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Building for the Future (4).

THE Westbury-on-Trym Baptist Church was blitzed into existence! Following the destruction of the beautiful building of the Tyndale Baptist Church in an air raid, the members of that Church had to determine whether they would, when opportunity occurred, rebuild on the existing site, or establish a Church in a new area. With characteristic enterprise they decided to do both, and the Westbury Baptist Church is the "new area" part of their decision.

A site was secured in a residential district of good property. Two Civil Defence huts were purchased and transferred to the site; these were beautifully decorated and furnished by the generosity of the Tyndale people. In March, 1946, these premises were opened for Services. It should be added here that for a year or so Sunday School had been held in the home of the Rev. Henton Davies, and in certain other homes as occasion demanded.

The larger of the huts had a seating capacity of 200, but no one could predict what kind of response might be forthcoming from the neighbourhood. In fact, however, the immediate response was encouraging. Some forty or fifty people attended the Services, and approximately the same number of scholars presented themselves for membership of the Sunday School. The work was organised by a joint-committee representing the Tyndale Baptist Church and local adherents of the new Cause.

The pulpit was supplied by local Baptist Ministers, pending the return from the Forces of the Rev. J. I. Carlyle Litt, who had agreed to undertake pastoral charge for a year, upon the termination of his duties as Army Chaplain, which came about at the end of May, 1946.

The foundations of success had already been laid by those who had initiated the work, and almost from the very beginning the Cause prospered far beyond what anyone had dared to hope. The Sunday School grew rapidly; congregations increased Sunday by Sunday. The hundred chairs which had been provided were very soon inadequate; and again after a short while the fifty additional chairs which had had to be purchased proved insufficient, and yet more had to be purchased.

Nor only in numbers did the Church prosper; a great enthusiasm gripped the people. "Westbury" became a word to conjure with. There were cases of people actually removing in

order to be nearer the Church; and the writer knows of at least three cases where members of the Cause turned down advantageous offers by their firms to take up appointments in other places, because they did not want to leave Westbury!

Within a year the almost unbelievable happened; the Cause was ready and anxious to be independent, with all the financial and other commitments which such independency involved. So, on April 20th, 1947, there was a great service at which the Westbury-on-Trym Baptist Church was founded, with a solemn Covenant and a Church Roll signed by seventy-one foundation members.

Organisations of all kinds began to spring spontaneously out of the virile life of the Church; and every section of the local community was catered for. Applications for membership, by baptism, by profession, and by transfer, began to come in. Very soon the original membership of seventy-one had risen to a hundred, and at the present time the membership is practically double the foundation figures.

Within eighteen months of the opening of the building, not only had the Church assumed entire responsibility for the maintaining of a Minister but had also purchased a Manse for his residence.

At the time of writing, plans had been prepared and approved, for the erection of permanent buildings at the earliest possible moment; that is, as soon as permission to build can be secured.

So much for the story of the Church; but the practical value of this short sketch is likely to rest in any suggestions the writer can offer as explanation of this story of success.

There are probably, amongst others, five main explanations:

- (a) The Cause was initiated in the spirit of true evangelical concern, by the Tyndale Baptist Church:
- (b) The district was thoroughly visited before even the huts were erected, by the Rev. F. C. Bryan:
- (c) The huts were furnished and decorated very tastefully—there was nothing garish or “cheap” about their appearance (and, incidentally, every care was taken to see that there was plenty of light in them natural and artificial):
- (d) Those who started the Cause really welcomed all newcomers into a full share of the Church’s life and activity:
- (e) The Church has refused to be stereotyped in its methods or its Services.

J. I. CARLYLE LITT.