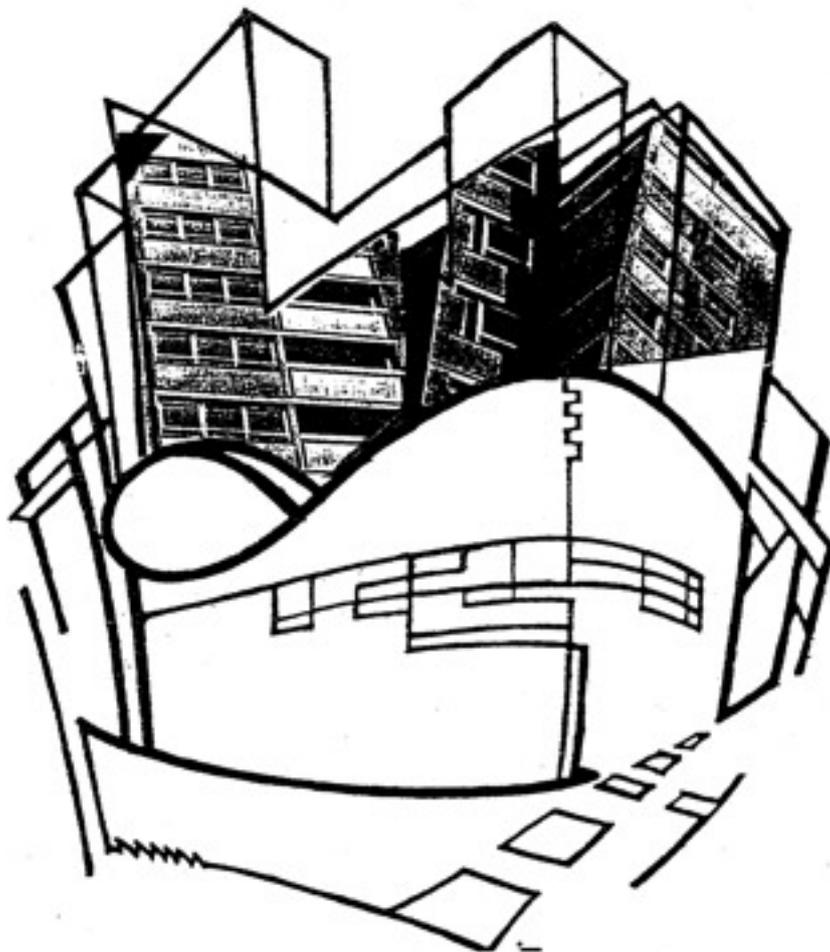


Blackbird Leys

A thirty year history



And a celebration of forty years of

The Church of the Holy Family

**The story of an ecumenical church growing out of nothing on a
new council estate built in the 60's.**

Foreword

At the beginning of 1990 it was suggested that a history should be written up ready for the 30th Anniversary of Holy Family Church in June that year. Jack Argent, the Chairman of the Church Committee, and Church Warden, for most of those 30 years was planning to do this, but with his sudden death in March 1990 nothing had been started. As I have lived on the estate for 32 years, and been a member of Holy Family Church since it first began, I was asked to produce an article for the Church Magazine. It proved to be such an interesting task looking through the folders of letters, Minutes and Magazines that I offered to write up the history in more detail. The following I hope is a glimpse of life on an outer city estate.

Dorothy Fox, Oxford, 1990.

Foreword to 2005 edition

This year we are celebrating forty years of Holy Family Church since its dedication on 10th April 1965. This anniversary and the associated celebrations prompted a number of people to regret that Dorothy's history was no longer in print so it was decided to reprint the text with a few new illustrations.

As part of our celebrations a number of people have written appreciations of Holy Family Church for the Church Magazine. These have been collated and are included in this book to make it a truly celebratory publication.

As soon as one undertakes an exercise such as this it becomes apparent just how much has happened in the years since Dorothy was writing. Time and energy do not allow for a fully updated history this year. In any case such an enterprise will surely be better planned for the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the whole community of Blackbird Leys in only a few years time.

Roger Burne, Oxford, 2005.

We are here in the name of Jesus Christ.
We believe he is present with us now, in the Spirit, as he promised.
We come from different church traditions.
We have committed ourselves to working together,
to worshipping together,
and to witnessing together in this community.
We have come now to listen to the Word
which Jesus speaks to us, so that we may act upon it;
and to join in the fellowship of His table,
so that we may live out this fellowship in the world.

This statement is from the Order of Service used on Advent Sunday 1971 on the occasion of the first joint Anglican/Free Church service, and expresses how we as a church felt then and now.

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Blackbird Leys: a thirty year history

Chapter 1.

The birth of the community

Blackbird Leys was built as a council housing estate in the 1960's to the south east of Oxford City. Holy Family Church was one of the first L.E.P.'s (Local Ecumenical Project) in the country. The following is a record of the planning of the estate and the church, and the efforts of the people to make it into a living continuity.

A map (see page 28) published at the end of the 19th Century shows villages around Oxford such as Cowley, Marston, Headington, Littlemore, all independent communities and the area beyond Cowley as open fields. These villages have now become part of the city, although the names are still retained in the postal addresses.

Oxford has always had a housing shortage, and with the car industry growing in the 1950's more workers were needed. Not much was then automated. From the City Council Planning Department came the scheme for building 2,800 dwellings on the land used by the sewage works and Sawpit Farm.

The area to the South East of Oxford on which Blackbird Leys is built was bought along with adjoining land by Oxfordshire Corporation in the late 19th Century. The City Development plan prepared between 1948 and 1953 gave the first ideas for much needed housing in the Oxford area planning application by the City Council for a housing estate at Blackbird Leys was approved in outline by the County Council in 1953. Once outline approval had been granted, the City Council applied to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government for an extension to the city boundary to include the site.

A number of technical problems had to be overcome before the site could be developed. As the land had been used as a sewage farm, the Chief Public Health Officer was worried about its suitability for housing on health grounds. Also, some of the land was very soggy which led to difficulties with foundations. To overcome both these problems much of the topsoil was removed to a depth of six feet and replaced by hard-core. Some foundations had to be piled, but others rested on solid rock just below the surface. Once the houses were occupied residents were still not happy about the state of the soil, blaming it for the many outbreaks of sickness, but tests proved that the soil was perfectly clear and the sickness just coincided.

The overall design for the estate was conceived by the then Deputy City Architect and Planning Officer, Mr Douglas Murray. An area of 260 acres was set aside for the new estate, and the first residents moved into Sandy Lane in 1958.

But let's go back to the early 1950's. Sheila, a local Councillor and church member and her husband, Ken, both grew up in Cowley and remember the open space of Blackbird Leys Farm, Sawpit Farm and the sewage works. Ken says as a boy he came collecting conkers from the avenue of chestnut trees, (some of which still remain standing in Windale Avenue). He later came to the Speedway Stadium in

Sandy Lane, sometimes bringing Sheila too. This has now been modernised and extended as a Social Club as well. They both recall that the place where the paddling pool is now situated at the corner of Sandy Lane and Balfour Road was where the sewage pump was!

The road came in from Long Lane, Littlemore to Sandy Lane West over a hump-backed railway bridge which was at a different angle to the modern bridge now leading in from Cowley. There was no ring road and traffic to the iron foundry near the railway station and Pressed Steel came along Sandy Lane to the Watlington Road.

Morris Motors and Pressed Steel works' traffic, mainly bicycles, came along Between Towns Road, Hollow Way and Oxford Road. At the end of shifts any weekday a mass exodus from the factory where men had been working like machines made crossing the roads very hazardous.

The first houses in Sandy Lane and Kent Close were built by Laings. They were semi-detached with a garage attached. Next were some on the opposite side of Sandy Lane of a different design with kitchens facing the main road. These did not prove too popular, especially as it was necessary to go through the living room to get to the garden and washing line.

Later on came Tucker Road, Sawpit Road and the first three houses in Blay Close and Wesley Close - then Balfour Road and the gradual filling in of Laddenham, Wingate Close and Moorbank. These last three areas had been planned to offer maximum play areas for children by forming the roads as cul-de-sacs with green turf and footpaths. This caused immediate problems with the tradespeople and removal men as they had to walk a considerable distance to the house fronts, often with heavy loads, in particular coal deliveries as all the houses had open fires. When the second part of the estate was built - the Knights Road area - the side roads were planned with rear access for cars and trade, and the fronts given to green turf and footpaths. The City Planners have now re-designed most of these cul-de-sacs in order to create more parking space.

Families moved in from the Slade, an area of Nissen huts between Cowley and Headington, which were used during the Second World War and then taken over by the City Council to house families of men working at Morris' factory. Families were also rehoused from St Ebbes in the centre of Oxford which was being demolished. Also young couples living with parents were offered their first homes. This was done on a points scheme, and to qualify couples had to have two children and live in cramped accommodation.

A school was being built in Wesley Close, but prior to its opening in the autumn of 1959, children of 5 to 7 years had to walk to Rose Hill or to Speedwell School in Littlemore. The 7 to 11 year old children went to Lawn Upton School also in Littlemore. For a short time a bus operated from Kent Close to Rose Hill. What is now Peers School was originally Littlemore Grammar School, but more about the local schools in the next chapter.

Transport was a problem as most people didn't own a car and public transport was not reliable. A bus went from Kent Close every 35 minutes, if you were lucky, or more

reliable was the Watlington bus from the other end of Sandy Lane. For years City of Oxford Motor Services had the monopoly on public transport, but because the hours needing to be worked to earn a decent wage were considerable and the factory held much more attraction, staffing was a problem and the public suffered. Blackbird Leys now has the best public transport in Oxford as there are two companies operating, both offering a five-minute service during the day, and a bus every fifteen minutes after 7 p.m. and on Sundays.

There were no shops when the first houses were occupied, although four in Balfour Road were being built with accommodation over them. Once the main frame of the building was up and safe, three of the shopkeepers set up shop in the garages to the rear - a greengrocer, a general store and a paper shop where postage stamps could be bought. There was also a general store built in Sandy Lane with a house attached. Otherwise the nearest shops were in Between Towns Road, Cowley, which could only be reached by walking a mile along the Watlington Road towards Oxford. These were a Co-Op (deliveries could be arranged) a greengrocers, butchers, toy and pram shop and gents' outfitters. In order to draw Family Allowance it was necessary to walk a mile either to the Post Office attached to the factory in Hollow Way, Cowley, or to one in Littlemore.

Dr David Thomas, his wife and young family lived in White Buffalo, a large house in Sandy Lane, next to the Speedway, and surgery was held in one of the downstairs rooms. Dr Thomas could be seen walking the streets to do house calls, his glasses on top of his head and a stethoscope round his neck. There were no prizes for guessing his occupation.

When Balfour Road was built, one of the houses was allocated to the Health Visitors. The upstairs was a flat where Miss Tattersall lived, and the downstairs was used for baby clinics and buying powdered milk and orange juice. It also became a meeting place, as most of the mums were very young, and setting up house for the first time on their own. Most people found Blackbird Leys a very isolated place to live.

In 1961 Blackbird Leys Road was built, and No 52 was used for a dual purpose, the top floor being living accommodation and ground floor business. Here a much needed chemist shop was opened by Jim Faulkner. Previously prescriptions could only be filled in Cowley. When the parade of shops higher up Blackbird Leys Road was completed in 1963, Mr Faulkner moved his business there and No 52 was taken over by Jimmy Kearney as a barber's shop. Mr & Mrs Kearney later moved to the top of Knights Road when those shops were completed. They moved again to their present shop in Blackbird Leys Road in order to expand to include ladies' hairdressing as well as gents. Also during the early 1960s a large shopping precinct was being built in Cowley which made life very much easier for the residents of Blackbird Leys.

Christmas 1962 saw the opening of the estate's first public house 'The Blackbird'. The original intention had been to build a Public House at the end of Tucker Road, but Peter Malton, the first Priest Missioner, wrote to the Council suggesting that, as the pub was a long awaited amenity, it would be better located if it were built in a place where it could be an amenity to everyone and not just to the Speedway Stadium. As

events turned out he was very wise in that the Stadium has its own public bar, and the Blackbird is situated more to the centre of the estate. To complete this area between the shops, the church, and community centre turf was laid and young chestnut trees planted.

By 1964 the next phase of the estate, Pegasus Road and Field Avenue, was built. This also consisted of different design houses and grassed play areas. The small roads leading off Field Avenue were all named alphabetically, hence Andromeda Close at one end and Woodruff Close at the other. One very pleasing aspect was an area of some 14 acres left as recreation ground between Pegasus Road and Cuddesdon Way. This has remained a very pleasant aspect with two enclosed play areas with swings, slides and climbing frames, tennis courts, a bowling green and club house, football pitches, and car space. The brook running through the centre leaves a lot to be desired with dirty, smelly water and overgrown edges, but together with the areas of trees and shrubs, it does present a place worth walking through.

Two landmarks were completed in 1965, Windrush and Evenlode Towers. These are 15 storey tower blocks with four two-bedroom flats on each floor. These tower blocks, although providing much needed accommodation, created other problems. Some of the residents complained of the isolation. Children had to be kept indoors because, although play areas had been created, it was not a good idea to leave young children unattended. The lifts were often faulty, and the open entrances encouraged vandalism. However this particular problem has been solved, as the entrances have been made more secure with entry phones. The lifts are now more reliable, for which the Fire Service is greatly relieved, as a common sight used to be a fire engine racing to the foot of the tower block to release someone trapped in the lift.

Several smaller blocks of flats and maisonettes built in different parts of the estate offer rented accommodation from the City Council. Many of the houses are now privately owned.

In 1965, the City Council built special accommodation for the elderly, Windale House and Northbrook House comprising bed-sit and one-bedroom flats with a resident warden, and later Longlands as a residential home. Jephson Housing Association built one hundred mixed bed-sits, one bedroom flats and twelve bungalows, linked to a central control system in case of emergencies. The Council also built a number of bungalows for rent by elderly people and several two-storey blocks of flats. Residents experienced problems when the flats were first built, with youngsters causing a nuisance in the entrances, but they have now been fitted with entry phones and are much more secure.

Another complex owned by North Cheshire Housing Association is Pegasus Court. This is very distinctive, built of white concrete with a barrack-like appearance and flat-roofed, the accommodation being bed-sits, one, two and three bedroom flats.

A Swimming Pool was built in 1966, through the instigation of the school, as a training pool for school children. The building was originally owned by the City Council, but in 1973 it was taken over by the County Council. It was closed in 1986 and rebuilt with better changing facilities, and was officially re-opened on the 27th

September 1988. The running costs are paid 40% from the County Council and 60% from the City Council. It is still used by the schools as a training pool, but is open to the general public at certain times during the day, evenings and weekends, and in the school holidays.

In October 1968, Redefield Library was officially opened by the Lord Mayor. This library was intended to be used by the schools as a reference library, especially by Redefield which was then a Secondary Modern School, but to be open to the public as a lending library on certain evenings and a Saturday morning. This year, 1991, it has been taken over by the City Council, and is open to the general public during the daytime with the schools continuing to use it.

In the late 1960's a large Sports Hall was built with facilities for indoor football, basketball, and squash. In 1989 the Council upgraded this building to provide more space for sport together with changing room, a Conference Hall to seat 700, a smaller hall, and separate rooms for meetings. There is a coffee bar and a fair-sized car park.

Around 1985 plans were being made to build on the remaining farmland to the east of Blackbird Leys. It was initially planned to build a mixture of council and private housing. However, with cuts in government grants and tighter controls over local authority spending, the planned extension has been greatly reduced to allowing only site 'A' to be completed, and this is a mix of Housing Association accommodation, private one bedroom starter-homes and a few Council/tenant participation dwellings. Although existing residents were not too happy at the increase in size of the estate, they appreciated that housing was badly needed. At various public meetings a few people aired their views, mainly to make sure that the mistakes such as lack of shops and public transport were not repeated. Unfortunately, it is just as isolated, with no shops, schools or medical facilities, although there are pedestrian walkways linking both the new and old parts of the estate. After the complex had been occupied for just over a year a minibus service began operating Monday to Saturday 8 a.m. - 6 p.m. with a half-hourly service through both estates to Cowley Centre.

When the Council were drawing up plans for the extension of the estate, space was allocated for a Community School, but by 1991 this section has still not been developed.

Chapter 2 *The Schools and the Community*

Blackbird Leys School opened on September 14th 1959 with a staff of six, under the headship of Mr Cecil Jacobs, and with 94 children, mixed infants and juniors. Parents were encouraged to come into school. A report in the Oxford Mail in December 1959 stated that over 200 parents and children attended Blackbird Leys School's first Christmas Concert. Each of the five classes gave their own performance, and the evening ended with the parents joining the choir of fifteen in some well-known carols. The cost of the programme was 2d. The school rapidly grew, with new children being admitted every week as the houses were occupied. By the autumn of 1960 there were

283 children and eight teachers. This meant that average numbers in each of the lower classes were 38 to 40. However the teachers coped admirably, and the school provided a welcoming atmosphere, in spite of the noise from the builders as new classrooms were constructed. The teachers stretched themselves even further by starting an 'after school club' from 4 p.m. - 6 p.m. offering a variety of activities for 7 to 11 year olds. Each year there was an outing; the first was in the summer of 1960 to the Isle of Wight, travelling by train from Cowley Station to Portsmouth and then on the ferry.

Another annual event was the week at Hill End Camp, an outdoor education centre to the west of Oxford. Children in their final year were given the opportunity to go, and for a lot of them it was the first time away from home. The sight of sixty or so cheering youngsters packed into the double deck buses hired to transport them from school was very heartening. The teachers found this an ideal setting for getting to know the pupils and vice versa.

The school playing field was the smallest in Oxford and restricted the amount of sport the children could play. Later, after the closure of Redefield School they had the use of the playing field across Cuddesdon Way. All the children were encouraged to gain cycling proficiency, and take part in football, cricket, netball and athletics. Swimming was felt to be a most important activity because of the number of rivers in the Oxford area. To help provide a pool on Blackbird Leys money was raised, and after a long struggle, the pool eventually opened in November 1966 with Miss Molly Bateson as swimming instructor. Every child was helped to swim, and a struggle from one side of the pool to the other, roughly ten yards, was greeted with cheers and a certificate. Teachers commented that the success of gaining that certificate gave the children confidence that carried over to other subjects.

Gymnastics was also a firm favourite, and a group of girls and two boys were coached by P E Teacher, Mr Robin Cox, to such a standard that they were chosen to give a display on Blue Peter which was filmed and shown in December 1965. The two boys lost interest, but the team of eight girls went on to take part in National Championships. Even after Mr Cox left Blackbird Leys School he continued to coach the girls, and they also carried on in the team after moving schools, using Redefield School Gymnasium for practice. Music and drama played a big part in the life of Blackbird Leys School, and from the very first, Christmas concerts and plays were performed. These proved very popular with parents and pupils alike, and through the hard work and dedication of the teachers some remarkable performances were given.

On the 29th March 1961, the Infants' School was opened under the headship of Miss Pam Drury. Those in the main school breathed a sigh of relief, as it was bursting at the seams with 332 children. One teacher had to cope with 51 children in her class.

Building was still going on all over the estate, and new classrooms were needed. Some of these were prefabricated and while they were not perfect for teaching in, they were vastly better than taking lessons in the school hall cum dining room. The numbers were still rising, and in September 1963 the roll was 437 pupils, with 150

coming up from the infants to the juniors in one term. The building was eventually completed in December 1963, the first time the site had been clear since 1959.

In 1962 Redefield School was opened as a Secondary Modern taking those who did not gain entrance to Grammar School. Mr David Lewis was appointed Head Teacher, and the school offered pupils freedom of choice in learning. Some pupils were encouraged by this and gained qualifications for teacher training, etc., but others found the freedom too much of a temptation and wandered out of school whenever they had half a chance, which created a bad name for the school.

In September 1964 a letter was sent from the Education Authority to all parents informing them that in an attempt to cater for the large number of children now living on the estate three new schools were to open the following year. These would be Overmede Infant School to open in January 1965, Overmede Junior School to open in May 1965, and St John Fisher Roman Catholic School, Sandy Lane to open during 1965.

The problem facing the authorities was deciding the catchment areas. St John Fisher would accept all the children from Roman Catholic families, but it was expected that younger children who already had brothers and sisters at Blackbird Leys School would want to follow them. This would not solve the problem of overcrowding. The purpose of the letter was therefore to tell all those families living in the Field Avenue and Pegasus Road area, and some of those in the Knights Road and Kestrel Crescent area, that their children would be transferred to Overmede School in the following May. This created quite an uproar from some of the parents in the Kestrel Crescent area, as their children would have a longer walk to school. A few chose to send their children to St John Fisher, as this was the nearest school.

In the autumn of 1970, both Blackbird Leys School and Overmede Junior School were again bursting at the seams. Another primary school, to be called Ivanhoe, had been built at the end of Knights Road, and the complete third year from both Blackbird Leys School and Overmede Junior, staff and pupils, were transferred. This was not an ideal solution as staff were isolated from the main structure. The children found being part of two different schools, yet housed in one building with shared facilities very difficult. This created tensions and rivalry both in and out of school time. At this time the schools were being broken into and damaged.

In 1973, under local government reorganisation, the three tier system - First School, Middle School and Upper School replaced the former Secondary Modern / Grammar School system, and the 11-plus exam was discontinued in Oxford. This meant that children stayed at First School till the age of nine. It also meant changes for staff, and more buildings to cater for extra subjects.

The names of the First and Middle Schools were also changed – Blackbird Leys Infants became Orchard Meadow, and Blackbird Leys Junior became Shepherds' Hill. Overmede Infants became Harebell School, and Overmede Junior became Pegasus School. Harebell School and Pegasus School were later amalgamated and Pegasus School now caters for children from five to nine years. After the age of nine they

transfer to other Middle schools, some to Wesley Green, the original Blackbird Leys School, others go by public transport to Temple Cowley School.

On the evening of August 3rd 1976, flames were seen coming from one of the new classrooms at Shepherds Hill. By the time the fire had been reported and, the Fire Brigade had arrived, the fire had such a good hold that four classrooms were destroyed. The Oxford Mail reported that it had been started deliberately, with books and papers piled on the floor and set alight.

Three Headteachers, Mr Cecil Jacobs, Miss Pam Drury and Mr "Jimmie" James, who had been at their various schools since they opened, retired in July 1980. They had all given valuable and dedicated service, and seen hundreds of children through their first years at school. A joint leaving party was held for them in the Community Centre, and suitable gifts were presented to mark the occasion.

The intake at Redefield School had dropped considerably by 1980, and the art block was re-organised to provide facilities for children with special needs. The small unit moved to the main part of the school when the numbers of children of upper school age on the estate dropped. Parents had for some time been choosing to send their children off the estate at 13-plus, many going to Peers School at the end of Sandy Lane West. The school site was later altered, and taken over by the College of Further Education.

Ivanhoe School was closed as a Middle school in 1981, and the special needs unit move from Redefield School, with half the building being used for teacher training. It is now known as Northfield School.

A serious fire in 1987 destroyed half the school and the teacher-training unit moved to Water Eaton School. Northfield School now has approximately sixty pupils, some of whom live in the residential wing, Northfield House in Sandy Lane West.

The link between the schools and the church, which was first started by Peter Malton, the first Priest Missioner on the estate, has continued, and over the years the clergy and members of the congregation have served as School Governors. The clergy also take regular assemblies at the First and Middle Schools, and Holy Family Church is used for Harvest Festival services, and a concert during the annual Blackbird Leys Festival.

Chapter 3

A vision for the church

In 1958 another vision was being acted on. The Archdeacon of Oxford, the Ven. Carl Witton Davies, felt that the new Blackbird Leys Estate should have an energetic Priest-in-Charge. He had met with the Rural Dean of Cowley and both the vicars of Cowley and Littlemore who had been sharing the visiting of the new residents as they moved in. Officially Blackbird Leys was in the parish of Littlemore, but it was agreed with the Bishop of Oxford that it would make sense for Blackbird Leys to be designated a 'Conventional District', in order to give the priest reasonable

independence, and to define boundaries with the neighbouring parishes of Littlemore, and Cowley.

The Archdeacon was also in correspondence with Mr Chandler of City Estates in order that accommodation for a priest be made available until such time as a parsonage house could be erected. The Council was willing to do this, but needed the name of the person to be appointed before it could allocate the house.

At the end of 1959 a young curate from Hammersmith in West London, Peter Malton, wrote to the Archdeacon saying he had visited the estate and was told of the need for a priest there. His words were "By the next day I was quite convinced that if it were at all possible for me to go there I would like, and would be willing, to do so." He was offered the job and, with his wife Ann and baby son, moved into 17 Blackbird Leys Road on the 21st June 1960.

Discussions about a site for a church and vicarage were already well advanced, but Peter and Ann were quite happy for their house to be used as a temporary church, and Peter lost no time in preparing a handout leaflet to go to all the houses introducing the church as a group of people meeting together in each others' homes and himself as the priest.

By 1960 Peter decided that the time had come to look for a temporary church building after trying to make provision for 47 children in his sitting room one Sunday morning. He had already taken up the offer to use the Health Centre for morning service, sharing the building with the Roman Catholic congregation. As has been said earlier the estate was housing mostly young families, and Peter was receiving requests from a number of these families to baptise their children. Without a church and font this could have proved difficult, but Peter overcame this problem by going to the house of the family and using either a washing up bowl or pudding basin as a font. The church register shows an average of three such baptisms every Sunday over a six-month period.

After advertising for a temporary building, a wooden hut was bought by the diocese and erected on the proposed site of the new church. In order to cut costs, Peter set about preparing the site for the hut on his own, but gradually in the autumn gloom men arrived with spades and other implements. These were not necessarily churchgoers and, in fact, Peter recorded that some were men he had never met before. Christmas 1960 saw the celebration of Midnight Mass in the first 'church'.

The hall was well used by the whole community, even for a Saturday night 'Rock & Roll'. It became a focal point for many groups such as scouts, guides, brownies, tap-dancing, junior and senior youth clubs, band practice, table tennis and the Co-Op Guild. The Community Association held socials there, and the local football club used it as a changing room.

In February 1961 the first Parochial Church Council was formed with Mr Basil Moss as Secretary. This was rather a brief appointment as Mr Moss died very suddenly, and Peter Malton recorded how the parish suffered as Mr & Mrs Moss had been among the first and most regular worshippers of the tiny Christian group.

At this time talks were being held about the new church building, and there was dialogue with the Free Churches on the possibility of having only one building, although a site had been allocated on the corner of Sawpit Road and Cuddesdon Way for a Free Church. There appeared to be legal difficulties in the way of co-operation between the two communities. The Roman Catholics had agreed on the site on the corner of Sawpit Road and Balfour Road.

Peter Malton was very keen for work to begin on the church building and had suggested Colin Shewring, an Architect whose work he had seen, to the Archdeacon.

On September 11th the PCC appointed a building committee consisting of three men and one woman. They were Jack Argent (Churchwarden), Charlie Brown (a scaffolder, confirmed only 18 months previously in his former parish), Roland Minchin (Treasurer, who had not been a regular churchgoer since being a choir boy) and Betty Moss (daughter of Alice Moss). Peter Malton was to liaise between the parish meeting and the architect. By the time the building was completed, however, only Jack Argent remained a regular churchgoer, the others having moved away or stopped attending. The PCC also looked at pictures and photos of church buildings, including one where Colin Shewring had designed the interior and which had interested them.

By the end of October Colin Shewring had visited the estate, taken photographs from the top of the nearby tower block, then in the process of being built, and made a thorough assessment of the needs of the people living on the estate and the surrounding buildings and amenities. His idea was to build a modern church which would be functional and yet include what people felt a church should contain. He had asked the building committee for a list to include everything from the altar down to matches!

From this it transpired that an altar and pulpit were essential for the sacrament and the word, but a separate lectern was not seen as necessary as one was not used in the existing hut. It was also felt that the altar and pulpit should be in the same area and constructed of the same material. The "action area" should be fully visible from all parts of the building without having to raise it too high above the floor level. Rather than stand the altar upon many steps it would be better to stand it upon few and slope the floor of the 'nave'. It should not be in a recess or special part of the building but part of a large area to emphasise the corporate nature of the worship. There should be no lighting behind the altar area as this would distract the eye, and lighting should be from a more concealed point. Quietness was considered essential. The circulation space should have as quiet a floor covering as stiletto heels would allow.

By December 1961, Colin Shewring had produced a model of the interior lay-out with which the building group were delighted. Plans were also drawn up for the whole complex of church, hall, classrooms, toilets and house.

To help raise money towards the new church each church member was asked to collect contributions from the houses in their own vicinity every Friday evening. This served two purposes, one helping to raise funds and the other visiting neighbours. Unfortunately this venture did not last, as it was difficult to keep the scheme going

with no visible sign of a church being built. However Peter Malton recorded 100 children for instruction in January 1962 and a congregation of between 40 and 50 at morning service, so the visiting was not without effect.

It was now necessary to talk serious financial matters with the diocese, and Brigadier R H Hill, Secretary to the Bishop of Oxford's Appeal for new churches, became involved. He and the Archdeacon approached the Mayor's Secretary to ask whether the City would sponsor a special appeal with a possible target of £50,000. Local industry would be approached. Unfortunately money was not readily available and only a small amount was raised by this appeal.

Peter Malton had also asked that approval by the Church Extension Committee at Diocesan Church House be given for the building to start early in 1963, this was given on March 8th 1962.

After a press conference in Christ Church, Oxford, an article in the Oxford Mail on July 16th 1962 announced that the new 'heart-shaped' church to be built on Blackbird Leys would be named 'Church of the Holy Family'. The congregation had been asked to suggest a dedication and two suggestions were submitted to the Bishop of Oxford - 'St Joseph the Worker' and, because of the number of young families on the Estate, 'Holy Family'. Bishop Harry Carpenter chose 'Holy Family' and this decision was greeted with pleasure.

The article went on to describe the construction of the building. It was to have serpentine concrete walls round its liturgical area to a height of 11 feet inside. The upper half of the wall would be timber, reaching a total height of 22 feet. The roof was to have a copper surface and would be flat. The Church Times was not so enthusiastic about the design, taking the view that most people would only know it as a landmark by its rather assertive exterior. . The comment was "this is a brave, generous yet modest venture, but unfortunately does not look like a church".

Colin Shewring the Architect, in an article in the Oxford Times on July 17th 1962 was quoted as saying of the inverted dome-shaped roof that it was lower over the altar and pulpit in order to act as a large sounding board. A prominent feature of the building would be the sanctuary, an egg-shaped area standing out from the wall, with a circular altar flanked by the pulpit, a reversion to very ancient Christian practice. This emphasized the dual nature of the Eucharist, teaching and feeding, and the natural lighting would be arranged so that it would flood the altar during the main service each Sunday morning. A ring of lights in the roof would illuminate the altar and pulpit at night.

The Baptistry wall would be tomb-shaped, symbolising death and resurrection, and would be situated between the two main blocks of seats. The font would be approached by three shallow steps to symbolize the descent into the river Jordan from the bank. The siting of the pews was intended to give a family feel to the building. The altar, font and lectern were to be of Clipsham stone.

It was the Architect's intention to have a car park, and for the water from the rooves of the range of buildings to the north to be used to feed a small but attractive pool. A total estimated cost of £50,000 was quoted.

In the summer of 1963, although building had not yet been started, it proved necessary to move the church hut, as it was exactly where the main entrance to the church would be. Some people at the time had questioned the reason for it being placed where it was, but as Blackbird Leys Road had only been built as far as the Health Centre, it was felt impracticable to put it any further into the 'field'.

Having been in constant and energetic use for a good three years the hut was in rather a bad state of repair and moving it didn't help. The Youth Club offered to move the hall to the opposite end of the church site, facing onto the now finished Cuddesdon Way, in the August. Church services continued, but due to the general mess, no electricity and a leaky roof, there was a drop in attendance. It took two months to get it re-decorated and even then Peter Malton had had to turn labourer and finish putting the drains in.

After a lot of further correspondence between the Church Commissioners, City Planners and the Architect, building was eventually scheduled for the spring of 1964. By this time the cost had escalated, and the project had had to be cut to only providing the church, the toilets and the parsonage. Part of this delay had been due to the Church Commissioners insisting on certain standards inside the church such as the length of pews. Peter Malton found it all very frustrating, and the fact that the cost of the house was quoted as over £8,000 was, in his opinion, pastorally harmful on a council housing estate. This, in part, led him to re-assess his commitment to Blackbird Leys, and at the end of 1964 he decided to move on to Pitsford, near Northampton, before the new church was completed.

On Sunday 2nd August 1964, at the end of the 9.30 a.m. Parish Communion, the Churchwardens led the Archdeacon of Oxford, Peter Malton, Colin Shewring, Brigadier Hill, and the congregation to the site where the altar stone had been placed. The Archdeacon proceeded to bless the altar. The reason for the altar being put in place before work on the rest of the building was started was that a church building is primarily a cover for the people of God to do that which Jesus told us to do - to celebrate the Eucharist. The Architect explained to a reporter from the Oxford Mail that its smooth top was the datum line from which all other levels of its construction were being taken. Building, which was being undertaken by Kingerlees, then proceeded, although progress was slow during a very severe winter in 1964/65. The framework of the church at this time resembled a 'roller coaster'.

In the autumn of 1964 Peter Malton was at a Diocesan Clergy Conference where he met and talked with Mervyn Puleston, a curate from Great Marlow. The week following the Conference the Bishop of Oxford wrote to Mervyn suggesting he should visit Peter at Blackbird Leys with a view to taking over from him. Mervyn and his wife Carole came to Blackbird Leys, had a look round, and met with Peter Malton, John Strong, and members of the church and community. After further talks with the Bishop, Mervyn and Carole decided to accept the challenge of this new church. They

moved into the brand new church house on January 15th 1965. Mervyn was inducted a couple of weeks later by Bishop Harry Carpenter.

The fellowship of the church at this time was very strong, and evening meetings with a speaker, film or discussion were usually preceded by a cooked meal. Mervyn Puleston who, before being ordained, had completed a catering training course, enjoyed helping with the cooking on these occasions.

As the new church was due to be opened a few months later, there were a lot of final details to complete. There was very little money to spare, but the congregation had not been idle whilst the church was being built. A group of women including Helen Cowan, Veronica Strong and Ann Evans spent afternoons sewing, and from Helen Cowan's design came the striking altar cloth for Pentecost. Other individuals had worked on sections of canvas with bright orange wool to make the kneeler for round the altar stone, and others knitted the green shapes to cover the old hassocks. Two children from Blackbird Leys School, Barbara Bednartz and Dorothy Edwards, under the guidance of one of the teachers, Miss Valerie Lucas, designed, sewed, and embroidered a banner depicting the Holy Family's flight to Egypt, and presented it to the Church.

The question of a musical instrument for the church had been raised at the church meeting and had produced some very heated discussions. Some people favoured an organ; others were more in favour of a piano. In the end a grand piano was bought for £50 and is still in use. A Julius Kreitzburger and much travelled, it was in the German Embassy before the 1914 war before being impounded at the outbreak of hostilities. It was then at Savoy Hill in the early days of the BBC. Later it became the property of a teacher at the Royal Academy of Music, and will have been played by many, now famous, pianists.

The church building was completed in the spring of 1965, and a service of Dedication was held on Saturday, 10th April 1965, the day before Palm Sunday. Bishop Carpenter had agreed that the church should be dedicated, rather than consecrated to allow the Free Church congregation to use it. Jack Argent and Mike Tassell, the two Churchwardens, escorted Bishop Carpenter into the church for the service. Peter Malton returned for the occasion, and Mike Tassell recalls the look of pleasure on his face when he entered the building. Children from Blackbird Leys School provided the choir, and sang 'The Lord's My Shepherd' and a modern hymn 'Go Into All The World'. Towards the end of April a film was made by ITV of the new church, and the choir was asked to perform again. Some of the congregation were filmed entering the church and asked for their thoughts on the building.

Soon after the opening of the church building, Father Matt Brady, the Roman Catholic parish priest approached Mervyn Puleston to find out whether the Roman Catholic congregation could use the old hut for their services until their own church in Sawpit Road was ready. Mervyn Puleston talks of this as being a very happy arrangement which helped to foster ecumenical relations. Father Brady used to call into church house after hearing Saturday Confessions for a cup of tea and, even if Mervyn and Carole were out, the arrangement was that he could help himself.

As the estate was rapidly being occupied with new families moving in every week, a lot of Mervyns's time was taken up with visiting. He made a point of calling on every family as they settled in finding the best time for visiting was on a Saturday afternoon. It was not a very rewarding task as many of the new tenants were not interested in church, but he was seldom refused entry, and often given a warm welcome.

As well as Ministers from the Anglican and Catholic traditions meeting the needs of the community, links were also being made with those from the Free Church as is shown in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

The vision of ecumenism

In 1960 the Tyndale Congregational Church situated in the Cowley Road was facing problems. Most of the congregation lived in other parts of the City, and the building needed at least £5,000 spending on it. After eighteen months of discussion and investigation a church meeting was called, and just over half the members voted to sell the site and to build a church on the new Blackbird Leys Estate. The local Congregationalists decided to form a committee, later called the Blackbird Leys Council, to explore the possibilities. Their main task was to fulfil the wishes of the Tyndale members, to examine the type of Christian witness which would best suit an area such as Blackbird Leys, and to appoint a Free Church Minister to work on the estate, with funding from the closure of Tyndale Church. (There were considerable legal problems, but eventually a Trust Fund was set up, and the interest paid into the church account to help with running costs).

In June 1962, David Goodall, Chairman of the Northern District of the Congregational Union, and Rev Geoffrey Beck, Minister of Summertown Congregational Church, wrote to the Archdeacon expressing interest in appointing a Free Church Minister to work on Blackbird Leys. This was a radical idea at the time and Bishop Carpenter replied to the effect that while the Church of England welcomed co-operation between the churches, it was not legally possible to share a consecrated parish church, and it would lead to confusion and a weakening of witness and discipline of both churches.

By this time the Presbyterians were also showing interest in this venture, and two representatives joined the Blackbird Leys Council. At a meeting held in October 1964, proposals were put forward to prepare the way for a Free Church Minister to be appointed to work on Blackbird Leys. Also at this meeting Peter Malton, the Anglican Priest Missioner, became a full member of the Blackbird Leys Council. The Committee felt it would be wrong to purchase the site allocated by the City Council for a Free Church building, instead they would try to arrange to share the Anglican building. A rented house had been offered by the City Council for a Minister and this was accepted.

The next step was the backing by the Oxford Council of Churches at its meeting in November 1964 encouraged by the Nottingham Faith & Order Conference held a few

months before, which passed a resolution to make Blackbird Leys an area of Ecumenical Co-operation. A meeting followed on February 13th 1965 between Rev Geoffrey Beck, Rev John Thornton, Mr Henry Towers and Bishop Carpenter, when the possibility of an experiment in Joint Evangelism was discussed, although the Bishop was very firm that no assumptions should be made that the experiment would automatically lead to free and un-restricted intercommunion in the Church of the Holy Family. He also stated that people coming into the corporate life of the church should become members of either one denomination or the other in order to be prepared for full membership. He did however agree that the church should be dedicated and not consecrated, thereby removing one legal complication for the future.

He envisaged a large and fruitful field of co-operation in all forms of evangelistic work, visiting, youth work, discussion groups and mission services. He felt the Priest Missioner and Free Church Minister would be a great support to one another, and the impact of the Christian faith on the people of Blackbird Leys would be strengthened by this united effort. He hoped that in some aspects of Christian work on the estate, they might find it possible to secure the co-operation of the Roman Catholic Priest and people.

From this meeting a Free Church Advisory Council was set up, with representatives from the Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Society of Friends, Congregational, and Anglican churches, to meet four times a year:

1. To advise and assist the Church Meeting in the calling of a minister.
2. To advise on ecumenical policy, and to help foster good relationships between the Church of the Holy Family and the local churches and the various councils of the denominations.
3. To help and advise on parish and other relevant matters which might be raised.
4. To appoint a Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer annually.

The Council would be responsible for the appointment of a Finance Sub-Committee to deal with:

- a) Minister's stipend
- b) Financial concerns raised in the Council
- c) The raising of money from Free Church sources for the continuance of the ministry in Blackbird Leys.

Following the setting up of the various Councils and bodies, it was agreed to appoint a Free Church Minister to work in Blackbird Leys, the congregation to use the newly opened church building. The Rev Barry Jones who had previously been Assistant Minister at the Congregational Church in Carrs Lane, Birmingham, was appointed, and on Wednesday 29th September 1965, he was inducted as Free Church Minister. (Appendix A) He was paid from funds donated by local Congregational and Presbyterian Churches, the Society of Friends in Oxford, the Lutherans and certain individual donations.

In February 1966, Barry Jones compiled a report stating how well the team ministry was developing. The normal pattern of worship was Anglican Parish Communion in the morning followed by a joint Sunday School, and a Free Church Service in the evening. Each month a united Anglican-Free Church Service was held, and during Lent there were inter-denominational house groups.

In August 1967, Barry Jones wrote an additional report, noting that the Free Church Service had been moved to the morning, and the pattern of worship was now:

8.00 a.m.	Anglican Communion Service
9.30 a.m.	Anglican Family Eucharist
10.30 a.m.	Coffee when both congregations met together
10.45 a.m.	Free Church Service
2.45 p.m.	United Sunday School
6.30 p.m.	Evensong

The 10.30 a.m. coffee time proved very popular with both congregations, and was a very good opportunity for getting to know one another. United services were held at 10.45 a.m. on the second Sunday of the month and at 6.30 p.m. on the third Sunday of the month. By this time Barry Jones was in contact with about seventy people with Free Church backgrounds, although only about half this number actually attended services.

The church meeting was an important part of the life of the church. It had ceased to be a Parochial Church Council very early on, and the officers were elected annually and chosen irrespective of denomination. Meetings took place about nine times a year and provided an opportunity for ecumenical discussion.

At the same time the clergy, Mervyn Puleston and Barry Jones and two other members of staff, Nicky Crane (Anglican Parish Worker) and Sue Armitage (Congregational part-time worker), functioned as a team, with a weekly staff meeting. Together they planned and discussed the way that the church could best serve the community as well as spread the gospel.

Towards the middle of 1967 dialogue with the local Methodist Circuit had meant a sharing in thinking and planning for the future. Barry Jones drew up a document 'Towards a Constitution and Covenant' in the hope that it would stimulate wide discussion of the issues raised. This was circulated to all the denominations with a letter stating that most matters had been discussed with his Anglican colleague. By 1969 both congregations agreed that the time was right to work towards unity and a feeling of anticipation began to develop.

At the end of 1970 Mervyn Puleston left Blackbird Leys to take up an appointment as vicar of St Mary's, Kidlington. The Rev Tony Moore who had spent nine years in the Southwark Diocese - four years as priest-in-charge of St Aidans, Edgebury, in the parish of All Saints, New Eltham, arrived and was licensed by Bishop Carpenter in November 1970. He, his wife Hazel and their three daughters fitted into the

community very well. Their son, Jeremy, was born in August 1971. Hazel took over the running of one of the Brownie packs, and later went back to her nursing career as a District Nurse at Donnington Health Centre.

As well as being very busy settling into the parish, Tony was on the Managing Body of Blackbird Leys Infant and Junior Schools. He led a weekly assembly at the Junior School and was invited into the Infant School at special feasts such as Harvest and Christmas. He also was on the managing bodies of the other schools on the estate. Tony was also a member of the Labour Party and was made chairman of the Blackbird Leys Branch only six months after his arrival. He found that canvassing before local elections was a very good way of meeting people in their own homes.

Tony and Barry together took up the task of furthering joint worship, and in the summer of 1971 the church meeting unanimously passed a resolution calling for united morning worship on a regular basis, and this to be Eucharistic. Bishop Kenneth Woolcombe, the new Bishop of Oxford, was approached for his approval. He was very sympathetic to the wishes of the congregation and offered practical suggestions. The Sharing of Church Buildings Act had become law in 1969, and the Bishop suggested that the Church authorities be approached to give their consent to a sharing agreement, which would allow the Free Church congregation a shared use of Holy Family Church. The Bishop also suggested that the Rev Derek Allen, Principal of St Stephen's House, should look at any agreed Eucharistic rite to make sure it was liturgically and theologically sound. It was then agreed that a working party should look at an Order of Service, which could be used by Anglican and Free Church people worshipping together as one congregation. The working party, including Barry Jones, Nan Patterson and Henry Towers from the Free Church Congregation, and Mike Tassell and Tony Moore from the Anglicans, met five times to draw up an experimental Eucharistic liturgy, which was first used on Advent Sunday 1971. Each Minister took it in turn to preach one Sunday and preside at the Eucharist the following Sunday.

Various suggestions and amendments were put forward after the Order of Service had been in use for some months, and these were incorporated into a revised form, which was reprinted in August 1972. After using the same, Order of Service for a number of years, it was agreed at a church meeting to include alternative Eucharistic prayers and now there is a choice of four such prayers. The basic Order of Service remains unchanged.

One specific part - the sharing of the peace - has become very special to Holy Family. Nan Patterson suggested all the congregation should move to the altar area and form a circle by joining hands. This was at a time when the sharing of the peace by the congregation was becoming common among all churches. Tony Moore had heard of the sung "Shalom", and it fitted in perfectly. Much later, in 1986, Anne Bartlett, a member of the congregation, made a collage of the words, and this greatly helps visitors to be a part of this act of our worship.

In September 1971, Sylvia and Irwin Barnes started worshipping at Holy Family Church. Rev Irwin Barnes, a Baptist Minister, had joined the staff at Ripon Hall,

Oxford. They both recall being warmly welcomed and speak of the relaxed atmosphere. This was also commented on by other newcomers at that time, especially those from stricter backgrounds. Irwin Barnes became an honorary staff member taking a regular part in the Sunday worship.

Barry Jones tendered his resignation to the Church Committee at a meeting on the 14th June 1972. He had given a very valuable seven years' service. There was no immediate funding from the Congregational Church for a replacement, and it now seemed to be the right time to look at the question of involving the Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians in both the selection and funding of a new minister. The following motion was also proposed at the same meeting: "Our Committee moves that Blackbird Leys be declared an Area of Ecumenical Experiment, and that we request the Bishop to initiate the creation of a Sponsoring Body, which would perform its duties in close consultation with our church".

Sylvia Barnes was approached by the Oxford Free Church Council to serve at Holy Family as Pastoral Assistant. This was to maintain a Free Church involvement on the staff, without which the church would have been in danger of reverting to a purely Anglican parish, and its ecumenical status would have been lost.

The Bishop of Oxford wrote a letter to the Secretary of the Oxford Council of Churches. He said that he had met with Church Leaders at Cuddesdon on the 21st November 1972, and that they would be happy to see Blackbird Leys declared an Area of Ecumenical Experiment. He suggested that the Oxford Council of Churches would make an appropriate Sponsoring Body. The OCC felt this should be explored further, and a sub-committee of Rev Nigel Gilson, Rev Tony Moore, Rev Bob Jeffery, Rev John Thornton, Rev Irwin Barnes and Mr Henry Towers met on 21st December to discuss this issue. This was followed up with a paper entitled 'Past, Present & Future' compiled by Tony Moore, Barry Jones, Henry Towers, Jack Argent and Irwin Barnes supporting the need for a full-time Free Church Minister. It also requested the Free Church authorities for the £2000 funding which would be required to support this ministry. They emphasized that the Blackbird Leys congregation felt that it would be a tragic setback to the cause of church unity in Oxford if the experiment was not allowed to continue.

Early in 1973 a meeting of the Reading & Oxford District Council of the URC discussed their further commitment to Holy Family, and agreed a grant of up to £700, provided the other Free Church denominations contributed as well.

At a church officers' meeting on the 18th April 1973, offers of financial help over a period of 5 years were received from the Home Mission Department of the local Methodist Circuit, and from the Mission and Stewardship Committee of St Andrews' Headington.

In June 1973, at a meeting of the Oxford Council of Churches, nominations for members of a Sponsoring Body were accepted (Appendix B) and

On the 26th June 1973 Blackbird Leys was officially designated an Area of Ecumenical Experiment by the denominational authorities.

The Sponsoring Body met and agreed that the post of Free Church Minister should be advertised in New Society and in the Church weeklies. This produced seven applicants, four were short listed by a sub-committee of the Sponsoring Body and plans were set up for interviews over the weekend of the 17th/18th November 1973. The candidates were invited to spend 24 hours in Blackbird Leys, where they were shown round the estate, meeting with other professionals such as Head teachers. They were interviewed by representatives of the Sponsoring Body, by representatives of the Church Committee, and by Tony Moore.

From this process Rev David Rowland was unanimously chosen as the preferred candidate, and offered the position of Free Church Minister, which he accepted. David was a Baptist Minister who had previously worked with the Baptist Missionary Society in Bangladesh, and also as warden of a students hostel and Principal of the Pastor Training School.

Oxford City Council were approached to supply a house for a minister to rent, the previous house had been handed back to the Council on Barry Jones' departure. David, his wife Audrey, their daughter and two sons moved into No 44 Blackbird Leys Road.

David's Induction Service took place on Thursday the 21st March 1974 and was recorded by Radio Oxford. It was at this service that the Declaration of Intent was signed creating Blackbird Leys as an Area of Ecumenical Experiment. (Appendix C).

This document stated:

"Christians from several denominational traditions have joined together at the Church of the Holy Family, Blackbird Leys, in common worship and fellowship; they have sought together to promote in the community God's purpose of justice, peace and service; they have sought to share with the community the good news of God's love, shown in Jesus Christ. They now seek to formalise this period of, united work by the inauguration of an Area of Ecumenical Experiment. In this neighbourhood they serve, they pledge themselves to continue to work as one united congregation. The ministers pledge themselves to work closely as colleagues and partners.

The Oxford Council of Churches pledges its continuing support and concern for the work, and recognises its significance for the Christian Church in Oxford.

The Church of England, the Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church, and the Baptist Churches pledge their support for the experiment in the following ways: by the financial commitment they have undertaken for a period of five years; by agreeing to the suspension of denominational traditions so that new patterns of worship, mission and ministry may be developed and evaluated; and by formalising this support through the setting up of a Sponsoring Body.

It is the earnest hope of all of us, that those who come after us will be in sympathy with the spirit of this declaration.”

In July 1976 Holy Family was accepted into membership of the Oxford & East Gloucestershire Baptist Association.

In 1976 a joint service of Confirmation and Acceptance into Church Membership took place, conducted by the Anglican Bishop of Dorchester, the Rt Rev Peter Walker, together with Tony Moore and David Rowland, with all three clergy carrying out the 'laying on of hands'.

A Membership Roll was drawn up to include all church members whatever their denominational background. This practice has continued ever since with an annual service of commitment, usually held at Pentecost. In 1986 the Membership Roll was put alphabetically into a Day a Month Prayer List, including a daily topic as well, and this is updated and given out at the same time as the Membership Service.

Chapter 5 The vision of the people in the life of the church

In addition to those already mentioned in previous pages there have been a great number of people who have added their vision and enthusiasm to the life of Holy Family.

In 1960 the church members were very active in their support of Peter Malton, although by the time Mervyn Puleston took over, a number of those most involved had moved away from Blackbird Leys. However, when Barry Jones was appointed, members of the Free Church congregation soon became involved in the life of the church, and church meetings were better attended, as well as the social events such as Harvest Festival. Some of the most vivid memories of the people to whom I have spoken, who were then part of the congregation, are of the parish gatherings, the preparation of food in Church House, and the celebrations in the old hut, or sometimes in the Community Centre. At Harvest 1966 a total of 105 tickets were sold for a Harvest Supper, which took place in the Youth Wing of the Community Centre.

In June 1964, John and Veronica Strong arrived on the estate. John was one of the first English worker-priests. With a colleague he took over a Kent mining parish in 1951 and went down the pit. After 13 years as a worker-priest in different situations he came to work at Morris's as a vehicle progress worker. He also helped out at the church on an honorary, unpaid basis. He was a fiery character in the pulpit, yet gentle in normal conversation. He gave three years' valuable service to the estate before leaving in 1967 to become Rector of the Baldons, a neighbouring rural parish.

After John and Veronica left both Mervyn Puleston and Barry Jones became increasingly more aware of the need for help in the parish. The Bishop of Oxford suggested that a woman worker be appointed for parish visiting, and in the summer of 1968 Miss Nicky Crane was commissioned as a parish worker. Nicky gave a lot of energy to working with the young people in Church, running a Youth Group and Sunday School Club.

At the same time, Sue Armitage, a Congregationalist from Summertown joined the team in a voluntary capacity for two and a half years. Sue took over from Mervyn Puleston the task of visiting every newcomer to the estate, greeting them in the name of the church. She was able to give them a map of the estate, which was very useful, as with the amount of new building it was not easy to find one's way about. The leaflet also gave details of the church services and ministers. Another task she undertook was the editing of the parish magazine. The cover of the parish magazine at that time, the two tower blocks behind the outline of the church, was designed by a student from the Polytechnic and was used until 1990, (see cover).

Also during her time in the parish Sue worked hard preparing reports in order to try to secure funding to keep a Free Church Minister at Holy Family. Sue later went on to train for the U.R.C. Ministry. An entry in the Minutes of the AGM for 31st March 1971 recorded presentations to both Nicky and Sue, with thanks for all the work they had done.

Dorothy Tolliday, a member of Magdalen Road Evangelical Church in East Oxford gave enormous time and energy to encouraging about thirty young children into a singing group, using the church premises on a weekday. She also spent a lot of time with Junior Church and was sadly missed when she moved with her husband to Southsea in 1981.

One tradition that was started in 1971 and has gone from strength to strength is a celebration on Maundy Thursday, which has taken the form of a Jewish Passover meal. The venue for this service was first in the old hut and on one occasion just twelve people sat at a table in the middle of an otherwise bare space. It had a great feeling of Our Lord's Last Supper. In other years, when the hut became too dilapidated for proper use, three groups met in individual homes. At one of these groups during a crucial part of the service when notice is taken of the empty place set for Elijah, there was a knock on the door. There was a hushed silence while the hostess answered the door. It turned out to be the milkman calling for his money!

When the new extension to the church was completed in 1983 tables were arranged to form a square in the common room, and in recent years the service has proved so popular that the church hall is now used. On Maundy Thursday 1990 there were approximately 70 people present including a number of the Roman Catholic congregation from Sacred Heart.

The Order of Service is still the same, with the re-telling of the Passover story, the sharing of the unleavened bread, bitter herbs, lamb and egg and the passing of the cup with either wine or grape juice. The end of the service recalls the last Passover Jesus shared with his disciples.

In November 1971, the Rev Malcolm Cooper and his family came to live on the estate. Malcolm was working in the Housing Department doing a Diploma of Housing Management. He was present at most of the Officers' meetings and took a lively interest in the proceedings. He and his family left in January 1974 and moved to Hampshire.

Irwin and Sylvia Barnes have been, and still are, greatly involved with Holy Family Church, although they no longer live in the Oxford area. Sylvia was asked to help out with pastoral duties during the Free Church vacancy. This she did on a part-time basis, although in practice this was almost full-time, and church reports show what valuable service she gave, both in support of Tony Moore, and also by keeping the way open for a new Free Church Minister.

Another project Sylvia was involved in with Tony Moore was UMP (Urban Ministry Project) during 1972. This was a training venture for Christian Ministers, Social and Community Workers and others, in which participants were helped to grow in awareness and understanding of the issues that arose from living in an urban environment. The London base of the scheme was St Peter's Church, Morden, and the Oxford base Ripon Hall Theological College (now merged with Cuddesdon).

The start of the course was a challenge to survive for 48 hours in London on 70p, a rather drastic way to study conditions that some people have to endure all the time.

Having completed this part of the course, they then had to look at their own area and build on that experience. Tony worked with one of the teachers and some of the pupils at Redefield School in Blackbird Leys looking at the neighbourhood, and Sylvia did a survey of community life in Cowley by interviewing people ranging from teachers and community workers to police and fire department officials.

The Church outing was very popular too. The first one was an outing to Turners' Court for a picnic and games, tea at the "Pop-in" in Wallingford, and then Evensong at Benson Parish Church. These have continued each year, usually visiting a rural church for a game of cricket or rounders, followed by and then attending the evening service. A return invitation is then extended to come to Blackbird Leys for morning worship at a later date, usually followed lunch.

Sylvia and Irwin Barnes were also involved with two House Groups, especially those that met during the winter of 1972/73 and looked in depth at issues relating to baptism. In particular the opinions and feelings of some young Mum's were taken into account, mainly family pressure to have baby christened and it was 'expected', especially by grandparents. Families on the estate who only had a fragile link with church felt it was very important to bring their children to church for Infant Baptism. In this way the child's link with God's family is made.

The brief for these two house groups was to look at the reasons why parents requested infant baptism, and a paper produced from the discussions suggested that Believers' Baptism should be seen theologically as the norm.

It was agreed that those parents bringing their children for a church ceremony should be offered two alternatives:

1. A service of Dedication or Blessing,
2. Baptism of Infants

These two options are still offered, and the majority of parents request infant baptism.

Following the report of the house groups a working party was convened to draw up a service to be called "A Celebration of New Life. This liturgy was then used as an experiment for one year, after which time it was approved by the Sponsoring Body and the Bishop of Oxford. The Service has been slightly altered over the years at the request of the worshipping congregation. It was felt that asking the parents and godparents to promise to bring their children regularly to church was asking too great a commitment. The liturgy now asks parents and godparents to accept the Statement of Faith, and to accept the welcome offered to the families, through the church members.

"We believe and trust in God, who sustains all things; who has revealed himself in his Son, Jesus Christ; who is at work in us and all the world through his Holy Spirit. We believe that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus shows us that God loves every woman, man and child. In response to that love we try to rely on God, to love each other, and to work for justice and peace in this world which is his and ours."

Much later, in 1983, a small group was nominated from the church meeting to prepare a response to the Lima Statement on "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" (B.E.M.) issued by the World Council of Churches in 1982 at Lima in Peru. This response was then presented in 1985 by the Sponsoring Body to the World Council of Churches as a contribution to the debate. Then in 1986 the Report was again studied by the House Groups at Blackbird Leys in a series of eight discussions from which a paper was produced and presented to the Oxford Baptist Ministers' Fraternal, and then to the Oxford and East Gloucester Association of the Baptist Union.

The Lenten House groups in 1972/73 also discussed the question of church membership, as it was felt that clearer guidelines were needed both for those coming into membership from one of the four denominations and for those coming into membership for the first time. From these discussions it was agreed that for those coming into membership for the first time, following instruction, there would be a service of Believers' Baptism for those not baptised in infancy, and then the Laying-on of Hands in Confirmation for all candidates, and then all would receive the right hand of fellowship.

The first of these services was held on the 11th June 1978. Arrangements were made for a service of Believers' Baptism to take place in the swimming pool adjacent to the church. The church was full, and after the opening prayers, the congregation of approximately 200 people followed Bishop John Robinson, the former Bishop of Woolwich, and the other clergy, to the swimming pool. It was a most moving experience for those who witnessed it. David Rowland and his daughter Helen went down into the pool, and after prayers had been offered, David gently lowered Helen under the water and then up again. Then while David and Helen were changing into dry clothes, the rest of the congregation made their way back into church for the confirmation of ten young people and seven adults.

On July 6th 1980 another young person was baptised in the same way. Tony and Hazel Moore had made a conscious decision not to have three of their children baptised as infants, but to allow them to make their own minds up when they were older. Tony's daughter Suzannah had decided on baptism by immersion. Bishop Colin Winter, presided at the service, and Tony Moore baptized Suzannah in the pool. The whole congregation again witnessed this, and as previously everyone returned to the church for the laying on of hands by the Bishop and the two ministers.

In 1973 a liturgical dance group was formed, and trained by a sister from St Mary's Convent at Wantage, Sister Rhona. On Whit Sunday the group performed a Mime and Dance sequence, which contributed to a meaningful act of worship. On Easter morning 1974, most of the congregation was persuaded to leave their pews and move joyfully round the church singing 'Lord of the Dance'. More recently the dance group reformed as 'Magnificat' and they occasionally add an extra dimension to our worship.

During 1975/76 a membership of fifty adults was recorded with forty children and young people on the Junior Church Roll. The old hut had been patched up and, with a new roof and new curtains, provided a meeting place for Junior Church, Guides and Brownies. A youth group was started on a Sunday evening by Audrey Rowland,

David's wife, with help provided by students from the various theological colleges. Although the numbers were never great it proved popular with those who joined.

A large proportion of the congregation are West Indian. They have been regular attenders for most of Holy Family's thirty years. In the 1970's Junior Church was about half black and half white, and although most of these young people have moved away from Blackbird Leys, there are still a few who continue to come to services and whose names are on the Membership Roll. The present chairman of the Church Officers' Group is from the Caribbean, although she has lived in England for most of her life.

Paul and Gisela Bailey and their young family joined Holy Family in 1976. Paul was a student at Regents' Park Baptist College, studying for the Baptist Ministry, having previously been a teacher. Paul and Gisela brought a sparkle to Holy Family, Gisela helping with the Junior Church and Paul as Church Secretary. After Paul finished his training they moved to St Mary's Baptist Church, Norwich. It was a very sad blow to everyone when Paul collapsed and died only a few months later.

Tony Moore took a 3-month sabbatical at the beginning of 1977, during which time he researched and later wrote up his findings in a booklet called "Cowley - Car Works, Community and Churches".

Brenda and Brian Wren became church members in 1977 and the family soon became part of the fellowship. Brian, a URC Minister working for Third World First, was on the staff as an Associate Minister, and shared in the leading of worship from time to time. Brian is also a well-known hymn writer, and he wrote two hymns especially for Holy Family. Brenda later helped out as pianist for Sunday services.

In 1978 the Sponsoring Body commissioned Jo Garcia, a Post-graduate student, and a member of St Andrew's Church, Headington, to assess the progress the church had made as a Local Ecumenical Project. This was tackled by way of an interview and questionnaire to church members. In presenting her report, Jo stated it had been a difficult task, mainly because there were no clear guidelines as to goals. However, she noted that for most of the congregation, and others on the estate, the ecumenical aspect was not of great concern. Her report suggested that annual written reports on church activities should be made by the Ministers and those involved in specific tasks, in order to facilitate a sense of achievement. From this, and a similar report by Audrey Rowland, several questions were put to the Church Meeting and minuted.

During the spring of 1979, David Rowland took sabbatical leave. While he was away, Sister Rhona from St Mary's Wantage lived at 35 Sawpit Road and assisted Tony Moore in his pastoral work.

On the 29th June 1980 to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the first church service held on the estate, a large company, including the uniformed organisations, assembled outside No 17 Blackbird Leys Road, Peter Malton's house. A procession was made first to the Health Centre for an act of witness, as a reminder of the time the congregation had been grateful to use the building for services, and then to the church

for the rest of the service. Afterwards there was a picnic on the grass between the hut and the church. This was reported in the local papers and on Radio Oxford.

In September 1980 Tony Moore was made Ecumenical Officer for the Oxford Archdeaconry, a part-time appointment, and one that he felt reflected the work being done in Blackbird Leys.

In 1980, on the Sunday before Christmas, about fifteen of the children from Junior Church and the same number from a group of young people from the Salvation Army who met regularly in the Community Centre, produced a modern musical nativity play. This was performed at Holy Family Church, and then at the Army Citadel in the centre of Oxford during an evening meeting. This was well worth doing and the leaders from both groups worked hard putting on both performances.

In February 1981 two contemporary panels six feet high were presented to the church by Kathleen Dodd, a Quaker and a member of the Sponsoring Body. One was based on the story of Ezekiel's vision while he was in exile in Babylon, and the other was based on St John's visions recorded in the book of Revelation.

Mr Cecil Jacobs, who had been Head teacher of Blackbird Leys Junior School since it opening in September 1959, arranged for an inscription on the font. It is a palindrome - Greek writing which when read either way says the same thing:

NIYONANOMHMATAMHMONANOYIN

"Wash my transgressions, not only my face".

He officially presented the inscription in commemoration of his 21 years as Head teacher at the Festival Service in June 1981.

Early in 1981 Tony Moore advised the church committee that he would be moving on. He had been at Holy Family for ten and a half years. During his time the two separate congregations had united, and the area officially designated a Local Ecumenical Project. The Bishop had offered him the parish of the Baldons, near Oxford, so would not be moving far. Hazel, Tony, and their family moved out of Church House, Blackbird Leys in August. The vacancy at Holy Family was advertised and there were three applicants, one of who withdrew his application and two others came for interview. The interviews took the same pattern as for David Rowland's appointment the candidates being offered overnight accommodation in order that they could spend time on the estate and meet as many people as possible. The decision to offer the appointment to Michael Doe was unanimous and plans were then made for his Induction Service. Michael had previously served in the parish of St Peter's, Norden in the Diocese of Southwark, and also as youth Secretary of the British Council of Churches.

Michael remembers the evening of the 30th October 1981 very well. Not only was it his Induction Service, but the Cowley car factory went on strike with a threat of closure, and the newly-painted garage door of Church House was spoilt with graffiti of some choice swear words.

David and Michael complemented one another, David with his quiet calm and patience and Michael with his lively, bustling character. Membership numbers increased, and some very lively services took place. David had carried on the policy from earlier days of visiting every new family when they moved onto the estate. He also set up a register of all the families bringing their infants to church for Baptism. A birthday card was then delivered to that child each year until the age of five. In the summer of 1986 the idea of building a Network was suggested, in which church members agreed to be the link between church and families (or single people), either because they were a neighbour, or already known to the church member. The link person could have as much or as little contact as they felt able to offer. But one important aim was to deliver a newsletter four times a year, Harvest, Christmas, Easter and at Blackbird Leys Festival time in June. It was felt this link could help make the church more open and welcoming. Some families have responded, but, in common with other similar areas, very few people find the time to attend church.

During the summer of 1981 it was agreed that the old church hut was in danger of falling down, and although there was no money available, a decision was taken to try and raise enough to build a permanent hall. A fundraising committee was set up, and, in an effort to raise funds, begging letters were sent out to all and sundry. Many fundraising activities also took place. They raised money but also served to bring the congregation closer together. The ceremony of cutting the first turf for the new hall was carried out by one of the youngest members, 4 year old Theo Addae and one of the oldest members, the pianist at the time, Mr Ted Anderson. The second turf was cut by Rev Tony Williamson in his capacity as Mayor of Oxford.

The signing of a contract with the builders for the new hall, posed a problem. One of the legal difficulties in administering a Local Ecumenical Project is when a particular denomination requires legislation to be carried out. This was discussed at an Officers' meeting, but as the Church Officers are all from different denominations, they do not constitute a Parochial Church Council and, for any legal matters of the Church of England the PCC is responsible on behalf of the parish. It was decided that a notice would be put on the church door seven days prior to the signing of the contract in order for anyone who wished to raise any objection to be present at the morning service on the following Sunday. Then, after the morning service, a meeting was held and a vote taken that the contract should be signed.

The new church hall was eventually completed in September 1983. Ideas for a personality to perform the official opening ceremony had been many and varied, but, although one or two suggestions had been followed up, no one was able to be present. It was therefore decided that, after the Festival Service in June 1984, all those in the congregation would process from the church to the new hall entrance and then "sign in". These signatures were then photocopied and framed, thereby declaring the hall well and truly open for use.

Audrey Rowland had spent an enormous amount of time and energy during the early 1980's working with the various church groups, especially the Junior Church, the Youth Group, and making a strong case for the replacement of the old hut by a new

hall. She was also very active in the community, and at a church meeting in April 1982, Michael Doe put forward a proposal that this should be officially recognised. The meeting was in full agreement with this, especially as there was concern at the cut backs in Community Workers on the estate. Audrey carried on working in a voluntary capacity; she was given the title Church Community Worker, and paid her expenses. During the following year the Sponsoring Body took over the appointment, paying a small salary while enquiries were made to see whether a fully funded Church Community Workers' post might be established. After much discussion, the responsibility for this post was eventually taken on by the Oxford Diocesan Board for Social Work. The post was then advertised, and Audrey put in an application. After some considerable time taken up with short listing and interviews, Audrey was appointed and given a job description and a contract. During this time Audrey had become involved with action groups around the country working against poverty and unemployment, sharing this knowledge with the church committee, and enabling members to be more informed and to take appropriate action.

In 1985 the Salvation Army Band led the Mayor, Church Leaders and the Guides, Brownies, Scouts and Cubs to the church to commemorate twenty-five years of the church on the estate. After the service those present formed the figure twenty-five on the grass outside the church, and a photograph was taken to record the event. The service was broadcast for Radio Oxford's Sunday morning programme "Spirit Level", a programme of which Michael Doe was co-presenter.

In January 1986 the founding service for the Oxfordshire Ecumenical Council took place at Holy Family Church, with a large congregation from various parts of the country.

After eleven and a half years at Holy Family, David Rowland felt it was time for him to move on. He had been invited to become the Minister at Botley Baptist Church, and was Inducted there on Saturday 28th September 1985. Writing in the Church Magazine just before he left, David shared some of his joys and sorrows of his time on the estate. Amongst the joys, which exceeded the sorrows, he listed the sharing in the community through the church, the growth in fellowship, and the joyful response to the love of God through the services. His sadnesses were the difficulty of finding a way of sharing the faith with others, and although ways of praying together were being studied, he felt no right way had yet been found for Holy Family Church.

As soon as David announced his resignation a replacement was sought. All three of the Free Church denominations were asked to put forward candidates, and the vacancy was advertised in the church papers. The Methodist Church was short of ministers, and could not therefore put forward any names. There were no applicants from the U.R.C., but there were three Baptist candidates who saw the advertisement, and applied. The procedure of introduction and interview took a similar form to that in previous vacancies. After the candidates had been shown round the estate, they met first with other professional workers, and then with a group of ten church members.

After further meetings with representatives of the Sponsoring Body and with Michael Doe and Audrey Rowland, the job of Free Church Minister was offered to Stephen

Heap. Stephen came to Blackbird Leys from Wrexham, North Wales, where he had been the Minister of Chester Street Baptist Church. He had also served as Secretary of the North Wales English Baptist Union, and Secretary of the Department of Faith and Witness of the Council of Churches for Wales.

On Sunday February 16th 1986 at 3 p.m. the church was packed for Stephen's induction with family and friends from Yorkshire, friends from Wrexham, representatives of the four denominations, members of Holy Family Church and representatives from the wider community. After the service refreshments were served in the hall, and an opportunity to meet with old and new friends. Stephen and his wife, Liz, soon settled into the Manse at 58 Blackbird Leys Road and to the life of Holy Family Church.

In June, the Oxford Diocese arranged for David Miell to come to Blackbird Leys as Assistant Curate to do his post ordination training. He was ordained Deacon in Dorchester Abbey on Sunday 29th June, and some of the people from Holy Family were able to go to the service. David, his wife Dorothy, and son, Matthew, moved into a house on Blackbird Leys. David had been a teacher before training for the Ministry, and Dorothy was a lecturer with the Open University. A year later, in 1987, David was priested in Christ Church Cathedral and again members of Holy Family congregation were able to be present for the service. David played a full part in the team ministry, and he was the instigator for a public act of witness in Cowley, 'The Way of the Cross'. This involved all the churches in the Cowley area in a vast pageant on Good Friday 1989. After David had completed his three years he was offered the position of team vicar in an ecumenical team ministry on a new estate just outside Milton Keynes.

In February 1987, Michael Doe was commissioned as Rural Dean of the Cowley Deanery. Two years later, in February 1989, he moved to Portsmouth to take up the post of Social Responsibility Officer to the Diocese of Portsmouth with a Residentiary Canonry in Portsmouth Cathedral.

Audrey Rowland had stayed on as Church Community Worker, commuting from Botley, but had made it clear that she would be resigning after five years, which was at the beginning of 1989. The post was advertised, and Jim Hewitt, a Roman Catholic layman and member of Sacred Heart Church, who had been involved with Holy Family over a number of years, was appointed.

During 1989, David Pickering, a student at Mansfield College, spent a year at Holy Family as part of his studies. This proved a real blessing during the interregnum. David was full of enthusiasm and sparkle and was well liked, both in the church and with the youngsters in Pegasus School where he spent some time. Members of the Church Officers' Group helped out with running the House Group and taking details from couples wanting their banns read or parents asking for the New Life Service for their babies.

Although the vacancy created when Michael left was widely advertised, it proved difficult to attract any candidates, and it wasn't until the end of 1989 that James Ramsey, previously a curate in Olney, Buckinghamshire, was appointed.

Chapter 6

The living church in the community

Right from the beginning the link between Church and Community has been very strong. Peter Malton firmly believed that it was more important to turn, a rather dead housing concentration into a community than to try to persuade people to attend services.

He formed links with the local schools as soon as they opened and, as has been mentioned earlier, the church hut was used for meetings and group activity before the Community Centre was built. Peter Malton helped to form an 'Amenities Committee'. They organised deputations to the bus company, road haulage contractors (to complain about the heavy traffic running through the estate) and the local Member of Parliament.

When the Community Centre was opened, the Amenities Committee transferred to the Executive Committee. At the first A.G.M. of the Community Association in February 1963, Peter Malton was elected Secretary, and Jack Argent became Chairman, a post he held until his death in 1990. Derek Frith was appointed full time Warden, and the Centre was well used by people of all ages. In particular, there was a fine wing for use as a Youth Club, with a gymnasium.

Mervyn Puleston took over as Secretary of the Community Association when he arrived in 1965, and Carol, his wife, was elected onto the Committee. Carol later became Assistant Warden until 1971. One of the ventures she started, together with two or three other Mums from the Church, was a Saturday morning picture show (KKK or Kiddies Kinema Klub) meant for children aged between five and nine, although it was difficult to stop older and younger children coming. This proved very popular, and most Saturdays there would be about two hundred very noisy youngsters waiting for the pictures to start. Yvonne Jeffrey had the brilliant idea of introducing two 'fantasy' mice who didn't like all the shouting, and this worked for a short while, especially as they then appeared in the childrens' own special newspaper. Mr Frith was able to gain absolute silence merely by standing on the stage! He introduced the children to a recording of Gustav Holst's Planet Suite, playing a different planet each week. Sweets were also on sale, and Nan Phelps, the mother of the grocery store manageress, kept the children (and adults) well and truly in order.

Barry Jones was appointed to the Executive Committee shortly after he arrived, and he too held the opinion that the church should be in the broadest possible contact with the whole community.

In December 1965, Barry Jones visited 150 old-age pensioners to offer them the chance to spend Christmas Day with a family. Barry Jones took the view that spending money on the construction of ancillary buildings was unnecessary as the well-equipped Community Centre catered for all other needs. At this time the Roman Catholics were using the hut as their church, and all parish activities used the Community Centre.

Barry Jones was Secretary of the '1972 Committee' set up in the mid 1960's to look at the amenities for young people on the estate, when it was realised, if that by 1972 there would be large numbers of teenagers for whom provision would need to be made. Apart from the uniformed organisations and youth clubs which do not hold appeal for the majority of young people, there was little else provided. There were also few interested adults who were willing to give their free time. One activity that has flourished for those in the younger age group has been football clubs, and, linked with the Blackbird Leys Festival in June each year, a football knockout competition is held lasting all day Saturday.

Another venture was a drama group of local people under the direction of a Tutor from one of the Oxford Colleges, who together wrote a play depicting life at that time on Blackbird Leys and at the Cowley Works. It told of the monotony for men standing on the line fitting nuts and bolts to car chassis as they passed on a conveyor belt; of the loneliness and isolation of the women whose lives had to revolve around their menfolk; and of the financial uncertainty. (During 1966 there had been an economic squeeze, and short time and redundancies had affected quite a number of those living on the estate). It had been fun to write and work on the production and eventually to put the play on for an audience in the spring of 1967.

On July 14th 1967, there was a very violent thunderstorm, starting about ten o'clock at night. The rain was torrential, and, as it had been quite a dry summer, the earth was baked hard and the water did not immediately soak away. The drains could not cope with the volume of water, and soon the dip at the bottom of Blackbird Leys Road and the corner of Balfour Road was flooded. The level of water was rising, and came over the doorsteps of the houses and into the rooms. Unfortunately it was not just surface water as the manhole covers had been forced up, and untreated sewage also came into the houses.

The families were transferred to the Community Centre, where Mervyn Puleston and others set up camp beds and blankets. The Council eventually put in more drains, and channelled the brook underground and cured the problem, but the houses took months to dry out and get back to normal. Even the contents of fridges were ruined.

The uniformed organisations, although not officially attached to the church, kept regular links with Holy Family, and, over the years have helped with refreshments at various church gatherings, as well as attending monthly services for Church Parades. The 1st Blackbird Leys Guide Company, under the direction of Mrs Pat Murphy, made a banner on which the names of the clergy were embroidered in silver and gold thread, and presented it to the church.

One need, which was widely recognised, was for a nursery school for under fives. It was known that North Oxford and Summertown had ample provision for pre-school age children, yet nothing could be offered for Blackbird Leys. The Church and the Community Association met together and, finally, after a much pressure on the local Councillors, it was agreed that a nursery unit should be provided using a room in the Community Centre. The church also became involved in Play Schemes in the

summer, and in 1968 a group of young people from different countries, under the auspices of the United Nations Association, came and helped out.

By the time Tony Moore became Priest-in-charge in 1971 the Community Association was becoming better staffed so, although there was still close co-operation between the Community Centre and the Church, Tony resigned from the Committee after serving one year. He started a lunch-time 'think-tank', a meeting of professional staff, Social Workers, Probation Officers, Doctors, etc at the Community Centre, which enabled those working on the estate to share ideas and problems.

One big problem has been the apathy of the community. It has frequently been said there is nothing to do, and yet there are plenty of opportunities to take part in a variety of activities. It has proved especially difficult to get people to meetings to discuss matters of importance, and it has been left to a few dedicated people to do the campaigning. However one meeting did draw a large gathering. In 1972 Mr John Willis, a Director of Shelter and previously a rent officer in Oxford had made a criticism of the estate, commenting that it could become a social slum. The residents were incensed, and a public meeting was called for Wednesday 18th October, to which Mr Willis was invited. People packed into the Community Centre to challenge him on his statement. He apologised for using the word 'slum', but reaffirmed that in his opinion Blackbird Leys was heading towards a situation of multiple deprivation. He urged that new industry should be brought to the area so that there was more chance of employment, and that there should be more owner-occupiers. The particular part of the estate he was criticising was one of the last sections to be built, and unfortunately the Council allowed more dwellings than in any other part of the estate. This meant there was not much play space and very few gardens. However the houses themselves are comfortable and, for the most part, well cared for.

David Rowland was instrumental in starting an annual Blackbird Leys Festival in 1975. Over the years this has tried to build up the sense of community by bringing all the organisations together for a parade of decorated floats and a fete. It has also tried to highlight the various groups who meet weekly, by encouraging them to open their activities to the general public. The Festival starts with a service held alternately in Holy Family and Sacred Heart Churches and, in earlier years was preceded by a Parade of the uniformed organisations through the streets.

For the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977 there were street parties in various parts of the estate, with many families joining in. Some of this fellowship carried on for a time, with Christmas parties in the church hall and street outings. A group of people from one area of the estate formed a committee to raise money for a community hall. They worked very hard to raise the money, and eventually built the Jubilee '77 Hall in Sorrell Road.

During 1978 and 1979 public meetings were held which dealt with issues affecting the estate, such as traffic dangers, sports facilities, a proposed new gypsy caravan site, and a possible housing development. From these meetings it was agreed to set up a Neighbourhood Council. The brief was that it should be 'an elected council which was non-political and non-sectarian to speak with authority for the people of

Blackbird Leys'. The estate was divided into fourteen wards, and a steering committee was set up with at least one person from each Ward. Leaflets were delivered to every household on the estate with a nomination form, and voting took place on the 15th November 1980. The number of those who voted was low, but nearly every ward produced two representatives. The Ward representatives reported on any problems in their areas to the Neighbourhood Council, and these were then taken to either the City and County Councils. Over the years they have added weight to issues such as education and recreation, and were involved in the planning of the latest extension to the estate, including the siting of the link roads and amenities needed in this new area. The Neighbourhood Council was dissolved in 1991 when Blackbird Leys became a parish with its own Parish Council and most of the representatives remained in office.

Audrey Rowland initiated the Good Neighbour Scheme, which was designed to offer help with transport for hospital appointments, shopping, and visiting the housebound. This flourished with some twenty volunteers, then towards the end of 1978 Audrey wrote a letter to the church meeting asking permission for the Blackbird Leys Good Neighbour Scheme to use the front entrance room, toilets, and a small back room of the church, on one day a week to run a Friendship and Information Centre. The Church meeting agreed and so the Neighbourhood Centre began. Its original aims were (1) to be a friendly place where people could meet, talk and have a cup of coffee, (2) to give information and advice on a variety of topics and (3) to be a geographical base for the Good Neighbour Scheme.

After running this Project for eighteen months, Audrey again wrote to the Church Committee requesting use of the facilities over five days a week. In 1983 when the new part of the Church building was opened, the Neighbourhood Centre moved in to run a coffee bar every day, and operate an information desk with trained workers on social and welfare rights. The Centre is funded by a grant and operates independently from the church, although a number of church members are involved in the work.

Chapter 7

Looking to the future

In 1991 it would seem that the vision of a 'village' community has not happened. The estate is too big in both size and density. The 'village green' is there in the centre, but not many people use it, those who do are usually walking the dog. A few bring the children to play in the playgrounds. The uniformed organizations exist, Brownies, Beavers, Cubs, Scouts and Venture Scouts. The St John's Ambulance have attracted a number of young people and have a thriving membership. The Community Centre is now a social club with three public bars and the Sports Centre plays host to public meetings. Wesley Green School has had the builders in yet again, and a permanent building for the pre-school group has replaced the last remaining terrapin at Orchard Meadow School. The Adventure Playground in Cuddesdon Way has a brand new building, and strong climbing structures, including a frame shaped like a Blackbird, which attract a good number of youngsters, especially at holiday times.

The Church has had a new covering to the roof, after 10 years of discussion over what was needed to solve the problem of water leaking through the ceiling. The diocese eventually agreed to cover the cost, but money is still needed to improve the heating and lighting and valiant efforts at fundraising are being undertaken by the congregation.

August 1991 a group of 13 church members and Stephen spent a week at the URC Holiday Centre in Keld, North Yorkshire. It gave a whole new meaning to the Church outing and it is hoped to repeat the venture again next year. A strong link with the Roman Catholics at Sacred Heart Church was made on Sunday September 2nd 1990 when a group of 20 together with Father Eddie Butler came to the morning service at Holy Family bringing with them a Declaration signed by 90 of the congregation committing themselves to co-operate in the search for Unity. The Call to Unity was made by those worshipping at Holy Family, and a gift of a Missal was handed to Cora Spencer, the Church chairman. Following this service a group of members from Holy Family, including children from Junior Church, walked to Sacred Heart Church and, after being welcomed by Father Eddie, Cora Spencer handed over a Bible signed by members of Holy Family Church. The congregation then read the Call to Unity. At the beginning of 1991, after spending thirteen years in Blackbird Leys, Father Eddie was moved to a parish in South Stoke, and we were all sorry to see him go. Father Pat Armstrong, Parish Priest at Littlemore, covered during the interregnum, and Father Brendan Byrne has now been appointed to Sacred Heart Church.

In the time I have spent collating this history there have been considerable problems with cars being driven at night along Blackbird Leys Road at high speeds and executing hand-brake turns. During the summer of 1991 this escalated by people turning up to watch. In response to complaints from the residents the police arrested several of these sightseers. Unfortunately, the media filmed and reported these incidents, and once more the estate was in the headlines as being a terrible place to live. However, the media were surprised to find the area was, for the most part, well maintained and having reported on the problem of car theft and 'joy riding' they withdrew. The problems still remain, not only on the estate, but also nationally. The publicity having highlighted some of the problems may mean that something can be done for the young people who say there is nothing to do, possibly by allowing them to create activities themselves which will not totally disrupt the lives of others. Once again church members and clergy are working with the community to try to reach a solution. One positive action was a community service of reconciliation, which was preceded by the release of a huge net of balloons with messages from the children in support of 'their' estate.

Over the years visitors from far and wide have come to Holy Family, in particular we have strong connections with people in Finland, India, Ghana and the United States and during the recent troubles it was good to receive letters from friends who were thinking of us and praying for us.

I feel privileged to have been part of the vision linking the church and the community and hope that this booklet may help to strengthen those links.

Appendix A.

Those taking part in the service of Induction of Barry Jones in 1965 were:

Rev W J Coggan, Moderator of the West Midland Congregational Church

The Bishop of Oxford - Rt. Rev Harry Carpenter

Mrs Kathleen Dodd, Member of the Society of Friends

Rev Geoffrey Beck, Gen. Sec. of Coventry Council of Churches (former Minister of Summertown Congregational Church)

Mr Henry Towers, Secretary of Blackbird Leys Council

Rev John Thornton, Minister of St Columba's Presbyterian Church

Rev Sidney Crowe, Joint Chairman of Oxford Council of Churches, and Minister of John Bunyan Baptist Church, Cowley

Mr Jack Argent, Church Warden, Church of the Holy Family

Rev Mervyn Puleston, Priest Missioner, Church of the Holy Family

Rev John Strong, Worker Priest

Appendix B.

Nominations for members of a Sponsoring Body -June 1973 were:

Holy Family Church: Rev T Moore, Mrs S Barnes (until a Free Church Minister was appointed), Mr Jack Argent and Mr Henry Towers.

Anglican Church: The Bishop of Dorchester and the Rev Dr A O Dyson, Principal of Ripon Hall.

U.R.C.: Rev John Wilding and Dr AH Tomlinson.

Methodist Church: Rev Frank Bishop and Mr Ron Drake.

Baptist Church: Rev Dr B R White, Principal of Regents Park College, and Mr RE Leeves.

Society of Friends: Mrs K Dodd.

Observer from RC Church, Very Rev Monsignor Wilfred Doran

Appendix C.

The Presiding Ministers for the Induction Service and signing of the Declaration of Intent in 1974 were:

The Rt. Rev Kenneth Woollcombe, Bishop of Oxford, and President of the Oxford Council of Churches

The Rev Hugh Logan, General Superintendent, Central Area, Baptist Union

The Rev Douglas Smith, Moderator of the Wessex Area, United Reformed Church

The Rev Gordon Argyle, Chairman of the Oxford and Leicester District of the Methodist Church

The Rev Nigel Gilson, Minister of Wesley Memorial Methodist Church, Oxford, and Chairman of the Oxford Council of Churches and of the Blackbird Leys Sponsoring Body

The Rev Robert Brown, Minister of New Road Baptist Church, Oxford, and Vice-President of the Oxford Council of Churches

Leslie Taylor, Secretary of the Oxford Council of Churches

Fr. Peter Lloyd, Priest of Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church, Blackbird Leys.

A celebration of forty years of Holy Family Church

This is indeed something to celebrate!

One of the first ecumenical churches in this country, this was a brave and positive experiment in ecumenism, catching the vision of the recent Nottingham Faith and Order Conference. A new estate, it was felt, deserved to be served, not by separate congregations of Anglicans, Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists, Moravians, but by one church. The building was conceived by the architect, Colin Shewring, as the beating heart at the heart of the community. And so the beautiful heart-shaped sanctuary with its inverted paraboloid roof has been a distinctive focus for Christian life and witness in Blackbird Leys over the last forty years.

In this special publication, contemporary witnesses, Henry Towers, Peter Malton, Ruby Archer, sketch the birth of the church for us from their own different perspectives. From the very beginning, the ecumenical witness has gone hand in hand with involvement in the wider community. And it has always been undergirded by worship. This is a creative source of inspiration for talented liturgists, as Brian Wren testifies.

And more than this! We have, as James Ramsey indicates, a warm, heterogeneous, committed congregation whose generosity of spirit is in itself a cause for celebration. And so Margaret and Roger Burne bring us up to the present-day.

There is so much for which to give thanks, so much to celebrate so much for which to look forward. Under God's guidance, and trusting in his grace, we look forward to the future with confidence.

Fleur Houston

Forty Years On: Blackbird Leys then and now. By Henry Towers

The witness on the estate of Blackbird Leys as an ecumenical enterprise really begins on 29th September 1965 when "a young Congregational minister, the Rev Barry Jones, was inducted to be the Free Church minister on the estate, at a service attended by the Bishop of Oxford and representatives on many denominations in the locality".

Thus began one of the first ecumenical ventures in the UK of the sharing of witness and buildings. This owed much to three groups – to the congregation of Tyndale Church in the Cowley Road, who closed their own church and who saw that the need for witness was then greater on the new Blackbird Leys estate, already with 10,000 people by the early 1960's (a far bigger population at that time than either Thame or Witney); to the vision of Christians of several denominations in Oxford, notably the Rev Geoffrey Beck, who perceived that a large new estate needed a different approach to worship and witness; to the Anglicans who allowed the Church of the Holy Family to be dedicated and not consecrated, thus allowing the Free Church members to use the church building for worship.

Initially a small group of Free Church people met for worship in the narthex, and once a month joined with the Anglicans, but this was felt to be impracticable and quite soon the two congregations became one.

Forty years ago most of the people settling into homes on the estate were young and often with small children. Some of the new arrivals, though, came as a result of slum clearance in Oxford, primarily from the St Ebbes area, now known as Oxpens, and homes such as Windale House were set up for those who needed sheltered accommodation. At that time almost no houses were built with garages, car ownership being mostly a privilege of more favoured people. All the houses then were council owned, with the same difficulties in getting repairs and refurbishment completed then as now. Many had come to find employment at the Cowley motor works, then easily the biggest employer in Oxfordshire, whereas today it is the NHS. By 1972 it was reckoned that half of the children in Oxford City would be on the estate.

Now, those original people who have remained are almost all pensioners – “When forty winters shall besiege thy brow and dig deep trenches in thy beauty’s field”. Health provision was seriously bad. There was no Health Centre and the only GP on the estate refused to come out at night. For all its faults the NHS is in a far better shape than it was then.

The estate, though, remains isolated from the rest of Oxford, but its population of approximately 14,000 continues to grow, through the extension of Greater Leys, and it is possible in future that it will grow even further – beyond Grenoble Road, though it is perhaps unlikely that, ultimately, the local people will have much of a say on this.

It was good to see that the need for a Sports Centre was granted, a response to changing leisure patterns and needs, but despite being a much richer country economically, shopping facilities on the estate remain poor and there are still far too many families existing on Income Support. Economically we are still a seriously divided society.

Patterns of family relationships, too, are much more fluid than they were fifty years ago, sometimes presenting their own particular problems, and we are more culturally diverse, certainly to the enrichment of the church community where those whose families originally hailed from the West Indies have made a conspicuous contribution.

Across the years we at The Church of the Holy Family have been very fortunate with our clergy, still woefully underpaid, and who, with their families, have enriched the community, seen problems on the estate, and acted on them. The Advice Centre is but one example of their contribution. In worship we have benefited from having a freer approach to worship and experiment than many congregations; let us hope that in succeeding years it will be possible to join in worship more fully with the Roman Catholics.

Our Magazine reflects an increasing concern for the wider world, where problems remain as acute as ever – between rich and poor nations, and in conflict and lack of understanding between groups of people, and to this has been added the ever present,

creeping threat of climate change. Forty years ago we did not worry about wearing a hat outside when the sun shone.

Perhaps one way of measuring the contribution of the church over the last 40 years is to ask what might have happened had it not been there. In that case, Blackbird Leys and Greater Leys would have been much the poorer.

Henry Towers

From James Ramsey

I have many vivid memories relating to the Holy Family building. Of course roofs and drains are not usually pleasant matters, but they are essential, so we should give glory to God for them - and pass to other things. Perhaps I'll also pass over the times when the alarm, newly installed, would go off in the early hours, triggered probably by a spider or insect walking over a sensor (glory to God, of course, for spiders and insects). For me the interaction of sacred space and everyday community space was always significant - bringing trials and tribulations, certainly, but way more importantly, great joys and moments of spiritual and theological realisation. In the relationship of prayer and services at both ends of the building, there is true ecumenism. I came to know in practice what the Orthodox see as "the two Liturgies". However, this anniversary is specifically of the construction of the 'sacred' space ... well, where do I start with memories?

The church building is all sanctuary. Yet the dais exercises a powerful sense of where a 'different' kind of action takes place. The circular altar and font, and the angular lectern always had symbolic significance for me: a trio of gathering points, all made of the same stone, each an invisible pillar of Church. The building seems made to be full. When there is a major celebration or event, there is a wonderful sense of wholeness and participation; there are no awkward corners to be stuck behind. Nevertheless I remember someone observing how they didn't like the church because it was "full of corners". What did that mean? Perhaps it meant the pew ends, which produce spectacular bruises when you bang your knee on them. Or the (architecturally deliberate) slight difficulty of finding your way into the building. However, I also felt the remark referred paradoxically to the fact that there is nowhere in the church space where you can tuck yourself away, be invisible, hidden, private with God. I think for some people this creates a certain unease. Some of my most moving memories, though, are of prayer and discussion with perhaps just one or two people, held in the openness of that space, a sense of presence and potential for healing and renewal coming into the particular moment of our offering.

Whether it is such times - or yelling at skateboarders to get off the roof (which, to my amazement, they did), or noting young people's respect (yes, respect) for the building, or being arm-twisted by Ted Rose into buying another ornament from his magnificent stall, or singing 'Shalom' in every conceivable kind of hand-linked circle, ellipse, or practical illustration of chaos-theory - I treasure all that I received and shared during my time in Blackbird Leys. And I wish the church joy for the future, with many festal gatherings, quiet epiphanies and alleluias to come.

James

Forty-Five Years by Peter Malton

One of my earliest church recollections at Blackbird Leys is a picture in the Oxford Mail of a row of children sitting along the top of the piano in our house at 17 Blackbird Leys Road. This was our first attempt at a sort of Children's Church/ Sunday School venture.

Anne and I, and the children, had arrived at Blackbird Leys in 1960. I was the first 'Priest/Missioner' (as it was called) on this new housing estate, and was appointed by the Bishop of Oxford to do something for the spiritual needs of this new community. Strictly speaking, we were part of the Parish of Littlemore, and Martin Young (the Vicar of Littlemore) and John Betton (Vicar of St. Luke, Cowley) were enormously supportive.

We lived at 17 Blackbird Leys Road, which the City had provided for us. The house had just been built, but Blackbird Leys Road itself was not complete at all -being mainly mud and gravel at our end. I didn't own a car at that time, but by the time I did the road had been finished and I had somewhere to park!

There was no church building of any sort at the time. We held our first church services and meetings in people's houses and occasionally in the Health Centre (which had just recently been built).

The largest place to gather was in the recently built Redefield School. I remember a nativity play we did there, called "From Chaos to Crib", written by Anne, which involved a full-size photograph of a late-model car from Morris Motors. The Oxford Mail described the play as ". . . fire and thunder . . ."

At about the time that Windrush Tower was about to be built the Diocese of Oxford made money available for a wooden hall (which I had selected from a catalogue of some sort) to be built on the site already set aside for a church building. This wooden building was erected by the suppliers, but the foundations, plumbing, wiring, painting, etc. was a community effort, done, at cost, by wonderful people who appeared out of nowhere and offered to help. The chairs, I think, were a gift from Pressed Steel; the paint, I think, from Morris Motors. The hall was used for community bingo and Sunday services and baptisms and parties and meetings and social functions.

There are pictures of this hall, looking rather bleak, standing alone on a piece of grassland, just where the entrance to Holy Family Church now stands. When eventually the church itself was about to be built, the hall was officially dismantled (somewhat aggressively, by a local youth- group -much to the dismay of nearby residents who didn't know what was happening!) and moved to the other side of the site nearer the school, and nearer the then little-used new road called Cuddesdon Way.

I remember when the building of the present church actually started. Believing that the primary intention of Christian worship is to ensure the "people of God gathered around the altar of God", the architect of the church building (Colin Shewring) and I agreed that this could well be emphasised by building the altar first and then constructing the church building around it. This we did. In the middle of a plain, empty building site the heavy stone circle of the altar was firmly fixed in place. The

Archdeacon blessed it, in 1964, at a short ceremony following the usual Sunday morning service. The altar was then carefully covered with a protective shield, and church building commenced. When the church building was finished the altar cover was removed and we got on with the worship of God in our new building!

A suitable name for the church was considered and dealt with very early on. I had no personal favourite saint to dedicate the church to and as far as I remember no one else did either. Since the whole estate seemed primarily populated by young couples with young children, a dedication to 'the family' seemed appropriate. I suggested the dedication of the "Holy Family" (Jesus, Mary, and Joseph) to the bishop, and he agreed. It was as uncomplicated as that.

We started using the church as soon as the builders had finished their work, but we, as a family, left Blackbird Leys before the church was formally consecrated, and Mervyn Puleston took over.

When we first arrived at Blackbird Leys there were two older houses on the estate - houses that had been built long before the housing estate was even thought of. One of them belonged to Dr. David Thomas and his wife Jill. David and his family became good friends and regularly invited us to their home. I remember it had a swimming pool! The other house was the original farmhouse of the area. Mr & Mrs Hodnett lived there, and they frequently invited Anne and me and the children to an old fashioned Sunday dinner of roast beef with all the trimmings.

A small number of names remain special in my memory: Jack Argent, our first church warden, always so helpful and supportive; our first pianist in the church, a talented 16 year old, called Rosemary Young; various City and Diocese personalities like Derek Frith, the Archdeacon of Oxford the Venerable C. Witton Davies, Brigadier R.H.M. Hill. And there are many others whose contribution remains in my memory. Above all are the people who lived with us at Blackbird Leys and, although in many cases not being "churchgoers" at all in any traditional sense, helped develop a social and spiritual community when all the traditional bits were missing.

A Blackbird Leys 'Community Association' was formed early on - guided into being by the indomitable Derek Frith. I have in my possession a silver cigarette box, inscribed "To Peter Malton from Blackbird Leys Community Association 1964" given to me just before we left Blackbird Leys. It is now used as a communion-wafer box in our local village church, so "Blackbird Leys Community Association" figures in our weekly Eucharists!

There are, I hope, a few people reading this who remember Anne and the children and me from those days. We live today on a 100-acre farm in central Ontario in Canada. Twenty-five years ago we renamed it 'Blackbird Leys Farm' thereby remembering a very special period in our lives, surrounded by some very special people.

Peter Malton

From Ruby M. Archer

I started teaching in Blackbird Leys in 1965 when I became Deputy Head at Overmede Junior School. In 1973 it became a first school. Then in 1974 I became Head Teacher of Harebell First School which was next door. In 1980 Harebell and Overmede First Schools were amalgamated to become Pegasus First School and I was appointed its Head Teacher. I remained in that post until 1985 when I retired through ill-health as I lost my sight.

I enjoyed my twenty years working on the estate where I got to know many families. The schools also had a good relationship with the Church of the Holy Family, working with the Rev Tony Moore and the Rev Michael Doe. The church was used for our local music festivals. Many years we held our Harvest Festivals in the church, taking all produce donated over there to form a display and then taking it back to school to pack up into bags and then distribute to our elderly neighbours. It was also a good venue for carol services.

I do hope that your 40th Anniversary celebrations go well and I wish you every success for the future.

Ruby M. Archer

From Margaret and Roger Burne

We came to this Church approximately 18 years ago at a time of change in our spiritual life. We were delighted with the warmth of the welcome and the friendliness of the congregation, and although we did not live on the estate we did not feel as though we were "outsiders". We also felt that the Holy Spirit was here. Over the years we have gradually taken a more active interest in church affairs. In 1995 we were privileged to be able to share the celebration of our silver wedding here, even Father Christmas turned up!

We did not realise what an important part Holy Family would play in our lives. Roger is now in his second year of training for ordination. His calling for ordained ministry was nourished at Holy Family, spotted by James and warmly encouraged by Church members. We are very grateful for the support and prayers of everyone during our joys and woes. As we celebrate this 40th Anniversary of the church we thank God for guiding us to this place where we truly feel part of the Holy Family of God.

Margaret and Roger Burne

From Brian Wren

Friends - Sisters and brothers in Christ - The Church of the Holy Family was my spiritual home for nearly ten years. I treasure the experience of belonging to a lively, ecumenical, multicultural congregation where people felt free to share joys and sorrows in a wonderfully "un-English" way. Also, having long believed in the value of weekly worship including both Word and Table, it was a joy to experience its fullness and depth, week by week.

Here is a hymn I wrote for you, for New Year's Day 1978 (which happened to fall on a Sunday). I think we sang it! You may be interested to know that it has since been published in the ecumenical Australian hymnal, "Together in Song," and (here in the USA) in the hymnals of the United Methodist Church, Disciples of Christ, and United Church of Christ, and that it is quite widely sung.

This Is a Day of New Beginnings

Brian Wren Poetic Meter: 9.8.9.8.

- 1 This is a day of new beginnings,
time to remember, and move on,
time to believe what love is bringing,
laying to rest the pain that's gone.
- 2 For by the life and death of Jesus,
love's mighty Spirit, now as then,
can make for us a world of difference
as faith and hope are born again.
- 3 Then let us, with the Spirit's daring,
step from the past, and leave behind
our disappointment, guilt and grieving,
seeking new paths, and sure to find.
- 4 Christ is alive, and goes before us
to show and share what love can do.
This is a day of new beginnings;
our God is making all things new.

(Alternative verse 4, at communion written with the COTHF in mind)

In faith we'll gather round the table
to show and share what love can do.
This is a day of new beginnings;
our God is making all things new.)

Peace and hope in Christ!

Brian Wren

Brian Wren, Copyright © 1978 by Stainer & Bell Limited, London. All rights reserved. Used by permission. Written January 1978 for the Church of the Holy Family, Blackbird Leys Oxford, England. Revised into its present form in 1995. The first line of the original version was, "Is this a day of new beginnings?" The tune BEGINNINGS by Carlton Young is in Brian Wren's 1995 hymn collection "Faith Renewed" available from Stainer & Bell Limited."

GATHER ROUND

sunday august 2. 1964. altar dedication prayers

Dearly beloved in the Lord, we are gathered together here to give thanks to Almighty God and to dedicate this Altar stone around which we humbly trust, a building may in due time be consecrated as a house of God.

And first, let us praise God's holy Name for the mercy and goodness in which he has so far prospered our handiwork; and let us further devoutly pray, that He will of his good providence bless all who in any way contribute to its completion; that He will protect from danger those who may be engaged in the building; and that He will send his blessing upon our undertaking.

Almighty Lord God, who, although the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee, yet do vouchsafe to dwell within thy Church here on earth; Visit we beseech thee, with thy loving kindness, this place on which will rise a building for thy people the Church and a shelter for this Altar stone. Let not this stone be profaned to any impiety or put to any common use and grant that our desire may be accomplished that thy servants may see thy work and their children thy glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, who art the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His Person; the one foundation and the chief Corner Stone; bless what we now do around this Altar stone, placed in thy name, and be thou, we beseech thee the beginning, the increase, and the end of this our work, which is undertaken to the glory of thy Name, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit livest and reignest, one God, world without end.

Let the building which will now arise round this Altar be evermore the Temple of the most high God. Here let true faith and fear of God with brotherly love ever abide. May the Holy Family of Jesus Mary and Joseph be our Inspiration. May their prayers and those of all the Saints be our aid, and may the Holy Sacrament of this Altar be the source of all our strength; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

MERVYN PULESTON priest missionary

The best way to understand this Church is to go outside and have a good look round. What you will see is a modern housing estate, well planned but looking what it is – a housing estate., consisting of houses, shops, a pub, health centre and community centre, surrounded on two sides by a large car factory where a good many of the people who live on the estate work.

To most of the people the church means very little, why should it? In the past the church has largely through its own fault lost their allegiance. But we believe that these people are the children of God, and that they need the Gospel, their lives are

incomplete without it. What this church building is here to do is to help the Christian Community who are “The Church”, to live out in their daily lives the Gospel in terms that are relevant to the people living on the estate.

The building is a place where the Church gathers every week round the table in the fellowship of the Eucharist, and then goes out into the world outside and is the Church in the world – the hands, the eyes, the feet of Christ, Christ in the world. The Church building is designed to give the feeling of a family gathered round the table, not for us the priest separated by nave, chancel and screen.

sunday

You must look at the building in the light of what goes on in it. It is no good seeing it just on a weekday when it is empty. The only time to see the building and really understand its meaning is when the Church – God’s people – are gathered in it for the parish Eucharist on a Sunday morning.

a table in our midst

The creation of a combined Eucharistic and Baptismal room for the Anglican Community in this place started at a table in a council house. If that table were the Altar in a building, then it would be possible to decide how much space was needed around it for the actions of the Priest on behalf of the people. A living liturgy will always be changing. The space required could be in any direction around the Altar. (1)

Anglicans put Word and Sacrament on the same level. To visually symbolise this fact so must we. How big is a clergyman – how much room does he take up at a pulpit, how much room to walk round it from any direction? (2)

If we are to symbolise the relationship we can place them side by side. (3) Better still to fuse them together. (4)

Baptism is a public ceremony, a Sacrament with promises made which must be heard by the people. Baptism must take place in its own sanctuary where all can see and hear, but not so that its position robs Altar and Pulpit of their importance. Here it is among the people. Some think the font should be near a door as symbolising the entrance to the church. We are thinking of the church as people and not a building, so our font is by the entrance to the place occupied by the people. (5) Seat 300 around so that all can not merely see but take part in the services, draw a line round the outside to keep the weather out, and this is the Church of the Holy Family, Blackbird Leys.

It is easy to say these things when the building is almost complete. They took hundreds of hours of thought and discussion. The Altar must look like an Altar so it should be of stone. It must look at the same time like a table so it must have legs. But it must be a very special table. The Altar and its setting must be simple and uncomplicated as were the houses, the health centre, and the wooden hut where the congregation formerly worshipped together. The materials should be rugged rather

than sophisticated, stone and brick. The place of Baptism must symbolise death and resurrection. It is tomb shaped, down two steps to symbolise the descent into the Jordan. The pebbles and freestone dug from the foundations of the building remind us of the Jordan shore. There is running water here to symbolise the rebirth, the paschal candle to light in rejoicing. The building must be at one time a sanctuary, and yet look out to the world. The walls enclose, and yet all round through the slit louvers we see the homes of the people. The Priest as he stands at the Altar only needs to glance to his left to see the tall block of flats rising above the building to be aware of the people he serves. A feeling of space of breadth to worship, a roof which unites the worshippers who take part in the liturgy. No vast heights here to inhibit but a low gentle shape to unite the congregation in their common purpose. We have entered first the Atrium courtyard with its garden, up the steps under the cross and into the Narthex. All the time the curved shape of the church building is inviting us to enter.

The building is incomplete without its worshippers. This is no ecclesiastical art gallery, its beauty will be in what takes place day by day, Sunday by Sunday, year by year to the greater glory of God.

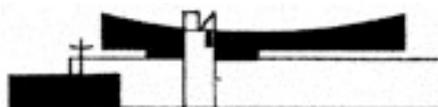
priests and workmen

Peter Malton (5) was living at 17, Blackbird Leys Road when we first met round his sitting room table to discuss the possibilities of designing and erecting a church building for the estate. This small committee included the Architect Colin Shearing (2) Jack Argent the Missioners Warden, without whose enthusiasm we would not have got so far so soon.

Real guidance and co-operation from the Archdeacon of Oxford the Venerable C. Witton-Davies and Brigadier RHM Hill, secretary to the Bishop of Oxford's appeal for new churches who financed the operation, smoothed a tortuous path into an easy way, and we always had the help and interest of the Bishop of Oxford.

When the time came to build, of the three contractors finally tendering, the quotation of Messrs Marshall-Andrew was accepted. It was impossible at that time to know how closely it was going to be possible for them to work to some of our unusual needs (Build the Altar first, build the church around it – all measurements taken from the centre of the Altar) Mr Bennett of Hume, Tottenham and Bennett was our structural engineer, and so complicated was some of the steelwork of the ring beam on which the roof is supported that he enlisted the help of a computer at Southampton University. The timber roof itself was erected by Gardner and Company whose skill and speed amazed us all.

There were never any real problems that could not be surmounted, and we have to thank Charles Donald, Marshall Andrew's site foreman for representing his company so well. He was at all times to be seen in the thick of the construction, and some of his own perfect brickwork is to be found inside the building. Under his leadership the men who have laboured on this building site gave of their very best – Jim the ganger (4) George the carpenter (8) Phil with his expert team of bricklayers, Lyle the plumber



(7) and many others. Each month the Quantity Surveyors Don Richardson and Ray Piper (6) came down to the site to sort out the finances of the job. Their wisdom has kept our costs to a reasonable level.

Shortly before the completion of the building Mervyn Puleston (1) came to Blackbird leys to take over as Priest Missioner from Peter Malton. So clear was the image passed on to him that his help and encouragement have been a real extension of the work of the committee. As the days drew near to the dedication, the work of craftsmen such as Albert Brooker, Silversmith (9) was being finally polished, the seats



of the Norbury Joinery Company dusted, and the fine Clipsham stone Altar, Pulpit and Font made by Axtell and Perry in Oxford given a last look, the building is nearly complete. The moment YOU enter will be the moment of its completion. Without you it lacks the purpose for which this labour was undertaken.