

Christians Coming Together

At the meeting on February 19th, the members of Christ Church South Manchester URC voted unanimously to join with Didsbury URC to form a new church. This is a momentous decision, marking the beginning of another stage in the development of Christian fellowship and witness in South Manchester. I want to look back briefly at the stages which have led to where we are now.

Burnage Congregational Church

Samuel Watts of Burnage Hall had two daughters, who left school in about 1855. Their father asked them what they wanted to do. They replied that they would like to open a Sunday School, there being no church in either Burnage or Ladybarn. Their father agreed, on condition that they attend Rusholme Congregational Sunday School, in order to learn how to run one. After they had done this for 12 months, father gave them a cottage on Moorton Avenue, which is behind the present church building. There, on February 6th 1857, they opened Burnage Sunday School, with 20 scholars from the neighbouring cottages.

From this auspicious beginning, numbers attending grew rapidly and in 1868, also on Moorton Avenue, Burnage Congregational Chapel was built. Mr. Newbury was appointed to be its first minister. The gateposts from this chapel now stand proudly on Burnage Lane either side of the entrance to the current church car-park. The foundations of our church were laid in devotion, self-sacrifice, love and a desire to serve so that the love of Christ be made known in Burnage.

Parrs Wood Road Congregational Church

In the 1920s, new housing, council and private, was being developed in the environs of the site. Bus and tram services enabled people to live in more pleasant surroundings and travel to work. Also, major employers, notably Hans Renold Chains in Burnage from early in the 20th century and Fairey Aviation in Heaton Chapel from the 1930s, offered steady, secure employment within walking distance. The Lancashire Congregational Union saw there was going to be a demand for a church to serve those moving into the new housing and in 1927, it bought land on the corner of Parrs Wood Rodd. and Fog Lane. Within months, 26 people united to form the Congregational Church, Parrs Wood Road. The attraction to the community was immediate. The second Sunday after it opened, the Sunday School welcomed 80 children and, by the end of 1932, the membership roll numbered 83. The church building was opened in 1931, the building financed largely from donations from all the Congregational churches in the Greater Manchester area.

Green End Church of Christ

The Churches of Christ originated in USA in the first quarter of the 19th century. Bethesda Church of Christ in Moss Side was founded in 1885 and brought to Manchester the Churches of Christ tradition of a gathered church (not grown out of the local community but established by Christians from elsewhere) to spread the faith and improve the lives of people in the vicinity. In 1935, Bethesda planted a daughter church in Burnage, Green End Church of Christ. This quickly concerned itself with improving housing conditions, providing a Sunday School, and many clubs, social events and camping holidays for adults and for children. In short, the church built and fostered a community, greatly enriching the lives of those it reached out to.

Christ Church South Manchester

In 1980, Burnage, Parrs Wood Road and Green End joined to form Christ Church - one

church meeting in three places. In 2005, the Green End building was closed for financial reasons and sold to Moss Care Housing Association for the provision of social housing, very much in keeping with Churches of Christ principles.

We are approaching the most important festival of the Christian year, which directs our thoughts to the fundamental issue of death and regeneration, the mystery of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Son of the Creator God, which is at the heart of the Christian message and of our faith. It seems appropriate, therefore, that this is the season when we are considering such fundamental change in order to strengthen our fellowship and Christian witness, to keep the light of God's love and our love for each shining brightly in South Manchester.

Robert Lock

I want to acknowledge my debt to Elaine Brooks, Ian Kenna and the late Bernard Cowley's book "Conversations with Luke" in the preparation of this article.