

The History of the Full Gospel Church in Fleetwood

from the Golden Jubilee Brochure, 1983.

CHAPTER 1.

“In the beginning...”

The Full Gospel Church began in Fleetwood in July 1933. The Rev. Fred Squire, the renowned evangelist, came along to hold a six week campaign in a tent that was erected on a plot of spare ground where the General Post Office is now. The first tent was large enough to seat 500 people.



The crowded Campaign Tent



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On July 16th, the Lord healed a man who for nine years had never spoken a word. Mr. Meyer was a life pensioner, receiving money from the government each week because the doctors said that he would never speak again. One thousand people packed into the tent the night after the dumb man was healed

That week a terrible 90 mile per hour gale blew and down came the tent. At that point the opportunity was taken to put up a larger tent. Before the campaign ended the tent had to be enlarged again because by that time the congregation had grown to over 3000 nightly.

On Thursday 16th August 1933, Pastor Squire hired the Fleetwood Open Air Swimming Pool for 30 shillings and, whilst ordinary bathers were swimming at one end, he conducted the Church's first Baptismal Service at the other. Over 100 people were baptised and more than 3000 paid the customary spectators fee to witness the event.



Over 100 baptised in Fleetwood Swimming Pool

1170 people registered decisions to accept Christ as their Saviour in the first six weeks of the life of the Full Gospel Church in Fleetwood.

In the autumn of 1933 the new congregation settled into their first church building, which was a suite of rooms in Lord Street above the property adjacent to the spare ground where the church had been. The Tabernacle (which later became Peel's Cafe and then Horsleys Furniture Store) was first pastored by Rev. Charles H. E. Duncombe. The congregation was at that time around the 200 mark.



Lord Street "Tabernacle" 1933–1935



Harvest Festival

Pastor Duncombe was a well respected Bible expositor, who had been the principal of a Bible College. He encouraged fellowship between Church members with Fellowship Teas and sought to enlarge the Church membership with evangelistic campaigns.



Rev. and Mrs. Charles H. E. Duncombe – Minister 1933–1941

A Great Youth Campaign was held in the church in May 1934 with London evangelist Gordon Cove and in January 1935. Pastor Dan Philips, the 'singing evangelist' from Ashton-under-Lyne, conducted a 10 day "Revival and Divine Healing Crusade". Both these campaigns encouraged growth in the church.

There was by this time a need for the church to have their own building and a building fund had already been opened. Church members gave sacrificially and the fund grew. The site was chosen and the builders, Messrs. J. Cryer and Sons, began the foundations in Lowther Road and a stone laying ceremony was held in July 1935.

The last service to be held in the Lord Street Tabernacle was on Sunday 1st September 1935. Then commenced a great two week Revival and Divine Healing crusade. All these services were held in the 'Gospel Tent' which had been erected on the spare land alongside the new church building, which was almost ready for occupation.



Full Gospel Church in Lowther Road, Fleetwood

CHAPTER 2.

“Early Days”

To the shout of “Hallelujah!” between 300 and 400 people entered the new Full Gospel Church for the opening services on the afternoon of Saturday September 4th 1935. [Rev. J. Nelson Parr](#) from Bethshan Tabernacle in Manchester had the pleasure of unlocking the door.



The Opening of Lowther Road Church

Rev. John Nelson Parr and Rev. Charles H. E. Duncombe, 1935

In August 1936 the internationally known evangelist Smith Wigglesworth spoke at the church’s 3rd Anniversary Convention, the first to be held in the Lowther Road church.

Early in 1941 Pastor Duncombe elected deacons for the church from amongst the members and as he was called more and more to the work of an evangelist up and down the country, these men, along with his wife, who was herself a gifted preacher, looked after the assembly

As Pastor Duncombe was called away more regularly, the need for another minister became evident for the spiritual welfare of the Church. In February 1942 Rev. Edward J. Jarvis, who for some time had been in charge of the sister assembly at Cleveleys, was asked to take over the pastorate of Fleetwood assembly.



Rev. Edward J. Jarvis – Minister 1942–1944

Pastor Jarvis was well liked by everyone and the church prospered under his ministry. He began a monthly church magazine called “The Messenger”.

Amongst the many visiting speakers welcomed to the church whilst Pastor Jarvis was the minister was the world famed evangelist and musician Dr. E. P. Grahame. His unique style of evangelism brought many people into the church that would otherwise never have heard the Gospel message. On each visit Dr. Grahame sang and played classical music and then preached with “all the old time fire”.

During August 1944 Pastor Jarvis said farewell and moved on to a church in South Wales, belonging to the Elim Pentecostal Movement. The Fleetwood church was by this time in fellowship with the Assemblies of God Pentecostal movement.

The Fleetwood pastorate was taken up by Rev. W. Ron Jones on September 23rd 1944. In 1945 the church purchased a house in Carr Road to be used for the minister and his family. By August 1946 600 had been raised by donations from the church members to help to pay off the loan.



Rev W. Ronald Jones – Minister 1944–1948

Youth work was important to Pastor Jones. He was very interested in the Sunday School which was already established in the church; so much so that he taught one of the classes himself every Sunday. With Y.E.S. – the Youth Evangelistic Society – he encouraged the youth of the church to enjoy each others company on bike rides and rambles in the country as well as taking part in open air meetings and distributing Gospel tracts.

A youth choir known as the ‘Gospel Songsters’ was formed around this time. They sang at church meetings and also at conventions around the area. Pastor Jones left Fleetwood to join the Elim Pentecostal Church during January 1948, and shortly afterwards he married a member of the Fleetwood assembly, Miss Kathleen Gillingham.

It had been agreed at a church meeting that Rev. Samuel Prescott, who was at that time living locally, should be the next minister, but he was later elected by the deacons to pastor the Cleveleys assembly and Rev. Robert K Dorling was invited to fill the pastorate at Fleetwood. Pastor and Mrs. Dorling came from East Ham, London, and were inducted into the ministry at Fleetwood at the end of February 1948.



Rev. and Mrs. K. Robert Dorling

Pastor Dorling was a godly man and taught the Word of God with authority, but the financial problems that were everywhere in those post war years were also present in the church. The burdens proved too much and brought on ill-health, so in February 1951 Pastor and Mrs. Dorling moved to Folkestone.

CHAPTER 3. “A New Era”

On March 27th 1951 Rev. Stanley Smith, previously of the Radcliffe Full Gospel Church was inducted into the pastorate of the church. He was an experienced minister and one of his first moves was to reconstruct the government of the church. Mrs. Winifred Smith, the Pastors wife, began a uniformed youth group called

Christ's Ambassadors, shortly after their arrival. Sunshine Corner, a club for the younger children was started about the same time.

Rev. Stanley and Winifred Smith



el Church at Knott End became an extension of the Fleetwood Full Gospel when the re-opening service was held. It was agreed that Pastor Stanley and Smith, who was about to attend the Bible College of Wales, should fulfil the the Knott End Church on a rota basis, although for the first twelve months, most Sundays found Michael Smith as speaker.

A special Revival Crusade conducted by Rev. Harold Miles of London was held during December 1951 and again during January 1953. In fact Harold Miles was a frequent visitor to Fleetwood.

The house in Carr Road was found to be unsuitable early in 1952 and a better house in Warren Avenue North was purchased. Money was needed to clear the outstanding bills and loans and a gift day was arranged. The congregation gave sacrificially, to the extent of one church member parting willingly with her wedding ring, and the debts were cleared with only a small mortgage left to pay on the new manse.

On the church's 21st Birthday – August 1954 – Pastor Smith organised a celebratory Fellowship Tea with a film-slide presentation recalling the early days of the church's history. At this time the church had 80 members attending on a regular basis.

Pastor Howell M. Harris conducted a Divine Healing Campaign during March 1955. It is recorded that about 1700 people attended the first week's services. Over 70 cures were recorded including cases of deafness, arthritis, internal disorders and physical deformities, and over 100 people registered decisions to follow Christ.

Many people will remember such visiting preachers and evangelists such as Rev. Bert Mitson, Rev. Tom Wilson, Rev. Gerald Rowlands, Pastor L Richardson, Rev. Norman and Mrs. Christine Wright, Rev. Henry Shave, Rev. James B. Hosier and Rev. Eddie Durham, and to those who do, the mention of each will bring back their own special memories. Rev. Neville West and Rev. Alan Caple will be especially remembered as drawing crowds into their special services with the giving away of oil paintings that had been done during the meeting. The Rev. W. Ron Jones was the accompanying evangelist. More than 1500 people attended those meetings.

Missionaries have always been important to the Full Gospel Church and many have been sent out and supported by the church. Miss Elsie Wrigglesworth spent more than 30 years in India and after her retirement spent only 3 years back home in the church before taking up a new post as a missionary in Ethiopia. Her time there spent as governess to the children of the Royal Family.

Miss Margaret Alban married Joe Robinson and together they went as missionaries to the Congo (now Zaire). From time to time these and many more missionaries home on furlough would spend some time in Fleetwood telling the assembly the things for which to pray and praise.

To celebrate the church's Silver Jubilee Pastor Squire returned to Fleetwood during May 1958 and led a short campaign, and in August Pastor Jarvis, Pastor Jones and Pastor Dorling took part in a special crusade. The church members presented Pastor and Mrs, Smith with a silver canteen of cutlery as a memento.

Mrs. Smith was keen to encourage more young people to attend church and so she set up and supervised a Youth Evangelistic Team and Youth Choir. During the early 60's, with the help of the existing young people attending the church, she ran a coffee and biscuits break after meetings. The young people would go out on to the streets and invite other to join them for a coffee and a chat.

The Church building was given an interior face lift in October 1962. A minor hall was built for use during midweek services. This seated about 70 people. Rewiring was done and a new false ceiling put in to improve lighting.

An assistant minister was recruited during 1965: Mr. James Thompson, who later left to join the Elim Pentecostal Church as a minister.

As the youth work prospered over the years and teams took services at various venues, an annual event sprang up naturally – the Youth Demonstration – the first of which was put together for Christmas 1966 and went under the name “The Greatest Story”.

It was at a special House Party Retreat Weekend, run for the Church by Mrs Smith at a Church member's Blackpool Hotel, that ‘Their Master's Voice’, a folk group with a gospel message, made their mark. This was the beginning of yet another era in the youth outreach of the Full Gospel Church. ‘Living Word’ were another such group, formed from young people regularly attending the Church.

Both these groups attracted young people to the services and the church was always packed to capacity and with ‘Standing room only’ notices outside on nights such as these. It grew more and more obvious to Pastor Stanley Smith that the move he felt God wanted was now essential.

When he had first come to Fleetwood in 1951, Reverend Stanley Smith told his wife that he believed God would lead the Church in such a way that ultimately there would be need to move from Lowther Road, and that Elm Street Methodist Church would become the home of the enlarged congregation. At that time the idea would have appeared ludicrous: the largest congregations meeting in the Full Gospel Church were no more than 50 including children, and the Lowther Road building was capable of seating over 150 people. Besides, Elm Street was a reasonably healthy church, situated at a key site in the town.

Yet the vision did not diminish, and after years of hard patient work, seeing increase followed by slight decrease, followed by greater enlargement again, the congregation had grown too large for its home. And although the Methodist officials had stoutly maintained that Elm St Methodist Church would never be sold, a new building at Broadway meant the property was now surplus to requirements, and just at the time that the Full Gospel Church needed it, 18 years after Pastor Smith came to the town, it was available for purchase.

CHAPTER 4.

“Where Moses stood...”

The opening and re-consecration of the new home of the Full Gospel Church (it had been used temporarily as a Youth Centre before lying unused for some time before the Methodist Church decided – right on cue! – to sell) was scheduled for January 18th, 1969. The day before, sitting at the front of the church watching

his wife putting finishing touches to the floral display, Pastor Smith suddenly said: "I feel like Moses!" This was not one of his customary flashes of humour. Mrs. Smith was stunned when he continued seriously, "I have brought these people to the Promised Land and my work is done. God has a young Joshua to lead them on now to bigger things." What no-one knew that weekend of celebration was that their beloved leader, who had occupied the pulpit of the Full-Gospel Church for more than twice as long as any previous minister, would be taken from them within five weeks!

The re-consecration day arrived bringing with it joy and expectation of great things to come. It was an impressive occasion. A short Service of Thanksgiving was held in the old Church early in the afternoon of that fine, crisp January day. Mrs Ada Pearce, the longest-standing member of the Church, lovingly locked the doors for the last time after the congregation had filed out: not a few eyes were moist as the crowd formed itself into the mile-long procession, and then set out towards the new church escorted by courteous policemen. Long after the Reverend Stanley Smith at the head of the procession turned into Elm Street, the last members of the crowd moved away from the Full Gospel Church, Lowther Road.

The mile-long procession



conducted by the man who had done the same thing in 1936, [Reverend](#) his church – at that time Britain's largest Pentecostal Church – and God. However, when the moment actually arrived that the key be turned, clinging on "the man who really deserves the privilege of opening these sacrificial labour," to place his hand on the key and open the doors with

him.



peated requests that it should be so, preached by Pastor Smith. It was the death and resurrection of Lazarus, and during the final moments I am dead. Do not mourn for me: for I shall have lived more in that one

Opening services at Elm Street



tion Services was the elder son of Pastor Smith, Reverend Dr. Michael growing Pentecostal Church in mid-Devon. His message too, was father’s prediction the previous day, had elected to speak on the text, therefore arise, go over this Jordan, . . . possess the land.”

Stanley Smith occupied the pulpit in the new Full Gospel Church for one Sunday only! After two weeks in bed with 'flu on 21st February, 1969 exactly 18 years to the day after accepting the call to come to Fleetwood – he unexpectedly died. The funeral service, the first in the new church was conducted by his life-long friend, [Reverend John Nelson Parr](#). There were over 300 people present, more than 50 of them being ministers from the Assemblies of God, besides ministers of other denominations. It was a service that carried with it a sense of triumph: those who went in sorrowing came out of the church rejoicing in a renewal of the hope there is in Christ.

Interior of Elm Street Church

CHAPTER 5

“Possessing the Land!”

The remarkable events of that time have not yet all been told. On the day of his death, the late minister, Michael B. Smith, discovered an entry in the Pastor’s diary. For the weekend of 23rd–24th March 1969, the inscription “Mike’s Induction”. How remarkable then, that the Church should call Michael B. Smith to succeed his father as Pastor of the Full Gospel Church – despite the fact that, including the late minister’s widow, knew of this entry!



with wife Brenda and children Mark and Cheryl

the Church in March, 1969, and things continued to move as they had done in his father’s pastorate. The inevitable slight decreases followed by larger increases, and the life of the fellowship, continued.

The original Methodist Mission – was cleaned out and the rear re-designed as a Coffee-bar. The walls were covered by a mural depicting the Fleetwood deep-sea fishing fleet in Icelandic waters, and painted by local artist, Keith Sutton and the fishing motif was followed throughout with nets, floats, barrels, etc. providing the decor. The name was the ‘Cast-A-Net’, punning its musical emphasis and the evangelistic aim of the coffee-bar. This venture was successfully carried out on a regular four-evenings-a-week basis until the demise of the “Coffee Bar Era”.

Music at the Cast-A-Net was provided by national and international religious recording groups, like

Parchment, Canaan, Living Sound, etc. as well as the Church's own bands – Verity, Agape, Vine, Inheritance and Love-Life. These local groups experienced continual metamorphoses, each group more efficient than the last, until the most successful and proficient of them all “Thruaglas Darkly” was born in 1979.

Early in 1970 it was decided to open centres for youth and children's evangelism outside the central location of the Church. For a number of years a regular bus service had been organized by the Church bringing people to the Sunday Evening Service from Blackpool, Thornton and Cleveleys, and accordingly centres were opened in the Red Cross Headquarters in the centre of Blackpool, and in the Community Centre on Grange Park Estate. This work continued for a period of years, ending when eventually having its own bus, the church was able to bring people to Fleetwood for all the activities.

In June, 1970 a printing and publishing department was opened by the Church and booklets, leaflets, notices, etc. were produced by the thousand. However it became clear in 1975 that in-house printing was no longer competitive and the work was given to outside contractors and the voluntary workers re-deployed elsewhere.

During 1971 the “Good News Chorale” were formed. This uniformed choir consisting of bass, tenor, alto and soprano voices had Dr. Smith as Choirmaster. They were well known all over the north of England and were frequently invited to take part in convention meetings or to take special musical evenings, but as the pressure of work built up for Dr. Smith the choir gave way to other forms of musical ministries.

Whilst a student in the mid-fifties, Dr. Smith had been involved in broadcasting with “Revivaltime” – the weekly ‘Voice of Assemblies of God’ heard at 11.00 pm every Tuesday over Radio Luxembourg. Coincidentally the radio evangelist was [Reverend John Nelson Parr](#)! The idea of running a regular programme from the Church had long been in the Pastor's mind, and in 1974 the decision was taken to broadcast twice weekly over Manx Radio. A Studio was built in the ante-rooms of the Church, and in April 1974 the first programme “Impact”, was heard. Other programmes produced were “Kaleidoscope” and “Musical Showcase”.

Soon air-time was given to broadcast over Radio Free China, and tapes were flown regularly to Taiwan for transmission. The radio ministry was carried out by a team of reporters, DJs, and technicians: J. W. A. McLellan, Pete Blundell, Derek Hargreaves, Dave Ball, Jan Pennington, being the regular staff working with their minister in the project which lasted until Manx Radio eventually discontinued its religious broadcasting service. At which time the team felt that all broadcasting should be stopped at least temporarily due to increasing costs, and decreasing availability of air time.

Between 1970 and 1976 the hardier members of the Church ventured into the depths of the country to camp for a week at the invitation of smaller pioneer churches to make a concentrated gospel outreach in their area. The Youth Camps were an idea that was born out of the evangelistic camps when the congregation were challenged one evening by Pastor Smith to share their evangelistic dreams with him. They began as an encouragement to the children attending Sunday School and the Boys and Girls Clubs to enjoy their faith in God and share it. Three or four weekend camps were run each year until 1978.

Fresh from Bible College in London, Pastor Stephen Davies from Risca, Newport in Monmouthshire was inducted as assistant minister in July 1973. He was a great help to Pastor Smith in the year he was with the Church. In August 1974 he took up a pastorate in North Wales.

Over the period of 1973 and 1974, great tension developed between the Church and the denomination of Assemblies of God, to which it had belonged throughout its history. The main point at issue became the

jealously-guarded principle of the autonomy of the local Church, and as the members grew to disagree more and more with the District Council Officers in the matter, it was at length decided that the best option was for the Church to resign from Assemblies of God and become independent. The decision was not an easy one to take, and the denomination warned of the risks the Church might face in losing contact with other Churches. Happily, the predictions were unfulfilled, indeed the Church has stronger and wider links than ever before!

Due to the continued increases in attendance and proliferation of activities, it was evident in the early part of 1975 that extensions were necessary. It was decided to re-develop the site of the "Ark" and Maurice Dowsing, one of the Trustees, was asked to draw up plans for a new complex which would effectively provide new facilities for a Sunday School and larger side-chapel for weekday services. The project was undertaken by Lord's Construction Limited, and was opened in February 1976 by the Mayor of Wyre and dedicated by the Vicar of Fleetwood, Reverend Trevor Southgate, B.A.

In 1976 the Church opened its Kindergarten, a pre-school playgroup for the children of the local community. Registered as a Day Nursery with Lancashire County Council, the Kindergarten was under the able supervision of Mrs. Lesley Forshaw, N.N.E.B. and 40 children per morning and afternoon sessions, aged from 2 to 5 were given professional care and attention in a Christian environment. Over 80 children were on the register.

Dr. Smith had for years carried the vision of operating a Day School. Himself a product of a Church of England Public School, and Private Christian School, and believing that education based on sound Christian principles was education of the highest calibre, he eagerly presented to the Church Board the concept of Accelerated Christian Education in the summer of 1978. In January 1979, the Church opened its own independent Grammar School. Due to the growth of the Emmanuel Christian School, it eventually transpired that the Kindergarten changed its character and became the reception class for the school.

Emmanuel Christian School, Fleetwood

Changes were sweeping the various denominations of the Christian Church during the mid-seventies, and some of the innovations taking place in other Churches were to be found with the Full Gospel Church too. Early in 1977 House Groups were formed throughout Fleetwood, Thornton, Cleveleys and Bispham. These groups continue very successfully to the present time, and there are plans for them to be multiplied during the coming decade.

House Group leaders and wives

Over the past twenty-one years, changes have evolved in the administration and government of the Full

Gospel Church. For the first seven years of its history, the full burden of this lay on the shoulders of Reverend Charles H. E. Duncombe. Then, just before he left, he introduced a diaconate to guide the affairs of the Church. Pastor Stanley Smith, upon his arrival, saw the failure of this system to meet the needs of the fellowship, and a new Constitution was drawn up which placed the government in the hands of the members of the Church, and gave the minister “full spiritual oversight”. At the beginning of 1977 the Church recognised that the Lord was leading them to appoint Associate Ministers to assist Dr. Smith in the care of the Church, and a very short time afterwards, Mrs. Kay Dowsing volunteered her considerable secretarial abilities and was appointed Clergy Secretary in the summer of that year. Following their ordination, the new Associate Ministers began to function in different capacities. Reverend Charles Cooper took charge of the administration side of the work, Reverend John W. A. McLellan was responsible for missions and evangelism, Reverend Ian R. Makinson was responsible for pastoral care, whilst Reverend David D. Ratcliffe took on the task of Christian Education. The latter left Fleetwood in 1978 and became yet another in the long line of ministers to leave the Full Gospel Church and join the Elim Pentecostal Church.

Left to right: Rev. & Mrs. John McLellan, Rev. & Mrs. Ian Makinson, Rev. & Mrs. Mike Smith, Rev. & Mrs. Charles Cooper

By 1978 the whole character of the church had changed. Its worship had developed so that it was broadly similar to the Renewal that had swept all the Christian denominations. People of all backgrounds, Free Church, Anglican, and Roman Catholic found it joy to worship in the Full Gospel Church and from time to time visitors remarked upon its warm and “truly ecumenical” spirit. So it was, that the Constitution was again re-written, and the full weight of leadership was placed in the hands of the minister, with the Associate Ministers and Trustees forming a Church Board of Governors for the school, which should act as an advisory body to the minister.

Obviously this heavy increase in the church’s workload required extra staff, and bigger offices. Therefore in 1981 a new administrative block was provided, designed by Maurice Dowsing and built by Clement Dickens Limited of Cleveleys. There was a new Recording Studio, Reception, General Office Stockroom, School Staff-room and two offices for the ministers in the scheme, but the cry is now heard again “We’re short of space!”. Mrs. Myra Hardaker was appointed Receptionist, and Mrs. Lynda Anderton was school Secretary, but upon being recalled to the school staff her place was filled by Mrs Dawn Butterworth and later by the present School Secretary, Mrs Jill Barber. Mrs Kay Dowsing became Dr. Smith’s private secretary in 1981.

Stockroom – Mr. Ken Hardaker

Reception – Mrs. Myra Hardaker

Office – Mrs. Jill Barber

On 29th April that same year at its Annual General Meeting, the North Fylde Free Church Federal Council appointed Reverend Michael B. Smith to be its Secretary, and in the following year they gave him the responsibility to speak out on their behalf in all matters of public concern.

Rev. Michael B. Smith, M.A., B.D., Ph.D.

Within the life of the Church new developments since 1980 have been the formation of a team of dancers who occasionally grace the worship by the new choreographed illustrations of Christian hymns; Mantle Peace, the Church Drama groups have continued to function, although the junior drama group called Emmanuel Theatre Workshop is at present “hibernating”! The Church Choir has been regenerated into “Vision” and together with the band of musicians (half of whom are professional) complement and enhance the worship of the congregation.

“Vision”

“Dance in Worship”

What does the future hold? If the past has any clues to offer, this will not remain static for long. The big question must be “If there is to be more growth, how will the already overstretched building accommodate it?” The answer? “Watch this space!” The answer will surely not be long in coming!