



BLOOMSBURY CENTRAL

BAPTIST CHURCH

Annual Report

2019-20

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Church Secretary's Report

As this report is published, life is rather different to how we began the year! None of us could have foreseen the impact that coronavirus would have upon all of our lives and on our life as a worshipping community. This report mostly covers what we have been doing in the last year pre-coronavirus. Since then, we have, however, found different ways to meet, with our interactive Zoom Sunday morning services, 'Provoking Faith', as well as online Deacons' Meetings, Home Groups and Bible studies. Our church isn't closed because our doors are shut - church is only closed when we fail to love. So, we are currently finding new ways to put our love into action by finding different ways to build community and by learning new things that we can take forward with us into our shared future.

This year we have welcomed three people into Church Membership, and our membership now stands at 153 people.

On a personal note, I am particularly grateful to Nigel Redford who has taken on the position of Assistant Secretary, and who has been Acting Secretary in my absence due to Bill's illness. Also, my thanks go to Philip Cotterell, Helen Swinyard and Matthew Streeter who have also undertaken some of the secretarial 'duties'.

On behalf of the church, I wish to register our gratitude for the work of our Ministers, Simon Woodman & Dawn Cole-Savidge, whilst acknowledging the additional burden on Simon whilst Dawn is on maternity leave. I also want to thank our Church Manager, James Fisher, who keeps our building running, and all of our paid staff who, with James, help keep the church ticking over day-by-day. We are also indebted to those who willingly give of their skills and time to keep all of



Bloomsbury's activities going. Too numerous to mention here, but it is appreciated.

But, I cannot finish without recording our special thanks to Howard Brown, who has served as Church Treasurer since the late 1990's, having previously been Church Secretary for two years, and who stepped down at our Annual General Meeting in November. We are very grateful for all he has given to Bloomsbury as an Officer over the years and are glad that he continues as one of our Deacons.

This report celebrates our life together over the past year. I hope you enjoy reading it and that it inspires you for the coming year as we consider new ways of doing things, and particularly as we start to develop our church strategy for the years ahead.

Jackie Somerville, Church Secretary

Minister's Report 2019-20

As I write this in May 2020, after eight weeks of lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic, looking back to the 'former things' of 2019 feels like looking in a glass darkly. The old has gone, and the new has come! However, the process of taking a longer view than the current lockdown is a helpful reminder of the truth that the faith-story of Bloomsbury extends beyond any moment of current crisis. Bloomsbury has stood firm through world wars, through highs and lows, through tragedy and celebration; and the trajectory of that past propels us into the present with a sense of vibrancy and mission that calls us to minister to a hurting world, bearing witness to the God of love revealed in Jesus Christ.



Mission, Vision, and Values

Through 2019 the fellowship at Bloomsbury engaged in a process of 'vision discernment', with a series of consultations facilitated by Andy Turner of HeartEdge. The Church Meeting in January affirmed our new statements of Mission, Vision, and Values:

Mission Statement

Our mission is to discern God's loving and inclusive will:
we nurture faith and build community,
we confront injustice, create sanctuary,
and deepen relationships.

Vision Statement

Provoking faith in the heart of London.

Values Statement

We strive to be:
Radically Christ-centred, proactively inclusive, empowering with justice; dissenting yet faithful, thoughtful and reflective, relevant and outward looking; diverse yet focussed, courageous and loving, hospitable and generous;
imaginative and risk-taking.



These words capture the 'essence' of Bloomsbury, and the task before those of us in the current generation of the church is to embody and enact these in our time. To this end, 2020 was designated by the Deacons as the year to take strategic decisions about the building, particularly how it can be best used to both facilitate and fund the mission of the church going forwards. The long term financial and social impacts of Coronavirus are as yet unclear; but the prudence, foresight, and courage of previous generations have given Bloomsbury a strong basis on which not only to 'weather the storm', but also engage in creative and significant ministry through it.

Worship

During 2019, the main preaching series was a monthly sermon on the Book of Revelation. We considered how the apocalyptic visions give us heaven's perspective on our earthly situation, and how they challenge us to live lives focussed on the revelation of God in Jesus, for the transformation of the world for good. On Communion Sundays we explored the 'Parables of the Kingdom' from Matthew's gospel, and how these subversive stories can shape us to be the people of God. We even had a go at writing our own parables! We also had a once-a-



Artwork by Dawn Cole-Savidge, created during one of her sermons.

month series marking our registration with the Inclusive Church network, and guest speakers addressed: ethnicity, LGBT, disability, gender, economic, mental health, and trans inclusion. You can read more about this series here:

<https://www.bloomsbury.org.uk/towards-full-inclusion-in-church-life/>

As usual in a city centre church such as ours, the worshipping congregation sees new people arrive, and says goodbye to people who are moving on; and we remain greatly blessed by the contributions people offer during their time with us.

It is instructive that the most common way people find us is through our online presence (see below on 'Website'). We held occasional all-age services, and it is always a joy to have a variety of children, grandchildren, and visitors join us for these. We're grateful to all those who serve us on Sunday mornings in so many different ways – from preaching to reading, to offering gifts of music, to running the PA, to making coffee, to offering a welcome to friends old and new. Our monthly Sunday evening service 'Studio Church' continued, offering a creative exploration of faith in a collaborative context.

In March 2020, in common with all other churches in the UK, we had to close the building due to the Coronavirus pandemic, and move our worship services (and other meetings) online. Bloomsbury's approach was to prioritise the experience of sharing community together, recognising that whilst we may not be able to physically gather, we could nonetheless have a 'live' gathering for worship, being present together in time if not in space. To this end we adopted a Webinar format, with a weekly panel of presenters, and the congregation joining in through the 'chat' to share greetings and news, as well as offering reflections on the topic of the service. One of the positive innovations

has been a discussion panel to follow the sermon, where the written contributions of the congregation merge with the voices of the panellists to reflect on the word that has been brought. We have been experimenting with creative worshipful contributions from some of our church musicians, and a wide selection of people, both older and younger, have been involved in leading the services. Very early we decided that we were going to celebrate communion together, and created a liturgy for 'scattered communion'. This was picked up widely within the Baptist family, and many churches around the UK are using the Bloomsbury liturgy in their online communion services. The Baptist Times published an article on this, which can be read here:

https://baptisttimes.co.uk/Articles/571834/Scattered_yet_gathered.asp
[X](#)

Fellowship

We welcomed Udoka Emanuel-Odiachi, Nigel Williams, Susan Rutter into membership during the last year, and our quarterly church meetings continued to be times of fellowship, discernment, prayer, and business, as together we take responsibility under Christ for the life of our church.

Our April 2020 Church Meeting was cancelled due to the pandemic, and we will have to address the constitutional implications if we are not able to hold church meetings through 2020.



A variety of small groups meet regularly, including home groups, Exchange, and the Soho Gathering. These offer pastoral support, friendship, and fellowship, and are valued by those who attend. If you're not part of a regular small group, why not consider joining one? The 'Northern' home group has continued to meet online during the pandemic, and we have started a new online Bible study group 'Provoking Questions' which meets bi-weekly.

The church is served in many different ways by a huge variety of people – we are an organisation of volunteers. From the many rotas

that keep things ticking over, to those who offer their gifts of welcome, hospitality, cooking, practical service, or technology, we are grateful.

The Church Manager continues to work hard to keep us on top of the constantly evolving schedule of maintenance and upgrading that a historic building such as ours requires. The London Baptist Association vacated their suite of offices in the autumn, and we wish them well in their new home. The Deacons are currently considering options for letting the fourth floor on a longer-term basis to provide a solid base of income to support the ministry of the church.

Pastoral Care

We have been active in supporting people with a great variety of pastoral needs over the last year. From the homeless and vulnerable with whom we engage on a regular basis, to those facing immigration and asylum issues, to those living with illness, infirmity, or bereavement. As is always the case, it is not possible for us to easily measure the 'success' of the support that we offer, and we continue to stand alongside one person who is battling an often intransigent and cruel immigration system; we are aware of many others who have such needs, and we offer support where it is appropriate. We invite people to receive our Shared Prayer email, and if you would like to receive this, please speak to Simon.

We have marked some significant moments for people over the course of the year. Our long-standing member Ben Hayden married Sarah (an Anglican vicar), and we wish them well in their new life together in Cheltenham; we will miss them from Bloomsbury.

A number of our Bloomsbury members have suffered bereavements over the past year, and the ministers have been active in offering funerals and pastoral care to people both within and beyond the fellowship. We were particularly saddened by the deaths of John Dawson, Ruth Johnson and Norah Shapton, who have all been part of Bloomsbury for many years.

Children & Young People

We currently have four Sunday Club leaders who have continued to provide material and activities for those children who come on a Sunday morning. If the age range of the children differs greatly, two

people run the session: if not, then one person takes responsibility. We have also prepared a number of activity ideas and put them in a box in the foyer cupboard. If no leader is available on a Sunday, the Duty Officer is able to produce the box for a parent to use. So far this has not been necessary.

A number of the children took part in the service before Christmas, providing a Nativity tableau for the congregation, although unfortunately several children were ill that day and unable to be present. Father Christmas made his usual appearance and gave gifts to those who were there. Arrangements were made to ensure the others received their gifts at home.

Because of the coronavirus lockdown at Easter, we were not able to make our usual Easter Garden for the congregation to enjoy, so families were invited to make their own at home and send in photos of their creations. This challenge was also taken up by a number of adults. The results were amazingly different and greatly added to our isolated celebrations at home.



Shang's Easter Garden

The leaders enjoy their sessions with the children and look forward to a time when we are able to meet together again.

Festivals

Christmas was a time of joy and celebration, including a Nativity service, a Churches Together in Westminster Advent service at St James' Piccadilly, and two successful carol services: the Bloomsbury Carol Celebration and the Big Queer Carols; all in addition to our

Christmas Day service. We were delighted to again welcome the London International Gospel Choir to participate in the Carol Celebration. Easter was celebrated under lockdown, and the parallels between the denials of the Lenten season resonated with the lived experience of a congregation experiencing fear, loss, and confinement.

Music

Bloomsbury maintains its strong musical tradition. The organ concerts continue to generate a very high profile for the church in the musical world and the number of world-class players in recent months has again catapulted the church to a high visibility in this area. Many of our 'regulars' travel each month from Brighton, Kent and other parts of the South-east and there is no doubt that the buffet afterwards



helps in transforming the regular concerts into worthwhile social occasions. Some of those attending chat for a few hours afterwards

The international nature of the series has continued to feature performers from around the globe including Canada, the USA and Germany. A particular highlight was to welcome 21 year-old Sebastian Heindl - an exceptional virtuoso - who played for us after winning First Prize in America's most prestigious organ competition - a stunning occasion with glowing reviews in many publications. Another memorable occasion was the return of the distinguished Welsh organist, Jane Watts, for a 60th Birthday Celebration Concert. The audience included many from the London Welsh church in East Castle Street and there was no shortage of Welsh cakes and similar goodies at the buffet!

The annual Bloomsbury Organ Day has established itself as a major event in London's musical life and around 400 people attended this year's event throughout the afternoon. To be able to enlist the support and encouragement of one of the world's great musicians - Dame

Gillian Weir - has been a special privilege. In addition to leading the masterclasses, Dame Gillian was also interviewed by the BBC for the special Songs of Praise programme featuring Bloomsbury, and there was much favourable reaction to the four young teenagers who commented with great enthusiasm about the Organ Day and the teaching!

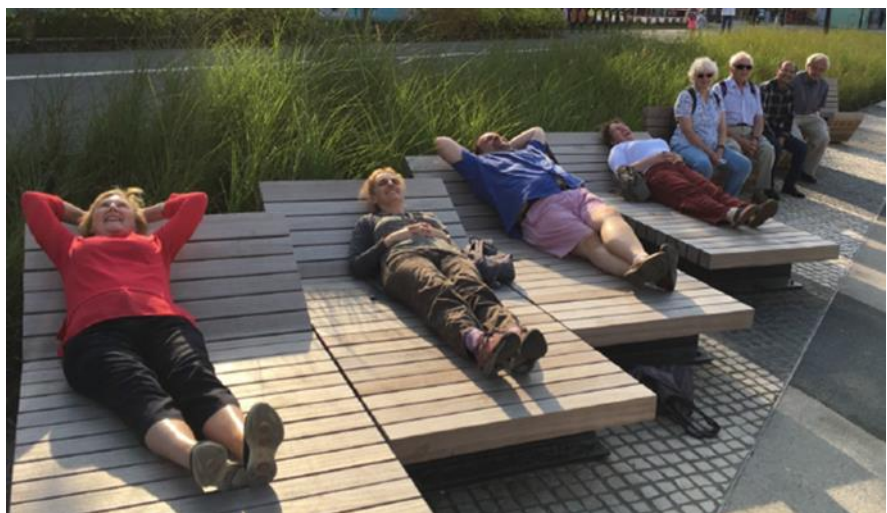
Do, please, make these concerts as widely known as possible and do look-in on an occasional Saturday and meet some of our 'regulars'. Most of the concerts contain 'easy listening' and all for a voluntary donation and a buffet too!

Social Spaces

Tuesdays at Bloomsbury continued to develop, with the active-retired drop-in sitting alongside 'Stay & Play', a carer-and-toddler drop-in, and 'Brushes and Biscuits', an art group for the over 50s. John Hayes, assisted by others from Dragon Hall and the team of Bloomsbury volunteers, continued to offer pastoral and practical oversight of the work on Tuesdays. We have seen many new faces come through the doors as a result of this, and the schedule of talks has been interesting and varied.

Tuesday evenings saw our weekly 'Evening Centre' meal, run in partnership with the Simon Community, for rough sleepers, offering social space and opportunities for other support in addition to food. Katie Calvert joined the Bloomsbury team as our Evening Centre Manager.

The popular 'Summer Strolls' series of gentle guided walks through various parts of London (ending in a pub for a meal) took place on Monday evenings throughout July.



Hospitality and Catering

Sunday Lunch has continued to be popular and we are able to meet the dietary needs of the diners. This is quite a challenge with the variety of people with allergies and those who follow vegetarian or vegan diet as a life-style choice. We have needed to reduce the wide variety of the menu we started with as the lower number of volunteers do not allow us to prepare more time-consuming dishes. The home-made soups continue to be a firm favourite.

At Christmas, the Tuesday lunch group were able to enjoy a traditional festive meal provided and cooked by an outside group of volunteers. Not only did they cook and serve the meal but provided much fun and entertainment as well. We welcomed Vicky Ogden, Corporate and Social Responsibility Ambassador for Ascential, and her volunteers at other times during the year. These occasions give Margaret Cooper-Johns and Hazel Beynon, along with their faithful team of volunteers, a well-earned break.

Ben, Nigel and Libby decided on an alternative festive menu for the Sunday lunch at Christmas. Each chose one of the three courses to prepare. Ben's 'soon to be in laws' made a welcome addition to the team. Many of the congregation shared in this meal.

Since the lockdown the kitchen has been closed. We are grateful to James and Nigel who have checked that nothing is causing any kind of hygiene problem. They have also been using up some of the food which may be reaching its best before date.

Social Justice

Bloomsbury's commitment to social justice remains strong, and our involvement with London Citizens continues. We hosted the Citizens Assembly in November 2019, which saw 500 people from across London set their Mayoral Manifesto 2020, addressing issues such as: Housing and homelessness, climate justice, welcome and sanctuary, Living Wage and hours, and youth safety. Whilst the Mayoral elections have been postponed to 2021, we will continue



working with others across London through Citizens to address these issues that affect all our lives. We are also exploring with London Citizens how they can support us more locally, both in the internal development of our congregational life, and in our relationships with other churches, mosques, synagogues and community groups working together on the social issues that matter to us.

The West End Welcome group (a spin-off from London Citizens) saw Bloomsbury partner with the Quaker Meeting from St Martin's Lane and the American International Church to form to bring Fatima and Amina, two Syrian sisters who had been in a refugee camp in Iraq, to live in the West End under the Community Sponsorship programme. A number of people from Bloomsbury are involved in this, providing pastoral and practical support, and language learning lessons.



The annual London Pride in July 2019 saw a strong Bloomsbury turnout, as we joined with others from Christians at Pride to offer a strong message of God's love for all.

Open Doors continues when we have volunteers, but increasingly we are struggling to keep the doors open by volunteer effort alone, and we can only pay for reception if there is a commercial booking in place. We continue to seek to offer an hospitable welcome to those who come in through our doors. Some of those we meet have very challenging needs and behaviours, and we have been learning to recognise that there are limits to what we can do. The Deacons are considering how we can best respond as a congregation to the needs of the most vulnerable in our city, as our mission to confront injustice and create sanctuary guides our compassionate responses.

Deacons

We are grateful to our Deacons and Officers who serve the church with faithfulness and wisdom. They meet monthly, and exercise careful leadership of the congregation, along with the ministers. Since March the Deacons have been meeting online by Zoom.

Ecumenical Links

Bloomsbury's involvement in Churches Together in Westminster (CTiW) has continued, with Martyn Watson taking a place on the committee, ensuring that our longstanding voice in this ecumenical forum



continues. Members from Bloomsbury have continued to attend CTiW 'Meet the Neighbour' events, where we visit each other's churches to gain a greater level of understanding of different Christian traditions.

Bloomsbury's ministers regularly attend (and occasionally host) the Westminster Clergy Ecumenical Breakfast which is a valuable opportunity for those who lead the different churches of the West End to get to know each other.

Bloomsbury continues as an active member of HeartEdge. Initiated by St Martin-in-the-Fields, HeartEdge is a movement for renewal, fuelled by people and churches sharing their assets, experience, resource and need. An ecumenical network, HeartEdge brings together people to share ideas and experience, do theology and develop their church and community. HeartEdge is about churches developing four Cs:

- Commerce: generating finance via enterprise, creatively extending mission.
- Culture: art, music, performance re-imagining the Christian narrative for the present.
- Congregation: inclusive liturgy, worship and common life.
- Compassion: empowering congregations to address social need.

Special Events

Bloomsbury hosted a number of special events through the year.

Theology Live! was held again at Bloomsbury in the spring of 2020, attracting about 70 people (mainly ministers) to a day of short papers



reflecting currents in research amongst Baptists. We also hosted the annual Faith & Thought (The Victoria Institute) lectures in May 2019, on “Is the Bible 'Fake News' Evidence from Archaeology” with guest speakers Prof. Alan Millard, Prof. Sir Colin Humphreys, and Rev. Prof. Philip McCormack.

Bloomsbury was featured on BBC Songs of Praise in February 2020 with interviews with: our Deacon Fifi Evelyn about the church’s inclusivity, our Minister Simon Woodman about the church’s history of social justice, and Dame Gillian Weir about the church’s tradition of organ music and recitals.

In the autumn we held an “enquirers’ course” entitled Answers Questioned, hosted by our young adults group Exchange, which saw a good number of people coming along to ask questions of their faith in an open but faith-ful environment. We hope to run this again.

Website

Bloomsbury’s new website went live in 2019, following a period of consultation. www.bloomsbury.org.uk has been well received, and we are grateful to the team at SeeGreen for their ongoing assistance in designing and running this.

BLOOMSBURY
CENTRAL BAPTIST
CHURCH WC2H 8EP

QUESTION YOUR ASSUMPTIONS

We invite you to share a meal and conversation with people who love exploring the implications of the Christian Faith with open minds.

9 OCTOBER, 19.00-21.00 - WHAT DOES 'HAVING FAITH' MEAN?

16 OCTOBER, 19.00-21.00 - WHAT CAN WE KNOW ABOUT JESUS?

23 OCTOBER, 19.00-21.00 - IS IT MEANINGFUL TO TALK OF GOD?

6 NOVEMBER, 19.00-21.00 - WHAT ARE WE TO MAKE OF THE BIBLE?

13 NOVEMBER, 19.00-21.00 - WHAT EARTHLY DIFFERENCE DOES FOLLOWING JESUS MAKE?

20 NOVEMBER, MAKING A DIFFERENCE! JOINING WITH CITIZENS UK FOR THEIR LONDON DELEGATES ASSEMBLY

27 NOVEMBER, 19.00-21.00 - IS THERE ANY POINT TO PRAYER?

ANSWERSQUESTIONED.EVENTBRITE.CO.UK

Giving to the Wider Baptist Family

Bloomsbury continues to give 10% of its income to the Baptist Family, with the largest cut going to the Home Mission Fund which supports the national resource at Didcot, the regional Association teams, and grants to enable churches to afford ministers. We also give to BMS Word Mission, the Baptist mission agency transforming the lives of people in fragile states and under-evangelised communities, among the world's most marginalised people, on four continents. We also give to the Baptist Colleges in the UK, which are all accredited for the formation of ministers by the Baptist Union of Great Britain.

Report on Regents Park College 2020

Keith Bevis attended Regents Park College's College Council in February and gives a glimpse of their Annual Report that was presented. A modern Baptist College is about more than the formation of Baptist ministers.

Student numbers are doing well and in particular the number of Ministerial students has recovered from a worrying slump in the previous year. In 2018/19 there were 119 undergraduates, 21 students in ministerial formation, 73 postgraduates and 32 visiting students. These simple statistics do not show the range of subjects being studied. The postgraduates include a number of non-ministerial theological students. Other students aiming to go into other roles outside the Church, for example within education benefit from studying within this larger cluster of likeminded vocational students. For the wider Baptist community, the College ran its Footsteps course for 39 students spread across the Southern Baptist Association and the Central Baptist Association.

In last year's report I commented on the importance of the Angus Library. Alongside that significant resource the Centre for Baptist History and Heritage has been re-launched as the Centre for Baptist Studies with Dr Chris Joy nes as its Director from 1 October 2019. Bloomsbury members will recall our own process of incorporation. In a more complex process all the employees, assets, and liabilities of the old charity Regent's Park College have been moved to a new charitable company limited by guarantee, Regent's Park College Limited, thus modernising the College's governance and putting the college in a better position for future challenges.

The complexities of Higher Education funding in the UK means that whilst Regent's finances may appear stable, there are always worries about the future. It is good that eighteen churches including Bloomsbury continue to support the College. This last year their total contribution has been £10,000.

For information about Regent's Park College Oxford, please refer to their website, <http://www.rpc.ox.ac.uk/about-regents/> or for more detail, our representative, Keith Bevis has a copy of their Annual Report.

Simon's Ministerial Reflection

Ministry at Bloomsbury remains a privilege, and it is always encouraging to hear how those beyond the congregation hold us in high esteem as a pioneer congregation which courageously stands firm for its core convictions.

I have represented Bloomsbury this year at two very different events, both at the House of Lords. Firstly, The Holocaust Memorial Day commemorations were profoundly moving, and were held immediately following a protest in Parliament Square attended by a number of us from Bloomsbury asking for unaccompanied refugee children stranded in Europe to be reunited with their families in the UK. This protest was

led by Lord Alf Dubs, who was himself a child refugee who escaped Nazi Germany on the Kinder Transport. The tying together of the plight of child refugees in our time, with those who were displaced and killed during



the Holocaust, was deeply significant. The second event was the launch of the new website www.christianity.org.uk, which is run by the Christian Enquiry Agency (of which I am a trustee). Do take a look at the website which offers a public face for ecumenical Christianity in the UK.

It has been a joy to continue Bloomsbury's longstanding association with King's College London through the voluntary chaplaincy which I offer there. I gave a research paper to the Postgraduate group at Spurgeon's College, on the preaching of Martin Luther King at Bloomsbury in 1961. In October I attended the VIP reception and Sam Sharpe Lecture at the Jamaican High Commission and Imperial College. Bloomsbury has been a long supporter of this initiative to address racism and promote inclusion within British Baptist churches, and it was a joy to hear the lecture 'Reparations' delivered by Professor Verene Shepherd. In June I attended the inaugural conference on The Bible and Violence in Bristol, and the intention was that the 2020 conference would be held at Bloomsbury but this has had to be postponed due to the pandemic. During lockdown, I have started a weekly Biblical Studies Masterclass offered online, and this now has a regular attendance of over fifty, including many from Bloomsbury.

Dawn went on maternity leave at the end of November 2019, and we rejoice with her and Simon on the safe arrival of Nova and Ember. I have missed having my colleague on-hand, and look forward to her return to work later this year.





BLOOMSBURY CENTRAL BAPTIST CHURCH

235 Shaftesbury Avenue LONDON WC2H 8EP

+44 (0) 20 7240 0544

E-mail address: church@bloomsbury.org.uk

Website: www.bloomsbury.org.uk

Facebook: www.facebook.com/BloomsburyBaptist

Twitter: [Bloomsburycentral](https://twitter.com/Bloomcentral) (@Bloomcentral)

Instagram: [bloomcentral](https://www.instagram.com/bloomcentral)

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