

Secretary's Annual Report 2020
Free Grace Baptist Church
215th Church Anniversary and Thanksgiving

**God holds the key of all unknown,
And I am glad;
If other hands should hold the key,
Or if He trusted it to me,
I would be sad, I would be sad.
(Edgar Wood version !)**

We praise our gracious Lord that in His mercy and for His glory alone He has preserved this church thus far through a particularly challenging year for everyone.

Today we celebrate the completion of Pastor Tom and Cat's fourth year of ministry among us. We thank God for His preservation of them and the grace of perseverance given to Pastor through many weeks when he was having to preach to an empty church. During that period, he must have felt so cut off from the flock.

The hymn writer says "I do not know what lies ahead – the way I cannot see"

That was indeed true for all of us back in January. Edgar Wood used to say that the final line of that verse quoted above should say "I would be sad" rather than "I might be sad"

We were particularly concerned by the serious illness that our brother Mark suffered with covid 19. We thank God for His preserving and restoring mercies. Up to March we saw many encouragements in the ongoing work in Sunday School, Monday Club, LAMBS, KIC club, the Ladies' Meeting, FOY and outreach. That all came to a sudden halt in March. Rather like Habakkuk most of us had times of questioning as to what our Lord was doing. But His ways of dealing with His beloved people now are not new. John Newton captured this in his precious hymn.

**I asked the Lord that I might grow
in faith and love and ev'ry grace;
might more of his salvation know,
and seek more earnestly his face.
'Twas he who taught me thus to pray,
and he, I trust, has answered pray'r,
but it has been in such a way
as almost drove me to despair.**

Over these months our Lord has provided new opportunities for maintaining the ministry, prayer and service.

We praise God for the provision of the technology for streaming the ministry and for our brother who supported Pastor through the period of lockdown in doing this. In the early months it was evident that many people unknown to us were logging into the ministry each Sunday. We were able to maintain our times of prayer together over zoom which was a blessing but obviously not the same as gathering as one body. Many of our friends engaged in the ministry of mutual encouragement by telephone or letter. Of particular concern were our elderly friends who could not access the ministry. Various ways were found to overcome this. We thank those who have continued to provide for our children a virtual Sunday school with sound teaching and wonderful craft activities. We were

prompted early on to have book boxes with free bibles and evangelistic literature outside some of our homes that are in strategic positions. We thank God again for the wonderful response particularly from the book box outside the chapel. Particularly encouraging has been the uptake of literature and bibles in other languages. By the time of our anniversary around 1000 pieces of literature will have been taken. Many of these have been bibles or new testaments. Physically we have worked hard to ensure that our return to physical worship was as safe as possible within the guidance given. We purchased a large relay screen for the schoolroom to provide for additional distanced seating over this period with the knowledge that in the days ahead it will help with a growing congregation if God so blesses. We also purchased several portable transparent screens to help with seating in our small building. We thank our brethren who have been helping with weekly seating plans and stewarding and all the membership for their willing cooperation with some of the uncomfortable restrictions. We rejoice in reporting that since the last Annual Report, we have welcomed into membership five brothers and sisters and a brother and sister by testimony and baptism.

We have other friends who are attending and seriously seeking the Lord's will for them. This is not any easy time for any of us in finding practical ways of getting to know each other.

Pastor has provided the following brief outline of his ministry over the year.

- Short series 'comforts in affliction' from Isaiah 27 - 4 sermons in total
- Lock down comforts from 1 Peter - 1 message in total
- Luke series continued - 29 messages this year (over 100 messages in total)
- Sermons from Titus on male & female roles and the necessity for elders (Rest of letter to be continued in the future)
- Various evangelistic and devotional standalone messages
- Joshua series continued - 12 sermons this year
- Bible study series commenced on 1689 confession - 7 sermons so far
- Habakkuk series commenced- 3 sermons so far
- Christian Basics Discipleship groups with various believers
- Christianity explored session with seekers (we praise God for one conversion through this)

Mark Higgins We have also had the joy and privilege of supporting Mark Higgins during his second year of a part time course at L.T.S. He is now welcomed to preach at a number of churches. In the Lord's providence the current restrictions have meant that often Mark must preach "virtually" and therefore the opportunity for developing an understanding of the Lord's will for either Mark or the churches is severely restricted. Mark has been using his gifts within the church particularly with discipling classes.

We conclude by once again expressing our appreciation of the fellowship of sister churches in the south east.

Annual Report- Online Activities 2020

Periscope livestream

Our services are freely streamed via Periscope, they also remain on that platform for later viewing. An average service will receive 30-50 views at present although normally only 20-25 of these will be during the livestream. The highest number of livestream viewers at one time was 42, this was recorded in April at that time our broadcasts were attracting 120+ views in a week.

VOD: Sermonaudio.com & YouTube.com

More than 521,000 of our sermons have been played on Sermonaudio since 2001, with in excess of 53,000 of those plays being on mobile devices. We have people regularly listening in to the recordings from over 60 countries worldwide. Our Youtube channel reaches a different audience and presently has 42 subscribers who are notified when new content is added. There around 40 videos from recent sermons which are slowly gaining views on the site.

Google listing

In the August 1780 people found us using Google with 8 people going on to ask for directions to the chapel building. Keywords used to find us include 'belvedere', 'grace baptist church' and 'grace baptist church near me'.

Social Media: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram

Facebook: Our page is now followed by 262 people up from 206 last year. Nearly 900 people saw a post from the church over the last month 207 of our followers are based in the UK, while others come from the USA, the Philippines, India, Nigeria, Hong Kong and many other countries.

Twitter: Our feed had 220 followers, many of whom don't follow our other channels. Our posts are usually similar in content to the material on the Facebook page.

Instagram: Our page has 108 followers with 200+ pictures posted. The Instagram demographic tends to be considerably younger than those reached on either Facebook or Twitter.

All social media accounts are linked from the website, and each account also includes links back to the website allowing visitors to interact with us through their channel of choice.