Birmingham Baptist Churches Exploring their Black History Project

Church 6: Six Ways Erdington Baptist Church
Story: 'Being a Good Neighbour'

Authors: Gale Richards with Marcia Smith, Frances Taylor, and Morine Burrell-Banton.

The founding of the church

Erdington Baptist Church (later renamed Six Ways Erdington Baptist Church) was formed on 7 April 1878. 'Erdington was then a small peaceful farming district. The railway had only just been constructed' and there 'was only one paved road…and a few side streets – no paved footpaths.' However, by the late 1890s Erdington was proving to be a popular place for businessmen to live.[1]

Early engagement with Black people

By the early 20th century, through the help of the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS), the church was sending members out to serve Black and Brown people overseas, in places like the Congo–Zaire (1906) and Ceylon-Sri Lanka (1912).[2]

[1] *Erdington (Six Ways) Baptist Church Birmingham 1878-1978*, Church Anniversary Booklet, p.5, p.7.
[2] *Erdington (Six Ways) Baptist Church Birmingham 1878-1978*, Church Anniversary Booklet, p.9.

By the 1950s, the church found itself considering a call to welcome migrants/immigrants from Commonwealth countries, especially from the Caribbean. This is evident in church members' meeting minutes dated 9 September 1957, which refer to a letter being received from 'The Birmingham Christian Social Council' urging churches across the city to be aware of 'coloured people' in their midst, and recommending a list of eight guidelines for the churches to follow, in order to be able to offer an appropriate welcome to these migrants/immigrants.[3] These guidelines were entitled 'The Churches and the Coloured People',[4] and it must be acknowledged that they were seen as pioneering at the time, but with hindsight, they were not as far-reaching as many today would wish. For example, there is no encouragement to seek to learn from the cultures of migrant/immigrants within the guidelines, or to challenge any systematic racial discrimination migrants/immigrants might be experiencing.

Black people beginning to worship at the church

Oral history accounts suggest that a number of Black people from the Caribbean were regularly worshipping at the church (although not formally coming into membership) from at least the early 1960s. However, the first formal reference found to a Black person coming into membership at the

[3] Erdington Baptist Church, Church Members' Minutes book 1929 to 1960, pp. 400–401.
[4] The eight guidelines were as follows: The attitude of Christians should be one of simple friendliness, being neither frigid, fussy nor hearty. Extremes are barriers; Coloured people feel the need to be invited to the homes of Christians on the basis of continuing friendship (Not one visit only); They appreciate being invited and (brought) to church groups and organisations; Those doing the inviting should not be put off or disappointed by failures on the part of their guests to turn up; It would be helpful if churches could provide facilities for coloured people to meet in their own groups, in addition to taking their full part in the life of the churches; Coloured members of the congregation value invitations to help in church life, e.g. as a steward, sidesman, or in the choir; Christians should consciously exercise good manners in their day to day contacts with coloured people, e.g. on buses, in shop queues, etc.; We should remember that our coloured friends are often disillusioned with England as they find it. We should use every opportunity to help them see the good side.

church is 22 March 1964. Church members' meeting minutes of that date refer to a Mr J Ogbeide transferring his church membership from the Church of the Redeemer on 22 March 1964. Whilst his ethnicity is not mentioned, his surname suggests (and so it is assumed) that he was Nigerian.

There is clear evidence that by the 1960s, the church was actively involved in initiatives designed to welcome migrants/immigrants. Firstly, there is reference to the minister of the church from 1963-1968, Revd Brian Harrison, holding the role of Chairman of the Erdington and District Inter-Racial Council, that issued and distributed a leaflet through the community entitled 'Good Neighbours in Erdington'. Secondly, there is evidence of an inter-racial playgroup (believed to be the first to be named as that in England) meeting at the church. It is during this period that the church was involved in these initiatives, that significant numbers of Black people from the Caribbean are noted as beginning to worship at the church.[5]

There is also evidence of the church supporting the efforts (including financial) of the West Midland Baptist Association's *Birmingham District Executive Committee* and the Birmingham *BMS Auxiliary Executive Committee* to bring over a minister from Jamaica, in 1964. The church members' minutes of 1 April 1963 refer to a letter being received concerning the need to help 'coloured people in Birmingham', that suggested it would be good to raise funds to bring over a 'West Indian'[6] pastor for a period of time, to work amongst the 'coloured people'. The letter estimated it would require churches to contribute something like £10

[5] *Erdington (Six Ways) Baptist Church Birmingham 1878-1978*, Church Anniversary Booklet, p. 21.
[6] At the time the term 'West Indian' was a term commonly used for people from the Caribbean.

each, to make this possible. The minutes record the deacons as supporting the proposal and the church members approving it.[7]

First Black church members

Despite all the aforementioned efforts to welcome migrants/immigrants, it is not until the 1970s, that references are found to Black Caribbean people (many of whom who had been worshipping at the church for years) starting to formally come into membership at the church. For example, Lincoln Morrison in 1972, Mayvil Farquaharson, Dass Duncan in 1977, and Gloria Richards in 1978. The more detailed accounts of the experiences of Lincoln Morrison and Gloria Richards who went on to become the church's first Black deacons, in 1974, and 1984 respectively, shed some light on some of the reasons for this. Namely, it seems some church members were more welcoming of migrants/immigrants than others. Gloria's story highlights that when she came to worship services at the church in the 1960s, some church members did not greet Black people or shake their hands, and Black people when deemed worthy of a role in the life of the church, it was for behind-the-scenes roles not the upfront ones.

Furthermore, Gloria only started attending the church in the first place because of an invitation to Gloria's daughter Angela from a friendly white neighbour, to attend Girls' Brigade, at the church. Until then, Gloria had long feared she might not be welcomed at the church, and so had stayed away.

[7] Erdington Baptist Church, Church Members' Minutes book 02 Jan 1961-16 Jan 1983, pp. 73–74.

A Church of Sanctuary

Through the pioneering and prophetic efforts of individuals like Lincoln, Gloria, and many others, the church in more recent decades (and to this day) has been known for its hospitality and welcome towards migrant/immigrants, of Black and other minoritised ethnic groups, in the city. This was formally recognised when in 2019, the church was awarded Church of Sanctuary status, by City of Sanctuary UK.[8]

This welcome from the church to migrants/immigrants over many decades has come in the form of initiatives such as those for older people, Come and Meet Each Other – also known as CAMEO, led by and for people of all ethnic backgrounds, offering culturally inclusive activities, and English Classes for people who have newly arrived in the country. This hospitality and welcome have extended to opportunities for all to worship at the church, as part of multi-ethnic church services marking things like Racial Justice Sunday, and Black History Month, to, providing space for diaspora groups and congregations to meet together for mutual support as they navigate life in England.

First Black ministers

The church called its first Black minister in 2014, Gale Richards, who served as a minister-in-training alongside the lead minister, Gerard Goshawk. She then briefly served as an associate minister, before leaving

[8] See: Baptist Times 'First Baptist church awarded Church of Sanctuary status', 19 November 2019. Available at: https://www.baptisttimes.co.uk/Articles/559926/First_Baptist_church.aspx#:~:text=Six%20Ways%20Baptist%20Church%20in,all%2C%20especially%20those%20seeking%20sanctuary.

in 2016, to lead a church in Cambridge, and went on to be the Baptist Union of Great Britain's first Black woman Regional Minister. In 2015, the church also supported Mark Francis-Green, a Black man, to plant and lead a Baptist church a few miles away, in the Castle Vale area of Birmingham.

Faith at work in the Black History of the church

It is clear that Jesus' challenge to his followers to love their neighbour near and far (e.g. in the Bible verses, Matthew 22:37–39), has been one that has been central to the life of this church. Perhaps most notably through embracing the 1957 guidelines to welcome migrants/immigrants to the city, and the church's distribution of the 'Good Neighbours in Erdington' leaflet in the 1960s.

It is a church that has learnt – including through the initial pioneering and prophetic efforts of many Black people – to meet people where they are at, and open its doors for people to come in and get any help and support they need. This has been recognised by the church being awarded 'Church of Sanctury' status.

It is a church that has ultimately chosen to focus on the vision of heaven in the Bible, as one made up of people of all ethnicities, and sought to help usher in a foretaste of that vision.

September 2026

Copyright: Creative Commons license BY (Attribution 4.0 International)
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

References

Baptist Times ‘First Baptist church awarded Church of Sanctuary status’, 19 November 2019.

Birmingham Baptist Churches Exploring their Black History Project’ oral history interview with Angela Richards, 7 August 2025, conducted by Gale Richards and Marcia Smith.

Birmingham Baptist Churches Exploring their Black History Project’ oral history interview with Diane Scrannage, 19 November 2025, conducted by Gale Richards and Frances Taylor.

Birmingham Christian Social Council ‘The Churches and the Coloured People’ 1957.

Erdington Baptist Church, Church Members’ Minutes book 1929 to 1960.

Erdington Baptist Church, Church Members’ Minutes book 02 Jan 1961-16 Jan 1983.

Erdington (Six Ways) Baptist Church Birmingham, 1878-1978.

Erdington Inter-Racial Council, ‘Good Neighbours in Erdington’.

Erdington Baptist Church Members’ Roll.