once the largest rail / water transport link in the country. Housing remains in short supply and the problems arising from badly designed tower blocks are immense.

NEWCOMERS

Many people have moved into the borough, both from other parts of the UK and from overseas. Immigration is nothing new, since even the oldest established families can only trace their roots to the 1850's. And older people can remember that there were black people living in Canning Town in the 1920's. By 1981 20.5% of the population of Newham was born overseas and 26.5% lived in homes where the head of the household was born in the New Commonwealth or Pakistan.

The change in the population has presented a challenge for the churches. How can the people of God all be 'one in Christ Jesus'? In the 1950s and 1960s many West Indian and African Christians tried to worship in churches of their own denomination. But often

they felt unwelcome and rejected by the leaders and congregations of white churches. So they formed their own churches under black leadership. There are at least 30 such fellowships in the borough. Many of them are Pentecostal and belong to national and worldwide denominations.

NEW CHURCHES

In the 1980s many other new fellowships are emerging. Some of them worship in languages other than English, for example in Urdu or Tamil. A third of the churches in our area are new ones, founded since 1970. There are also traditional churches which have become multiracial, and which have found new life. There are signs of hope as many Christians have struggled on and survived, as many have recommitted themselves to the work of the Kingdom in East London, and as new forms of urban mission and church life have started up.

However, Christianity in Newham is still a minority religion. Out of every hundred people it is unlikely that more than five go to public worship on a Sunday. Of these five, one follows an Asian religion, three are Roman Catholics, and one Protestant. Probably half of the Protestant worshippers are associated with black or newer churches.

The main denominations continue to struggle. Non-Christians rarely respond to evangelism, and the churches have to minister to people with huge pastoral and social needs. Often they are short of people and money, while weighed down with inappropriate buildings and unnecessary regulations.

THE SURVEY

This paper tells the story of the church life of Plaistow and Canning Town IN 1984. It is based on a survey of local churches and Christian centres. We discovered many things which were interesting, surprising, hopeful and worrying. We hope that members of local churches will enjoy reading about themselves. You may question or disagree with some of the things we say. But we hope it will set you thinking and talking about the Work of God in our area. The full report, which was presented to the Archbishop's Commission on Urban Priority Areas is available from Lawrence Hall at a cost of £1.

SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The people we interviewed recognised there were many social problems in the area. The list included unemployment, housing, education, racial harassment of black people by whites, poverty, vandalism and crime, and the lack of youth provision, hospitals, lack of community facilities, single parents, the police, and services for the old and handicapped. Government policies, notably the GLC abolition, were also seen as a problem area. A number of church councils had recently discussed such issues.

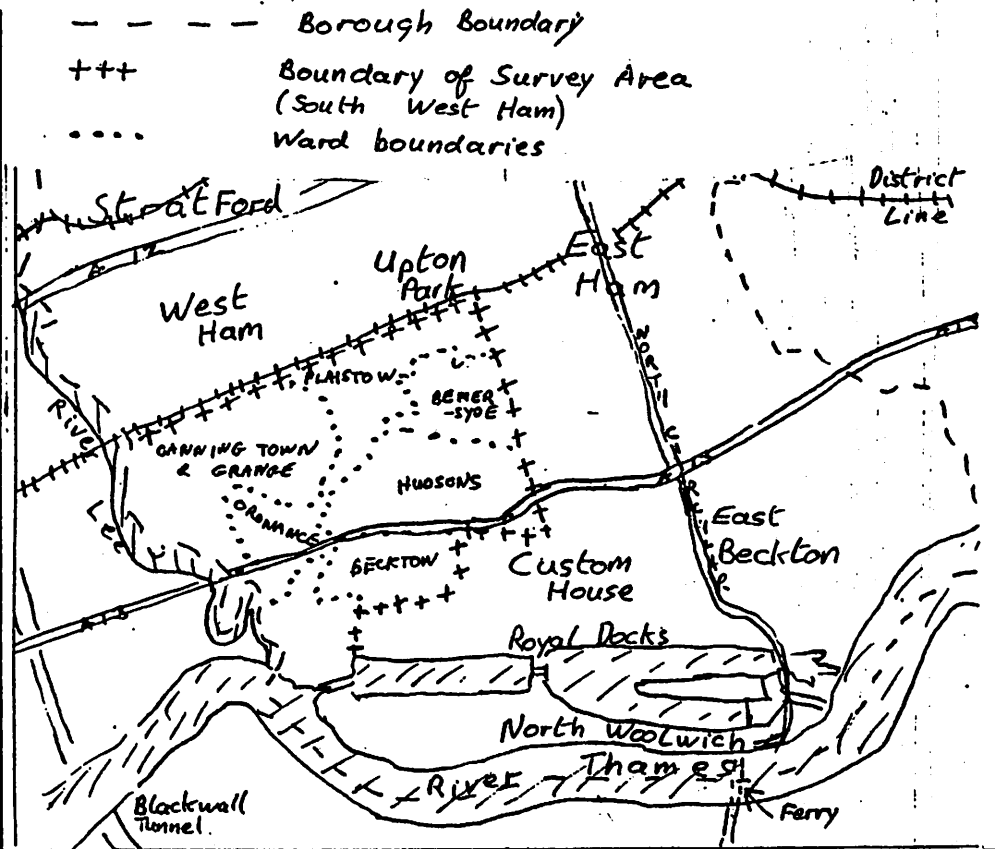
At the personal level many of the church leaders said local people suffered from powerlessness, apathy and lack of self confidence. But many churches are rediscovering the good news that in God's eyes every individual person is immensely valuable and loved. It is in Christ that the fullness of human dignity can be restored.

LONELINESS

Other personal and pastoral problems mentioned were loneliness and isolation, and the need to rediscover a sense of community. There was the problem of broken family relationships, especially marriages. One or two people also mentioned the need for inner healing. They knew of some people who had deep seated resentments against other people and bitterness about life as a whole, which only God could change.

At the spiritual level the most common suggestion was that people needed salvation. They needed to come to church, and to find or rediscover spiritual or Biblical values. Some people needed deliverance from the problems that came from involvement with seances, evil spirits and the occult.

Newham showing major through routes 1984.



Interviewing

In the survey we tried to get interviews from every christian fellowship (23 in all) and all the Christian voluntary agencies active in our area. Wherever possible we tried to question at least two people from each group, so as not to rely on only the leader's viewpoint. We managed to complete interviews with over two thirds of the churches.

The interviews were conducted by a team of six volunteers who were all involved locally in Christian work. In addition, one of us visited most of the places of worship for the regular Sunday morning worship, in order to get to know people and find out what was going on. Most of the work took place in May, June and July 1984. We used a questionnaire which asked for details about the church and its congregation, workers, activities, style of work, problems and hopes.

The Area

The area selected for our survey was the South West quarter of Newham including most of Plaistow and Canning Town. The resident population of the area at the 1981 census was 45,889. This was 22% of the total population of the London Borough of Newham.

Only a quarter of families in our area were owner occupiers, while well over half were Council tenants. South of the A13 there are in fact only a handful of homes not owned by the Council. Only half the households have a car; much less than the national average of more than 60%. There are 1124 households where the head of the household is a female lone parent.

There are relatively few black people in South West Ham. 6630 people (14%) were living in a household where the head of the household had been born in the New Commonwealth or Pakistan. This compared with a figure of 26% for the borough as a whole. There are very few Asian residents in the Council estates south of the A13. But people of West Indian and African background can be found in most neighbourhoods.

GOOD THINGS

On the other hand there were many good things about the area. Local people were valued for their warmth and openness, their directness and honesty, their resilience and communal spirit. The people of Newham have a good sense of humour, a strong sense of family loyalty and a lot of

hidden potential. Some people saw the multicultural society around us as positive, exciting and no problem. Others thought the life of the voluntary groups in the borough was one of the best things of all. And of course we do have the best football team in the world!



Who Worships?

Sex:

in almost all the fellowships (except the RC church) women greatly outnumber men. Out of every 10 worshippers six or seven are female.

Age:

most of the local worshipping adults (at least in Protestant churches) appear to be in one of two age groups: over 60s or under 35s. Several churches have about equal numbers of the two groups, with a gap in the middle. Most churches have a number of children present for at least part of their worship, and many of them run Sunday schools or children's activities at other times of the week.

There are at least three fellowships where two thirds or more of the members are under 35. These young adults are mostly incomers to East London. Some are in the area simply because of their job, housing or education, others feel a call of God to be involved in the life of the inner city community and church.

There are several other churches where two thirds or more of the congregation are pensioners, who have lived locally all their lives.

People in the 35-60 age group are found in numbers only in a few churches. These include the RC church and some of the Black led fellowships. They are also found in two Canning Town groups which have their origins in the work of David Sheppard and George Burton amongst young people at the Mayflower in the early 1960s.

Class:

South West Ham is traditionally a solidly working class area, yet with few exceptions the churches are not solidly working class. In most churches the older people have respectable working class, or lower middle class, origins, while the majority of young adults are well educated and doing middle class or professional work.

Again the RCs and the older generation of Black Pentecostals may be exceptional. They have a higher proportion of manual workers in their congregations. There are signs that many local Christians, including young black people, were originally working class, but since their conversion have 'bettered themselves'.

Race:

The traditional Anglican and Free churches contain mainly white British people, although almost all of them have a few black members, and a larger number of fringe attenders. It seems generally that black people are not represented in such churches, in leadership positions. There are certainly no black ministers or full time church workers in pastoral charge, and as far as we know no black churchwardens, deacons or church stewards in any of the older churches in the survey.

Black led churches have, almost without exception, entirely black congregations. In most cases 'black' means people of West Indian origin (including Black British young people). Recently we have heard of a mainly Ghanaian fellowship starting to worship in the area, and elsewhere in the borough there is an active Nigerian church. In black churches many members travel from a good distance.

In all the congregations in the survey there are probably less than 25 worshippers of Indian or Pakistani origin. However in other parts of the borough there are at least three fellowships composed mainly of Asians, worshipping in Urdu, Panjabi and Tamil respectively.

There are considerably more Christians of Chinese background in the area. They are mainly young students and professionals from Malaysia and Singapore. Such people are found in small numbers in several of the churches. But in one local pentecostal church, which has a Chinese pastor, they account for two thirds of the membership. This church uses Chinese as well as English in its activities.

CHURCHES

We discovered a total of 23 Christian fellowships regularly meeting in our area in the spring of 1984. The denominations were as follows:

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| RC | 1 |
| C of E | 6 |
| Methodist | 1 |
| Baptist | 1 |
| URC | 1 |
| Elim | 2 |
| AOG | 1 |
| Other Pentecostal | 4 |
| Independent | 6 |

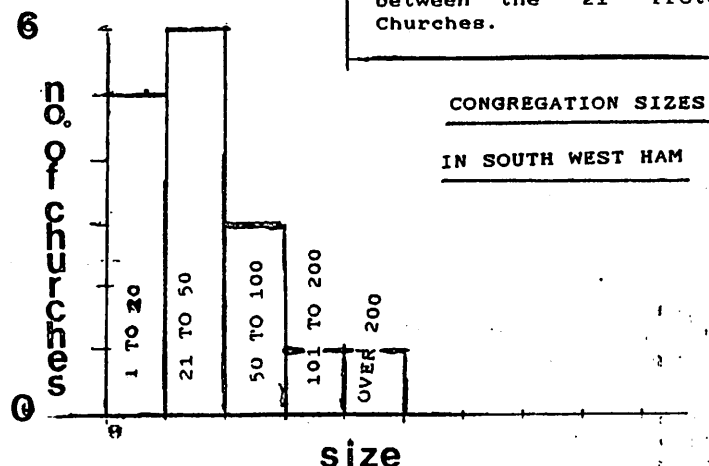
MINISTERS

Eight of these fellowships have no full time minister serving them. Ten have only one person in paid ministry, the RC church has two priests. The remaining four churches have more than two full time workers, in three cases thanks to a link with a Christian mission organisation. There is a very high proportion of 'professional' Christians to ordinary congregation members, especially if we count over 50 people who are employed as community workers, social workers and youth workers by the various Christian centres and agencies in the area.

CONGREGATIONS

Only two of the churches have a regular congregation of over 100 members. These are the Roman Catholic and Baptist Churches. 3 others have over 50 in the congregation. The remainder have congregations in the order of 20-35 people with a few cases of 15 or less worshippers.

As far as we can tell only 1500 people ever attend Christian worship in S.West Ham. Some of these worshippers live outside the area, probably more than the number of those who travel out to church. It seems unlikely therefore that more than 3% of the population of the area ever go to church. A third of these are Roman Catholics, leaving only 1000 shared between the 21 Protestant Churches.



The Work of the Churches

PASTORAL CARE

Almost all the churches are aware of the immense range and depth of pastoral needs of people in the neighbourhood; loneliness, family tensions, boredom amongst kids, unemployment, housing, poor health and mental illness. Different churches would tackle these problems in different ways. Some rely on prayer and faith, others use a social work approach. Many churches try to combine these approaches and almost all care for people in need with a good measure of Christian compassion.

SERVING THE COMMUNITY

One interesting trend is that Christians are trying to get involved and become influential in the life of the borough as a whole. Christians are serving God and their neighbours in local politics, as school governors, teachers, and social workers. Christians are found in pressure groups on issues of peace, housing, education and race relations. The churches are getting more involved in local community life. A large number of Christians are employed in positions of responsibility by the borough, and there is an active Christian fellowship within the staff of the Town Hall.

EVANGELISM

Evangelism is also being carried out by a number of the churches. Some, mainly the Black Pentecostal fellowships are quite active in door to door work. Most churches have Sunday school work, and a growing number run Holiday Clubs with some Christian teaching for children. Several churches have occasional or regular special services, gospel concerts or meetings, and many encourage personal evangelism among friends and neighbours.

In 1983 a large number of East London churches combined for a series of events leading up to a two night stand by Luis Pilau in a big tent in Plaistow. However, only a handful of the churches in South West Ham, and none of the Black led ones were able to give their wholehearted support to this campaign. There was even less enthusiasm locally for the 1984 Mission to London at QPR. Yet many people did go to these events and several churches report that they have contact with individuals who were deeply influenced or converted at these meetings.

However, the outcome of all these types of evangelistic activity does not appear to have made any great difference to the total numbers attending local churches. Perhaps there has just not been enough evangelism, perhaps the evangelism that does take place is simply not the right style for the inner city.

WORSHIP

Sunday worship takes a variety of forms according to the different traditions. In many churches there are changes taking place. Some of the churches maintain the traditional pattern of 11am and 6.30pm services. Fellowships that hire buildings often find that they can only meet when the people who own the building are not meeting. Thus many of the black led churches meet from noon to 3pm and from 8pm to 10pm.

Newer churches tend to hold longer meetings on Sundays; 2 or 3 hours not being uncommon. It is also significant that a growing number of churches are concentrating their efforts into a single Sunday meeting.

Content of the worship varies considerably. A few churches still appear to use a very traditional pattern, either a prayer book service or hymn sandwich, led by one preacher or the vicar alone. Pentecostal worship services are sometimes just as predictable and uninspiring. On the other hand in some churches experimental and unusual types of service take place, though not everyone likes them.

Many churches are stressing participation in worship, involving members of the congregation in prayer, bible study groups, sharing news and testimony. Some churches are using dance and drama in worship, and music increasingly tends to be of the guitar and chorus type rather than the organ and choir set piece variety. The gospel music of some of the black churches is lively and exciting.

HOME GROUPS

Most of the churches now have some form of home groups for fellowship, bible study and prayer although some still hold midweek prayer meetings or Bible study in the building they own or rent. Perhaps it is significant that the churches who have neither home groups nor prayer and Bible study seem to be the most despairing and declining ones in the survey.

COMMUNITY WORK

Many churches in the main denominations continue to run traditional organisations, such as women's meetings and Scouts and Guides. Their survival often depends on the continued commitment and enthusiasm of one or two leaders.

Some of the churches are involved in new forms of community work such as parent's and toddlers clubs, children's and youth work, and social activities for pensioners. However such new ventures depend upon the availability of a building and are only possible if willing people from the congregation are free in the daytime during the week.

BUILDINGS

Some of the churches have useful modern buildings, but some of the older large buildings are hard to maintain. It seems crazy that while about one third of the churches find their buildings a burden, another third have no buildings of their own and are very keen to find one.

Growing Churches

Five of the 23 churches in South West Ham have grown in numbers in the last five years at least doubling in size. They are without exception in the Evangelical / Baptist / Pentecostal / House church tradition, although other churches from the same traditions are declining or static. None of the Anglican, Methodist or URC churches have done so.

Much of this increase (probably half) can be put down to Christians who have moved from other churches outside the area. But within the growing churches there have also been several conversions of local people. Most of the other churches claim to have held their own, or suffered a slight decline, as older people have begun to die off. There are one or two cases of churches in where decline is rapid.

Growth is not only a question of numbers, and almost every person questioned in the survey said the quality of fellowship in their church had got better. Many individuals had experienced personal spiritual growth.

CENTRES & Urban Mission

In Newham, besides the churches, there are several Christian mission organisations, centres and groups. Usually they do not meet for regular worship, but carry out their work seven days a week. Typically they employ large numbers of staff, hold large buildings and draw finance from outside sources (e.g. government and Council grants, denominational bodies, trusts etc). In most cases the thrust of their work is towards community work and social projects.

There are at least half a dozen such groups active in South West Ham. Between them nearly 100 people are employed either full time or part time in some form of Christian mission or service. The main ones are these.

Mayflower

The Mayflower Family Centre in Canning Town started its life as a settlement for university graduates who wanted to serve the 'less fortunate' people of Docklands. The buildings have been almost completely renovated in the last five years. The people housed there are 'residents', young people who move into the area and work locally, while giving spare time to youth and church work, or longer term 'stay-incomers', some of whom are on the Mayflower staff team.

The Mayflower is ecumenical but has always had an Anglican warden and emphasis. The church fellowship operates as a private chapel within the local parish. It has approximately 70 members, of whom about 50 may attend any one service, the evening one being more popular. Nearly half the congregation is made up of staff and their families, residents and other non-locals.

The full time professional staff at the Mayflower number about a dozen and there are another dozen part timers. A wide range of community activities take place at the centre. The Youth Club is open most nights, one night a week as a family club, and once a week in the middle of the day for the unemployed. There is a pensioners' lunch club each weekday and a full time nursery school. The Sports Hall provides for many different tastes from bowls to karate. There are also work experience schemes for the young unemployed, and a variety of other community groups.

Mansfield House

This University Settlement is one of the oldest Christian agencies in the borough. Founded as a Free Church settlement it is formally ecumenical, although for the last forty years or more the warden has always been an Anglican priest.

Over the years activities centred on the Youth and Sports Clubs based in the massive Fairbairn Hall. 600 members still use the facilities and six full time staff are employed. A dozen part time youth leaders and a team of 30 volunteers are also involved. At the moment plans are in hand to renovate the building and expand the range of community work.

The Friary

The Society of St. Francis (The Brown Brothers) is a religious order within the Church of England. They have had a house in Plaistow since 1952, although their predecessors started work there in 1894. At present there are nine permanent members there, two of whom are women from the sister Order. Besides their community life of prayer and religious discipline, they are involved extensively in the local church and community. They take services in the local parishes and are involved in many of the local Christian networks and community projects.

In Contact

In Contact Ministries is one of the more recent groups, having begun work in Newham only in 1976. It is based in a redundant Anglican church in Plaistow which has just been renovated. The main hope was to plant new inner city churches, particularly among ethnic minorities, and to share the Gospel with people of other faiths. Three churches in the borough owe their origins to the work of In Contact. A second task of In Contact Ministries has been the training of Christian workers for evangelism to Asians.

Renewal Programme

The Newham Community Renewal Programme has 36 people presently on the payroll, 12 of them full time community workers. It works to support local churches, for example through a monthly newsletter, through printing services and its audio-visual resources. It helps run the children's holiday projects of local churches.

It also has three neighbourhood community centres, housing about 50 different community groups, including 5 Christian churches. The Programme runs its own specialist projects, such as an English as a Second Language project for Asian women, an Afro-Caribbean project, a hostel project for homeless young people and an Out of Work Centre for the young unemployed.

Types of Church

We reckon there are three types of churches in the area, with equal numbers in each type; Which type is yours?

1) New Churches which have emerged in the last ten years.

Some are the result of splits from existing fellowships, others of church planting and growth within particular communities. Typically these are lively in worship, and growing in numbers and fellowship. They are people centred, rather than building centred, and totally self supporting in terms of leadership and finance.

2) Renewing Churches are churches, with a building of their own, which have been seeking to reverse years of decline. Often this has been the result of a change of leadership, and the arrival of new members with youth, commitment and professional skills. Often there has been resistance to change and attendance at services has not yet started to improve. However, the change of emphasis is there, and people have started to look forward in hope, rather than back in nostalgia.

3) Declining churches usually have an elderly membership, who depend on the clergy to do everything for them. They have a traditional style of worship and often a sense of despair. More effort is put into fundraising than into outreach. They struggle to keep things going just as they have always been done, and people are often frightened of new ideas.

Jesus Is Lord

Lawrence Hall

Lawrence Hall is a large Christian community centre in Plaistow. It is linked informally through its staff with the local Baptist church.

It is a central point for many of the Christian and community activities in the borough. Besides several halls and meeting rooms there are over 50 flats which are let to older people and to young Christian couples. The halls cater for some 40-50 community groups including four new and growing Christian fellowships, which have no church building of their own.

About 16 full time professional workers are employed at the centre with funding coming from rents, Council grants and the Aston Charities. The main projects are with pre school children, adult education, the Volunteer Bureau, a Luncheon Club and day centre for OAP's. There is also a Community Industry project which provides work experience for nine youngsters.

Other Groups

Christians also run a number of other organisations in the area such as the Shaftesbury Society, (housing and old peoples welfare), West Ham Central Mission, (housing and social work), Anchor House (Seamen's Welfare) and the Roman Catholic Convent.

NETWORKING

Recently there has been a growth in 'Kingdom building networks', in which Christians from different churches meet and work together for Christ. These are based above all on personal relationships of trust and love. There is sharing of experiences and resources, together with occasional united events. The networks themselves overlap at many different points, so that you are always meeting people who know people that you have met somewhere else. One question is whether they will be able to keep a human face, or whether they themselves will start to 'gather funds, staff, projects and buildings and become impersonal organisations. Examples are

1) The Celebration network, alias 'Newham Christian Fellowship'. At the core of this are half a dozen fellowships whose pastors meet regularly for prayer, and whose congregations combine for a monthly celebration service. They are also seeking influence in the life of the borough, for example hiring the Town Hall for their prayer meetings, and organising a float in the Town Show as a witness to the people of Newham.

2) Keir Hardie Group and the Plaistow Churches Group are examples of 'unofficial' ecumenical gatherings of Christian leaders and their congregations. In the former, three churches have agreed to work together. They recognise and share their ministers, and occasionally worship or have social outings together.

3) Badger Group is a borough wide group which tries to link up some of the Black pentecostal Christians to the white church networks. Every few months there is a worship service in which Black and white Christians contribute in their own style.

4) The Evangelical Coalition for Urban Mission has a network of Christian workers in East London, and has an office at Lawrence Hall. It puts on conferences and courses about Christian work in the inner city.

7) Newham Youth for Christ has developed a local network and now have a full time worker. They work in schools and run evangelistic meetings for teenagers. Many of the local churches are involved in this work.

8) Anglicans, Free Churches and Roman Catholics have denominational networks for both ministers and laity such as the Deanery Synods and Methodists in Newham group.



Jesus Is Lord

He calls us, his people, to proclaim and work for his kingdom and rule 'on earth as in heaven' according to his purpose as set out in the Bible.

So We Commit Ourselves

To Penetrate
all parts of urban and industrial society to foster a Christian presence there



To Identify And Challenge

in Christ's name, the oppressive and demonic in individuals, communities and institutions

To Join Hands

with all who own Jesus as Lord in making real among urban people the new community of righteousness, peace and joy to which the Holy Spirit is calling us all.



Questions ?

Why do some churches grow and others fail?

Why are there so few white working class people, so few men, and so few middle aged people in the churches?

Have the churches been doing enough in evangelism, and in social action? And have they been doing it in the right way?

How do the big Christian organisations and networks, help or hinder the growth of local churches?

Is it right, or inevitable, that black people and white people, mainly go to separate churches?

What can the denominational authorities do to help, and what can we local Christians do to make things better?

Where do you see God at work in the life of the churches of South West Ham?

Credits

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