



9 May, 2018

News:

Events for Baptist church growth

A series of 24 hour 'Firestarter' events hosted by Baptist churches experiencing unusual growth have been organised

Called Firestarters, they are conversations involving nine of these fast growing Baptist churches. Each event will offer 24 hours to 'learn, expect and act', says Alex Harris, of the Beacon Church in Stafford. Two such are taking place this summer, with a further three in the autumn.

'God is rapidly growing Baptist churches in the UK,' Alex explains.

'These are real Baptist churches made up of real people in very real and diverse situations - and yet the growth in new followers of Jesus and baptisms is unusual. Some have doubled in size in 12 months. One has seen over 50 converts in less than 18 months, another a fivefold increase in five years, planting six new congregations to accommodate that. Another has seen God grow them from 70 to 400 in three years.

'These are real churches in our Baptist Together movement - few if any count as a 'large' church. This is not about resources or numbers. Though some have a staff team, most don't. Few are 'new' church plants but rather churches 50 or 80 years old.

'But God is reaching unexpected amounts of people through them. We want to see more. We think this accelerated growth could become normal.'

Firestarters are not conferences with a perceived expert keynoting, as useful as that is, he continues. Nor are they retreats with guided self-reflection, as vital as that is.

They are conversations hosted by some of these churches experiencing this surprising growth. Two took place in 2017, which saw some 'jaw-dropping outcomes from talking, praying and inspiring together'.

‘We are hungry for more,’ continues Alex, ‘and hope you will come and be part of the journey.’

They would work excellently for:

Ministers coming along to be inspired, challenged and re-invigorated in what God might do with their leadership.

Staff and/or leadership teams, especially of lay people and volunteer leaders, to spend 24 hours together with the expectation of fresh energy and renewed vigour. To bring emerging leaders to for an early experience of churches that are growing fast.

There are only five in 2018 and numbers are limited. £25 per person is all meals, materials and resources [overnight accommodation not included] and conferences start at 1030 day 1 and end 1600 day 2.

June 14-15 in Coventry

July 9-10 in Blaby, Leicestershire

September 19-20 in Stafford

October 2-3 in Shinfield, Reading

October 22-23 in Sheffield

For more information, or to sign you or your team up, email Kate at kate@thebeaconchurch.com

The Baptist Pension Scheme: a ‘Family Solution’

A new proposal that seeks to substantially reduce the deficit in the Baptist Pension Scheme has been agreed

Details of the proposal, known as the Family Solution, have been shared with ministers and churches.

The key outcomes include:

very significant additional cash contributions to the Scheme being made by the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB)

no change to the monthly deficit contributions for other employers

the deficit contributions are planned to finish in 2028, 6½ years earlier than the previous plan

some agreed changes to benefits for members and their dependants.

The Family Solution follows lengthy and detailed negotiations between the Pension Trustee and the BPS Employer Group (acting on behalf of the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) and the other scheme employers, which include around 1,300 churches).

The previous recovery plan, agreed at the last valuation of scheme in December 2013, involved employers making pension deficit payments until 2035. Since then the scheme's deficit continued to rise.

While cautioning there may be yet further challenges ahead, the letter to members and churches stated the Family Solution gives the Baptist family 'a genuine opportunity to eradicate the pension deficit within the foreseeable future.' The daily online tracking system provided by LCP, the pensions firm which administers the scheme, showed that the estimated deficit peaked at well in excess of £100m in the summer of 2016, but by the next valuation date of 31 December 2016 it had reduced to £93m. By the end of April 2018 the deficit is estimated to have reduced to £80m due to contributions from employers and positive movements in financial markets. This will be still further reduced when BUGB makes a scheduled £30m contribution at the end of 2018.

Rich Webb, moderator of the Baptist Union of Great Britain Trustee Board, said, 'Just a few years ago the pension problem felt overwhelming and we wondered if there was any way to deal with a deficit that was threatening to undermine our mission.

'It is fantastic to see what God has done through the hard work and determination of a number of people, both from BUGB and the Pension Trustee, to enable us tackle this obstacle.

'The scale of the achievement must not be underestimated.'

The Employers Group was formed in 2015 to co-ordinate the views of the scheme's employers. Through its roadshows it discovered an appetite to deal with the large deficit now, rather than leave it to a future generation.

Malcolm Broad MBE, Employers Group Moderator, praised the willingness of all involved in working towards this solution.

He said, 'The "Family Solution" is the culmination of two years' work by the Employers Group (EG) in an attempt to address the seemingly ever-increasing pension deficit. It's been quite a journey getting to this point and I want to thank the churches and other employers in the Pension Scheme for their commitment to pay deficit contributions both past and present and into what we all hope will be a shortened future commitment.

'The EG is immensely grateful for the support received from Associations, Colleges, Unions and Retired Baptist Ministers Housing Society (RBMHS), without whom the Family Solution would not have been possible. The Family Solution has achieved something quite remarkable in Baptists Together and proves that when we harness our combined energies and work together with a common purpose all things are possible under God.

‘Today, we take one big step towards eradicating the pension deficit once and for all, and tomorrow another step, and then another until we reach our goal, with grateful thanks to all those who journey with us.’

A key feature of the Family Solution is a loan of £20m to the Union from RBMHS. The Society will in turn take a loan of £20m from the Baptist Union Corporation (BUC) which will be secured against RBMHS's property assets in order to provide the funds for the loan to the Union. All the interest cost of the loan from the BUC will be covered by interest on the loan from the Union, so there will not be a cost of the scheme to the day-to-day finances or operation of the society.

Bill Johnston, chair of RBMHS, said, ‘The Managing Committee of RBMHS is very pleased to have been of assistance in finding this solution. It has taken a while and involved a lot of discussions and research, as we had to be satisfied that our primary purpose - the provision of housing to retired Ministers and Missionaries, who meet our eligibility criteria - would not be compromised in any way.

‘That we have been able to do this is very satisfying, especially as the assistance we can give is aligned to our primary purpose: providing support to people in retirement.’

Chris Maggs, Moderator of the Baptist Pension Scheme Trustee, stressed that the family solution protects member benefits. He added that even though the solution has been reached, work will continue alongside the Employers Group.

‘As Trustee, our main concern has been the security of member benefits and ensuring we continue to meet the commitments of the Scheme in a fair way. I believe the agreement reached balances these fundamental elements.

‘Our next task is to work alongside the Employers Group to review investment strategy with a view to keeping the recovery plan on track.’

Full details of the Family Solution, including correspondence sent to ministers, churches and tenants, can be found at baptist.org.uk/familysolution

'Don't dream your life, live your dreams'

Baptist church member, 84, authors book about living life to the full in later years

Struggling with the ageing process? Wondering what now? What next? Or what it's all been about?’

These are some of the questions Baptist church member Angela Lucas is seeking to answer in her new book *How to be a Super Ager – Living Life to the Max in your 50s*,

60s and beyond. It carries a motivational message of 'don't dream your life, live your dreams,' explains Angela, of Church from Scratch in Southend. While primarily for people of third age, its message is relevant to us all.

In many ways Angela is the embodiment of living life to the max. This is her first book, published aged 84. She was inspired to write after tackling part of the ancient Camino de Santiago two years ago. 'At every challenge, especially steep walking uphill and yards of sticky black mud, the refrain in my mind was "this is what it feels like to get older",' she says.

'It wasn't a defeatist thing but a challenge to make the most of. To be renewed and invigorated.'

She hopes that readers will be gripped by the idea that our later years are not necessarily for winding down: they can be 'delightful, rewarding and have means and purpose.'

Her own life has shown her this. She spent her wartime childhood years in Rhyl, north Wales, a time of learning self-sufficiency and contributing to the family larder. Alongside marriage and the birth of her five children, she followed a career in nursing. In her 50s redundancy encouraged a change in career, prompting study for the Private Secretary's Certificate. This led to work in Saudi Arabia as a medical secretary and later as a TEFL teacher in Egypt, teaching English while attempting to learn basic Arabic.

These opportunities were 'a game changer', she says.

'Firstly I realised that it was only by 'an accident of birth' that I was born in England and at a time when schools taught us scripture. Millions of people around the world haven't been born into such luxury.

'It taught me not to take my good fortune lightly but to understand that my privilege came with responsibility to be very open about Jesus Christ. In particular I have a heart for Muslim women and am relaxed about forming such friendships.'

She has been a long-term member of Church from Scratch, the pioneering Baptist church plant in Southend. Minister Peter Dominey says she isn't just writing about living life to the full – 'she is doing just that'.

Angela Lucas How to be a Super

And she's not writing naively: in her book Angela addresses common inhibitors to living life to the full, such as health or family or social problems. 'I am very aware that for many people life can be tough, lonely, painful and physically limiting,' she says. 'But not necessarily inhibiting – think of Stephen Hawking.'

It's something she's had to face in a very tangible way. Six weeks ago her home and its contents were decimated when a fire beginning in the neighbouring house rapidly spread. In 'less time than it took to eat a sandwich' she was homeless. She says she was deeply shocked, but with 'a deep, deep sense of being cared for in heavenly terms.'

'Now I am living in rented property just next door but one to my own home – hopefully by the end of the year the house will be rebuilt and a new chapter of late life will begin.'

There is a strong biblical message underscores what she says and writes. 'For me at the moment, it's to do with responsibility while being very aware of being secure in the care of my Lord and saviour. How I react and behave will say far more than any words I can ever use.

'None of this is said lightly, and in spiritual terms, even at this late time in life, in this situation, I am a work in progress!'

Unexpected find at Worcestershire church Renovations at Fernhill Heath Baptist Church unearthed a time capsule marking the laying of the foundation stone in 1903

It contained a copy of the programme for the stone laying service, and a magazine from Worcester Baptist Church recording the occasion and an 1885 coin.

Minister Jeff Porter explained that was the year that the Worcester church started to regularly worship in the village. Subsequently a plot of land was donated and a building erected – the estimate for its construction being “£300 plus seats and fittings” - no VAT in those days!

The building was extended over the years and Fernhill Heath became an independent church in 1993.

Jeff said, 'We had no idea that the capsule existed. It is amazing that it was discovered just as we were about to celebrate 25 years as a separate church!'

The church is planning a series of events for the anniversary year, details of which are on the church website www.fernhillheathbaptist.org.uk where there is a link to the church Facebook page.

Announcement of new IBTS Centre director The Revd Dr Mike Pears will be the new director of the IBTS Centre in Amsterdam

Mike is one of the first of the Centre's students to graduate in Amsterdam, having begun his doctoral studies in 2011 when IBTS was based in Prague. He succeeds the Revd Dr Stuart Blythe, who led the Centre for a three year term as it established itself in Amsterdam.

The IBTS Centre board announced the appointment on Monday (30 April). Mike begins his new role on 1 August.

Chair of the board the Revd Dr John Weaver stated the appointment comes with the 'unanimous approval of the Board and with their enthusiastic appreciation of the gifts that Mike will bring to the post.'

Since 2014 Mike has led Urban Life, a network of people exploring and researching new approaches to mission and Christian presence in deprived and marginalised neighbourhoods.

His ongoing research interests include: the theology of place, especially as that relates to issues of power and inequality; the use of ethnography in relation to theology and mission; and urban theology. Along with Prof. Paul Cloke (Exeter University), he is co-editing and authoring a series of six books entitled Mission in Marginal Places currently published by Paternoster.

In terms of both conviction and identity Mike is strongly baptistic. The core aspects of his faith have been shaped and enriched through a broad variety of ministry and mission contexts including significant involvements in inner-city London, Vancouver, Frankfurt, Sofia, and Bristol.

This breadth of experience has deepened his appreciation of the way that Baptist identity is expressed and grounded in diverse contexts and how baptistic convictions are embodied in various cultures.

On his appointment, Mike said, 'IBTSC is strategically situated, both culturally and geographically, to encourage research and learning of baptistic theology and spirituality across Europe, the Middle East and further afield.

'At the same time its primary areas of research – identity, mission and practical theology – present a particular resonance with key contemporary themes both within the theology and mission of the church as well as in wider society.'

On Urban Life, Mike explained that a key part of its growth over the past two years has been the formation of a well qualified core team that works with him to facilitate Urban Life's learning programmes and also manages its development. While Mike expressed sadness at leaving the team, he is confident that they will manage well without him and continue to work innovatively in supporting mission in marginal places.