

MY TWO PASTORATES

Hadlow Baptist chapel: the story of a short pastorate

Hadlow is a village some four miles out of Tonbridge on the road to Maidstone, Kent. In 1823 a house was rented, by a Mr Harrison, and fitted out as a place of worship. In 1824 a Particular Baptist church was formed with fourteen members, who continued to worship in the same building till 1830. They were then given notice by the owner to quit the house, so they acquired a site on which to build a chapel, which was duly opened in October 1830 for “Strict Communion Baptists maintaining the doctrines of grace” – that is to say, Calvinistic Baptists who admitted only baptised communicants to the Lord’s Table (Holy Communion). This much we learn from Ralph Chambers’ Kent volume in *The Strict Baptist Chapels of England*.



I believe my first visit to Hadlow Strict Baptist chapel was to preach there at the Thursday Bible Study and prayer meeting, when I preached on Isaiah 61:1-4, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted...”

In those days I held a second-blessing view of “the baptism in the Holy Spirit”, and wishing to be open with the people, on my next visit, Thursday 31st August, 1972, I preached on that theme from 2 Chronicles 6 and 7, and later I gave a series of studies on the theme including in September 1973.

On Thursday 12th October I preached there again, this time on 1 Corinthians 9.

It wasn’t long before I was preaching there on Sundays. On 21st January 1974 I took the morning and evening services, and on 12th February I noted in my diary that, “I have much ministry at Hadlow booked up till December.”

A significant step forward for the church was taken on 29th March 1973 when it was decided to increase the Thursday evening Bible study and prayer meeting from fortnightly to weekly. That evening I spoke on the conclusion to Galatians 2, and finished Galatians on 5th July, for I believed in consecutive expository ministry.

I was booked there on Sundays 8th April, 29th April, 12th August, 23rd September, 14th October, 2nd December, 1973, and on seven Sundays in the first four months of 1974.

On 25th April 1974 the church members decided by a unanimous vote to issue an unconditional call to me to the pastorate. I was already booked to preach there on a Sunday in each of May, July (or wedding anniversary!), and August, and there was encouragement on Friday 14th June, when three people were baptised.

On 16th June I was received into membership and was given Deuteronomy 31:8 by the church secretary: "And the Lord, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be afraid."

My induction to the pastorate took place on 14th September, 1974. Then aged 27, I hoped it was the beginning of perhaps forty years of preaching and pastoring among the Strict Baptist churches of Britain, seeing God bless in power the word spoken and the ministry given, of becoming widely known and in demand as a preacher among the churches as people sought and found a deeper and more overflowing blessing in their walk with God.

At 4 pm there was a prayer meeting, for every work of God which men undertake should commence in prayer. This was led by Pastor Colin Goldsworthy of Rusthall. In the words of *Grace* magazine, "many engaged in prayer, and it was evident from the beginning that a warm spirit of fellowship would prevail throughout the day."

At 6:30 pm the chapel was well filled for the evening service. It was led by Norman Parker, best man at my wedding the year before. Pastor David Obbard of Tunbridge Wells gave the charge to the church. He also gave me the "charge to the pastor", basing his words on Deuteronomy 4:1, "go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers giveth you."

But from the very beginning a shadow fell over the fellowship. *Grace* continues: "Collections for the day amounted to £14:50; this money was a love gift to the Pastor and Mrs. Young." Norman Parker checked the figure with us in conversation, being unable to believe that it was the full amount, knowing how much he himself had put in - a figure he did not reveal to us. Some of the money, it appeared, must have been diverted elsewhere. We shall never know for sure.

The church could not afford to pay me a stipend, but it did pay the rent on the cottage we lived in at Borough Green, beginning on 9th September 1974. From October 1974 till June 1976 Mrs Cole, one of the members, gave us an occasional gift of £1. Thus, I was still tied to four days a week of schoolteaching to supply the needs of my family.

Also, I did not feel it wise to attempt to take as many morning and evening services at Hadlow as a full-time pastor might, and I did very little preaching elsewhere. I retained some engagements for the remainder of 1974: Sutton at Hone on a Sunday in October and in December, and Meopham on 24th November. I had engagements at Rusthall in January and November 1975, and January and April 1976, and at Ryarsh in June 1975, though I do not recall fulfilling the last.

There were four remaining church members: Mrs Lilian Cole, who had moved to Borough Green; a spinster (whose identity I withhold) and her aged mother, who lived together in a village some eight miles from Hadlow; and Mrs Simmons, who was frail, aged and almost blind, and who lived on the edge of Hadlow with an unmarried, middle-aged daughter who brought her to chapel and attended the services with her.

It seemed to me, though only God sees the heart, that only Mrs Cole showed signs of spiritual-mindedness; I never heard any of the others engage in prayer. Mrs Cole remained in touch with us till her last Christmas in this sublunary world, and died in September 2000. She wrote to us in October 1998:

Dear David, Margaret & family,

I felt I must write to you a few lines, I rather think I didn't get round to it last year, but you are not forgotten & especially with the news of Albania as it is, often wonder how much you are involved.

A short time before the induction, on Thursday, 5th September, Mr Obbard preached at Hadlow from Luke 18:1-8, saying that the Lord waits a long time then answers speedily. At that service my spirit seemed to witness that his theme was a word regarding how things should develop at Hadlow. On the day the church began paying our rent, a text calendar I saw carried these words: *Work hard and cheerfully at all you do, just as though you were working for the Lord. Colossians 3.23.* Norman Parker had also preached on the need for hard work, and a student at Hadlow College called Andrew had expressed the same thought. On 22nd September, the Sunday after the induction, the preacher was Mr P. W. Jennings; he made much of the verse which assures us that we shall reap in due time if we faint not. The following day this scripture seemed to speak to my heart: "the thing came about suddenly" (2 Chronicles 29:1, 36). All of this seemed to combine to set out the purpose of God for the coming years: God was leading us into a time of long hard work, followed by sudden blessing. I felt I knew what to expect and what I had to do.

I gave myself to serious prayer, and indeed to fasting, for the blessing of God to fall upon the work, and quickly embarked upon a programme of systematic door-to-door visitation. Using an Ordnance Survey map, I plotted the area for which we were the nearest evangelical place of worship, and visited each house, flat and gypsy caravan. If someone came to the door, the way of salvation was explained; if not, a piece of literature explaining the gospel was left. It was my policy never simply to invite someone to chapel: I went, to invite them to Christ.

I began with the homes and farms around Hadlow, and then continued by visiting the homes in the village itself. The task was finished on 27th October 1975, except for the staff flats at the agricultural college which I did not know how to find, and in fact never went to.

People joined us from Tonbridge, including Richard and Margaret Worthington, their friend June and a man called David Perumalla. But by early December 1974, I felt the Lord was leading me not to look any more for people to come from elsewhere who would strengthen our hands, but to focus on Hadlow and its area, and the Christians already there. During the course of the door-to-door visiting, I found five professed believers attending no place of worship at all; a Baptist family commuting to a church in Tonbridge; a Brethren family travelling to Tonbridge; and about half a dozen other believers commuting elsewhere to evangelical Anglican or Pentecostal churches. It became my hope that God would draw His people in Hadlow together into one body.

Only three weeks after the induction service, I preached from Amos 9 on the removal of people who are hindrances and the building up of a new thing. By the end of 1974 Margaret and I were praying that the Lord would totally remove the internal hindrances to blessing in the church and bring us into a time of upbuilding.

In the first *Strict Baptist Directory* for 1975, the member whom I have not named, who lived in the other village, was still the church secretary; in the second, for the months May-August, she no longer is. One of the visiting preachers was a married man. He formed a friendship with her. His wife divorced him, and they intended to get married. They came to our home to talk with me about their relationship on Wednesday 15th January 1975, and the hope grew bright within me that God was on the point of achieving something significant in the church.

Now in this paragraph I record only what happened, without comment: I am not saying we were right, or that we were mistaken. Be that as it may, some time later she was put out of membership by a decision of the church meeting, for their relationship which was perceived as adulterous in intention. I emphasise here that I am not saying it was so; only that the church perceived it as such when it acted as it did. The Day will declare it. When she was put out of membership, her mother and Mrs Simmons left with her, leaving eight members in the church, all from outside village. The couple went ahead with their plan, and were married in a nearby Methodist chapel.

Unfortunately my 1975 appointments diary is missing. The church's Minute Book for the period is also missing, and neither the Corporation (now re-named Grace Baptist Trust Corporation) nor the Strict Baptist Historical Society has any knowledge of its whereabouts or fate. So it is not possible to reconstruct the year as fully as it might otherwise be, momentous though the year was in the light of later developments.

An evangelistic mission was held from the 19th to the 28th April, run by a team from Cliff College.

In time a small number of extra people began attending services, including a severely epileptic girl, a mentally retarded man of about 40, his elderly widowed mother, all from Pittswood, and an elderly blind widow who lived a few doors along from the chapel. It was necessary for me to go round prior to services collecting these people in my Renault 4 car: first a trip round the country lanes to outlying homes, then when those people were safely brought into the chapel, a walk along Court Lane to fetch Mrs Homewood the blind lady. I thus began services with my mind already in a whirr, and decided that if ever I should become a pastor elsewhere, people would need make their own arrangements to get to chapel or be fetched by someone else. A pastor needs to begin the service in the right frame of mind, and to be at the chapel early enough to pray with elders or deacons, or to welcome worshipers as they arrive.

Despite all of this effort, no-one in village was converted - though Caroline the epileptic girl made a profession of faith which did not really seem genuine at the time - though only God reads the heart truly -, and a girl of about 18 from Roughwood professed faith and was baptised, but she soon left us for a larger church in a nearby town.

Another aspect of my attempt to penetrate the village also met only with failure. To rent accommodation in the village or at least somewhere in the area for which we were the nearest evangelical church proved impossible. Nothing became available, even though I made serious enquiries every time I came across an empty house. And of course I could not afford to buy a house in the prosperous South-East of England on a salary from part-time schoolteaching. Thus it never became possible to fulfil my desire of living in Hadlow, though in Borough Green we were only ten minutes away by car.

By January 1975 I was wondering whether to teach full-time the following academic year, so as to buy a house in Hadlow. It was a conundrum: if I bought a home, I could do it only at the cost of time for the work; if I retained the time, I could not afford a house. In the event, I remained part-time, and never managed to move to Hadlow.

What can be said of the life and fellowship of the church itself?

I led the church into the practice of tithing its income to missions, with considerable emphasis on ministry to the suffering church in eastern Europe. The congregation were encouraged to take an interest in their situation and in the ministry that the church was supporting for their benefit, and we had at least one meeting at which an *Auslandsdeutscher* (that is, a German man) from the Soviet Union spoke, and I interpreted. His name, I seem to recall, was Arnold Rose. A monthly prayer meeting for eastern Europe was regularly announced, and was held at Richard and Margaret Worthington's home in Tonbridge.

In 1976 - perhaps earlier too - the church's weekly prayer meetings rotated monthly round four different homes: June's; Mrs Cole's; the Worthingtons'; and ours. Other occasional services or types of meeting were held: a chapel anniversary on 25th April 1976 at which Norman Parker preached; a visit on 23rd May by Mr. E. C. Last of the Protestant Truth Society, and one on 13th June from E. M. Biggs of the London City Mission; quarterly church business meetings. A harvest thanksgiving service was held in September 1975. It was the practice to deck the chapel with hops, picked wild from the hedgerows: a habit which amused me, as probably some of the worshipers were teetotallers.

Other activities were allowed to go on on chapel premises, and brought in a little income. There were Women's Institute jumble sales in the Sunday School hall over the road from the chapel. The Liberal Party also used it for one of their functions, as did the parish council.

The unnamed couple's nuptial aspirations were not the only problem. In August 1987 Mrs Cole told me it was commonly believed in the village that two women who attended had been engaged in a lesbian relationship. Again I must emphasise that I have been unable to confirm this, and that no-one else has said it to me. Whether this was true or false, I cannot therefore say, but if it was *believed* to be true, this would have added to the church's poor name in the village. Richard and Margaret Worthington were thinking of leaving the area, and in any case Richard went off to a conference on the very weekend the 1975 evangelistic mission began in Hadlow. We received very little practical help from the newcomers with matters like cleaning the chapel and maintaining the grounds. Attendances at regular meetings were disappointing: I recorded one week in April that Richard and I were the only people at the prayer meeting.

On Thursday 5th June 1975 a referendum was held to decide whether Britain should remain in the Common Market. The Sunday before the referendum was one of high purpose and emotion, and I urged my listeners to consider the probable developments of the Common Market very seriously in voting on whether Britain should remain in membership. It already seemed obvious to anyone with eyes to see, that the member states would be led into a union as one nation. Outside the chapel a poster was prominently displayed showing a box wrapped in a Union Jack, and the caption *Freedom is fragile: handle with prayer*.

Shortly before the summer holiday, on 6th July 1975, I preached what must be reckoned as one of the most significant sermons of my ministry. I spoke on the barren fig tree. It was exactly three years since I had first ministered at Hadlow - 6th July, 1972 - and I had reached the conviction that I must give the church and village one more year, by the end of which there must be a *local* church, that is, a body of at least two baptised

believers from Hadlow or its area. Otherwise I would leave. So important, so pivotal, to the rest of my life was that theme that the passage needs to be quoted verbatim:

A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, 'Lo, these three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down; why should it use up the ground?' And he answered him, 'Let it alone, sir, this year also, till I dig about it and put on manure. And if it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down!'"

Early in the *barren fig tree's* final year of trial we held a special week, in August, for children and young people, and undertook decorating and repairs to the chapel. Already the plan was formed to hold an evangelistic mission from the 1st to the 11th of July 1976: that would mark the end of the fourth year of my ministering at Hadlow. If there was still no local church by then, the work would be terminated and the chapel closed down. Remarkably, it was the missionaries who suggested July as the time for the mission, though they did not know the significance of the timing when they made the suggestion.

From the beginning of the September school term I reduced my schoolteaching from four to three-and-a-half days a week. This enabled me to give an extra half day to the demands of the pastorate - prayer, visiting, preaching and so on.

The morning service on 28th January 1976 saw five people in attendance who were not usually there. Maybe something was beginning to stir... But on Sunday 15th March, only Richard Worthington and Mrs Cole came.

By the end of March, with only one more school term to go, it was clear that human reason would have led me to give up the work at Hadlow, hand in my notice at school from my 3½-day-a-week job, and seek full-time employment elsewhere. But I felt God had said we were to decide in July, and we were committed to trusting Him and hanging on till then. That would be too late to give in my notice at Combe Bank School. "What will we live on if the chapel closes?" I wrote.

July came, and the mission was held as planned, our last hope of a clutch of converts as the beginning of a local church of people from the village and area. I cannot say that anyone was truly converted, though the Day will reveal it. Nothing clear-cut, definite, took place; no clear, deciding indication was given: just another uncertain possibility. The evangelists made an appeal, and I recorded that Mrs Homewood the blind lady "was the first to respond to 'the appeal'"; some children also responded. But a church had not been brought into being.

The mission ended on the evening of Sunday 11th July, and with it our hopes. I led the final service, and chose as the closing hymn "When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound". The last verse says:

*Let me labour for the Master from the dawn till setting sun,
Let me talk of all His wondrous love and care;
Then, when all of life is over, and my work on earth is done,
And the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there.*

At 8pm the following evening a church meeting was held, surely one of the most fateful meetings I shall ever attend, let alone lead. The decision was taken to close the chapel. There was no such entity as Hadlow Baptist Church: we were perpetuating a fiction. I asked a pastor in Tonbridge to undertake the follow-up and pastoral care of Mrs Homewood and the people from Pittswood, and perhaps of the children.

A few days later, after going to the chapel for some final practicalities, I stopped the car at the edge of the village before returning home to Borough Green. In obedience to the scripture, I got out of the car, took off my shoes and shook off the dust of Hadlow from them. I had set before them life and death, blessing and curse: they had chosen death. The kingdom of God had come near; their blood is upon their own heads.

Whether the decision to close the chapel was right or not, I shall probably never know in this world – nor do I expect to be told in the next, for the former things shall be remembered no more. True, it was a unanimous decision of the eight remaining members: but it was I who led them into it, and I must bear the responsibility. But whether right or not, I discovered this: it was irreversible. However, the promise given to me by the church secretary when I was received into membership has, in God’s mercy, proven true: “And the Lord ... will not fail thee, neither forsake thee.”

When I was a boy, my Latin master used to quote the saying of Heraclitus to the effect that “no man can step into the same river twice.” I thought the saying was foolish: now I know that it has permanent and immutable truth.

David M. Young

2023

BETHEL BAPTIST CHURCH, LLAY

the first ninety years 1927-2017

Bethel Baptist Church was founded on 16th October, 1927. The founding members were:

William Arthur Evans
Martha A. Evans
Richard Jarvis
Ann Jarvis
James Lloyd
Ann E. Lloyd
William Williams
Hannah Williams
Mary Ann Williams
John William Williams

The minister at the founding of the church was the Rev. Ed. Mitchell of Ponciau.

The church first met in the home of Mr R. Jarvis, but after two or three meetings application was made to the managers of Llay Council School for the use of the school room; this was granted, and for two years the church worshipped in No. 1 classroom. Such was the success of the work, that the church began thinking of a more permanent place, and after much consideration purchased a large hut which was erected in the field adjoining Pentre Lane. The hut was officially opened early in 1930. Members were local, and congregations numbered 70 to 80. Other chapels were used for baptisms: Groes Penycae; Tabernacl Brymbo; Bradley Road Wrexham; Bethania Acrefair. More recently the church has used the Church of the Nazarene in Llay, and Bethania Baptist, Leeswood.

Eventually the hut was demolished to make way for a private housing development, and the church worshipped in Glanaber Welsh Presbyterian chapel.

Bethel was a member of the Baptist Union of Wales, and began as a Welsh-language cause. Some of the leaders of the Welsh Baptists helped greatly in getting the young church established, especially Dr E. K. Jones; the Revs D. Wyre Lewis, E. Mitchell and Gardde Davies; together with Messrs John and Meredith Williams of Brymbo. The church's first secretary was Mr. W. A. Evans; treasurer, James Lloyd; precentor and organist, William Williams; deacons, William Richard Jarvis, John Williams, James Lloyd, Arthur Evans.

In January and February, 1928, one English service per Sunday was held, and on 25th March there was a unanimous members' vote to change to an English cause. William Williams left the church due to his objection to the English language. On Easter Sunday (8th April) English services were begun for a three-month trial period, and on 22nd June the report was given that the services should continue in English. The church, however, remained in membership of the Baptist Union of Wales.



Minute book entries from October 1932 show that the church practised closed membership, that is, required baptism by immersion upon profession of faith. Strict communion was also practised, baptised persons only being admitted to the Lord's Table. This was the practice of the vast majority of Welsh Baptist churches from their beginnings in about the 1650s. In fairly recent times, Bethel opened its membership to non-baptised persons, but no non-baptised persons applied, and It was agreed at the church meeting held on 10th January 1984 to revert closed membership, which we held to be biblical. The 'open Table' however was retained.

A little of the early life of the church seen from these entries in the minute book:

8th October, 1932 to appeal to our members to remain at our after meetings on Sunday evenings and to invite further someone or other from the congregation who are desirous to surrender themselves to the Lord to remain with us.

7th January, 1933 that we seek the support of church members in our efforts to commence a week-night Bible class.

4th January, 1934 resolved to hold a week's prayer meetings to commence on January 15, time of meetings to be from 7 o'clock till 8 p.m.

15th April, 1934 that the church break bread every Sunday morning after service in future.

5th September, 1943 "to re-start prayer meeting Tuesday evenings which had been discontinued for some months.

On 28th March, 1943, a letter was read to the church from Mr J. Evans of Rhos, secretary of the North Wales English Baptist Union, regarding the possibility of Llay's joining the English churches of the Lancashire and Cheshire Association. The church resolved to consider the matter within a month. On 31st August 1943, the

deacons met the Rev. Vaughan Morris of Old Colwyn, who argued that it would be better for the church to join the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland and to sever its membership of the Baptist Union of Wales. However, on 21st September a ballot was taken of members and it was decided "for the time being at any rate" to remain in the Denbigh, Flint and Meirion Association (formed in 1844) of the Welsh Union.

Eventually, however, in about 1946, the change of membership was made and has remained, as far as I am aware, till the present.

Ministers of Bethel till the 1970s

The Rev. Gardde Davies, pastor at Tabernacl, Brymbo, acted as Bethel's first moderator and pastor from its foundation.

After some years the church felt it would like to have its own pastor, and the Rev. Thomas Owen Jones of Wrexham was invited and worked at Bethel from 1932 till 1938.

After his resignation some time elapsed till regular ministry was sought from the Rev. T. J. Hughes of Penybryn Chapel, Wrexham, He was inducted as pastor of Bethel in November 1941, and stayed till September 1946, when he moved to South Wales.

Mr Hughes was followed fairly soon by Mr Gwilym Thomas of Cefn Mawr. In December 1946, he appears in the church minute book as "Mr". By February 1947, he was presiding at the Lord's Table, signing the minutes at business meetings and being called a deacon. In October his name was put on the chapel notice board as pastor. He served the church till March 1956, but always retained his secular employment as well.

Help was then sought from the Rev. Dyfan Thomas, who took a good number of preaching engagements at Bethel and also dedicated children, received members and performed baptisms, weddings and burials.

With guidance from the Rev. Trevor Hubbard of the Lancashire and Cheshire Association, Mr. Denis Wright from Hoole Baptist Church was recommended to the church, and served for some twelve months from late 1966 till the end of 1967. He was never inducted as pastor, and after his time at Llay took a pastorate near Derby.

During the years that followed some help was given (though no preaching) by Derek Thomas, minister of Chester Street, Wrexham, but the 1970s were largely a fairly static decade.

The 1980s

In March 1981 the church decided to start holding prayer meetings again on Tuesday evenings. This significant development in the church's life seems to me to be paralleled by the similar decision taken at Hadlow in March 1973: both times the decision was followed by the call of a pastor, and by growth in membership and attendance. About that time, at Llay the Sunday School began to build up.

I had entered the ministry in 1973 among the Strict Baptists and became pastor of the church in Hadlow till that chapel closed. The need for full-time employment to support my family then brought me to North Wales as a schoolteacher and into membership of the Baptist Church in Bradley Road, Wrexham. Then, some time in the

first half of the 1982, I heard that Salem Newydd chapel at Brynteg was going to be closed, and that there might be the opportunity to buy the harmonium. I wrote to the Lancashire and Cheshire Association of the Baptist Union, in whose area Wrexham fell, asking to buy the harmonium – which, in fact, was an American reed organ. I collected it on 4th June. In the letter I mentioned that I had been a Strict Baptist minister and would be glad to serve the churches in the Wrexham area. On 8th June I received a phone call from the Rev. Stephen Heap, minister at Chester Street, Wrexham, concerning the possibility of my helping at Llay.

At the Association assembly in June 1982, Trevor Hubbard, the area superintendent (a sort of Baptist “bishop”), mentioned my name to Derek Price, one of the deacons at Llay, together with the possibility that I might do some work in one of the local churches.

Stephen Heap raised the matter of my possibly going to Llay at a church meeting at Chester Street, and the members approved of his suggestion that he should ask me to preach at Chester Street, so that he could hear me and decide whether or not to direct me to the church at Llay. I preached there at the 10:30 a.m. service on 4th July 1982, having spent the morning in a partial fast, drinking normally but not eating, to draw God’s attention to my prayer that only His will should come out of the service.

On 20th August, two letters were written, one to Derek Price, deacon and church secretary at Llay, and one to me. The first said:

...Out of all this we suggest that David exercise a preaching ministry in a church for about a year, say two Sundays [sic] a month, and then David and the church can assess the situation and try to discern the will of God.

The other said:

Trevor... agrees to your suggestion re a preaching ministry & then you & the people searching for God’s will as to the future.

In September, the church at Llay had a business meeting and discussed the suggestion of my going there, but they came up against a hindrance. Someone else thought he was already the lay pastor! Before the end of the month, he and his wife left the church, and the rest wished to meet me. On 8th November, Derek Price came to see me, and I accepted some dates for speaking at the chapel in Llay.

On 14th December 1982 I gave a brief epilogue at Llay on the text “good will toward men”. It was a Christmas social cum Sunday school event. On Tuesday, 11th January, I preached there on Judges 5:2: *That the leaders took the lead in Israel, that the people offered themselves willingly, bless the Lord!* I preached there again on Sundays 6 March, 3rd April and 29th May.

I took advice about whether my call was genuine, and if so how I should aim to fulfil it. By the end of May the whole weight of the counsel I had received was against giving up my school-teaching job at this stage, and I felt that God Himself clinched that advice with scripture applied to my heart.

On 7th June there was a members’ meeting at Llay, and they were unanimous in wanting me as their pastor, and on Thursday 23rd I wrote accepting.

The induction took place on Sunday, 23rd October, 1983. At the morning service in Bradley Road, prayer was made for me. In the evening at Llay, Trevor Hubbard and Pastor Harding of Bradley Road laid hands on me and thus inducted me to the pastorate. Stephen Heap led the first part of the service.

A new chapel

The Baptist congregation had lost its chapel – or rather, hut - years previously, and, as mentioned above, was renting the Welsh Presbyterian chapel for services. The Welsh cause was in serious decline, and discussions began about a reversal of roles: the Baptists would buy the chapel from the Presbyterians, and the Presbyterians would use it for their Sunday afternoon service. A meeting was held on 27th September to discuss this proposal, and after various discussions and procedures, the Baptist church was able to purchase the chapel and rename it Bethel during the first half of 1986. The purchase cost the church over £10,000, and money then needed to be put into decorating and improving it.

Church life

Christmases at Bethel were grand events. On my first Christmas in the pastorate I joined others on Thursday evening, 15th December, to decorate the chapel. On the Saturday there was a social event, beginning at 7.30 pm. On the Sunday evening, the chapel was packed for a carol service. On the Saturday afternoon (23rd) there was a Sunday School party at the village hall. A grand display was also put on for harvest services in the autumn, and there were harvest suppers. I always felt that if village people, with whom the church had these happy, wholesome annual contacts, ever became aware of their need of God, the contacts offered potential for significant church growth.

For greeting the New Year, I introduced a midnight communion service beginning at 11.30 on Saturday, 31st December.

We considered moving to Llay, so as to be more closely involved with the people and the work, but Mr Obbard (our pastor when we were living in Sussex) and Mr Harding both advised against it, and we followed that advice. The chapel was only 2½ miles from our home.

I attempted in various ways to develop both spiritual and social relationships within the church and its meetings. I introduced communion services at the Tuesday evening prayer meeting, with a view to more open, less formal services. Later, in September 1984, the two churches, Llay and Bradley Road, mounted a joint sports day at Wrexham's Bellevue Park for the children, and another in September 1985. In July 1984 we had a *cymanfa ganu* one Saturday evening, with refreshments afterwards. It was attended by a good number of people and, I felt, went well. A second one was held in April 1985, and another in September.

In August 1984 there was an evangelistic mission, with meetings first for children, and at the weekend for adults too. In the summer of 1985 an eleven-day evangelistic mission began. We had invited the Mission for Christ, whose speciality was rural evangelism, and who had done evangelistic work in Hadlow when I was there some years earlier.

By the summer of 1987 I was troubled by the facts that the church in Llay was not then growing numerically. There were baptisms and new members during my years at Llay, though continued growth was not evident that summer.

The new year 1988 – which included an evangelistic mission in May - began with a service that started at 11:30 pm on 31st December. At 6pm on Sunday 3rd January we held the “Service for such as would enter or renew their covenant with God”, the words of which are powerfully moving. They include this prayer:

I am no longer my own, but Thine. Put me to what Thou wilt, rank me with whom Thou wilt; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for Thee or laid aside for Thee, exalted for Thee or brought low for Thee; let me be full, let me be empty; let me have all things, let me have nothing: I freely and heartily yield all things to Thy pleasure and disposal.

I resigned from the pastorate on 8th July 1988. The church continued to pay the previous expenses of £33.33 a month till December.

1989-2017

On Saturday 29th April 1989 a new man was inducted to the pastorate - Ian Richardson, from a Bible college in South Wales, but he had left by early February 1990.

In 1994, Rev. Richard Reddoch, an American missionary with the Bible Baptist Fellowship, was invited to be the pastor of Llay. He and his wife moved from Scotland and took the church for one and a half years, leaving in mid-1995.

The church then went without a pastor until 1997. In August, Rev. Larry Quade was invited to pastor in Llay. He accepted the call in September and ministered there until 13th October, 2017.

The church's belief

The church's Trust Deed, adopted in 1966, requires by law that

No person shall be entitled to become or remain a member save such persons as hold the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ and the authority of the Holy Scriptures and that interpretation of them usually called Evangelical.

David M. Young

November, 2017