

# **Church Profile: Bethesda Baptist Church 2024**

## **Background**

Bethesda Baptist Church Ipswich is a community of people committed to making Jesus known in our town and beyond.

Today's church is the product of a reformed evangelical ministry together with a diverse membership drawn from a variety of backgrounds. This year we celebrated our 195th anniversary.

Throughout its history the church has recognised the importance of high-quality preaching and teaching ministry, recognising that it is crucial to the life and growth of individuals and the church corporately.

The church meets in a listed building located in the centre of Ipswich. A virtual tour of the building both inside and out is available on the church website.

Bethesda has a good relationship with a range of local evangelical churches, including those from Baptist and Anglican traditions.

## **About Ipswich**

Ipswich is a historic town in Suffolk, England, with an estimated population of around 140,000 people, making it one of the largest towns in the East Anglia region. Its town centre has experienced shifting demographics in recent years, welcoming an increasingly diverse community that reflects a range of cultural backgrounds and social needs. Ipswich benefits from excellent public transport options, including regular rail services to London (approximately an hour's journey) and connections across East Anglia, alongside a comprehensive bus network. The town is also known for its quality schooling options, with well-regarded primary and secondary schools, as well as private schools, and further education institutions like Suffolk New College and University of Suffolk, providing strong educational opportunities for families and young people. You can access census statistics for Ipswich [here](#)

## **Vision**

We see by faith a healthy and growing Christ-centred church for the people of the town that exists to worship God, grows together in faith, and bears witness to Jesus Christ with focused investment in reaching children, young people and their families.

Our vision is shaped by a heart for the next generation. The words of Psalm 78.4 seem fitting: "We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done".

We see people of all backgrounds coming to faith in Jesus Christ through Bethesda and its associated ministries, who learn together to obey him in all of life.

We see young families in the town cared and provided for, children given space to grow roots in Jesus and develop faith from an early age, parents helped to navigate discipleship in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain with peer support, grandparents and retirees serving into later years and cared for with compassion.

We see evangelical churches in Suffolk partnering in mission to reach out amongst all the changing communities of Ipswich and the surrounding area with the love and message of Jesus.

## **Attendance and membership**

The current membership of the church is around 90. Covid restrictions in 2020 and 2021, resulted in a significant decline in attendance and, although there has been some recovery, the church has not returned to its pre-Covid levels. The majority of attendees are over sixty although there are also families with children who attend. The leadership has identified growth in the 20-40 age group as a high priority for the church going forward.

Attendance at our Sunday worship, is usually in the region of 70 - 90, with a significant number meeting with us who are not church members. Others also join us online or via recordings.

We currently offer a Sunday School for children of primary age which has a small number who attend. Children and young people of secondary age attend the service and therefore we seek to ensure that the services are accessible to them.

## **Leadership**

The Church Leaders are the Pastor and Deacons, who also take on the legal responsibility as Managing Trustees for the Church. They meet monthly and provide overall direction to the church.

We currently have ten deacons although the Constitution allows for more than this. There are three deacons who, together with the pastor, make up the Ministry Team. Two of these regularly share the responsibility for preaching on Sundays. In addition, the Ministry Team takes responsibility for a number of eldership issues.

The Pastor takes prime responsibility for spiritual leadership of the church, and lead responsibility in the outreach, teaching, preaching and pastoral care of the congregation. This involves leading and working with a Ministry Team to plan and deliver Sunday worship and the preaching and teaching programme, and a Pastoral Care Team that co-ordinates monthly visitation to the elderly and frail who are unable to regularly attend church services. Both are accountable to the deacons.

## **Sundays**

We meet every Sunday morning to worship God together. Services include a blend of traditional & contemporary songs which are projected onto a screen and a range of video clips and other visual materials are often used. We have a team of pianists and organist musicians, with some songs played via recorded music video. Whilst in the past a band has also been involved in leading worship, we currently do not have musicians to facilitate this.

Communion is included in the service once per month and all committed Christians are invited to participate.

The needs of new Christians, younger people and those on the 'fringe' but have not yet made a Christian commitment are taken into consideration when planning services, as well as providing for those who have been Christians for many years.

We are always ready to welcome guests, and normally run a creche and groups for 3-11's. We have a small but faithful number young people of secondary age who attend services, and we seek to ensure that the services are accessible to them. All-age' services are held from time to time and are designed to be accessible to seekers and those who do not regularly attend church.

Following the morning service, there is the opportunity to meet for fellowship and refreshments in the Key.

We also run occasional meetings on Sunday evenings, including celebration of the Lord's Supper, additional teaching series with an opportunity for worship, 'Songs of Praise' services with testimonies, and films.

## **Prayer**

Prayer is integral to our church life and there are many opportunities to join in corporate prayer. We meet to pray before the Sunday morning service. We also hold twice-monthly midweek gatherings for prayer and church updates on Tuesday evenings and a monthly daytime meeting on a Thursday. We also hold a monthly online prayer session.

## **Midweek Groups**

We encourage all members to be a part of a house group or daytime midweek group to support, pray and foster better care for each other. We normally study a Bible passage with a focus on application, discipleship and worship.

Monday Fellowship meets throughout the year and provides the opportunity to meet together for Bible teaching and fellowship in the context of a more traditional worship style.

## **Outreach**

There are a number of midweek activities run by church members to help us socialise, care for each other and share Jesus through the friends we make. Such activities include short mat bowls and a 'finishing time' craft group.

## **Parents, Carers and Toddlers**

This is a church-run toddler group on Tuesday mornings which includes a Bible story time and seeks to build relationships with parents and carers. There are regular opportunities to invite those who have no church connections to come to other church activities.

## **Evangelism**

We encourage the whole church to make the most of sharing their faith with those we spend time with during the week and to bring friends and family to church events and services. We regularly run evangelistic courses, most recently using Christianity Explored and Hope Explored material. We run a weekly 'open table' group for people who are just looking into the Christian faith. We also run seasonal events for making new friends and sharing the gospel.

## **The Key**

Set up as a separate charity, "The Key" is an integral part of the ministry at Bethesda. "Bethesda Community Charitable Trust" is run by a group of five Managing Trustees chaired by one of our deacons. The building was previously a pub until it was purchased by the church in the 1990's and underwent a huge transformation to provide a valuable facility for the church to use.

Central to the activities of "The Key" is the Coffee Shop, open to the public on three days each week. A paid manager and three paid kitchen staff run "The Key" on a daily basis, supported by a band of volunteer helpers. The Key is available for hire and currently used by a number of charities, church groups and educational groups. The first floor of the building contains three flats, which are let on a commercial basis providing much-needed funds. It is anticipated that our new minister will take an active interest in the work of The Key and attend Trustees meetings whenever possible.

## **Pastoral Care and Visitation**

This aspect of the church's ministry is considered to be of primary importance and is co-ordinated by two church members with visitation carried out by a number of volunteers from the church.

Monthly visitation is made to the elderly and frail who are unable to regularly attend church services; communion is arranged where requested. Priority visits are made to those in the church family who are sick or in hospital, or who have specific needs and support is offered as is considered appropriate.

It has been emphasised to all church members that Christian love and care is a responsibility of everyone within the church family as we seek to practically comply with the command of Jesus “to love one another”.

## **Bethesda Eventide Homes**

The church's concern and care for the elderly is further demonstrated by our Bethesda Eventide Homes, a property acquired by the church in 1963 and run as a separate charity. The home is currently registered for 28 residents who are not only associated with Bethesda but many other local churches. It is anticipated that our new minister will be actively involved in pastoral care for the residents and Eventide Trustees meetings.

## **Global Missions**

We believe that every Church member has the privilege of being involved in spreading the good news about Jesus worldwide through prayer, giving and active participation. The Mission Council encourages, organises and provides a focus for this involvement.

We partner directly with mission workers overseas and a number of mission organisations, including SIM International, Elam, Trans World Radio, a little bit of HOPE and Open Doors. We support ministries involved in radio work, the Muslim world and unreached people groups.

We also support those working in our own locality including Ipswich Christian Youth Ministries, Christians Against Poverty (CAP) and Families in Need (FIND).

Information relating to mission is shared at our mid-week meetings, Sunday services and through printed updates. We pass prayer requests to the church and gifts to the missionaries. We actively encourage members to consider involvement in mission whether short or long-term and through prayer and giving.

## **Redevelopment**

Substantial funds have been given towards a redevelopment fund since the buildings on the East Side of the main church building are no longer fit for purpose. The cost of progressing with the original plans proved prohibitive. However, there is an urgent need to provide new toilets and an improved disabled access, with a side entrance and reception area being highly desirable. We have permission in principle to replace the pews and are considering how this would provide more flexibility for use of the building.

## **Staffing**

The church employs an administrator on a part-time basis to produce our weekly 'Family News', help with the preparation of our Sunday services, publicity, coordination for weddings and funerals, and a variety of other tasks as the need arises

We are committed to the principle of team ministry, and we anticipate that the new pastor would be responsible for building a strong team of volunteers.

## **Financial Governance**

Bethesda is a Registered Charity that relies upon the freewill offerings of God's people. Thus far God has always met our needs. Most of our offerings come via Standing order and are gift aided. 12.5% of that given to the General Fund is set aside for Mission work as a tithe. In addition, further designated giving is encouraged, and church members give considerable support to The Key and Eventide Homes.

A Stewardship Committee supports the Treasurer on financial issues. Annual accounts are prepared in accordance with the Charities Act and are subject to independent review.

We have sufficient reserves for six months operating expenditure and trust the Lord to provide for our financial needs as prayerfully envisaged in our budget.