

The Good Society

BAPTIST churches have been invited to participate in a nationwide conversation that could have a profound impact on local communities.

The Good Society is a joint partnership between Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) and Church Action on Poverty.

Taking the idea of the Big Society as its starting point, the project is seeking to discover what a 'Good Society' means by giving a voice to the people already contributing to one.

Over the past two years Good Society researchers have been visiting different UK destinations to investigate how churches are tackling a range of social issues from homelessness, worklessness and poverty, to religious and ethnic tensions.

The initial findings have been documented – and now wider conversations about constitutes a Good Society are being encouraged.

An official project launch took place this Wednesday at the Basil Hume Centre in Westminster.

Explaining the research already undertaken, the Revd Bob Fyffe, General Secretary of CTBI, said, 'We wanted to learn about the thousands of people who are motivated by faith to



ensure that those on the margins of society are included, cared for and supported.

'What challenges do they face? Why do they do what they want to do? What are the values they feel most important for a good society? How can the voices of those who feel marginalised be heard more effectively?'

'And - as the spiritual landscape of Britain continues to shift - what does the growing Good Society mean for the future of the churches?'

He said what has emerged from this initial research 'provides a challenge to the accepted role of faith and the church in seeking the common

good.'

'Faith leaders are becoming mediators and community leaders,' he explained. 'They are being seen as voices of truth, values and integrity, rather than holders of power. They are leading by creating possibilities, and seeing buildings as places of sanctuary and community.'

Communities and churches across the UK are now being encouraged to have their own debate and conversations about the Good Society.

A free toolkit has been created to help facilitate conversations. The hope is that these stories and views will help inform what the churches say together in the run-up to the next general election.

'We want to promote a year of conversation about the values that have emerged, what are the marks of a Good Society, and seek to involve other groups,' Bob continued.

'Good relationships are built on listening as well as talking. We hope the Good Society project is the beginning of a much longer period of reflection and listening on behalf of churches and wider community.'

For more visit
<http://agoodsociety.org>

Baptist Assembly 2014 round-up

'IF nothing else', said new Baptist Union President Chris Ellis during the opening session of the Baptist Assembly, 'I hope people return to this piece of scripture. There is so much blessing in it!'

Chris was outlining hopes for his presidential year and referring to Ephesians 3: 14-21, the text around which the Higher, Deeper, Wider theme was inspired. His induction and subsequent address was one of the many highlights of this year's Assembly at the Bethel Convention Centre in West Bromwich on 10-11 May.

It was Lynn Green's first Assembly as General Secretary of our Baptist Union, and her addresses were ones of encouragement and challenge to fellow Baptists. In the Baptist Union AGM on Saturday afternoon, she asked in five years time, what do we want people to be saying about our Union?

She outlined four key areas: a confident people, a kingdom people, richly diverse and integrated, and a deeply loving people. In the course of the latter point she revealed how challenged she has been by the 1 Corinthians 13 passage on love.

'Without love, we are nothing,' she said. 'We need to be a deeply loving people, so others can hear and experience the unconditional love of God.'

Her address on Sunday afternoon paved the way for a moving Communion which closed the gathering. Exploring the image of God's banquet in Luke, she reminded delegates that God's 'widest' vision is that all come to his table.



Our role is to work with him. 'I believe God wants to do something in and through us that will blow our minds!'

Elsewhere the diverse work undertaken by BMS World Mission in some of the world's poorest and marginalised communities was shared, including a reference to the gender-based violence campaign which will launch in the autumn.

A session on pioneering mission linked the bicentenary of the relationship between Jamaican and British Baptists, the similarities between reaching closed countries and closed communities in the UK, and several UK-based pioneering stories of 'going to where the church isn't, doing what Jesus does, and seeing what happens'.

Saturday night saw the Bethel Centre full for both the valediction of mission personnel going overseas and the recognition of ministers and lay preachers who have transferred to the fully accredited list.

More reports can be found online at bit.ly/1gShNVz

Youth are "hungry to learn"

INNOVATION, Assembly's programme for young people, took place away from the main venue in nearby Warley Baptist Church.

It was once again led by Viz-a-Viz ministries along with their band Taste and several volunteers. Members of the BMS Action Team from Italy were also on hand to help, as it coincided with their visit to this church.

The programme was structured to help the participants - there were more than 30 - reach their full potential in God.

They followed the Higher, Deeper, Wider theme by looking at the life of Peter. There was a talk each night with lots of worship and the opportunity to make responses.

Games, art, photography and sport also featured.

Andy Clark from Viz-a-Viz said, 'There's been lots of music, worship and games, and we've tried to make it very interactive.'

'A lot come year in, year out, and they get so much from being together. They are really hungry to learn. They just love the Innovation programme. It was also great to have around half a dozen new faces.'

'We've been able to have some good individual conversations, particularly with people going through some difficult things. There is that space to think things through. It was a brilliant location and we are really thankful to the church for allowing us to be here.'

A three-dimensional faith

WE are called to a three-dimensional faith and be open to the gospel of a God 'so big that he takes our breath away', said new President Chris Ellis (pictured) during the opening session of the Baptist Assembly 2014.



Examining Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3: 14-21, Chris highlighted how our faith is called to be 'higher in our appreciation of the greatness of God; deeper in our response to his love and our willingness to open ourselves to the work of his gracious Spirit; and wider in our vision of his kingdom presence and purposes.'

Taking each point in turn, he said the "higher" of the theme invites us to come in awe before the Lord, encouraging us to see God as 'greater than anything we can understand of express'.

As he moved onto the "deeper" of the message, he said that to have a three dimensional faith, we need all dimensions interacting.'

'It is not enough to praise the creator – we need to know the wonderful love of the redeemer.'

In other words, he continued, the 'glorious almightiness' is made known to us through Jesus, 'in his coming close in mercy and love.'

And the third point was mission, 'not our mission but God's mission'.

'It's more than God sending us on a mission – it's mission itself as an outpouring of God's very life, a moving of the Holy Spirit... We are enlisted to participate in this movement of the Spirit, not as freelance entrepreneurs, but as carriers of God's love, which has seized our hearts and involves us in God's loving of others.'

The 3-d Christianity, he continued, is where the gospel is 'not only preached, but lived, not only known but grasped.' It's a joined up gospel in which

spirituality and politics, justice and prayer, worship and work all interact.

'It is the gospel in widescreen, engaging with the breadth and the depth of human need.

'It is the gospel of a God so big that he takes our breath away.'

Let's Talk About Worship, a resource to accompany Chris's year as President, can be found at bit.ly/1sUNBcb

hearts, prayer, discipleship and mission – Lynn Green's address at the Baptist Assembly
<http://bit.ly/1tnSzQP>

> It was a privilege to minister to the children at the Baptist Assembly: our heart is that one day all will appreciate the ministry each child has
<http://bit.ly/1vL1zBG>

> Standing for what's right and bearing the consequences: the day I asked a young man to turn his music down on the bus, and was punched in the face
bit.ly/1qXkHwB

> It's welcome that some Nigerian church leaders have spoken out about the kidnapped schoolgirls, but I wish more would
bit.ly/1i7bmJ5

From the www. baptisttimes.co.uk

Recent stories and comment pieces on *The Baptist Times* website

> God's banquet – there is still room! Let's get all those who are not yet Christians into our

New JPIT foodbanks church resource

A THREE-part resource for churches about the growing food poverty crisis has been produced by our Baptist Union alongside the Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church and Church Action on Poverty.

"Faith in Foodbanks?" recognises the ministry of many churches helping people who cannot afford to eat and looks at why there has been such a growth in foodbanks.

It also suggests ways churches can take action to tackle the underlying causes and offers worship and bible resources to help Christians to reflect on food and poverty in Britain today.

In the last five years the need for foodbanks in the UK has grown dramatically, and thousands of churches have responded by starting or supporting foodbanks within their communities.

Last year Trussell Trust, which helps 4 in 10 of the UK's foodbanks, fed over 900,000 people including more than 300,000 children. The entire foodbank movement will now feed well over a million people a year.

"Faith in Foodbanks?" includes an outline of the facts and fiction surrounding foodbanks, worship materials, reflections, prayers and action points. There are also six Bible studies that explore the ministry of foodbanks and what God's Word might teach us about them.

Visit <http://bit.ly/1i0ipTM>

Assembly artist prints

A3 prints of the pictures painted by Oliver Pengilly at the Baptist Assembly last weekend are now available from <http://www.baptist.org.uk/Shop/Categories/17209/Art.aspx> for pre order. Delivery next week



Day out in Parliament?

THE Joint Public Issues team will be running an event in Parliament entitled 'Using faith and politics to change our world,' on Tuesday 8 July.

The aim of the day is to explore faith, politics and participation in social justice. There will be tours around the Houses of Parliament, a panel discussion with MPs and Lords, before ending the day at Methodist Central Hall for a reflection and discussion

session in small groups.

This event is solely for young people between the ages of 16-23 who consider themselves a Methodist, United Reformed Church or Baptist Church member.

The deadline to apply is 30 May.

For more information contact Roseanna Levermore on politicalaffairs@methodistchurch.org.uk or visit <http://bit.ly/1jwTm6>

JOBS

Ecumenical Accompaniers, Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine & Israel (EAPPI) Chaplains, RAF

For more details visit: www.baptist.org.uk/jobs

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Send notifications of baptisms, ministerial changes, deaths and testimonies to phobson@baptist.org.uk