



Just a typical minister's life

Well-known resident Michael Davies has been a resident of Lindfield for more than 19 years, but his life's work spans the globe in various roles as URC Minister...

Michael was born in Harrow in 1933 and brought up in the Eastcote/Pinner area in Middlesex. From 1950-55 he was articled in the City of London as an accountant and company secretary, but then felt the call to Christian ministry and from 1955-59 trained to be a Presbyterian minister at Westminster College, Cambridge.

In 1959 he married Rosemary Davison, whom he met in the youth group at their home church St Andrews, Eastcote, and was inducted Assistant Minister at St Columbas Church, Worthing with oversight of a new congregation being started at Rustington. This was an exciting time there, as in six years it grew from 25 people to 200 members and built its church and halls. In 1962 he was sent to Haywards Heath to explore the setting up of a Presbyterian Church and actually preached at Lindfield Congregational Church – but they did not proceed in view of the impending union of Presbyterians and Congregationalists. In 1963 Michael, Rosemary and their new first baby daughter, Heather, enjoyed a three months exchange ministry in Illinois, USA, travelling there and back in style on the old Cunard Queens.

1965 saw the family, which now included second daughter, Jacky, move to Wallasey, Merseyside, where Michael became minister at Egremont Church, a big cathedral-like edifice with 400 members, overlooking the River Mersey and the city of Liverpool. Whilst there son Peter joined the family.

In complete contrast, 1970 saw them all moving back to London when he was appointed Secretary-General of Help the Aged, then a new charity appeal which passed its first £1 million annual income whilst he was there. It was also in this period that it instigated what is now the largest not-for-profit Housing Association in the country – the Anchor Group. More recently, of course, Help the Aged has joined with Age Concern to become Age UK, a major national charity.

In 1972 the United Reformed Church (URC) was founded when Congregationalists and Presbyterians united. Michael joined the headquarters staff team as national Youth Secretary at a pioneering time for the new church. Young people were given a great

deal of say in running their own show. FURY was founded – the Fellowship of United Reformed Youth – and had its own annual Assembly. There was a big programme of youth activities, camps and conferences and a boating event Anchors Aweigh! on the Norfolk Broads each Easter, with up to 12 large cruisers and 100 teenagers, which he ran for twenty years.

During this time Michael was chair of British Council of Churches Youth Unit and a member of the Executive of the Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe, the only youth organisation which operated both sides of what was then the 'iron curtain'. So he joined the 'ecumenical jet set' with interesting trips to meetings in such places as Finland, Odessa, Northern Ireland (in the midst of the troubles) and Rome. One vivid memory was a visit to the Buchenwald Concentration Camp in East Germany.

In 1978 he was appointed Moderator of the Thames North Province of the URC, caring for 168 churches and over 100 ministers in churches in north London and the home counties. The 12 Moderators from England & Wales met monthly and were once described as 'bishops without the purple, the paraphernalia or the power'. Their main role was helping vacant churches find ministers and giving leadership in mission.

After twelve years in this post he admits he would have liked a 'nice, quiet country pastorate' to look after for his final assignment, whilst he hoped Rosemary would further her teaching career. But, as he explained: "The Lord has a great sense of humour." In 1990 he was elected Assistant General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva. This was a complete contrast to all which had gone before, with his original training coming to the fore. They wanted a mixture of pastor to the 344 staff and administrator to look after the funds and infrastructure. It was a very demanding time. The Berlin Wall coming down had considerable repercussions for the WCC, as did other current economic constraints. Basically based in Geneva, he was also given responsibility for liaison with North East Asian churches (Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan and Korea – with the UK and Australia thrown in) – which meant a good deal of time in the air and visiting church leaders and headquarters in those lands. The WCC also had major world Assemblies in 1991 (in Canberra at the height of the first Gulf War) and 1998 (Harare at a difficult time of unrest in Zimbabwe). Each had five or six thousand participants and were major undertakings, even without the political events overshadowing them.

Back home in ostensible 'retirement' he continued serving the WCC as a consultant in the UK 1997-99, as well as being roped in to a number of other different jobs. He served as Treasurer of the Free Church Council 1998-2003, President of the URC East Sussex District Council 2001-03 and held various jobs for the Southern Synod based in Croydon. In 2008 he was appointed a Trustee of the URC and regularly travels to their Church House in Tavistock Place to assist in such tasks as helping arrange the URC's biennial General Assembly, undertaking the annual Risk Management Review for the church's central administration and overseeing a £7m centenary makeover for Westminster College in Cambridge, where he trained in the 1950s.

But it has not all been church related activity! Almost as soon as they moved to Lindfield both banks closed on consecutive days and Michael served on a small group trying unsuccessfully to acquire the former Barclays Bank for community purposes. Then there was the saga of the postal address – where Royal Mail obstinately refused to acknowledge the existence of Lindfield and to include it in our postal address. He chaired the Lindfield Postal Action Group, with the late Lord Peter Blaker as a very active campaign President, until eventually good sense prevailed and that battle was won.

So he found himself a Lindfield Parish Councillor 2003-11, chairing the Finance and General Purposes Committee and also a Parish Council Action Group battling against the closure of all the village public conveniences threatened by MSDC!

A lifelong interest has been railways, and he works in spare moments on Uxbridge Junction, a 00 Gauge model of an imaginary M25 type railway by-passing London on the North West. In the 12" to the foot gauge he is secretary to the Sussex & Coastway Division of Railfuture (the Railway Development Society), which is trying to get the Uckfield to Lewes line reinstated and Marshlink (Hastings to Ashford) electrified. Sadly he suspects it will be his grandchildren that will be the first to reap any benefit from these efforts.