

# New Churches in Newham

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Over 350 new Christian churches have been known and listed in the London Borough of Newham since 1975. This chapter begins with the context- Newham, the place and the people. Then comes the story of the flow of new churches- unnoticed at first, emerging in the 1970s, growing through the 1980s, accelerating in the 1990s, widening and diversifying in the 2000s. A contemporary 'Sounding', Summary and 'Questions Arising' ends the story.

The ABC of New Churches in Newham concludes the chapter, giving the name of each church and the place where they gather now- or did so in the past. The list includes all who call themselves 'church' or are Trinitarian in faith.

## THE PLACE AND THE PEOPLE

### Now 2015

Newham is a growing, lively, young, ever-changing place with persisting social problems which keep it among UK 'deprived Boroughs'. The population is growing. It rose from 216,300 in the 2001 Census to a population estimate of 308,000 in 2011 and has moved to black and ethnic majority. The composition has changed with the highest birth rate, second lowest proportion of 'over 65s', highest number of families with dependent children and the largest average household size. 42% of the population were born outside the UK, the highest figure in the country.

Massive regeneration has altered the sky line and the physical face of Newham. Internationally known for London City Airport, The Olympic Park, Westfield Shopping Centre and Excel exhibition centre-and the older West Ham United football team. Redeveloped across the old Dockland, with the Beckton estate, the University of East London and Docklands Light railway. Cross-rail is coming. Now a multi-racial, multi-faith Borough where the Caribbean, African, South Asian and Eastern European influx has largely replaced the white working-class. There are now children from 120 nations in Newham schools and 88% speak English as a second language. 'The census results show east London is changing as rapidly today as at any other time in history. The area has always been a melting pot for different nationalities and races and the latest snapshot reveals that we are less white, less Christian and less often British-born than we were 10 years ago'<sup>1</sup>

The 2011 Religious Census recorded two dominant faiths, 40% Christian and 32% Muslim. Newham also had 8.8% Hindu, 2.1% Sikh, 0.8 Buddhist, 0.1% Jewish and 2.1% others. Only 9.5% said they had no religion-the lowest in the UK. Within the identified Christian population 24.5% were white UK, 21.1% Eastern European, 33.5% Black and 10.2% Asian.

New churches have emerged alongside the mosques, gurdwaras and temples. Forty now have their own premises. They still share buildings with the 68 older, 'anchor' churches, scores are in the community centres, many in the schools and town halls and even more in unexpected places. Pentecostalism is significant, with 36% of all Christian groups, often reflecting ethnic flows within many the Independent congregations but found increasingly in branches of international [especially African] churches.

## Then 1975

Newham was a very different world in 1975. West Ham and East Ham had been united in Newham in 1965 as one of the 32 London Boroughs. The population was dropping as people moved to the suburbs. The docks had closed and industry was declining. The social problems of unemployment, poverty and poor housing continued.

Churches had survived two world wars, secularism and a national decline in faith but were struggling to maintain their membership and work. There were then 81 established churches-29 Anglican, 8 Roman Catholic, 14 Baptist, 8 Methodist, 7 URC, 7 Independent congregations, 2 Salvation Army, 3 London City Missions and 3 Pentecostal churches<sup>2</sup>. The only post-war new church was the Mayflower in Canning Town led by David Sheppard, 1958-69 –aiming to be ‘an indigenous church with local leaders’ from the white working class.<sup>3</sup>

## Observer-Participant(s)

Coming to Newham in 1965 as a Baptist minister I have lived, worked and worshipped within the communities of Newham for 50 years. Leading a church, living in 3 different homes, raising a family, walking the streets, running community centres and visiting other congregations I have watched and noted the changes. Initially researching the inter-action of church and society in this Borough and recently logging ‘Faith flows in Newham’, I have also written articles and books.<sup>4</sup>

I am grateful to two other activists in the work, participants in the networks and observers of the changes for their contribution and encouragement. Greg Smith,<sup>5</sup> for 27 years a ‘fellow-worker’ in the Newham Community Renewal Programme, Evangelical Coalition for Urban Mission, Community Involvement Unit and as Research Fellow in the UEL. He began the *Newham Directory of Religious Groups*. He created the Word-Cloud. Matthew Porter has been in Newham for 25 years, coming as an economic migrant and finding a deeper calling here. He is now Senior officer of Transform Newham ‘a movement of churches, groups and individuals who are seeking the good of Newham by praying and doing things in joined up ways’

## The Flow of New Churches in Newham

### The Wider Backcloth

In the UK the Charismatic movement from the 1960s led on to a renewal of many congregations and the Church Growth and Church Planting movements. Urban Mission, from the 1980s, faced wider community, social and political issues within the Inner Cities of the UK. Many Newham churches, especially the Anglicans and Methodists, were caught up in the wave of Urban Mission.<sup>6</sup> But in Newham UK missionary agencies like Ichthus, Kensington Temple, In-Contact Ministries and Urban Expression together with three denominations-the Assemblies of God, Baptists, Seventh Day Adventists- were to join the Black-majority churches in stressing evangelism and church planting. Globally, the breakdown of colonialism [especially in the Commonwealth], developing communications, refugees, immigration, a surge in faith [especially in Africa] and reverse missionary flow affected the UK, especially places like Newham. The population became multi-racial and began to grow again through immigration and regeneration. We became a multi-faith community as Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists joined the Christians. New churches started, often unnoticed.

## Beginnings

Against a background of 'white flight', a dropping population, weak and closing churches, together with the opening of the first two mosques in 1964 and 1965 tensions grew. The arrival of Caribbeans in the late 1960s aroused a racist re-action in the community and a luke-warm response from the churches even though East London had long known 'coloured' people. The local paper reported under 'Go home, nigger' 'an outbreak of threats and insults to coloured folk living in Upton Park' <sup>7</sup>. Correspondence on the 'Colour Crisis' in 1960 picked up religion. A West Indian asked 'I would ask what religion is here. The churches are always empty on Sundays, but not the pubs' and a local vicar commented 'West Indians are more religious than the average Britishers. They have a deep and spontaneous faith which makes me feel ashamed' <sup>8</sup>.

The churches gave a mixed response to incomers in the 1960s. West Ham Central Mission opened International House led by the Sri Lankan, Charles Karunatna, for black students arriving in East London. Woodgrange Baptist Church elected Heckford Sharpe as the first black deacon and in 1963 he became assistant minister after previously trying to found his own church and commenting:

'I planted the Eastern Overseas Baptist Church in the East End of London, because many overseas people, Jamaicans in particular, complained that they were not feeling welcomed in the white congregations'

But against the backcloth of racism, coldness, fear, personal and public opposition small prayer meetings or congregations did start. First in homes, then in hired halls, led by 'tent ministers', hidden and unnoticed by the white population, the established churches or historians.

## Emerging in the 1970s

The first new churches to appear in Newham, taking over old church buildings, were Caribbean [initially known as West Indian] with one African congregation. In February 1975 I walked into a packed hall in Vicarage Lane, Stratford E15 filled with enthusiastic, welcoming, singing, fervently praying West Indians, listened to a direct, powerful [and lengthy!] sermon and was invited to the platform for greetings, blessing and prayer. Miracle Ministry Mission, led by Pastor Harold McWhinney, had taken over the former Unitarian building and started a new church.

The second visit in 1975 was to the Cherubim and Seraphim, the first African congregation to settle in Newham in a former Congregational Academy of Music in Earlham Grove, Forest Gate E7. <sup>9</sup> Here a much quieter congregation was gender divided by a central aisle with the women in white robes. Symbols and singing mixed with scripture and prayers. Outside the notice-board announced 'The Holy Order of The Cherubim and Seraphim UK HQ' Sunday Divine Worship; weekdays, Special Prayer for Blessings Etc, Counselling by the Spiritual Leader, Bible Study and Special Prayer for the Sick' with the names of the Apostles and Evangelist. A large van stood on the forecourt, the precursor of the future fleet of mini-vans used by new congregations gathering members and advertising their churches. <sup>10</sup>

Both these churches were included in a 1975 list of '*Coloured Churches in Newham*' drawn up by Paul Charman of the Zebra Project <sup>11</sup>. The list included the Evangelical Church, Apostolic Church and Church of the First Born Assemblies in Plaistow E13; Seventh Day Adventist and Cherubim and Seraphim in Forest Gate E7; Church of God [UK] and Church of Jesus Christ Apostolic in East Ham E6. All were West Indian, except Cherubim and Seraphim, and with an estimated membership of 700, 10% of the then West Indian population in Newham. Four of these churches were also listed as projects of Newham Community Renewal Programme <sup>12</sup> which launched the Badger Project, the

Newham branch of Zebra led by Paul Boudier, in 1983 to link new black churches across the Borough.

In 1978 I noted: 'New congregations have emerged. The growth of at least 11 West Indian congregations with their warmth and informality has been paralleled by the opening of shop front churches and the coming of house churches inspired by the charismatic movement. All are biblically rooted and evangelical in ethos' <sup>13</sup>

Shop front outreach led by local Christians was seen when Plaistow Care Centre, led by John Beavis, opened 'Resurrection' in a former undertakers near Plaistow station. The influence of the charismatic movement in many evangelical churches led in some cases to house churches like the Christian Family Fellowship in Plaistow 'meeting in various homes'.

More new churches surfaced as the decade ended, including the New Testament Church of God, Church of God Prophecy, Shiloh, United Church of Christ Apostolic and the Bible Truth Church of God. <sup>14</sup> A 1978 photograph of the Bryant Street Methodist Church notice board announced: 'Used weekly by Stratford Methodist, New Testament Assembly, Seventh Day Adventist, Living Family Church'. New churches were now sharing the buildings of established churches but also renting rooms in community centres.

From 1970 I lived and worked in Lawrence Hall <sup>15</sup>, a new community centre in Plaistow. There OAP clubs, dance groups, Anglers, Weight-Watchers, First Aiders groups were joined by new churches. These were named in *Signs in the City* in a paragraph that bridges the 1970s and 1980s:

'Five congregations have begun life at Lawrence Hall. The black-led Church of God Prophecy began with a handful of people in 1974 and subsequently moved on to a local church hall. The Seventh Day Adventists began a branch church in 1978 which has steadily grown into an entirely black congregation. They were followed in 1982 by the Plaistow Christian Fellowship, a multi-racial offshoot congregation from In-Contact Ministries. Then came the International Christian Centre, a largely Malaysian congregation breaking away from the local Assemblies of God Church. Finally, the Apostolic Church settled with us in 1983 and is almost entirely black in membership. All have a freedom and informality in worship, are evangelistic, bible centred, close-knit fellowships. They vary in leadership styles through elders to pastors' <sup>16</sup>

## Growing Through the 1980s

In the 1980s new churches became more mission-orientated as well as identity groups for the newly arrived. Now mainly Pentecostal, often Independent and with Caribbean and African churches grouped as Afro-Caribbean, they were joined by two further streams. South Asian congregations and mission agency teams from the UK arrived in Newham.

Examples from both streams were seen in Lawrence Hall. The International Christian Centre, a breakaway group of young South Asians from the Plashet Grove Assemblies of God, was made up of Malaysian and Filipino students, nurses and hotel workers living in East London. I went to a special service where four members moving on to Sweden and Switzerland were commissioned to form cells in the hospitals and hotels where they were to work. Personal evangelism, church planting and global mission was noted within a transient congregation, which soon moved on from Newham. The Plaistow Christian Fellowship <sup>17</sup> separated in 1982 from the mission agency, In-Contact Ministries, led by Patrick Sookhdeo which was based in the former Anglican St Andrews Church, Plaistow. This young, still continuing church, led by Terry and Pat Diggins, developed new styles of

worship and mission and was committed to working in Newham.<sup>18</sup>

Throughout the 1980s new churches were appearing across the whole Borough and in a variety of churches, halls and districts but concentrating in the northern and central section as, south of the A13, Docklands was in transition. They were often unnoticed within the wider community. The 1986 *Social Welfare Agencies Directory* of the Newham Voluntary Agencies Council had 430 entries and included all the established churches and many mosques but only one new church- The Healing Church of Christ E7.

The flow of fresh congregations with known dates included Forest Gate Brethren 1980, Miracle World International 1981, Humble Heart Assembly 1982, Apostolic Church 1983, Tamil/ Immanvaal Kristova Ai Ikizam 1984, New Life Bible Way Church 1985, Beckton Christian Fellowship 1985 and Community Church of God 1986.<sup>19</sup>

One of these, the South Asian Church Immanvaal Kiristova Ai Ikizam or Emmanuel Church, an independent Tamil-speaking church was led by Ebby Ebenezer and Jonathan Eden. They came mainly from Sri Lanka, displaced by the civil war, and India. In 1984 they began to meet in the side hall of the near derelict Manor Park Baptist Church and went on to renovate the whole building while setting up a series of branches in neighbouring Boroughs. In 1987 a choir from this congregation sang in their own language in a BBC Songs of Praise broadcast from Rathbone Market in Newham- the first non-English contribution. In 1986 the 120 strong East London Christian Fellowship, a breakaway from the Assemblies of God led by John Ivinson came to share the building in a unique co-existence which still continues.

But some church planters struggled. In a booklet *'Church which didn't quite make it'* Alan Bright told the story of the efforts he and his wife made to start a church in their own home in Beckton E6 from 1985, gathering local people, encouraged by London City Mission, door-knocking, meeting in a sports pavilion, having a full-time worker funded by the Shaftesbury Society, growing to 18 members in 6 years, then finally joining the Anglican St Marks in 1990.

Most new churches carried an evangelical urgency and now were almost entirely Pentecostal. The two established Pentecostal denominations already in Newham were Elim and the Assemblies of God. They had established their presence in the 1920s and 1930s after a revival led by the Jeffries brothers in East Ham Town Hall in 1926. Their distinctive teaching centred around the gifts of the Holy Spirit, particularly miracles of healing and the practice of speaking with tongues. Now two strands of global Pentecostalism joined them. Most of those in Newham, keeping an orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, were linked with mainline denominations like the New Testament Church of God, Church of God Prophecy, New Testament Assemblies and Assemblies of the First-Born. Alongside them were many other Independent churches- often quite small and sometimes linked in smaller, more informal groupings. The 'Jesus name' churches, often with the word 'apostolic' in their title and performing baptisms 'in the name of Jesus' held a less than fully Trinitarian doctrine of the Godhead.

Invariably led by strong, gifted leaders; often without their own buildings and mobile across venues and districts; drawing membership from wide areas; sometimes worshipping in a range of languages and frequently accompanied by tensions and breakaways, these Pentecostal new churches dominated the new church listings.

But they were not alone. Writing midway through the 80s I commented:

'Over-all the new churches of the inner city fall into three broad categories –the cultural churches, mainly black but including a wide variety of Afro-Caribbean, Asian

and even European congregations; the community or fellowship churches, stemming from the charismatic movement but with a pronounced emphasis on the fellowship and life-style; and the planted churches, deliberately planned by denominations, rising from the embers of a dead congregation, or initiated by one of the para-church organisations' <sup>20</sup>

In the 1980s some of these strands began to come together in the Newham Christian Fellowship, a loose gathering of old evangelicals and new Pentecostal churches seeking to break down the walls of separation. Others linked with the Newham Dockland Churches Group facing the problems and opportunities of the major redevelopment scheme.

### **Acceleration in the 1990s**

With increasing immigration, a growing and changing population, now multi-racial and multi-faith, the landscape of religion was visibly and rapidly changing. There was acceleration in both the numbers and variety of congregations. Pentecostalism mixed with trained church planters and denominational initiatives. Significant black-led networks and the arrival of mega-churches ran alongside a surge of smaller Independent congregations and the appearance of Orthodox churches. A range of African, Asian and European languages were often used in worship. All within a transience of people and leaders as believers travelled in and out of Newham to their chosen church, shifted venues, and crossed Borough borders.

Training courses in the UK produced fresh leadership. The Elim Kensington Temple in West London sent planters across London. Their 1992 Satellite Directory had 2 of their 48 satellite churches in Newham- Beckton [Kensington Temple] and Filipino International. The south London Ichthus supported Emmanuel Christian Fellowship Church. Locally, In-Contact Ministries under Patrick Sookhdeo, ran residential courses in their Plaistow HQ and founded St Andrews Fellowship. Spurgeons College ran Church Planting courses- Samuel Agyeman started Victory Life in 1997-to be followed by Fred and Annie Onwuchekwa in 2003 with Victory Life Family Centre. Urban Expression, led by Stuart Murray, began in East London in 1997 and by 1999 the UE UP-date reported 'two initiatives in Newham'.

Three denominations- the Baptists, the Assemblies of God and the Seventh Day Adventists planted or linked with a number of new churches. The Baptists, with their emphasis on personal faith, believer's baptism and the gathered community, welcomed 8 new churches. Faith Temple Mission, led by Obeg de Lawrence, began life in Stratford in the 1990s in the Major Road Baptist Church before moving on to north London. Calvary Charismatic joined the London Baptist Association in 1994. The Royal Docks Community Church was sponsored by the London Baptist Association in 1997. Harvest Rock, Victory Family Centre, IHOPE and Biserica Romana Baptista Hanul were to follow in the 2000s. <sup>21</sup> The Pentecostal Assemblies of God had three new congregations in the Asian All Nations in Manor Park, 'Back to God' in the former Spiritualist church in Plaistow and Praise Centre in St Marys, Plaistow. The Seventh Day Adventists, with their expectation of the return of Christ [Advent] and the keeping of the Sabbath on Saturday, became a major strand among the black churches. They built a new Church in Forest Gate and used other churches and schools. Beckton Maranatha, East Ham Nigerian Blessed Hope, London Nigerian Blessed Hope, East London Portuguese speaking, SDA [Stratford] were joined in the 2000s by the 400 strong London Ghana SDA standing prominently beside the A13 in the former St Cedds.

The story of the only URC church plant, gathered by URC minister Rev Jayne Bazeley, illustrates the twists and rapid changes within denominational affiliation:- 'Iglesia Cristiana de Newham began life

as a church plant from Plaistow Church URC, now Christ Church, 663 Barking Road. It met in Lenwood Hall, Coronation Road, on the new City estate in Plaistow. It was multi-ethnic but soon became largely Spanish speaking, mostly people from Chile and Ecuador. In 1999, pastors Pedro Pablo and Luz Stella Arias arrived to take on the leadership, and in 2000 a decision was made to worship solely in Spanish, with provision for translation into English when required. The church outgrew the small building, and moved to the Barking Road site in 2001. After some differences of opinion and much discussion, Iglesia decided to leave the URC in 2003 but continued in friendship with PCC, using the building until 2005. By then it had also outgrown the larger building, and moved to River Church, formerly the Mayflower Centre in Canning Town. It is now called Ministerio Bendiciendo a Las Naciones, Iglesia Cristiana de Newham'

International networks were also operating -one of the most significant was the Nigerian-based Redeemed Christian Church of God which began with Trinity in Tom Allen Settlement in 1994. Different languages in worship were seen in the 1990s in the Spanish speaking Iglesia Ni Cristo Christiana De Newham 1990; the French-speaking Cellule De Priere 1991 and the Portuguese Fellowship 1992. Calvary Charismatic had services in Swahili, French, Twi, Lingala and Kikuyu in 1995. Asian congregations used Punjabi or Urdu. The Syrian Coptic Church of St Mary and St George were using St Bartholomews, East Ham in 1992 and would be followed by the Greek Orthodox Church settling in Rutland Road E7. But the global connections are two way. Reverse missionary flow brought evangelists to the UK who also returned to their own sending nation or continent. Edmundo and Olga Santos, leaders of the Portuguese Fellowship go back to Mozambique, Sao Tome and Cape Verde every year.

The biggest mega-church in London-and Europe, Kingsway, founded by Matthew Ashimolowo in 1992 claimed 15,000 members from 46 nations and had 75 staff. The church was situated just outside Newham on the Hackney/Newham border until their site was compulsorily purchased for the 2012 Olympic Games. They then took over a cinema in Walthamstow, lost a planning application in Rainham and are now a regional church in Kent.

Two of the largest congregations in London –Calvary Charismatic Baptist Church and Glory House- began life in Newham in the 1990s- and they illustrate the different origins, style, commitment and mobility of new congregations. Calvary Charismatic arrived in 1994 'to invade the East End for Christ' as a church plant from the Trinity congregation in West Norwood, South London. 30 members, mainly Ghanaian, led by Francis Sarpong, used three different centres before setting up their HQ in a converted garage in Plaistow. Backed by the London Baptist Association, the church opened with much local and denominational publicity. Membership growth was phenomenal- the initial 30 rose to 100+ by 1995, 824 in 1999 and 1307 by 2002 with 40+ supporting ministers and 7 branch churches. Congregations were drawn from over 20 nations and national flags flew on outside railings. Large Conventions, strong choirs and preaching with training courses attracted people across-and into- Newham. In 2007 the central office and worship centre moved to the former Trinity Methodist Church in Poplar, Tower Hamlets leaving two branches in Newham at New City School and at Woodgrange Baptist Church.

The very different and neighbouring Glory House, led by Albert Oloyede, settled in Plaistow in 1997 after using premises in Leyton and Bethnal Green under the name Glory Bible Church. This large and lively congregation now known as Glory House-The Miracle Centre claims to be a 'multi-racial and multi-cultural; dynamic charismatic church'. The local church, fellowship centres, media outreach and the training Academy are in Plaistow E13 with branch churches in Nigeria and Brazil. The web-

site lists the activities. 'Welcome to Glory House where Greatness is Released, Destiny is Fulfilled and Miracles Happen Daily'. Worship, Prayer and Fasting and New Believers Classes are balanced with concern for the wider community expressed in the adaptation of the premises, the development of social programmes that included a Day Nursery, Health Information days and employment training courses.

Within all the initiatives and changes of the 1990s there was also evidence of closure, change and decline. Churches like the International Christian Centre moved on. Beckton Christian Fellowship joined St Marks in 1990. A visit in 1995 to one of the earliest Caribbean congregations, the Miracle Ministries Mission, saw 20+ older, mainly women scattered around the Sebert Road building. Other Caribbean churches reported difficulty in maintaining momentum and keeping the second generation.

As the decade opened the Community Involvement Unit of Aston Charities began to publish the *Newham Directory of Religious Groups* with Greg Smith as lead researcher.<sup>22</sup> This included all faiths and many of the new Christian churches. Before this only the Newham Voluntary Agencies Council had listed new churches.

As the decade closed Greg Smith summarised the religious situation in Newham:

By 1998 there were at least 294 faith based organisations in Newham-181 being Christian congregations. 72 Pentecostal, 26 Church of England, 15 Independent Evangelical, 13 Baptist, 12 Roman Catholic, 7 Methodist. Alongside 20 mosques, 5 Hindu temples, 4 Sikh gurdwaras and 1 Jewish synagogue. A majority of all Christian congregations are majority black and the majority of Pentecostal ones are black-led and almost totally black in membership. 82 [40%] of these have started since 1980. Between them these groups owned 104 buildings and employed at least 350 full-time staff. They put on 437 different religious activities [conducted in at least 25 different languages] and ran at least 183 'secular community activities ranging from children's and pensioner's clubs, a night shelter for homeless people to employment training and advice and support for refugees'<sup>23</sup>

## Widening, Diversifying and Continuing in the 2000s

*The Black Majority Churches UK Directory 2003/4*<sup>24</sup> listed individual churches, many now within developing networks. 43 new churches from Newham were included, most were Independent congregations but an increasing number were in 9 dominant networks. The Assemblies of God First-Born, Celestial Church of Christ, Cherubim and Seraphim, Christ Apostolic Church, Church of God Prophecy, New Covenant Church, New Testament Church of God, Redeemed Christian Church of God and Seventh Day Adventists all had linked congregations in Newham. There were 6 in the Redeemed Christian Church of God and 5 with the Seventh Day Adventists.

The Redeemed Christian of God [RCCG]<sup>25</sup> has had at least 13 official 'connection' churches or planted parishes across Newham, often moving, using a variety of premises. They include Bethel, Fountain of Praise, Fountain of Revival, Harvest Chapel, **House of Great Grace**, Jesus People Parish, Joint Heirs Connection, Liberty Christian Connection, New Life Assembly, New Wine Assembly, Royal Connections, The Lord's Sanctuary and Trinity Chapel. Trinity Chapel, the first in Newham, stated: 'Trinity Chapel has a mandate to establish God's government on the earth by building a fully functioning governing church. We aim to enable people to discuss, develop and deploy their God-

given potential to influence society' <sup>26</sup>.

But many smaller, single, independent, locally rooted congregations-like El Shaddai and Harmony- were not listed and were unknown either locally or nationally. <sup>27</sup> Many new churches, often meeting in the older churches or community centres, were hidden from public view. The ABC shows where many were. By now almost all Free Churches in the Borough-Baptists, Methodists and URC- each housed 2, 3 and even 4 new churches, 19 of the 26 Anglican churches had opened halls and then sanctuaries. Newham also has 8 large Christian-based Community Centres initially led by 6 Christian ministers <sup>28</sup> and they had even more in their halls and rooms. The two Aston-Mansfield centres, Durning Hall in Forest Gate E7 and Froud Centre in Manor Park E12 consistently list 28 faith groups, with 23 Christian congregations outnumbering the 5 'other faiths', using their premises.

Community Centres, schools, Town Halls, the UEL and Industrial Units all housed week-end congregations.

Against a background of continuing migration and increasing transience new churches kept emerging, several added branches, others moved on and some disappeared. Between 2006-10 I discovered and noted the names of 139 new churches not recorded in the 2006 *Newham Directory of Religious Groups*- gleaned from Transform Newham, spotted on journeys or discovered in the local centres. Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries International had branches at Canning Town in an industrial unit; Plaistow at the Afro-Caribbean centre and Custom House in the Ascension Church. Kingdom Prosperity Church, Last Call of Jesus Christ Church, the Manchester-based Eden network and the London Gypsy Church [Romani] have all come. City Chapel led by Jonathan Oleyde [formerly at Glory House] opened in 2008 in Beckton as 'a new form of church which will reach out to all races and cultures' and later opened a Foodbank. Some began life in unusual places-UEL Stratford had Bread of Life Church, West Ham Football Club had Salem International. Others went to the earlier new churches-International Christian Mission to the Church of God; Igreja Batista Missionaria Laberadas De Fogo to the Upper Room Foursquare Chapel. Kingsway and Harmony went to Walthamstow and Dagenham. Some, like Harvest Rock and, St Johns Episcopal closed through scandal and the sudden death of a leader. The St Andrews Fellowship, planted by In-Contact Ministries, crossed the road to merge with the Baptist congregation to become Memorial Community Church in 2007.

Unusually, three former churches returned-the Unitarians returned as Stratford Unitarian and Free Church in a new building and hosted the Metropolitan Church of East London while the Presbyterian name which had disappeared in 1972 came back in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa UK Outreach.

New Communities and Orders settled here- the Bruderhof Woodgate Community took over the Christian Care centre in Forest Gate and new Roman Catholic Orders like The Franciscan Friars of the Renewal from New York were based in Canning Town. Kenyan Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary came to East Ham, one of a cluster of new Orders based in Newham.

More Asian congregations emerged. IHOPE –International House of Prayer and Encouragement- was formed in 2008 following 6 years preliminary work in the Asian Friendship Centre, set in a densely populated multi-racial and multi-faith district. All Nations was an Assemblies of God linked gathering of Asian peoples led by Bakhtaur Basra from 2004 in the former Grantham Gospel Hall in Manor Park E12. St Saviours and Trinity Church 2003 had a small congregation of Pakistani Christians led by Bashir Sadhu worshipping in the Bonny Downs Baptist Church with a mission training school for arriving young people intending to return to Pakistan.

Eastern Europeans, taking advantage of the 2004 'Open Door' policy of the EU, arrived for work.

Many were Roman Catholics and local congregations were increased by Polish believers and the Catholics made special provision for the Polish, Keralan and Tamil communities. Others were Orthodox linking with their churches- the Greeks and Syrians in Newham and the Romanians travelling to Wembley. Other Eastern Europeans were Evangelical/Pentecostal and used their own language in worship. The second Romanian Baptist Church in the UK, Biserica Romana Baptista Hanul, led by Pastor Teofil Haril, began in 2006/7 with a widely scattered congregation at Stratford Central Baptist E15. The 600 strong Lithuanian Pentecostal Church, now in Beckton E6, adapted a shop-Lithuanica-for employment and outreach purposes. In 2014 another Lithuanian group of 40, led by an ex-RC Priest was meeting in St Martins and Memorial Community and linking with the homeless.<sup>29,30</sup> The Rabin Gabor Slovakian Church arrived in East Ham. A Bulgarian congregation was absorbed into the Anglican church in June 2014, meriting both picture and comment in the Diocesan paper:

The Bulgarian language church at St Paul's in Stratford has been welcomed and received into the fellowship of the Church of England. Some 14 Bulgarians were baptised, 16 were confirmed and 28 received into the Church of England at a service led by the Bishop of Chelmsford'<sup>31</sup>

Even more widely, there was a Russian language service in the Anglican St James in Forest Gate and a Russian-Speaking Bible Fellowship started at the Pilgrims Way Methodist Church in 2011. Latin America is represented by the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, a fast-growing church established in Brazil in 1977 which now has branches in Stratford and Plaistow. China is linked through the Chinese Overseas Christian Mission and Chinese World International Church.

As 2014 closed three known new initiatives emerged. The Anglicans appointed Annie McTighe as Pioneer Minister around the Olympic Park with Wednesday evening meetings for local residents to meet and pray with discipleship as the key-note. Kahaila, a café church, opened in East Village led by Paul Unsworth- 'The café is the way that we build community for the purpose of making disciples, we also have a weekly church meeting which looks a bit different from more traditional models of church' The International Praise Centre, led by Baptist minister Claude Halme-Adjepong, took over the Earl of Wakefield pub in Katherine Road E7 to create a worship centre and nursery.

## Soundings

Nautical soundings check the depth, speed and currents of the river or the sea. Uncovering, understanding and recording the shifts and changes in the flux and flow. Always difficult because rivers keep flowing, the waves keep coming, tides go in and out, there is both rise and fall and nothing stays still.

Taking soundings about the place and the people in Newham is not easy. This is a place where change is constant. Regeneration and immigration are uneasy companions. Newham is still growing, with the largest population increase of all the London Boroughs. It is transient- it is rumoured that 10,000 people arrive every year but only 40% stay! It is multi-racial, multi-faith and multi-national.

Taking soundings within the streams and currents of faith within Newham is difficult. Details, dates and statistics are slippery, lost or hidden. Broad brush overviews can give the trends. Late in 2014,

Iona Ramsay, another researcher, looked at the significant changes in the on-line *Newham Directory of Religious Groups* since 2012. She summarised the continuing trends showing:

An overall increase from 239 to 291.

Muslim groups have grown from 30 to 56 and Islam is now the fastest growing faith.

Christianity is expanding and diversifying and groups have increased from 185 to 212. Only a few seem to have closed in the past 2 years.

There are more Pentecostal churches and these are often a base for world-wide missionary activity and have new branches. A number of these Pentecostal churches are on Face-book, mainly for evangelisation.

More congregations are speaking Eastern European languages.

There is a slight increase in community outreach and engaging with other faiths.<sup>32</sup>

The causes and the consequences of the changes in the overall religious pattern in Newham clearly continue. Within this multi-faith landscape the list of New Churches in Newham set out in the ABC and the accompanying story are the evidence that something extraordinary in British eyes has happened here in the past 40 years. Growth, diversity and vitality stand over against decline, tradition and maintenance.

## A SUMMARY

### OLDER, ESTABLISHED CHURCHES

*There were 81 established churches noted and listed in 1975. They have since shrunk by 15% to 68.*

Most of the 13 that closed have been taken over by the new churches or turned into community centres. The majority of the continuing churches have opened their doors to the new congregations. All are dramatically altered in composition and outlook. They are now younger, blacker and more outward-looking.

### NEW CHURCHES

*Over 350 new churches have been identified and listed since 1975.* The overwhelming majority, but not all, of these churches are within the Evangelical and Pentecostal streams linked with ethnic or national groups The ABC tells where they are now-or once were.

### MOST ARE STILL HERE

*220, or over 60%, of these churches remain in Newham-many dating back to the 1980s and 1990s.*

The majority, but not all, are listed in the latest directories. At least 40 of them now have their own premises-like Plaistow Seventh Day Adventist. More than 60 are to be found in 40 of the 'anchor' churches- there are 4 in Bryant Street Methodist, Stratford. 80 are in the 25 independent or local authority community centres-23 are currently in the Aston-Mansfield centres, Durning Hall and the Froud Centre. At least 40 rent accommodation in a variety of units, adapted shops, redundant pubs or schools.

### MOVING ON.

*30/40 churches, or 10%, have moved out of Newham and are now based elsewhere.* Some, like Calvary Charismatic, were motivated by rapid growth or the need of their own premises. Most went to adjoining Boroughs- Harmony to Barking and Dagenham, Victory Life to Tower Hamlets. Others, like Faith Temple and the Ethiopian Church, have moved right across London. The mega-church, Kingsway, is now a regional church based in Kent. Some went with the cultural shifts, like the

Malaysian International Christian Centre. Others followed charismatic leaders-Henry Kontor's congregation went from Plaistow to Barking and then Ilford.

#### DISAPPEARED?

*Over 100, or 30%, of the names in the ABC have disappeared from the Newham directories.*

At least 50-60 of these can be accounted for in four groupings:-

20-25 are among the *known closures* caused by division, scandal, death of the leader, single cultures moving on or 'seedlings' failing to prosper. Often occurring where there is solo or dominant family leadership.

5-10 are in *mergers* where congregations blend with or 'join up' with denominations [St Andrews Fellowship merged with Memorial Baptist Church to become Memorial Community Church] or there is retraction within networks like the Redeemed Christian Church of God.

15-20 are in *time-phased* groups which have run their course. Either those ageing together, as the 1970/80s first Caribbean congregations. Or with a limited age range, like youth churches, which are inevitably transient.

10-20 have experienced *name changes* as churches initially known under one name alter their title-the Kimbanguiste church in Newham is now known as Christ's Disciples Mission International Life Gate Branch.

But 40- 50 churches have *disappeared completely* from the list-but not necessarily from Newham. Some churches have 'gone below the radar' in a time of change or dissension and may re-surface. Others have just disappeared from view entirely.

#### CONGREGATIONAL NUMBERS

Congregational numbers in each church now range from a handful to 2000. But most are 30-50, many 100+ with several 500+ churches. A guess-estimate at the current total in the new congregations is around 10,000 with the 200+ churches averaging 50. Compare this with the current Roman Catholic community strength of 30,000 with 7500 mass-attendance, 2000 Anglicans on the electoral rolls, 1500 Free Church members and 2000 in the other pre-1975 established churches.

#### QUESTIONS ARISING

After 50 years living in Newham, working in the churches and communities, observing and researching and then writing up the story of the new churches I continue to ask questions. Here are 6 key questions:

*Global movement or local rooting?* Are we witnessing a Pentecostal world mission flow or a reflection of population movement? Which groups are incarnational, rooting into the community, drawing together a variety of cultures? Is Glo-cal a reality?

*Culture or Faith?* Do new congregations spring from a cultural background or through evangelism leading to personal faith? Are the new churches often locked into a single culture where languages and historical attitudes make impenetrable fences? Why did they begin and how will they end?

*One in Christ?* Jesus prayed for his disciples, 'I pray that they may be one'. Christianity in Newham faces the loss of traditional gatherings, the rise of the Independents, an ever-increasing diversity and the near- death of ecumenicity. New forms of communication and collaboration, like Transform Newham, have emerged but more are needed. Mission and prayer are the keys.

*Prosperity Doctrine or Servant Church?* Rewarded personal faith or social action within the community? Which belief is dominant within the spectrum of motivating theologies? Can these differing theologies be held together in mission?

*Inter-Faith Relationships?* In the most religious borough in the UK can there be any real relationship between the faiths and their leaders? Can we move beyond superficial acceptance to shared 'oneness' in social action or personal morality? How can we face and resolve religious extremism and conflict?

*Quo Vadis, Domine?* The legendary question for the first disciples was 'Where are you going, Lord?' The question now hangs over Christians in Newham-and London. What is the purpose of God and the future of faith in our changing society? Where will we be in 2050?.

## REFERENCES

1. *Newham Recorder* 19.12.2012
2. Listed in the 1974/75 *Newham Directory for Social Workers*. 13 of these were to close
3. David Sheppard, later Bishop of Woolwich and Bishop of Liverpool, was involved nationally in urban mission, culminating in the 1986 Anglican 'Faith in the City', writing *Built as a City* Hodder and Stoughton 1974 with a chapter on Newham. See also Peter Watherston *A Different Kind of Church-The Mayflower Family Centre Story* Marshall Pickering 1994
4. *Interaction of Church and Society in an East London Borough*, London School of Economics, 1978 Ph. D thesis. *Signs in the City* Hodder and Stoughton 1980 and *Shalom, my Friends* Hodder and Stoughton 1986. Research Fellow- '*Faith flows in Newham*'- University of East London 2006-9 which led to an archive of photographs and contributions to the LBN Newham Story web-site.
5. See <http://gregsmith.synthasite.com> for details of research and writing, especially on Newham.
6. Providing national leaders in the Anglicans David Sheppard, Stephen Lowe, Roger Sainsbury for 'Faith in the City'; Tony Holden in the Methodist 'Mission Alongside the Poor'-all of whom had worked in Newham
7. *Stratford Express* 28.11.58
8. *ibid* 4.11.1960
9. An Aladura or African Indigenous traditional church. Churches founded by 'prophets' who emerged as independent charismatic leaders, blending teaching learned from western missionaries with traditional African customs. Followed later in Newham by the Celestial Church of Christ and the Kimbanguiste church
10. The local authority *Newham Magazine* Nov 2014 put the Cherubim and Seraphim choir alongside Newham Super Choir at the Town Hall for pre-Christmas singing

11. Zebra Project was born of Methodist involvement and financial commitment in 1975 and closed in 1994. A black and white partnership covered four East London Boroughs, worked for racial justice and was managed by an ecumenical committee of Black, Asian and White Christian leaders
12. Established in 1971 by Clifford Hill, taking 3 redundant churches and creating community centres at Trinity, Harold Road and Sebert Road where many new churches found accommodation. Then going on to initiate a programme of community programmes for the homeless, unemployed and refugees.
13. Colin Marchant *Inter-action of Church and Society in an East London Borough* 1978 p 289
14. All named in *A Marsh and a Gasworks-100 Years of Life in West Ham* Section on Religion by Colin Marchant Newham History Workshop WEA 1986 p 81
15. A large residential and community centre in Plaistow built on the site of the former Canning Town Women's Settlement. 60 'sheltered housing' flats for OAPs and 6 'start-up' flats for young couples were above a complex with Citizens Advice Bureau, Meals on Wheels kitchen, a Nursery and a series of halls for community groups
16. Colin Marchant *Signs in the City* Hodder and Stoughton 1985 p83
17. One of *Ten Inner City Churches* edited by Michael Eastman Marc-Europe 1988 has a chapter on Plaistow Christian *Fellowship* by Helen Bonnick
18. Members included Jane Bazeley who became a local URC minister; Matthew Porter of Transform Newham; John Oliver, youth worker with Frontier Youth Trust, then a local Anglican vicar; Greg Smith, a researcher and writer nationally and locally; Stephen Timms, councillor, Leader of the Council, MP for East Ham, Chair of Christians on the Left
19. Dates of origin of many new churches are unknown or lost. Only the second 1994/5 *Newham Directory of Religious Groups* attempted to note some dates
20. Colin Marchant *Signs in the City* Hodder and Stoughton 1985 p 83
21. Colin Marchant *Baptists in Newham 1852-2012*
22. Five copies were printed in 1992, 1994/5, 1999 and 2006; the Directory went on-line from 2012 and was revised in 2014. Now Transform Newham also have their own documentation.
23. Greg Smith *Religious Organisations in Newham in 1998-9* pp118-9 Paper accompanying the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of *Directory of Religious Groups in Newham*
24. Published by the African and Caribbean Evangelical Alliance and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland
25. See Richard Burgess *African Pentecostal Growth: The Redeemed Christian Church of God in Britain* chapter 8 of *Church Growth in Britain 1980 to the Present* edited by David Goodhew Ashgate Contemporary Ecclesiology 2012
26. *Newham Directory of Religious Groups* 2006
27. Between 2006-9 I was a Research Fellow at the University of East London looking at '*Faith flows in Newham*'. My grandson, Matthew Crisp, took over 300 pictures of visible faith buildings and presence in Newham that covered all faiths. There are 42 contributions to the web-site 'The Newham Story' with pictures and text covering Buddhists, Methodism, Salvation Army, Settlements, URC inter alia as well as many new churches.
28. Five under the Newham Renewal Programme-Harold Road, formerly Methodist church; Hartley Centre, ex-Church Army; Sebert Road, former URC church; Shalom Centre, former URC church; Trinity, formerly Presbyterian church with Congregationalist Clifford Hill,

Methodist Paul Regan and Anglican Anne Easter as leaders. Three under Aston Charities [now Aston- Mansfield] at Durning Hall, Froud Centre, Lawrence Hall with Anglican Jimmy Froud, Baptist Colin Marchant and Methodist Paul Regan as initial leaders

29. Census 2011 on Lithuanians has 8348 in Newham with 360 in 2001. Neighbouring Barking and Dagenham 4028 with 80 in 2001
30. Information from Matthew Porter, Transform Newham
31. The Church of England in Essex and East London August 2014 p3
32. Iona Ramsay, analysing changes in the *Newham Directory of Religious Groups* between 2012 and 2014. This paragraph is based upon her notes and findings.