

HOUGHTON REGIS BAPTIST CHURCH



**Home Mission support enabling growth
and a vision for a Christian presence in new
housing areas**

We begin 2015, thankful for the fruitfulness Home Mission support has brought to our church and conscious of the substantial opportunities ahead of us.

We have undoubtedly grown! In 2009 we were a congregation of 60 adults and children. Today we have 170 people who worship with us sometimes, a third of them under 18 years. We're located between two large social housing estates set in the three most deprived wards of Central Bedfordshire. It's been a white working class population but it's changing as black and minority ethnic communities develop. Looking back we can celebrate many different people joining our church. Some have been away from church for a long time, for others church is completely new. We've also seen people joining us from a diverse range of backgrounds. We now have 10 nationalities amongst us.

We've worked hard on our 'Sunday welcome' but still need to develop a strong cultural understanding that can bridge our different ethnic and church backgrounds. A key priority is to enable everyone to own our church life for themselves.

Many attend on Sundays but fewer than half the adults are in membership. The autumn saw many new arrivals but so often those who have come have no experience of membership. Church meals do seem to universally work and are a particular joy with a fantastic range of food. As the church develops it's vital we identify people to lead from across our congregation to maintain our momentum. With this in mind we're engaging with BMS in 2015 to help us deepen our fellowship as we set out on a new phase of mission together.

And it feels like we have to force the pace of our growth. In the coming months building work will start on 7,000 new homes - doubling the size of Houghton Regis. We've been leading the discussion with the local authority about the provision by the churches of a community building in the new development, which would also house a new church.



Find out more about how Home Mission is enabling Baptist churches to make Jesus known in their communities, see www.baptist.org.uk/hmstories

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This would be close to where our church stood in 1750. The original houses are long gone but a new community is about to be formed nearby and we'd like to be present to help welcome, build and nurture a new healthy community with a church at its heart.

We're also discussing other ways of developing a Christian presence across the new estates. We're exploring how local congregations can support pioneer initiatives as the new residents arrive. It's a 15 year vision for community building, church planting and Christian witness. The task feels overwhelming but it is helping us to focus on what is important and it is raising the profile of the church in the public sphere. At Christmas our church was full for the carol service, for the first time in many years, and amongst the congregation were a number of town councillors.

Looking ahead we continue to seek God's way, believing he is calling us on towards this great vision. We will be looking to quickly become a church that can play a significant part in this task. But we will be hoping that the Baptist family will once again be able to play a vital role in supporting a new strategic initiative to shape a community and establish a Christian witness among the many who will be moving here.

David Skinner
Minister,
Houghton Regis Baptist Church

Please pray:

- » Giving thanks for the people from different cultural backgrounds who are now coming to the church
- » For the church as they develop an understanding of each other's ethnic and church backgrounds
- » For the developing relationship with BMS to help deepen the fellowship as they set out on mission together
- » For the opportunities that the new housing developments will bring, and for a vision of where God is calling the church to be a Christian witness