



## OUR STORY

There had been discussions in the 1890's among members of the English community in Lugano about the need for a church. The use of Santa Elisabetta, courtesy of the Hotel Belvedere del Parco, was deemed inadequate. It was small and right on the lake front and therefore subject to flooding. A 1900 survey of visitors and hotel owners gave new momentum to the idea of establishing an English church in Lugano.

The foundations for the Church of Saint Edward, King and Confessor, Lugano were laid in 1902. The architect was George H. Jeffery and the builder was Angelo Corsini of Lugano. The first service was held on All Saints' Day of same year.

Among the many early benefactors from the English and American communities emerged The Countess Marie Bismarck, Mrs Christopher Benson, sister-in-law of the late Archbishop of Canterbury, The Rev R. H. Walker, Mrs Mark Whittaker (Marion) Boekmann, and Mrs J. H. (Emily Mary) Jackson. The list of donors included the Queen of Romania.

In April 1903, Mrs Benson asked that she be permitted to build a house (more recently known as Casa Benson) for her use next to the church on condition that upon her death it would become the property of the church, possibly for use as a parsonage. As the plans developed, it was decided to add one bay to the south aisle to connect with the vestry over the gateway. The church and house were further linked by a 'Parish Room' next to the vestry.

On November 5, 1911, Mrs Christopher (Agnes Elizabeth) Benson died after a short illness. She had been a major force in the founding and development of St Edward's during the critical first decade. Less than six months later on April 14, 1912 the Right Revd Herbert Bury, Bishop consecrated the church to the Glory of God for the Jurisdiction of Northern and Central Europe.

The new funicular running up the hill from the lakefront next to the Chiesa Santa Maria degli Angioli went into operation in 1912. Church attendance increased noticeably. In 1913, St Edward's was the first church in Lugano to be electrified.

The Great Depression was not kind to Lugano. In 1932/33 documents were signed transferring ownership to the Gibraltar Diocesan Trust that would provide for the cost and maintenance of the property. St Edward's was closed from 1939-47.

From 1947 to 1961, St Edward's was only open from spring to autumn and served by visiting chaplains sent by the Bishop of Gibraltar.

In the 1970's the Commune of Lugano offered a piece of land for the building of a new church in view of a possible expropriation, in order to carry out the new roadways around Lugano. The plans would be eventually shelved, but the Commune mandated neglected repairs of the church property. While the requests were at least partially funded by the Diocese, the latter expected the congregation to be fully self-funding, a situation that remains to this day.

Back then this looked increasingly difficult, given the burden of chaplains and maintenance of buildings on one side, the diminished income on the other. The hard Swiss franc had taken its toll and the congregation was shrinking.

This was not the first time the Diocese had considered closing down the Anglican Church in Lugano altogether. However, in his book, 'The First 100 Years', Stuart C Nickerson says St Edward's had a history of not only clinging to the edge of a cliff by its fingernails, but also to climb back up and survive. There was always the will of the congregation to preserve the church.

The other solution would have been to sell the old parsonage. Eventually, however, it was decided to keep the building, considering it an inseparable entity with the church.

In 1989, the decision was made to engage a retired permanent resident priest and two years later St Edward's was transferred back from the Italian to the Swiss Archdeaconry. Up to this time (since 1977), the church had been served by visiting chaplains during the tourist season.

In subsequent years, fund raising became an important source of income, through successful garden parties, Christmas markets and other events. Later on, charitable giving would also be enhanced.

After years of effort, St Edward's was finally granted full tax exemption. Donors responded to appeals for funds in a generous way. There was also a sizeable bequest. Owing to a major benefactor, it was decided to renovate the property and finally to restore Casa Benson to its original purpose, serving as an accommodation for chaplains, thus saving the rent for an outside apartment.

St Edward's is now as vital in all aspects of its mission as it has ever been. We are very blessed to have such a beautiful church in which to celebrate the Christian faith in the English language, and to which all denominations are welcome.

There are active programs to support the church's families in the Christian way of life and to reach out to others. Among the offerings are Sunday School, Toddler's Corner, Soul Café and, more recently, a new Alpha Course. St Edward's also regularly participates in many ecumenical services and activities in and around Lugano. In 2017 an innovative new website was launched which has significantly enhanced our internal and external communications.

From our humble beginnings, St Edward's Church has strived to be true to God's calling. We've sought to be willing to step out in visionary faith and take risks for God, who, in response, has richly blessed us. This gives us hope for the future and inspires us to continue to share the love and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ to all in our reach.