

Swiss Church

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THE SWISS CHURCH IN LONDON

Many people ask: Is there a Swiss Church in London? The answer is: There are two protestant churches on account of the difference in language. The French-speaking congregation has its church: the Eglise suisse de Londres in Endell Street, W.C.2; the German-speaking congregation uses one of the City Guild Churches as its place of worship, the historic church of St. Mary Woolnoth in the heart of the City. The Annual Report has just come out, so I will use it as a guide for this short article. The Swiss Church in London has by the Grace of God been in existence for 200 years. On 27th May 1962 it celebrated its Bicentenary. Its structure is similar to the Presbyterian Church: it is governed by a body of Elders, composed of both churches, with a President at the head. It is self-supporting and there is always a struggle to make ends meet owing to the increased cost of living; and only by the generous support of friends, also of those who have returned to Switzerland, and the help given by the Federation of Protestant Churches in Switzerland could the budget be balanced. The Bicentenary Appeal brought in funds which help to cover immediate expenses incurred by alterations to the Church building and as a reserve for future alterations which will in due course become necessary.

Have we need of a Swiss Church? We have indeed. Although the number of residents is decreasing owing to members ageing and dying or returning to their homeland, there are always great numbers of young people who come to London for a time to learn the English language. It is very important that these have a spiritual home where they can find fellowship and are given the Word of Life in their own tongue. Many a young Swiss has found his or her way back to Church or even for the first time in life come in contact with the living Christ.

There are two services on Sunday in each Church, one in the morning and one in the evening, in which preaching and hearing the Word of God take a prominent place. The evening service is very important because so often many of the young Swiss girls who work in families are only free after lunch on Sunday. We sometimes have up to sixty or seventy young people in Church in the evening! During the week the "Schwyzerchränzli" (German Swiss youth group) and the "Jeunesse" (French Swiss) meet on different days to visit English Institutions, after that have tea and then listen to talks on various subjects, have discussions and bible-study and of course sing together! There are also some outings to outlying places of interest like Winchester, Coventry or the seaside, in which also many of the residents take part — these are usually very pleasant occasions!

Church-life has its peculiar difficulties. The fact that so many of the parishioners live a long way off makes regular church-attendance very difficult and costs a real effort in time and money. Therefore it has been quite a help to have regular regional reunions in different parts of London and even further afield in the homes of church-members where young and old meet for bible-study and discussions followed by a friendly cup of tea (and cakes!). Our pastors do their best to keep in touch with all their flock and are ever ready to help those in distress; all this takes a great deal of time and energy. The two Parish-papers: the Messenger (French Swiss) and the Gemeindebote (German Swiss) help the members to keep in touch with the life of the parish.

At Christmas-time there are homely parties for the ageing residents and also well-attended family-Christmas Services where especially the children come into their own! Both the French- and German-speaking ladies have their monthly sewing-meeting where many a useful garment for the Bazaar which takes place every other year and for the Swiss Benevolent Society's Christmas-parcels is produced.

Any Church that wants to keep alive has constantly to be on the alert so that it can be a true witness within a secular world. The Swiss Church also has its many problems and has time and again to reassess its tasks in the light of the Gospel of Christ.

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