



Good News Story

Intercultural Ministry: from Utila to Tottenham

Chris Haines updates us on his new post in multi-cultural North London

“How can we sing a song of the LORD in a foreign land?”

Psalm 137:4

In the last issue of Revive magazine, we summarized the two years Linda and I spent as Ordained Mission Partner and Accompanying Volunteer on Utila, a small island off the north coast of Honduras in Central America, serving the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas. As the Methodist Church in Britain reassessed its mission priorities, bringing home its Lay Mission Partners, we were given a choice of whether to remain for a third year or to enter stationing and return to the MCB, which we did.

During stationing we were matched with the New River Circuit in the London District, whose representatives we met on Zoom. We all felt that this was a suitable match, theologically and otherwise, so we moved here in August 2024, after re-orientation based at Cliff College. During a meeting of returning Mission Partners in south London, we visited the manse and the big church and met some of the laypeople.

I have responsibility for two churches (or technically one church on two sites) in Tottenham in north London, in the boroughs of Haringey and Hackney.



The large church, St Mark's, has well over three hundred members, most of whom are Ghanaian, with smaller numbers from Nigeria, Sierra Leone and various places in the Caribbean. Our wonderful worship group, David's Harp, lead a slot every Sunday morning and have been in demand for Connexional events, and our worship is generally strong. The smaller church, Ravensdale Road, which has just celebrated its Centenary, has about thirty members, both Ghanaian and from the Caribbean. This provides us with a very varied context within which to minister, and some of our experiences as Mission Partners have been helpful in these cross-cultural contexts too.

Funerals are an interesting parallel, with Caribbean and African influences, as are the Sunday Schools. The one at St Mark's has around forty children on its books, which makes it the biggest Methodist Sunday School I've seen in Britain. Children are taught in age group classes, though we've traditionally struggled with maintaining the interest of older teenagers once they leave secondary

school. We've had a strong cohort of sixteen-year-olds leaving this year, and are trying to engage them. Last month I did a short worship leading training course to encourage them in their leadership of our quarterly youth services.

We are also trying to encourage older teenagers, returning university students and other young adults, to engage with other events we put on for them, usually at half-term or during the holidays, including youth concerts. These typically involve a wide age range, from primary school-aged children, some of whom attend our Boys' Brigade, to young adults. However, most of them are teenagers, and their involvement has recently stimulated a proposed circuit youth music initiative. The different age groups are managed collaboratively and together we are planning an event for them next month, which if it succeeds as a pilot will be opened up to other churches next time.

We've been very warmly welcomed here by members of both congregations, who have been friendly, warm and hospitable. We

have got to know some members well, especially the leaders and those who attend the in-person and/or online Bible studies, and the folk at Ravensdale. I still struggle to remember everyone's name at St Mark's, and pastoral work is challenging, partly due to other commitments, and also due to the challenges of ministering in London, for example - no longer being able to drive to someone's house and find a place to park!

There are some good things and some challenging things about being here... However, there is plenty of good news to celebrate in our churches - the worship, the fellowship, the reliance upon God's Word, and a genuine desire for people to grow in their faith in Jesus.

REV CHRIS HAINES

Chris is a Methodist Minister and his wife Linda is a Local Preacher. They have recently returned from serving in Honduras as Mission Partners and are now stationed in the London District.