

Sidcup Baptist Church: A Brief History – 1889 to the present

Sidcup Baptist Church (SBC) was started in November 1889 as a “church plant” by the long-established Footscray Baptist Church. It first met in Sidcup Public Hall in Hatherley Road, but acquired its present site in the Longlands area of Sidcup during the First World War and opened its new building in January 1923.

The 1920s brought the hardship of the Depression and General Strike, and plans to build a large church in front of the existing ‘chapel’ fell by the wayside. But the 1930s saw a rapid expansion of church and community activities on the site, including Sunday School, Christian Endeavour, a choir, Literary and Musical Society – even a tennis club! The congregation grew steadily at that time, from 50 members at the time the new buildings opened to 130 by the eve of the Second World War.

The war brought significant changes: first, the minister at the time, Rev Stanley Gray, volunteered as a forces chaplain and was posted away from Sidcup for the duration; and then in September 1940 the church buildings were bombed and rendered unusable for several months.

The 1950s and 1960s saw both highs and lows. The highs certainly included the church packed with teenagers, evangelism amongst “teddy” boys and girls, 150 children coming to summer children’s missions and growth in various kinds of outreach in the community. The church remained relatively conservative in its worship as the charismatic renewal movement swept through the church at large in Britain, but SBC was by no means untouched by the Holy Spirit. Innovations such as house groups were introduced at this time, and moving into the 1970s and 1980s other developments included new links with Spurgeon’s College and Albany Park Baptist Church, sending missionaries overseas and modernisation of the worship and the church buildings.

Coming to more recent times, in 2001 SBC called Rev Ronnie Barham to be our Pastor. For a predominantly “white” church to call a black Pastor was a bold and inspirational decision. Under Ronnie’s leadership, the congregation became more ethnically diverse and enjoyed a new vibrancy in its worship, drawing upon Ronnie’s musical gifts.

Ambitious plans to re-develop the church buildings as recession gripped the UK proved unaffordable – an echo of the experience in the late 1920s – but in 2009/10 the church carried out a more modest scheme to improve and redevelop the halls to make the site fit for the 21st century.

In September 2010, Rev Ronnie Barham left SBC to take up a pastorate in South London; and we were joined in September 2011 by Rev David Rouse. With invaluable support from his wife Sue, David led SBC for five years until his retirement in September 2016.

After a year “in transition”, Rev Alex Newens arrived in September 2017 as our 15th Pastor and, with his wife Hannah, quickly settled into life at SBC. Alex is a young man who is wise for his 31 years. As we explore together what God’s will is for SBC’s congregation and the church’s role in serving the community, we look to the future with enthusiasm.