

CASE STUDY 4

Greenford Baptist Church, London

Introduction

Greenford is in the West London Borough of Ealing. Greenford Baptist (GBC) is situated in a suburban area to the west of the borough. Ealing is a vastly ethnically diverse borough. In 2011, 49% gave their ethnicity as white, 30% as Asian, 15% as Black and 4.5% as of mixed or multiple ethnicity. The community in Greenford is made up mainly of White British, South Asian, Eastern European, East and West African and Caribbean people. We have a membership of around 200, and a Sunday morning attendance of 130-140. Our regular church family represents around 35 nationalities.

History

The church was founded in 1935 by Welsh church planters. By 1985, GBC was a white majority church in a community that was growing in its ethnic diversity – many Caribbean and South Asians were resident in the area. (Southall, home to one of the biggest Asian communities in the UK is less than 3 miles away.) In 1987, Pastor David Wise arrived at Greenford, and began a work based on a vision to see Greenford become racially and ethnically representative of the community it served.

Change

Pastor David had a heart for racial justice, and spent much time studying and visiting other expressions of church in order to grow his understanding of how scripture is viewed and interpreted by other cultures. He visited Soweto, Brazil, Italy and Albania to broaden his understanding. During this time we began to introduce songs into our worship that came from ethnicities other than white western. We were provided with a number of songs from West Africa which soon became part of our regular canon. The staff and leadership team were taken to a number of mono-cultural churches in order to expose us to the style and ethos in practice in different cultures, and I spent time at some of the Black mega-churches in London, which gave me an incredible insight into the feeling of being a minority culture in a church. I went on training courses at All Nations College, learning about World Worship, Ethno-musicology and Ethno-doxology. We are now in a place where we are using songs from West Africa, Central Africa, Brazil, India, China, Pakistan and even a Native American chant! We have flags displayed in our building that represent the make-up of our church family, and artwork that reflects our diversity. We are on the road, but we acknowledge we still have a way to go.

Leadership Team

Our team has intentionally transformed over the years. We have a team that is truly representative of our church family. The team includes white English men, a Nigerian man, a Jamaican woman, a Trinidadian woman and a 20 year old Nigerian woman. It is a robust team, based on good friendships, a deep respect for cultural and theological differences, and an incredible level of trust.



Worshipping Together

What does a typical worship time look like? I don't think there is one. Our meetings are led by a diverse array of people, we do use a wide canon of songs, we also are exploring art and movement, there is freedom for people to dance or not, there is opportunity to pray in first languages, and we are constantly offering new experiences as we worship together. We look at the room layout, posture and space to respond. Freedom in worship leads to freedom in service, so it is important that we continue to develop worship spaces that allow people the freedom to be who they are in God. One of our biggest and constant challenges is providing space and opportunity for children and young people to engage in our worship times. We hand the whole meeting over to both of these groups on occasions, and we are treated to worship presentations through their eyes, skills and cultural references. Collecting the offering to a backdrop of dub-step is always exciting! We are also intentional in encouraging young people to join our worship team - we have three under the age of 16 in our singing team, and have had a number of musicians in the past.

Outreach

In all of our outward communication we are careful to communicate that we are inclusive, many nations, and welcoming. Our strategy going forward is to ensure that all of our outreach work is tailored to the vast differences in ethnicity – on one side of the road near our building the majority of residents are white, on the other, 70% are of South Asian background. We have provided courses such as 'Jesus through Asian Eyes' that provide education into the way the Gospel is viewed from particular cultural viewpoints. We hold an international evening every year that provides food, entertainment and an opportunity to wear national dress, and our major events at Christmas and Easter always draw on art and music that reflects our diverse approach.

Food

Regular church lunches always provide an array of culinary delights from around the world – from goat curry to swordfish. It's a brilliant way to eat, mix and meet each other!

Highlights

Being a part of a church family worshipping in a variety of languages and cultures: hearing and watching prayer in first languages; seeing people 'come alive' as worship is conducted in their first language; hosting events that explore and provide opportunities for all to learn and engage with worship from outside of their own experiences; being on this journey is exciting, challenging and a highlight of our church life.

<http://greenfordbaptist.london>