

La Siesta Evangelical Church

TORREVIEJA



A Brief History
1986 to 2003



Foreword by Rev. Daniel Reyes Martín



The beginning of the year 2003 saw many changes in our Church. Not only did Rev. Derfel Richards retire but at the same time several Elders also retired most of whom had been with the Church since it's early days or even it's foundation as was the case of Pam Brooks and Jean Bines.

There were, therefore, new Elders and many members who were unaware of the history of La Siesta Evangelical Church and the idea arose of publishing a brief account of our beginnings and progress in the Newsletter. What was intended to be a two piece article expanded to be completed over eight episodes.

At the completion of the series of articles interest was expressed in having it printed as a booklet, an idea which has been taken up.

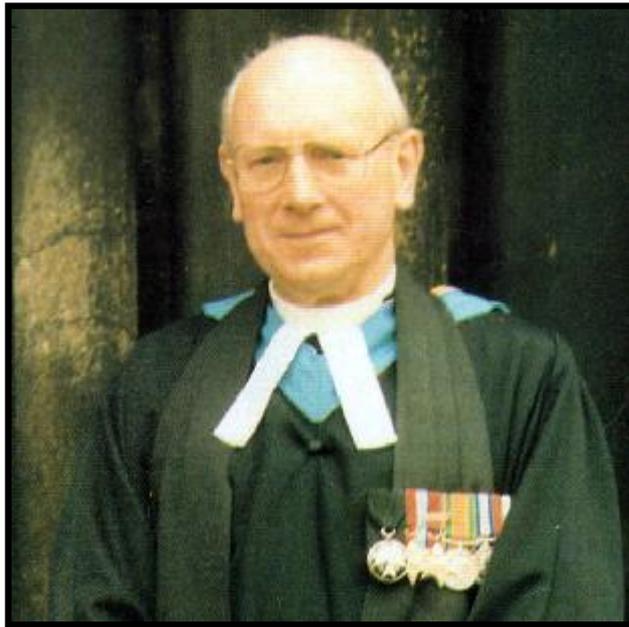
Thanks are due especially to Pam Brooks, Roy and Jean Bines, Alberto Araujo and Derfel Richards for the information they gave which made the writing of the history possible. Thanks also to several others who made their contribution and are too numerous to name individually.

God has indeed blessed us at La Siesta and we pray that He continues to do so and that we may expand and flourish to glorify His name.

Yours in Him

Daniel Reyes

In late 1980's Ken and Pam Brooks came to La Siesta, Ken having retired from his position of Minister in the URC Church at Lewisham. Shortly after, Ken was invited to form an English speaking congregation for the new church which was under construction. He accepted with the provision that the congregation would be an ecumenical one.



Rev. Ken Brooks

The first service was a Carol Service at Christmas 1986, it was actually held in the Flamingo Restaurant, the Church still being under construction. At Easter the first communion service was held in the church. At that stage there were no doors or windows, the congregation had to bring their own chairs: the church was actually being used as a store for building materials! By August, with the enthusiastic help of Julia Galán, Ken and Pam's Roman Catholic neighbour, the builders had been moved out and the Church completed. Regular services began. Ken obtained an organ and this was shipped from UK. The communion glasses and stands, the brass cross and the brass lectern (which had originally been made by Ken) were donated by Ken's previous charge in Lewisham. The hymn boards were made by Malcolm Exon, the Boy's Brigade Captain at the same church. The font was donated by another church which had received Ken's help while he was at Lewisham. The large wooden Cross was made by Ron Clarke of the Anglican congregation.

A suitable hymn book to cater for all denominations was published about this time and was chosen for our use.

Ken made the decision to unite our Church with the I.E.E., or Iglesia Evangélica Española, as their first English speaking congregation. The thinking behind this move was the necessity to align ourselves with the body recommended for Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists, Presbyterians and United Reformists. A very large proportion of the congregation came from these denominations, which is still the case seventeen years on. On an international basis, the I.E.E. is a member of the World Council of Churches, the Conference of European Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the World Methodist Council.

The Church continued to flourish but faced its first serious crisis when the Rev. Ken Brooks fell seriously ill in 1992 and within a short time was unable to continue taking our services.

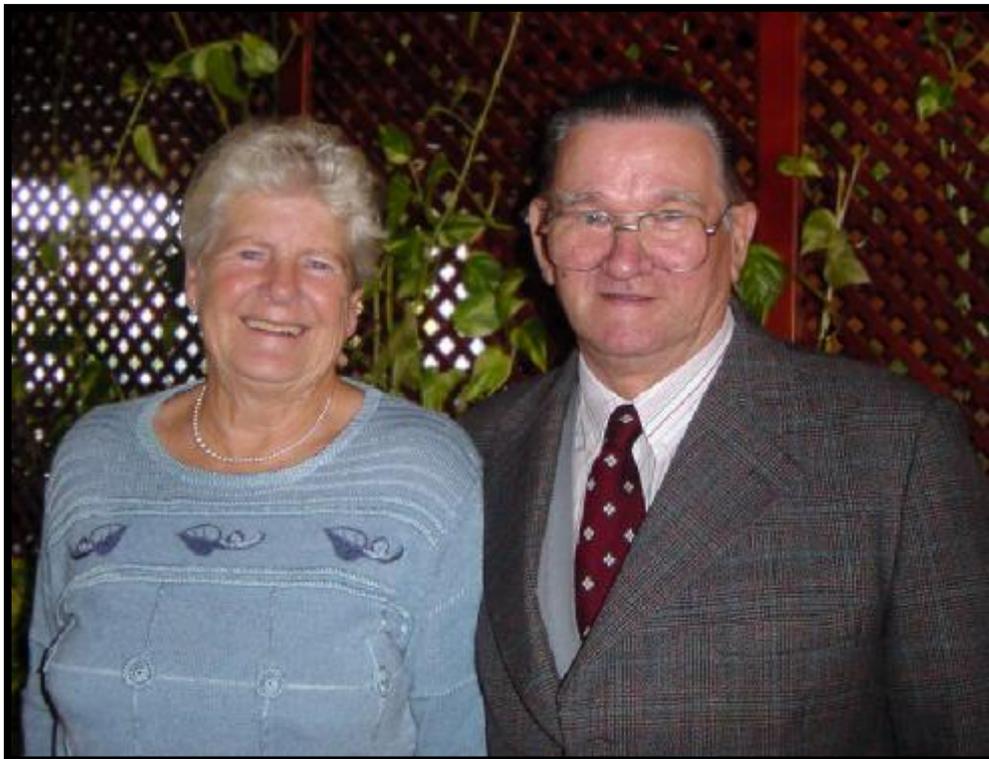
It was then that his foresight saved our situation, as we were able to turn to the I.E.E. for assistance. They were able to arrange for us to share the services of one of their Pastors, Rev. Alberto Araujo, with the I.E.E. congregation of Valencia.

Alberto was a Spanish national but with flawless English, having undertaken his theological training in Glasgow. Furthermore Alberto had demonstrated wisdom and good taste by taking Lillas as his Scottish wife! Alberto was, of course, no stranger to the La Siesta Church. When the congregation was set up and Ken approached the I.E.E. for membership, Alberto was appointed to co-ordinate the incorporation, translate and deal with any Spanish authorities, banks etc.

After a long illness, the Rev. Ken Brooks died in 1992. He probably had many triumphs in life but for his congregation at La Siesta his greatest living memorial must be his success in establishing our Church and for having prepared for its survival after his own death.

Ken did not, of course, do this on his own. Of the others who contributed, mention must first be made of Ken's wife Pam who worked tirelessly with him throughout his ministry and continued her work and support for the Church even while nursing Ken throughout his long illness. Pam continued as an Elder until December 2002.

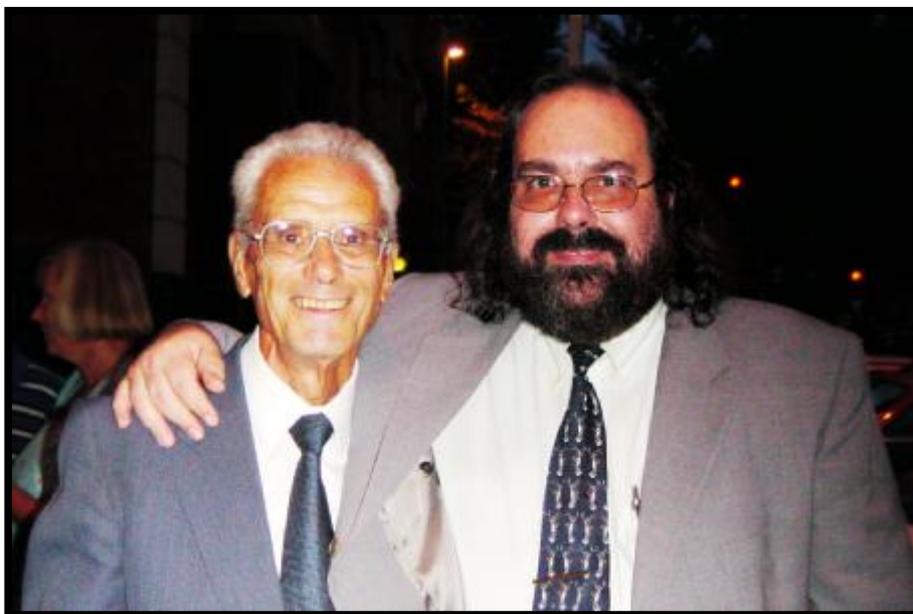
Jean Bines was a founder Elder and Lay Preacher whose contribution to our Church was great, from its foundation until her retirement in 2002. Jean was always available to conduct our services, an indispensable asset in two periods of crisis which would test our Church in the future.



Roy and Jean Bines on the day of their retirement luncheon December 2002

About this time the Pastor of the Alicante Church, the Rev. Francisco Manzanos had to undergo major surgery and he was succeeded by his son the Rev. David Manzanos who holds the post to this day. It was decided that it would be easier if David also covered the congregation at Valencia and the arrangement which these Churches still have was put into action.

Alberto continued taking the services at La Siesta and was ably assisted by Jean Bines who was able to take services herself as the need arose.



Rev. Alberto Araujo (left) and Rev. David Manzanos

The negative aspect of this time was the outbreak of vandalism which became rife and to which the Church was far from exempt. Following several break-in and damage to the interior of the Church, the windows were bricked in from the bottom up to a height more difficult to access. This would have been a major problem for the Church had we not had the services of Roy Bines. Roy quietly and unobtrusively repaired, cleaned, painted and polished not only for the Evangelical congregation but also for all the congregations which used the Church. Things improved but Roy continued with his excellent work right up to his retirement in December 2002.

In early 1993, Lillas, the wife of our Minister Alberto, had the idea of forming a Ladies' Friendship Group in order to reach out to the ladies of the area, Church members or not. The first meeting of the Group took place in the Church in May 1993. Due to rules and regulations, it was not permitted to serve tea within the confines of the Church building and for this reason it was decided to move, using the homes of ladies of the Group, this still being the case.

Thus the Church continued to prosper and the year of 1993 would see a further development which was to have a profound effect on our future

Although he had acquired a holiday home in 1989 and had worshipped at our Church during his visits to Torre Vieja, it was in 1993 that the Rev. Derfel Richards started to assist by preaching during his temporary stays. Derfel was, of course, destined to become our permanent Minister as will be later recounted.

Alberto continued as our "first" Minister throughout 1996 and it was in that year, on August 21st., that he officiated at the first Wedding in our Church that of Pat and Peter Samuels, still stalwarts of our Church seven years on!

At the end of 1996, Derfel took over as "first" Minister and at the end of 1997 Alberto was named "Honorary Minister", a post which he still holds, and Derfel took sole charge.

A point of interest, especially for those of Church of Scotland background, is that Alberto has translated the complete works of Professor William Barclay, the eminent Scottish theologian, into Spanish.

Derfel and Gwynneth bought their holiday home in San Luis in 1989, but although they attended a few services at La Siesta Evangelical Church when on holiday, Derfel did not make himself known until 1993.

From that time on, at each subsequent visit Derfel was not only asked to conduct services but also to take charge of the "Discussion Group" which existed at that time and comprised of about ten members.

During 1995, Derfel and Gwynneth made the decision to sell their holiday villa and purchase a larger one with view to permanent residence. The purchase was completed in September 1995 and they finally emigrated to Spain in February 1996.



Rev. Derfel Richards

As soon as Alberto got to know that Derfel would become a permanent resident, he put a great deal of pressure on Derfel to persuade him to take up the ministry of our church. In December 1995 the Elders sent a letter to Derfel, at that time in UK, inviting him to become the new Minister of our Congregation: the decision to offer this invitation had been unanimous. There was, of course, reluctance to see Alberto leave so it was agreed that he should stay on as "Second Minister".

Derfel accepted the invitation and intimated that he would carry out the duties without remuneration on the basis of expenses only so that the Church could build up resources for the time when a paid ministry would become necessary. This very generous gesture did indeed leave us in a comfortable financial position when Derfel did retire and did in fact guarantee our very existence: in this respect we all owe Derfel a great debt of gratitude.

During his ministry, Alberto had been running a Bible Study Group, but often such a group diminishes gradually over a period of time and ultimately has to be disbanded. In his experience, Derfel had found that Discussion Groups, in which the material chosen was for everyday

concern, with biblical references where applicable, had shown better chance of success and, therefore, such a Group was started. Although popular and initially well attended the problem arose in that some people spend only a part of the year here and others found themselves with other commitments and responsibilities which lead to absences and consequent breakdown in the regular attendance without which such discussions cannot progress. Eventually it became a waste of time and effort to continue with the elaborate and time consuming preparations and regrettably the experiment was discontinued.

Derfel introduced a social dimension to our Church which resulted in expansion and bringing people into church who had not attended a service in years. He and Gwynneth were to be seen at all social functions and they became well known throughout Torre Vieja and the surrounding district. Derfel was particularly active in encouraging Wedding Blessings, Baptisms and Memorial Services and he officiated at many such events, again bringing our Church into the service of the community as a whole.

Outwith the congregation, Derfel also served as the Chaplain to the British Legion and the Royal Naval Association, two groups which benefited greatly from his encouragement and support. Since taking over from Alberto, Derfel has officiated at all Remembrance Day Services held in Torre Vieja.

In 1998 the Anglican Chaplain, the Rev. Eddie Hall, who had been responsible for the general management and amenities, returned to England and was succeeded by Derfel. Derfel did not believe in an autonomous form of management, therefore, he immediately formed a Management Committee consisting of the Minister and two lay-persons from each congregation using the building. This arrangement proved very successful and remains so until the present day. As Derfel retired the Chairmanship passed once again to the Anglican representative.

Prior to Derfel's appointment there had been an ecumenical set-up comprising the Anglicans and some Roman Catholics under Father Carlos but he expanded this and brought in the other congregations using the church as well. This unity manifested itself in the annual Ecumenical Service held in the third week in January each year. Derfel personally

undertook to produce and print the material necessary in the language of each congregation, in which mammoth task he was assisted by the other clergy involved.

During Derfel's ministry, there were some excellent responses from certain individuals and their contribution to the life of the Urbanisation Church has been considerable. One family fitted out the church with blue cushions prior to a family wedding and then donated them to the church. The same family responded, when the Church Council finances were at a low ebb after some expensive repairs, by paying for the redecoration of the inside of the church. Then there was the elderly gentleman who presented the present organ in memory of his late wife.

In December 2002, Derfel retired from his post as our Minister. Great things had been accomplished during his tenure and this may be summed up in Derfel's own words when he wrote:

"God has blessed our church in a big way! Christians, irrespective of denomination or nationality have all benefited – a truly ecumenical blessing."



Rev. Derfel and Gwynneth Richards on the day of their retirement luncheon, December 2002.

Derfel's retirement did, of course, present the Church with a serious problem. A new permanent Minister would be required and in the meantime it would be necessary to seek guest preachers for our scheduled services.

Once again the I.E.E. came to our aid with the proposal that we should share a minister with the I.E.E. congregation at Cartagena in the same way that the Alicante and Valencia ministry was shared. The candidate they had in mind was the Rev. Daniel Reyes Martín who had trained at Queens University, Belfast. He was totally fluent in English and during his time in Belfast had married his British wife Ruth. Daniel had previous experience of English speaking congregations as he had ministered to such a one in Torre de Mar near Malaga prior to moving to Barcelona whence he would come to us.

Daniel preached at our Church on December 29th 2002 and a unanimous decision was made to invite him to become our Minister subject to the agreement of the Cartagena congregation which was forthcoming. The date on which Daniel would preach his first service was set as Palm Sunday, April 13th 2003.



Rev. Daniel and Ruth Reyes after Daniel's first service at La Siesta Evangelical Church on Palm Sunday 2003

The lesser problem of temporary cover was also solved, again with the help of I.E.E. who provided Derek French to cover two services. The Rev, Kerry Cook, a friend of our elder Margaret Mycroft, also visited us on two occasions and the other dates were covered by our own Elders, the services being organised by a Worship Committee set up for this purpose.

At the end of 2003 the Church continues to flourish: nine new members have been welcomed during this period. On July 13th. for the first time a Sunday School for younger children was inaugurated. Although this was an experiment only due to operate during the holiday months of July and August with the profusion of visitors to Torrevieja, such success was encountered that it was decided to continue throughout the year, presently with small but regular attendance. The Sunday School uses material from the Scripture Union and is run by Ruth, wife of the Minister, assisted by one lady of the congregation.

From small beginnings La Siesta Church has, by the Grace of God, assuredly grown beyond the dreams of those started it.

You may learn more about us on the web site www.iee-levante.org selecting the page Torrevieja (English)

It is a friendly Church to which all are welcome. Visit us in person and see for yourself!

