



**8 July, 2015**

**News:**

**Where's the review?**

**Churches and charities reiterate call for independent review of benefit sanctions**

It has been 100 days since the Work and Pensions Select Committee called for [a full independent review of the benefit sanctions system](#), but the Government has not indicated any intention to conduct a review. A group of Churches and charities is calling urgently for the Government to heed the Committee's report and act on its recommendations.

In the same 100 day period last year, 346,256 people who were on Jobseeker's Allowance and 35,554 people on Employment Support Allowance were referred for sanctions. 92,558 of those referrals were the result of bureaucratic error. These resulted in 175,177 sanctions for Jobseekers and 11,129 for those out of work due to ill health.

The call for a review is supported by the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Church of Scotland, the Church in Wales, the Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church and by charities Church Action on Poverty, Gingerbread and Mind.

"In working with churches across the North West, I am increasingly hearing stories of individuals whose lives are being blighted by the impact of benefit sanctions," added the Revd Phil Jump, Regional Minister for the North Western Baptist Association.

"There is clear evidence of the need for our government to take serious account of the concerns and recommendations of a committee which itself is part of our parliamentary system."

Dame Anne Begg, the MP for Aberdeen South from 1997 to 2015, chaired the Select Committee which made the recommendation. She said, "The implementation of the present sanction regime is controversial with the government claiming it is effective in helping people into work while many others say sanctions are causing real distress to families and are actually acting as a barrier to participation."

"If sanctions work as a deterrent, why are so many people still facing multiple sanctions? As there are so many questions about the effects on people who have been sanctioned, it is time the government implemented the recommendation of my Select Committee in the last Parliament to carry out a full, independent review of the whole sanction regime. Many believe that sanctions are being applied to the wrong people for often trivial reasons and are the cause of the increased use of foodbanks.

"Only an independent review can get to the truth of what is actually happening so that government policy can be based on evidence and not seen as merely punitive."

"The case has been made," said Paul Morrison, Public Issues Policy Adviser for the Methodist Church. "The sanctions system requires fundamental review and we call upon the new Parliament to respond positively to the recommendations of the Select Committee.

"Churches and charities are backing this call because we see day by day the harm that benefit sanctions cause in the communities we serve. We recognise the hiatus caused by the General Election, but hope that the new Parliament will recognise the urgency of this matter and announce a full independent inquiry as soon as possible."

In March this year the Churches called for such a review in their report [\*Time to Rethink Benefit Sanctions\*](#), which cited new evidence about the negative impact of the current regime. The report revealed that around 100,000 children were affected by sanctions in 2013/14.

The data, obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, also shows that people who receive the sickness and disability benefit Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) because of a long-term mental health problem are being sanctioned at a rate of more than 100 per day.

The Archbishop of Wales, Dr Barry Morgan said: "Since 2012, the rate at which sanctions have been applied to vulnerable people claiming Job Seekers Allowance and Employment Support Allowance in Wales has increased even faster than in England or Scotland. Many claimants, who are already suffering from mental or physical health problems and living in poverty, are threatened with sanctions because of administrative errors. For the sake of human dignity, fairness and compassion, the system must be changed."

Paul Farmer, CEO of Mind, said: "Far too many people with mental health problems are having their benefits cut for not meeting the requirements placed on them, which are often inappropriate in the first place.

"The use of sanctions is causing financial hardship and is based on the assumption that people claiming out-of-work benefits lack motivation and willingness to find and keep a job, which couldn't be further from the truth for

the people Mind represents.

“The vast majority of people who are out of work due to their mental health want to work. But the constant threat of sanctions causes a great deal of distress, making people more unwell and a return to work less likely. We support the Churches’ call for the Government to commission an independent review into sanctions policy.”

### **Baptist churches tackling poverty**

#### **Charity Christians Against Poverty highlights Baptist churches' commitment in helping people struggling with debt, unemployment and addiction**

A whopping 41 churches are now running a [CAP Debt Centre](#); nationally there are 280. A further 17 are running [CAP Job Clubs](#) (out of 115) and three are running the charity’s latest project [CAP Release Groups](#) to help people break addictions (nationally there are 30). Hundreds more run the debt prevention sessions called the [CAP Money Course](#).

'We love to work with the Baptist Church,' says CAP’s Chief Executive Matt Barlow. 'We’re always aware of this huge desire on the part of both the congregation and leadership to connect with the community in a real and relevant way.'

One example is Sidley Baptist Church in East Sussex. Four years ago member Ros Thomas approached the leadership with an idea to run a CAP Debt Centre.

Now she runs the centre four days a week, with a pair of trained debt coaches from a sister church in Beulah, in Bexhill-on-Sea, where a CAP Money Course runs too.

'It’s changed us,' says the Revd Dave Bishop, the church's minister for the past 17 years.

'Without a doubt it’s given us an insight into the community we didn’t have before. We are meeting with people who wouldn’t have come over the threshold. People feel positive about the church here. There is favour in the community towards Sidley Baptist Church. We’re not just a bunch of Holy Joes, we roll up our sleeves.'

Recently, the team have been helping a group of churches in Hastings to replicate the partnership, in order to allow another town to benefit from the free debt counselling service that has won the charity awards.

Dave said the service and aftercare of each client works best if several churches in an area shoulder it together.

'This isn't about a good idea for one church, it's God's idea for His Church in the community.

'We're aware that we need to do more follow up. We're just a church of 90 people and we need others to help us do that. We don't mind what church they go to. We're just content to start the journey with people.'

Dave added: 'It's been challenging financially to run this but God's good. We've had significant one-off and monthly supporters.

'Initially I saw the blessing of CAP as people saved and in my church. God's taken me on a journey with that. We are seeing people go debt free and if they are financially better off, they are open to hearing about the rest.

'The brilliant news we have here is that people are coming to Christ. Ros has led more people to Christ in the last year than I have. We're invited into people's homes. It's a great opportunity.'

These kind of stories are replicated around the country. In a recent [Home Mission film](#) Baptist minister James Neve talks about debt advice in Southampton. At another of CAP's 280 debt centres, in Streatham, London, Centre Manager Phil Stone explains how his church's involvement began.

'This has been an amazing five-year journey for Mitcham Lane Baptist Church, since one member saw the vision for CAP in our church. We started with CAP Money and then believed God was calling us to open the CAP centre.'

In those years the centre has received 210 referrals from key contacts in the area and seen 31 clients go debt-free, a process that typically takes years not months.

Most clients are able to pay off their debt thanks to a tight budget and a ready cheer squad, although insolvency options are available too to those who would be unable to reasonably do that within five years.

'Since July 2010, the church has backed us to the hilt, supported us in every way possible, and seen evidence of how God can change lives, free people from debt, and bring many into His Kingdom,' said Phil.

### **Development a 'template' for churches?**

**The creative way an Oxfordshire Baptist Church is being transformed could offer a solution for other church developments**

That's the view of those helping to oversee the renovation of Chipping Norton Baptist Church.

The project began in May and will see the historic building renovated and

refurbished as a centre of worship for the community, as well as the addition of eight affordable two-bedroom apartments.

It is being carried out by B&R Developments, a small company set up and run specifically for this purpose by three committed people, one of them being a church member, after partnerships with traditional property developers failed to bear fruit.

Joe Rice is both a deacon and one of those behind B&R. He explained that the developers see the project as a “win-win situation for all”.

‘Not only does the church receive a restored beautiful building for their worship and communal activity, but the project is also providing eight affordable homes in a location that is desperate for good housing,’ he said.

‘B&R Developments are committed to creating developments which can benefit a wide range of people within the local community rather than to develop larger ‘executive’ properties.

‘I really think this is a route other churches struggling with old, inefficient buildings could take.’

The present church, which has been empty for over five years, was completed in 1816 – although the official founding of the Baptist Church congregation was more than a century earlier in 1694.

Extensive work is required, as the interior of the site “looks like a bomb site after years of neglect”, explained Joe. However, the brick structure is in good order, and once restored will again make an impressive sight along New Street. The work is progressing well, with the majority of the rubble and interiors now removed.

Joe said the church community itself is “incredibly excited” about the project.

The church currently meets at the Highlands Day Centre on the Burford Road every second and fourth Sunday, with ‘Messy’ Church on the third Sunday. There is an informal Friday evening service each week, with food, worship and a talk. Whereas previously the church held up to 1,000 people, it has been redesigned to seat 150.

‘Not only will it provide the church family with a meeting point, but it will also enable them to reach out to the community and share what they already do from a more formalised and permanent location,’ Joe said.

He added that Chipping Norton Baptist was “a church for the unchurched”. A number of the congregation have severe disabilities; others are drawn from the traveller community. Several have started coming after their contact with the North Oxfordshire Foodbank, which is run by Joyce Rice, the church’s Lay Pastor. ‘They can see that the church cares for them,’ said Joe.

Joyce was invited by the Church to take on the role of Lay Pastor. She and Joe have now been involved for around five years. 'It's a hard mission field, and we could do with more workers,' said Joe, 'but we do feel that God has called us to do a job here.'

Both developer and church hope to open the new building in May 2016.

B&R Developments aims to deliver bespoke solutions in churches like Chipping Norton Baptist, and is currently taking on new projects. Contact [office@bandrltd.com](mailto:office@bandrltd.com) | 016808 641600

### **Understanding marginalisation through conversations**

**New initiative for those interested in how Christian mission engages with communities who experience deprivation and exclusion**

[Creative Conversations](#) is a collaborative project between [Urban Life](#) and [CMS Pioneer Leadership Training](#). Similar to [Radio 4's Listening Project](#), it involves making audio recordings of conversations between small groups of people followed by some careful and thoughtful analysis.

The project was launched last month (April) and involves a group of 14 people around the country - all of whom are deeply involved in a wide variety of marginal and deprived communities – convening a series of conversations in their communities.

Those they are speaking to are drawn from a whole variety of people on the margins: the elderly, ethnic minorities, even people from the punk scene in Wales. The recordings will be placed online later in the year, alongside introductory notes which will provide an analysis and reflection on the content.

There are a number of aims, explained Urban Life co-ordinator Mike Pears, both in terms of research and to foster among those involved in pioneer mission “a deeper habit of attentiveness and awareness of their own context”.

‘Creative Conversations’ is designed to assist churches and those involved in urban mission to develop a deeper awareness of their own location or context,’ said Mike.

‘Its specific aim is to help Christian groups explore the everyday lived experiences of those who find themselves marginalised from mainstream society and, through their growing awareness of the issues, to frame thoughtful and practical responses.

‘So at one level it’s a research method – documenting what’s going in an area. At another level it’s engaging people to learn to listen more deeply, and look at what’s going on around them.’

In part two of the project, communities from around the country will be invited to record their own Creative Conversations and contribute to a growing online library of conversations.

It's been a busy time for [Urban Life, which itself only launched last year](#). Since the beginning of 2015 it has been facilitating two "[Theology-to-go](#)" groups, one in Birmingham, the other Bristol.

Theology-to-go is for Christians involved in a wide variety of urban situations and who want to join others to reflect theologically upon the issues they face. It takes place over eight, three hour sessions. Urban Life facilitates the group with a local co-host.

The Birmingham group features mostly Baptist ministers while the Bristol group is more diverse ecumenically. Both are going well, says Mike, according to feedback and attendance.

Urban Life now hope to introduce more Theology-to-go groups next year, and is looking for people who may have an interest in hosting them in their area. Contact Mike at [mpears@urbanlife.org](mailto:mpears@urbanlife.org)

To keep up with Urban Life news, sign up for its regular mailing at [www.urbanlife.org](http://www.urbanlife.org)

### **MDGs final progress report**

**The Millennium Development Goals are the "most successful anti-poverty movement in history" - though inequalities remain**

The MDGs are eight targets to reduce global poverty and improve living standards. The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015 found that the 15-year effort to achieve the eight aspirational goals set out in the Millennium Declaration in 2000 was "largely successful across the globe, while acknowledging shortfalls that remain."

The data and analysis presented in the report show that with targeted interventions, sound strategies, adequate resources and political will, "even the poorest can make progress".

Two decades ago, nearly half of the developing world lived in extreme poverty. The number of people now living in extreme poverty has declined by more than half, falling from 1.9 billion in 1990 to 836 million in 2015.

The world has also witnessed dramatic improvement in gender equality in schooling since the MDGs, and gender parity in primary school has been achieved in the majority of countries.

“Following profound and consistent gains, we now know that extreme poverty can be eradicated within one more generation”, said UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon. “The MDGs have greatly contributed to this progress and have taught us how governments, business and civil society can work together to achieve transformational breakthroughs”.

Nevertheless, inequalities persist, the report continued. It report highlighted that significant gains have been made for many of the MDG targets worldwide, but progress has been uneven across regions and countries, leaving significant gaps. Conflicts remain the biggest threat to human development, with fragile and conflict-affected countries typically experiencing the highest poverty rates.

World leaders have called for an ambitious long-term sustainability agenda to succeed the MDGs, the report continued.

Building on the momentum of the MDGs, new global goals will "break fresh ground" with ambition on inequalities, economic growth, decent jobs, cities and human settlements, industrialisation, energy, climate change, sustainable consumption and production, peace and justice.

“The emerging post-2015 development agenda, including the set of Sustainable Development Goals, strives to build on our successes and put all countries, together, firmly on track towards a more prosperous, sustainable and equitable world”, said Ban Ki-moon.

Commenting on the findings, [global development charity Christian Aid](#) said the progress reveals important lessons about what the global community can achieve when it recognises “a shared moral imperative and the need for common action”.

But it also highlights "the worsening crises" which remain, Toby Quantrill, the charity’s Principal Economic Justice Adviser said.

“The UN’s new report reveals progress across much of the world on some of the most critical targets that countries set for themselves fifteen years ago.

“That means better daily lives for many millions of people. Achievements such as increasing the numbers of girls in primary education, halting the spread of malaria and providing access to clean water will make a real difference to people’s daily lives.

“However it is also painfully clear that progress in other areas has been limited and some problems have got worse – for instance the climate crisis and widening inequality at every level, including that between women and men.

“Action on the MDGs has had little impact on these problems, some of which were less clear 15 years ago when the Goals first came into force. But now that they are alarmingly apparent, the time has come for more fundamental change.”



**Baptisms:**

Albany Park Baptist Church, Bexley: Elizabeth Joy Cooper  
Barton Baptist Church, Torquay: Joseph and Chanelle Wine  
Beeston Baptist Church, Nottingham: Jen Seagrave  
Ryde Baptist Church, Isle of Wight: Alan Turner

For more visit: [www.baptist.org.uk/baptisms](http://www.baptist.org.uk/baptisms)

Send baptismal and death notifications to [phobson@baptist.org.uk](mailto:phobson@baptist.org.uk)

**Jobs:**

Safeguarding Administrator, Baptist Union of Great Britain  
Regional Minister Team Leader, East Midlands Baptist Association  
Legal and Property Officer, Baptist Union of Great Britain  
Youth Specialist, London Road Baptist Church, Lowestoft  
Pastor, Jersey Baptist Church, Channel Islands  
Director of Ministry, Prospects  
Youth and Children's Workers: Part-time and GAP Year – Grace for the Next Generation

For more details on these positions, visit: [www.baptist.org.uk/jobs](http://www.baptist.org.uk/jobs)

**Events and resources:**

**The Rugby World Cup**, the world's third largest sporting event, is taking place across the country in September/October 2015. Engage 2015 is a cross denominational campaign set up to help UK churches serve the rugby community during the World Cup event in October 2015. It has produced a set of resources called **The Game of Life** to help churches use this event in their mission. For more visit: <http://gameofliferesource.co.uk/>

**Gathering Round the Table: Children and Communion** has been reprinted. It now features an updated resources section. Visit [http://www.baptist.org.uk/Shop/Products/495693/Gathering\\_Around\\_the.aspx](http://www.baptist.org.uk/Shop/Products/495693/Gathering_Around_the.aspx)

**msm online** The Pioneer Collective has facilitated a partnership with Fresh Expressions to deliver the first online mission shaped ministry in the UK. Individuals are welcome to register, but msm online will be most effective when small groups gather in a home to access the course together. Visit <http://www.missionshapedministry.org/online>

**The Big Welcome** The Big Welcome is a simple idea to encourage Christians to invite someone they know to something they love - and this year's resources are now available. To find out more visit the [Big Welcome website](#).

**Glass Half Full: Glass Half Empty? Exploring Bi-Vocational Ministry** Tuesday July 14th – Wednesday July 15th 2015 with Bristol Baptist College and Urban Life Book online at <https://eventbrite.co.uk/event/16232405562/>

More information including a flyer and a copy of the programme available at <http://www.bristol-baptist.ac.uk/content/conferences>

### **Notices**

**Gas Green Baptist Church, Cheltenham** has thanked Mr Colin Dymock who has retired after serving for 58 years as its Church Treasurer. We wonder whether this is a record within Baptist circles? To mark the occasion Mr Dymock, who is a steam railway enthusiast, was presented with a voucher for his wife and himself for a day out on a steam railway, including lunch in a luxury dining car! He was also given a suitably engraved model of the "Flying Scotsman" engine.

**Revd Jim Clarke, Minister Gas Green Baptist Church**

**Placement/accommodation available for one to two learning disabled adults** to live in a beautiful bungalow in the Calderdale area. My brother owns and lives in the property and he has a full 24 hour care team. He has grown up in a Christian environment and would like to share with others who have a similar background. Please contact [Ruth.bradshaw@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:Ruth.bradshaw@blueyonder.co.uk) for further details.

For more visit [www.baptisttimes.co.uk](http://www.baptisttimes.co.uk)