

Lea Road United Reformed Community Church,
Penn Fields, Wolverhampton – West Midlands Synod

“We wish to serve as Jesus lived. We wish to live as Jesus died. We wish to live in a way that shows Jesus is with us. We promise to give to others, and we promise to receive. We promise to give outrageously to those who are not given enough, and we wish to receive graciously from them. We wish to give to those who have nothing, and we wish to kneel at their feet, and receive from their hands.”

Wolverhampton

- just under a quarter of a million people from a variety of cultural, racial, ethnic, faith and religious backgrounds live in a geographical area no bigger than 26 square miles.
- Over 22% of the local population are from visible minority groups.
- Over 60 languages are spoken across the City.
- Wolverhampton has an above average level of non-Christian religions (13.6% compared with 5.5% for England and Wales).



journey as part of the congregation.

Through its webpage project the Lea Road United Reformed Community Church shares its fascinating journey as a welcoming, community oriented and multicultural congregation. This is especially creative in the ways the webpage gives a synopsis of arrivals and uses the shoes of individual members to tell the stories of their

Arrivals

Arrivals 1950-1960

In the late 1950's and 1960's we were pleased to have folk from the Caribbean who had moved into the area join us. Members who joined the church at that time talk about feeling unwelcome at some of the other churches in the town. It is interesting to read in the minutes of the church meeting of the time, of the strong feelings of the members in their wish to support their black brothers and sisters. Lea Road church is in the Wolverhampton South-West constituency and had Enoch Powell as their MP when he made his infamous 'Rivers of blood' speech in April 1968. The church started to speak out against racism and discrimination, writing to local and national papers and challenging Enoch Powell personally on the damage they feared his 'rivers of blood' speech would cause.

Arrivals 1970-1980

Over this period Asian families began to settle in the area, some joining the church. More recently, in 2002 the Church gave a home to the Asian Calvary Church whose members now hold their services in the church on Sunday afternoons.

Arrivals 1990-2000

Penn Fields has become home to asylum seeker and refugee families from a number of countries. Lea Road church has actively supported these groups from many different countries, through providing space for them to meet on a regular basis for social occasions, practical help and training courses.

In our Shoes...

As is noted on the webpage church isn't just a building. It is a diverse group of people. Readers/viewers are invited to take the time to walk in other people's shoes and share their journeys. Here are three stories:



Sam's journey....

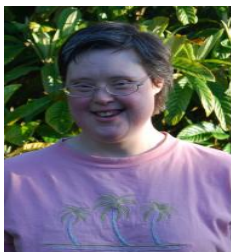
"I was born in Springfield, Maryland Jamaica on 1st October 1923. I came here with nothing and ended up with 2 houses, 2 cars and 7 kids. In 1955 I came into the country. I buy the newspaper in Jamaica. It advertise vacancies here, in Wolverhampton for labour and such like."

"When I came here my first job was in the foundry. I came to Blakenhall to my aunty and her husband. I was single. This chap get a job for me at C&B Smith. I went to Nechalls Lane 1955 until 1985 in the foundry. I married in 1960 in the Registry Office in Stafford Street and came down here to Claremont in 1966."

"I usually worked 7 days a week, Sunday to Sunday. Then I went to the foreman and said. I want to stop Sunday I got three kids and I want to see them. He said "Sam, yes but if I am in difficulty will you come in?" I say "Yes" Sometimes he called me and sometimes not."

"I came down here to Mr Jordan (minister 1970/77) All of us. Me my wife and kids. I got 7 kids. They all come here to Sunday School here. I usually came down and helped at the Day Centre when I retired in 1985."

"These people cheer me up. I will never leave here now. No way. Always been a friendly church."



Ruth's story....

Ruth has been a part of Lea Road Church since she was a baby.

"I was at Peter Pan playgroup. I was a Brownie at Lea Road as well. I remember Mrs Cowells. I got lots of badges."

"I went to Gateway Club (Gateway is part of Wolverhampton Mencap) on Friday nights. We did gardening and cooking with Roger and Olive. We used to do the Gateway Awards. I ran the tuck shop. I've got lots of friends. I could walk to Gateway and transport took us in the winter. (Gateway has now moved to The Maltings). I remember Joan Lloyd teaching me and Anne Peters and Mrs Dora Kimberley. They taught me in

Junior Church. I wanted to be a member of Lea Road Church so I was baptised by Reverend Bert Jordan.”

Ruth was asked what kind of things she is involved in at Lea Road Church:

- I'm a Sunday School teacher's assistant. I sit with the children and help if they need any help. I like helping the children.
- I set the tables for Oxfam lunch.
- I collect stamps for charity and ask people to recycle their Christmas cards.
- I help with Christian Aid.
- I sold bottles on the bottle stall at the Summer Fayre.
- Sometimes I read from the Bible in the services and do the prayers with my mum.

“I like the services at Lea Road. It's near home. I walk there by myself. I'm independant. I like the new church building. It's a community church and we get lots of different people in. It's nice there - friendly.”



Gauda and Sonto story....

Gauda and Sonto have come to us from South Africa. They have two lovely daughters, Thieo and Rorisang.

Gauda

“I came to England in 2002 and I used to live next to Bingley School in Norfolk Road. One rainy night I walked past the church with a colleague and said that I am going to that church on Sunday. But I didn't go that Sunday. When I moved house I used the car wash in Lea Road opposite the church. When I went over I spoke to Adella and that first interaction was something I didn't expect. Adella talked about Bloemfontein. It was love at first sight for Lea Road Church. I came back home and told my wife, Sonto.”

Sonto

“In South Africa our church was a black church. I was so nervous because I thought the church was white. When we went on the first day we met Monica and Tesfaye - this is unusual because most churches in South Africa are separate.”

Gauda

“Everyone was waiting for us. I have been to other churches, and I wanted to feel at home, you know, and the United Reformed Church is simple. Another thing I liked about the church is the Aid to Africa. They think of people, in Angola, everywhere, and giving help. I was happy to see Oxfam mentioned. Joan, our minister, is very down to earth.”

[Follow this link for more on the church: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nj-CIKmAF7I>]

**Members of Lea Road United Reformed Church
April 2009**