

**Bank Top**  
**United Reformed Church**  
**Ashworth Lane, Bolton**



**CHURCH PROFILE**

**MISSION CONTEXT**

## Church Setting

Bank Top URC is situated three miles out of Bolton town centre in a typically suburban area, surrounded by a mix of modern housing developments, pre-war semi's and older terraced housing. There are two primary schools and one secondary school close by. The church, which was originally the church for the mill village, celebrated its centenary in 2010. Bank Top perceives itself to be a village within Bolton and parts of the village, including the church, have Grade 2 listed status.

## Community

Predominantly white with a growing B.M.E. (Black, minority, ethnic) community into the immediate area. There is a broad mix of age ranges, with lots of young families in the area, but also many elderly people living amongst them. There is also a collection of bungalows and flats for the elderly within walking distance of church.



We've been running a Saturday Lunch on the first Saturday of the month now for well over ten years, with the intention of linking better with individuals in the local community. This has proved popular and there is now a healthy attendance by people outside our congregation.

The development of a community garden a few years back has also opened up possibilities for us to interact better with our neighbours, to our mutual benefit.

## Ecumenical Scene

There are several churches within a mile and these include Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Baptist. Until quite recently Bank Top URC joined with them to form 'Churches together in Astley Bridge' and during the year joint services were held at such times as Lent, Advent and Women's World Day of Prayer. However, this has now been disbanded mainly due to the aging committee and lack of support from the congregations. Ministerial cover in this area is weak.

# MISSION STATEMENT

*Guided by prayer we seek to bring the Love of God to all those we come into contact with and thereby create the opportunity for spiritual growth both within the church and the community.*

'Praying for Growth' – In 2010 several members of the congregation joined together to produce a Centenary Banner. This depicts a tree and the message at the top is 'Praying for Growth'. It therefore seemed appropriate to adopt this message as the heart of our Vision Statement for the future as we continue to serve to do God's will within our church, within our community and further afield.

Bank Top seeks to draw all people to faith and, as we have been blessed with the healthy presence of children, this makes our natural target for mission the "family." We are called on to finely balance the witness to families with children whilst ensuring that those without children and the older members of the congregation are still able to reflect peacefully in the Lord's presence. We aspire to this, but, don't necessarily meet the objective all the time.

# MINISTRY



Bank Top currently has one locally recognised lay preacher within its congregation. However, we do have two or three other church members who are willing to lead the service on occasions and we also have an active Worship Group of eight enthusiastic members who lead family services throughout the year. The Sunday School children lead the Nativity and annual Sermons Services and we have a Youth Group who usually take one service during the year. Guides, Brownies and Rainbows have also played active parts during services. Visiting ministers or lay preachers are usually arranged twelve months in advance by our Pulpit Supply Secretary.

Special services are held throughout the year such as Christmas Eve Midnight Communion Service, Christmas Day, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Sermons, Harvest, Nativity and Christingle and 'Songs of Praise' services which include the whole Church.

We have a Pastoral Carer's Committee which involves each volunteer member caring for three or four members of our congregation.

There are currently eleven serving Elders and ten non-serving Elders. Elders are elected and serve for a period of three years with the option of serving for a further three. Over the years we have had a steady supply of new Elders willing to take on this responsibility. After this time, they step down for at least one year before being able to stand for re-election. This gives opportunities for new Elders with fresh outlooks to join the Eldership. We have a Church Leader and a Church Secretary/Treasurer who are serving Elders but are not required to step down after three years.

# CHURCH LIFE

## Membership

	Regular Attendees
Members	30
Non-members	30
Children	28
Total	88

Our congregation covers all ages; from young families, to some between 50-60, and those 60 and over.

## Service and Worship

Our Sunday morning service commences at 10.30am. The children go out into Sunday school after the children's address. We have a Communion Service on the second Sunday of each month and several family services during the year (some including Communion). We allow all children (at parents' discretion) to take communion using non-alcoholic communion wine.



We follow the standard lectionary with the "Good News Bible" as our pew bible. We use both Complete Mission Praise and Rejoice & Sing hymn books.

In our church services we support Christian Aid, Samaritan's Purse and our local Hospice and Winter Watch (a charity feeding homeless and disadvantaged people, which several of our church members volunteer their services on a weekly basis during the winter months).

We have one House Group that meets on alternate Tuesday evenings throughout the year and it has nine to twelve regular attendees for bible study.

## Special Occasions

We firmly believe in an open policy of Baptism for all who ask. We will always visit the parent(s) before the service and take them through the promises they are making - it is evident that on rare occasions this message does not get taken on board as fully as we might want. Some Baptisms take place as part of the normal Sunday Service and others are performed after the service; depending on the wishes of the parents involved.

Though not a large building we have gradually become more attractive for weddings with the advent of the community garden, which offers very good photo opportunities.

## Sunday School



We currently have three Sunday school classes: Age 3-6 led by 1 teacher and a teenager - they listen to bible stories and draw pictures. Age 7-10 with 2 teachers, who follow Scripture Union, and an over 10 Youth Group with 1 teacher, who have discussions, bible study, banner making, crafts etc. We do struggle to keep children beyond the age of 11 or 12, but any that do stay are welcome to help with any of the classes.

The children participate in the first part of the service in collection of the offertory and reading of the first lesson. Each year they sing at our annual Sermon's services and they perform the Nativity and take part in the Christingle services.

For those who children are no longer involved, there is therefore an opportunity to choose to stay in church for the latter part of the service.

## Finance

Like many churches, we don't have enough money for everything that we may want to do. We have fund raised to restore our balance sheet to a healthier position after investment in the building.

We have run TRIO Services (The Responsibility Is Ours) in the past to boost the congregation's awareness of where the money comes from and goes to and the implications of a gap. This has resulted in increased giving.

# STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES

## Strengths

### **Family friendly**

We feel our church is a very warm and friendly church and the feeling is one of a large family atmosphere. Our Sunday worship is very informal, and this is reflected during the service when we celebrate family news, sing 'happy birthday' and expect a children's address.

### **The Choir**

We have a very enthusiastic choir of thirteen members, who open our Sunday morning worship with an introit. They also perform at special services throughout the year and have been requested on occasions to sing at weddings. We currently have three organists who cover all our services.

### **Community use of building**

Our church is used by the community almost every evening and most days by a range of groups: Guides, Brownies, Rainbows, Toddler Group, Craft and Art Groups, Theatre School, Baby Music, Yoga, Embroiderer's Guild, Weightwatchers and a Choir.

### **Growing involvement with the community**



Each year for the past thirteen years, we have used the Community Garden next to Church to put on a 'Village Fair', which has proved very successful indeed. We have also used the Garden for our Annual Sermons BBQ and have we also organised Treasure Hunts for the community, which ended in the Community Garden with cream teas being served. Some of our congregation members are involved in the maintenance of the garden and we have planted daffodil bulbs in the past.

## Weaknesses

### **Where do the children go?**

The loss of our children as they reach the teenage years continues as a trend that we have not been able to surmount. However, a great plus is that we keep many of the parents. A shortage of leaders prevents mixed gender social activities for teenagers.

## **Growth**

Our congregation has dropped in recent months, but we hope to address this by holding 'Back to Church' services and maybe leafleting the local area. We had two people ordained into church membership recently, but in the main people don't seem to want to make the additional commitment. This could prove to be a long-term problem when recruiting Elders in the future from a dwindling membership.

## **Theological Depth**

We are not blessed with retired ministers or members of the congregation with a formal (or even informal) theological training. Both from the pulpit and in our house group meetings we often miss the depth of understanding that such a regular resource could provide. We may overcompensate for this with theological breadth (or naivety)

This may also reflect in our belief that although it is lovely to be part of a lively bustling church, we also know that many members also crave to hear "the still small voice of calm." We don't achieve that balance as well as we should.

## **Bank Top or Bank Top URC**

Around half the adult congregation are not members of the URC and in recent years it has been even higher. So, to many in the congregation, the structures and processes of the URC are a mystery or, on a good day, just an irrelevance to their faith. This is a different, but equally difficult angle on the search for theological depth.

# WHERE ARE WE NOW

Bank Top URC is a relatively small building, having originally been converted from six mill cottages at the turn of the last century, and can hold around 120 people. Never the less, it is a living, vibrant church and, on a number of occasions during the year, is full.

We did have a problem a few years ago, housing the large number of children who attend Sunday School each week (up to 36), and so in 2010 we purchased a mobile unit which is situated in a garage compound at the rear of church, to house two of our classes. However, our numbers have recently declined and only one class are currently meeting in there, which is costing us £30 per week! The youngest class meet in the Upper Room in church, and the Youth Group meet in a den under the eaves.

As mentioned before, our building is used almost every evening and most days by various community groups. In addition, for the past thirteen years, we have been providing a lunch service on the first Saturday of each month. A few years ago, we did manage to secure a lottery funding which was used to refurbish the kitchen which has proved to be a considerable advantage to our catering needs.

During the past few years we have also greatly improved our building with a new roof, a new boiler and heating system, re-plastering and painting to the main hall, vestry and disabled toilet, and new windows to the front of church.

# VISION FOR THE FUTURE

## **Objectives**

- Reach out even further to build relationships within the community
- Reach down to offer the opportunity for greater depth in our faith
- Explore and establish links with and offer aid to a third world country

Whilst we hope a minister will be able to support us in these objectives, we would particularly like to see the appointment of a minister who would take us forward to a brighter future by

***Guiding us to deeper theological understanding  
Inspiring us to spirited and varied worship that meets the needs of all  
Helping us to build a faith with all who come across our door.***

**This Church profile has been agreed by:**

**The Elders on .....**

**The Church Meeting on .....**