

Therfield Chapel – Church Profile

www.therfieldchapel.org

1. History

Therfield Chapel was established as a congregation of Protestant dissenters (the “Independents”) in 1836. The current Chapel was built subsequently, in 1854, and the Church eventually became known as *Therfield Congregational Church*, being affiliated to the Congregational Union who acted as trustees for the Church property. When in 1966 the Congregational Union was replaced by a body which espoused more liberal views, the Chapel seceded and became affiliated first to the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC), and then to the Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches (EFCC).

In 1965, Allon Taffs was ordained as Pastor, after serving the church as Secretary/informal leader for some 10 years before. He remained until May 1993.

After a period of interregnum, during which time the church was cared for and led by the elders and deacons, the Rev Mark Kingston was appointed as Pastor in August 1997. He served the church until he resigned in July 2002.

2 Administration

2.1 Elders

The church is set up under the leadership of Elders, whose role is to oversee the church under God. These include the pastor (when in post) and other elders chosen and appointed by the eldership from among the deacons. The departure of the pastor on the 11th July 2002 leaves three elders in office. The elders accept responsibility for the teaching ministry within the church, and for the overall management of the church. The roles of both elders and deacons are based on Biblical counsel.

2.2 Deacons

The church is served by a variable number of deacons and deaconesses, nominated and elected by the church on the basis of their role within the church. These roles include secretary, treasurer, Sunday school leader, youth leader and coffee bar leader amongst others. Deacons are not elected on a competitive basis, but on individual merit, hence the variable number. There are currently 2 male and 5 female deacons. Apart from one remaining life deacon (appointed under an earlier administration) deacons serve for three years, after which they are subject to re-election by the church.

2.3 Trustees

The board of trustees comprises sixteen persons. Each of these is a member of the church, and would be expected to resign trusteeship if and when (s)he leaves the church. The trustees' normal responsibility is to maintain the church buildings and premises, providing suitable material facilities within which the church can operate.

The trustees accept the extraordinary responsibilities of continuation of the ministry of the church, or otherwise, in the event of failure by the church to fulfil its proper function.

2.4 Membership

There is a formal membership roll, and members are accepted on the simple basis that they are Christians. Each member has one vote, but there are non-voting grades, namely 'Junior' (15 to 17) and 'Associate' (for members who leave the area). Current membership stands at 49 full members and 17 associate members (or families).

2.5 Church Meetings

These six monthly meetings are often referred to as 'Member's Meetings' because a substantial part of the congregation is comprised of non-members. Non-members are not invited to attend Church Meetings. The meeting debates and votes on major and minor issues, but leaves the majority of the normal running of the church to the elders and deacons. Nevertheless, the meeting has the final constitutional authority. Proposals are carried provided that more than 50% of the current membership vote in favour, except for constitutional changes or the appointment of a pastor, where a 75% majority is required.

2.6 Deacons Meetings

The Deacons meet together with the Elders every 4 to 8 weeks. These meetings are chaired by an elder, and seek to develop a 'team ministry' as a means of leading the church. All significant matters regarding the care and leadership of the church are discussed.

2.7 Elders Meetings

The Elders maintain regular communication through telephone and e-mail. They meet on an ad hoc basis, as need arises, to discuss and pray over particular issues regarding the ministry, care and leadership of the church.

2.8 Funding

The church and its work are 100% funded by personal contributions from members and congregation. Gift-aid is used to reclaim tax where appropriate. The reclaimed tax is used to fund the work of the trustees.

3 Congregation

Therfield is a small village set in the hills three or four miles to the south of the town of Royston in North Hertfordshire. The population of Therfield is about 400, and that of Royston is over 14,000. The congregation which meets at *Therfield Chapel* is more than a local congregation. Some travel considerable distances. Only a minority comes from the village itself, though this is now growing. The next largest concentration comes from Royston, and the remainder from the towns and villages around. The 'furthest away' regulars travel about 14 miles each way. On a Sunday morning congregation is around 20 to 30 persons and in the evening the congregation regularly numbers 50 to 70 persons. *Therfield Chapel* has always been a 'young' church, though, as the leadership has 'aged', the church has tended to do the same. Currently about 40% of the congregation are below 30 years old. The Church is a good mix of "ordinary" people with no particular social bias.

4 Theology and Doctrinal Position

Therfield Chapel is a lively, evangelical, non-charismatic, Bible-believing church.

4.1 Basis of Belief.

We assent to that of the EFCC, see <http://www.efcc.org.uk> for more information.

4.2 Baptism of the Spirit

We do not accept the so called 'Second Blessing' as being a doctrine supported in Scripture. We believe that all Christians receive the Holy Spirit upon conversion.

4.3 Baptism

As a Congregational Church we are bound by our heritage to honour the practice of infant baptism. The current leadership does not accept this position, hence normally we 'dedicate' babies and young children. However, should any Christian parent within the church request baptism of their infant child, a minister is imported to conduct the ceremony. We practice believer's baptism by pouring. We have no baptistry.

4.4 The Bible

We believe the Bible to be the inspired word of God, and to be historically true and accurate.

4.5 Truth

We believe that Christianity is true, and, as such, can be believed with integrity. Hence we teach apologetics, believing that Christians must know why they believe what they do, and why they behave the way they do.

4.6 Religion

We believe religion is essentially man-made. It is the practice of going through ritual to satisfy man's idea of serving God. Frequently this involves many false concepts. Christianity stands opposed to this on the basis that it is true, being revealed by God, not devised by man.

4.7 Faith and Reason

We believe that *Faith* and *Reason* are not opposed to each other. There is good reason to have faith in God because He is really there, and what He says in His word is true.

4.8 Charismatic Gifts

We believe that the work of the Holy Spirit is essential to the life of the church, that he equips his people with gifts to be used in his service and that he works to produce the fruits described in Galatians 5:22-23 in our lives. However, we observe that the inappropriate use of some of the gifts may be unhelpful in truly building up individuals – and can be detrimental to unity in the local church. We have therefore not encouraged their public use.

4.9 The Lord's Supper

We believe that the bread and wine are symbols of the body and blood of Christ, and that the eating and drinking of these is done solely in remembrance of Christ's death. We do not accept that the emblems in any sense become the body and blood of Christ.

4.10 Evangelism

Our approach is to encourage people to come and consider Christianity and the claims of Christ. We try and address them where they are in their thinking, and answer their questions with reasonable and Biblical answers. There are good reasons for believing. When they are convinced we encourage them to submit to the Lord of Lords. This is the Holy Spirit's work.

5 Services and Functions

5.1 Sunday Morning Service

This is a service for all ages, led by one of the elders. Attendance varies from 15 to 30 persons. The ministry may be topical or consecutive. The service is aimed at families, those not able to attend in the evening, and to reach out to people within the village of Therfield. The service in its current format was started in 1999, and has built up its own regular attendance, with a higher percentage of people from the village itself. A "Junior Church" operates for part of the service for the under 10s. Many of these new "morning" people do not attend the evening service regularly, due to family or other reasons.

5.2 Sunday Evening Service

For historical reasons, this is the larger weekly gathering of the church. The service is normally led by one of the elders, but during the interregnum we are supported by a pool of reasonably local guest speakers. Responsibility for this service lies with one of the elders. We maintain a consecutive Bible ministry. The emphasis of the service is on teaching, with a challenge. Evangelism is woven into this ministry. Attendance varies from around 50 to 70 persons, from a wider pool of perhaps 120. A "Junior Church" is also operated for part of the service, and is normally held in the neighbouring school with which we enjoy a good relationship.

5.3 Discovery

This is our Sunday young people's work, which meets on Sunday mornings in a Community Centre in Royston. This is a long-established work in the centre of a large estate, and also provides opportunities to minister to the wider community in Royston. It operates at the same time as the morning service, which is one reason why the evening service is our main one. Discovery comprises:

- 5.3.1 *Explorers* - for 5 - 7 years
- 5.3.2 *Trekkers* - for 8 - 11 years
- 5.3.3 *Compass* - for 12+ years

5.4 Prayer Meeting

Held monthly on Thursday evenings in various homes. Attendance low.

A prayer chain has now been set up to encourage prayer for known needs within and beyond the church.

5.5 Kon-Tiki Youth Club and Coffee Bar

Held every Wednesday evening from 7pm until 10pm. A multi-age youth club with a variable programme at different times of the evening to suite various age groups from 10 to early 20s, attracting children from both the village and the surrounding area. Attendance up to 35.

5.6 Home Groups

There is currently one home-group meeting on Tuesday evenings. We would like to develop this aspect of church life.

5.7 Additional Events

Special events are held on Saturdays approximately monthly. These include punting on the River Cam, a Garden Supper, trip to the seaside, Spring lecture, Harvest Dinner and various other events of both a church-building and a spiritual nature.

We also go away for a weekend 'Breakaway' every two years with an invited speaker. This event is very popular.

5.8 Pastoral care

Pastoral care is conducted on an as needed basis by the elders and deacons, together with the normal activities of a caring church. In order to enhance this we are setting up a 'Shepherding' scheme to nurture and care for God's people in a more proactive way.

5.9 Links with other Churches

Over the last ten years, we have built up strong links with the Royston Evangelical Church. There is now a substantial overlap in congregations (though not formal membership), particularly at the evening service. Like ourselves, the REC is a small independent church, and is led by a team of lay elders.

We also have a sister Congregational Chapel in the nearby village of Barkway.

We enjoy good personal relationships with individuals in other local churches, and are pleased to be supported by the local Anglican vicar especially during this interregnum. From time to time we are involved in wider initiatives, but have not formally joined the area's Churches Together group because of its ecumenical nature.

6 Our Pastor

6.1 Recent situation

The church was led by a full-time salaried pastor from 1997 to 2002. The Manse, which adjoins the chapel, was provided rent-free, and all fuel bills, water rates, telephone and rates/community charge were paid by the church. A similar arrangement is likely for the new Pastor.

6.2 Looking forward - A new Pastor

Here we can only look to God. It is His Church, not ours, and we pray for a man called by God to this work. Will he be an evangelist? We hope so. The Church dies if no-one is converted. We hope that he will relate to young people and that he will preach the Bible with honesty and integrity and relevance to our society and our culture, so that, together under God, we can continue the work of His Church. The chosen man would be expected to be appointed as Pastor, working with the established Elders in a team ministry. He would need preaching, teaching pastoral and organisational skills to cope with an active and lively church, nurturing and fostering God's people. If married, we would expect his wife to be fully committed to support him in this work. We pray that the Holy Spirit will work amongst us so that we and the church will grow.

Compiled by

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