

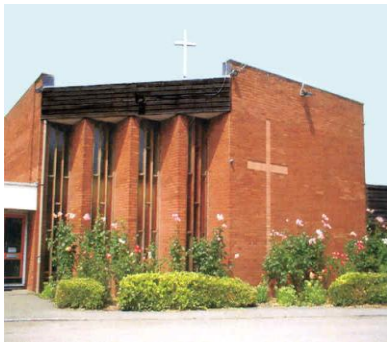
South Aston United Reformed Church & Bloomsbury Mission Project

South Aston & Nechells, Birmingham – West Midlands Synod

Birmingham has the smallest indigenous population by percentage of many of the major British cities. In 2005, it was estimated 32.2% of its population was non-white.

- Aston's total population was 26,972 in 2001. The largest ethnic group was Asian at 49.8% (Kashmiri ethnic group 22.2%). White British was the second largest ethnic group at 26.00% and Black British was third with 21.51%. Islam is the most prominent religion in the ward (44.3%) with Christianity as the second most prominent religion (32.4%).
- The 2001 Population Census found that 27,969 people lived in Nechells and that 62.6% (17,142) of the ward's population consists of ethnic minorities compared with 29.6% for Birmingham. These two wards have one of the highest rate of unemployment in Birmingham

The story of South Aston United Reformed Church dates way back in 1806 as Aston Park Congregational Chapel and moved to its present location in 1976. [For more of this history follow this link: <http://southastonurc.co.uk/parkroadcc.aspx>]



Now a joint pastorate, our continuing story is one of a new partnership for both churches. We are very definitely “inner city” churches and we have distinct but similar contexts. We are members of the North West Cluster of United Reformed Churches in Birmingham and as such have known each other slightly and worked with each

other a little in the past. We now welcome the challenge of becoming one pastorate in two places.

We are a relatively small Church but very active community of people trying hard to follow the Christian faith in the challenging environment of South Aston. There are few hours or days in any week when people from all walks of South Aston life and often well beyond, cannot be found either at worship in the sanctuary or at work or leisure in one of the two assembly halls or class rooms The facilities are used by both multi ethnic and multi faith groups; truly serving the local community.



We aim to demonstrate the gospel to our respective communities, which we do in many different ways. South Aston Church, which has a diverse membership, regular Sunday worship and an established community programme, would probably be considered a more “traditional” United Reformed Church. Bloomsbury Mission project currently has no members and has been offering mid-week community

style worship, focusing on their user groups. Both churches are well known for their commitment to community engagement.



Presently we have two Church Related Community Workers who know each other well and are looking forward to working more closely together. However, their appointments will both end at approximately the same time and it is vital that our community programmes are able to continue in the future.



For our submission to the Multicultural Congregation Story Award, South Aston United Reformed Church decided to tell our story through the eyes of our Junior church young people interviewing and recording (DVD) a variety of members of the congregation.

The interview was framed around two questions:

- Why and how did the member interviewed become a member of South Aston Church?
- What does the church offer to the wider community?



All those who were interviewed spoke of how they felt welcomed, at home and felt being part of a community. For those who travelled from other parts of the world to the area, South Aston has been like a family space. Others noted that their ancestors have been members of the church way back and they have kept

their membership at South Aston even though they have moved out of the area. In terms of what the church offers to the community, most pointed to the many activities that happen during the week and the work of the Church Community Related Worker. In our view: South Aston is a church at the heart of the local community!

**South Aston United Reformed Church,
April 2009**