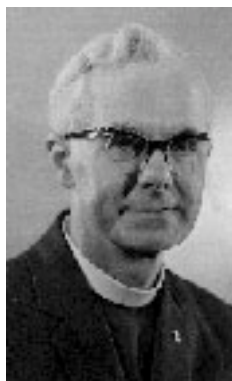


A Sending Church

Rev John Lyons

After a short vacancy, the church made a call to Rev John Lyons of Victoria Place Baptist Church in Glasgow, and he was inducted to the ministry in Falkirk on 8th and 9th May, 1955. John Lyons was born in Stalybridge, Cheshire, in 1915, the last of five children. His parents were Christians and his father was a lay preacher. He



became a Christian at the age of 16. After he left school he worked for Prudential Assurance Co. He was an accomplished violinist, and played in concert halls before the war. He married Anne Hawley in April 1940. Not long after the start of the war he was enlisted into the Royal Navy and spent five years of the war mainly in submarines as a radar mechanic. It was during leave on shore that he was influenced by Baptists, and was baptised in Rothesay Baptist Church. At the end of the war he felt the call to the ministry and, giving up his work in insurance, he was educated for the ministry at Glasgow University and the Scottish Baptist College. His first pastorate was at Victoria Place Baptist in Glasgow where he was from 1950 until 1955. He stayed there until after the Billy Graham Crusade that year, as he wanted to welcome any new converts into the church. The minutes of Victoria Place Baptist record that "Mr Lyons spoke of how very happy he had been in Victoria Place. He was very sorry to be leaving

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as it was his first charge after leaving College”.

Days of Opportunity

At his induction service to Falkirk Baptist he said, “It will be our endeavour to serve you to the best of our ability, with whatever talents we have, in the years that lie ahead”. He continued, “I firmly believe that we are living in a day of tremendous opportunity. This is the moment for which we have been praying and waiting patiently. The world is standing with hands empty and tremendous courage will be necessary.”. He went on to say that it would not be easy, but they would have to speak in the language of the man in the street in a way in which he would understand. The same Gospel would be used, but in a different presentation, and that would need courage.

One of the first acts of Mr Lyons ministry was to encourage those members who were wage-earners to give a weeks' wages to clear the bond of £500 still owed by the church. It was a time when earnings were rising, and Prime Minister Harold MacMillan's remark “You've never had it so good” had become a national slogan. Some members can recall taking part in this giving, and the debt was quickly cleared off. For the first time since the late 1920s a period of financial stability began. In 1956, the church required a new heating system and again the members raised the finance required. Mr Lyons felt strongly that the church should try never to be in debt. The early years of his ministry at Falkirk was a time of spiritual growth, both in numbers attending and in church activities. A Girls Life Brigade was started, under the leadership of Helen Kennedy, and later a Boys Life Brigade. Mr Lyons was interested in showing Christian films (he had shown some films while minister at Victoria Place Baptist), and a number of films were shown in the church around this time.

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He bought a car to help with his ministerial duties, which the church gave him £1 per week to help run! One of his interests was sweet-pea growing, and he won prizes at local horticultural shows.

Visitation

Mr Lyons was keen on door-to-door work, and encouraged the congregation to take part in this ministry. The church was involved with Visitation Evangelism, a venture of the Baptist Union of Scotland from 1956 to 1959. In December 1958 Mr Lyons wrote the following article in the Scottish Baptist Magazine : “We have just completed another visitation of the district. Each night for a fortnight 25 workers went out and visited over 1000 homes. Of these, 169 have no church connection. Immediately the campaign was over I sent out a letter thanking each one who had taken part, and invited them to be a member of a visitation committee which would be responsible for the 169 homes where there was no church connection. The response was uplifting - 18 people have now undertaken to visit the 169 homes once a month. Last Sunday we had 9 new people with us. The church has been richly blessed, and we are praying that many of these 169 will come to know Christ as Saviour and Lord”.

He arranged visitation of the multi-storey flats built in Callendar estate in the mid 1960s, when 700 homes were visited. Mr Lyons is remembered as a good visitor, and visited the members of his congregation regularly. Both he and Mrs Lyons knew the congregation and their families as friends, and would often take the church flowers to the sick and housebound after the church service. Their daughter Kathleen, and her friends from High School, formed a powerful nucleus for the Youth Fellowship along with the young people who had grown up in the church.

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Mr Lyons supported Baptist Union initiatives such as Visitation Evangelism. Another was the Stewardship Campaign in 1963 when the members were encouraged to think of their responsibility to the fellowship in terms of Time, Talent & Treasure, and asked to dedicate these things to the Lord. In 1965, he spent a month in the United States as part of an exchange between Scottish and American Baptist churches, when Rev Westmoreland came to Falkirk. Mr Lyons was a leading figure in the Leighton Ford Campaign in Falkirk and a number of members were involved in this outreach. The church was also involved in the WIN (Witness Involvement Now) school of evangelism in 1975. This was a Baptist Denominational programme in lay training for personal evangelism. Mr Lyons hoped it would help involve the church in witnessing to family, friends, and the wider community. Around thirty people took part in the school. It proved to have been a worthwhile venture, and Mr Lyons commented on a deepening in the spiritual life of those who had taken part.

Mr Lyons was a keen traveller, and led parties to Austria, Switzerland, Holland, and several times to Israel. During his holidays he would often travel to the islands to preach. Kathleen Lyons too was keen on travelling. She went to Peru at the beginning of 1968 and returned home in 1971. While she was there she taught in a girls school - Colegio San Silvestre - and also ran Scripture Union clubs and camps, and played the piano in a Baptist church in Lima. She travelled extensively all over South America and the Caribbean. She recalls how her main reason for going was to see the world.

Church growth is partly due to ministerial leadership, preaching and pastoral visitation, but

“Under his influence a number of members went into full-time Christian service”

“I Will Build My Church”

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John & Valerie Furmage

also measured in terms of warm fellowship and congregational co-operation, as well as in baptisms, church membership and giving. One aspect of Falkirk Baptist church growth has been the steady sending out of full-time Christian workers from the church. In August 1967 Sandy Greig was inducted to the pastorate of Lochgilphead Baptist Church. He was the first of what are commonly referred to as Mr Lyons' "Boys in the Ministry". Under Mr Lyons' influence, a

number of members went into full-time Christian service. Others who became missionaries or ministers were John & Valerie Furmage, James Clarke, Cliff Roseweir and Bill Stirling. Bill Ferguson, Douglas & Dorothy Smith, and Arthur & Wilma Hembling all came into membership during his ministry, and later went into full-time Christian service. Arthur Hembling took over the leadership of the Youth Fellowship which proved to be significant not only for Christian



Sandy Greig



James Clarke

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youth work in the town, but also proved influential in the church over a number of years. Arthur has kindly submitted an article for inclusion in this book, recalling his years of leading the Youth Fellowship, and reflecting on God's call to him to the ministry.

John & Valerie Furmage's work in Brazil with the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) has mostly been in the South Western Association of the State of Parana. Since they started working there in 1971 they have served in Pata Branco, Dois Vizinhos and Palmas, focussing mainly on church planting and building up an Association-wide ministry of support and encouragement to the pastors and fellowships. John & Valerie returned to the UK, to Preston, in 1991 when John was called to the pastorate of Fishergate Baptist Church. However, after an invitation from the South Western Association of the State of Parana, John & Valerie felt that God was once again calling them to Brazil to return to the work they were doing when they left in 1991. John & Valerie have been back in Brazil since September 1996.



Bill Stirling



Cliff Roseweir



Douglas and Dorothy Smith



Bill Ferguson

Music

Mr Lyons, who was very fond of music, often had the choir and organist on the platform each Sunday morning and evening to lead the worship.

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The organists during his ministry were Alex Braid, Hume Waddell, and Olive Robb. Olive Robb became organist in February 1972 as Hume Waddell had resigned the year before. As part of her acceptance letter to the position of church organist, Olive Robb assured the church that she would “seek always to serve the church faithfully and well at the organ, in all the activities of the church, and to bring blessing to the congregation in her playing”. And in 1972 the church also received a visit from a former member, Rev JJ Brown, in his role as President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland.

The church recognised the faithfulness of John Lyon’s ministry in the town by giving him a ‘love gift’ of £500 to help him buy a new car, recognising that the use of his car was almost entirely for his ministerial duties. John Lyons celebrated 25 years in the ministry in 1975, the same year that Mrs Lyons was National President of the Women’s Auxiliary. In 1980 he celebrated 25 years of ministry in Falkirk. Later that year he resigned as minister of the church due to ill health. He had been unwell the previous year and required a four month break from his ministerial duties. He retired from Falkirk Baptist on 25th October 1980 after 30 years in pastoral ministry.

During his ministry there was an atmosphere of reverence, peace and worship in church services. The children sat in the front rows from the beginning of the service on Sunday mornings, until they went out to the Sunday School just before the sermon. John Lyons was a sound, godly man. He was outward looking, traditional, faithful. His ministerial emphasis was on Biblical exposition, prayer, and pastoral care. He was a firm leader, and insisted that everything in the church should be done orderly and properly. The foundation he laid in the church and in the lives of the members

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is still there today, and many look back to his ministry with deep gratitude and affection. He involved himself in the wider work of the Baptist denomination, serving as convener of the Evangelistic Committee and was deeply involved in the work of the Ministerial Recognition Committee. After their retirement, Mr & Mrs Lyons and Kathleen moved to Lenzie to live, and became members of Kirkintilloch Baptist Church. Following another stroke, Mr Lyons bore the limitations that had followed with dignity and courage. He died on 18th February 1986, aged 70 years. At his funeral service Rev A Brunton Scott, the minister of Kirkintilloch Baptist, said that John Lyons testified to the validity and power of the Christian Gospel after his retirement as he did as a young sailor witnessing in the open air in Rothesay. He spoke of Mr Lyons' interest in music and harmony, and his enthusiasm for photography (he had won a number of cups and awards for his work in the camera club in Falkirk). He said that this meant Mr Lyons appreciated symmetry, balance and perspective. In an age of extremes, Mr Lyons knew there was an importance in the balance and symmetry of gospel truth, and he had brought to the whole of his ministry the perspective of Biblical theology.



Presentation of a pearl ring to Miss Helen Kennedy on attaining 30 years service as a deacon (1978). Pictured are Rev John Lyons, Bill Black, Helen Kennedy and Mrs Anne Lyons.