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News:

'For us, this is an issue of justice'

Christians have been urged to be a prophetic voice in their communities and embody an alternative model of lifestyle in the wake of climate warnings from the world's leading scientists

The UN International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) said this week that time is running out to keep global warming to a maximum of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

The world is off track, heading towards 3°C, noted its report released on Monday (8 October). Radical changes to our energy systems, transportation and how we manage land are needed otherwise the risks of drought, floods, extreme heat and poverty for hundreds of millions of people will be a reality. Limiting global warming to 1.5°C compared to 2°C 'could go hand in hand with ensuring a more sustainable and equitable society,' it continued.

Baptist minister the Revd Dr John Weaver, chair of the John Ray Initiative, which connects environment, science and Christianity, said the latest report shows 'no one can pretend any more that they don't know about the reality of climate change and the risk it presents for people throughout the world.'

He said major changes in our lifestyles are needed, and encouraged Christians, guided by faith, to lead the way.

Christians cannot ignore the predicted implications of climate change for the developing world nor for the biodiversity of God's good creation. For us this is an issue of justice. To avoid catastrophic and irreversible changes in global climate we will need to hold the rise in average global surface temperature to 1.5 degrees centigrade; and to do this we will need to change our lifestyles.

All decisions we make should be guided by our Christian faith, accepting our God-given call to care for the planet, founded on our ultimate hope which is in God's purposes and promises.

We will need to make changes in our sourcing and use of energy, changes to the way we manage land, changes in our shopping and eating choices, and changes to the way we move around with transportation.

Therefore, in our use of earth's God-given resources and our care of God's planet, churches should be a prophetic voice in their communities, where radical Christian discipleship embodies an alternative narrative, which offers hope – expressing an alternative model of lifestyle for all in our society. We can campaign with and support others who are working for a green, clean, sustainable energy future and a pollution free land and ocean.

Green Christian called on everyone to take action in these three ways:

- Consider all the ways your own life impacts on the environment – use Green Christian's leaflet 9 ways of living gently on the earth – and make a pledge to change your life, prayerfully accepting the natural limits God has given us. You could start by making one day each month a Fossil Fuel Free day – thinking too about the impact of things that we buy, particularly the distances our goods have travelled before reaching our shops.
- Join a campaign, write letters, spread the word. By joining Green Christian, or another environmental group, you can add your voice to the campaign, and find out more ways to make a difference. You can also write to retailers, and governments – those who have power to make a bigger difference.
- Prayer – for conversion of those in power who are ignoring or denying this issue. And for yourself, to grow in a spirituality that recognises that the desire to have more Stuff can get in the way of what God wants for us, and is profoundly damaging the first of God's gifts to us – our common home.

Operation Noah stated, 'The long-awaited UN climate change report is a call to action: if we're going to limit warming to #1o5C, we need to bring about 'rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society'. There's no time for further delay.'

Mission possible: children's, youth work

Prayer and taking time to understand local needs key factors in seeing missional objectives met, says report

The findings come in a new report from national Christian charity Scripture Union: Mission Possible aims to understand the key to success in mission with children and young people. It emerged as part of the charity's 95 campaign, which focuses on the statistic suggesting that 95 per cent of children and young people don't go to church.

The research was conducted across England and Wales over the past 12 months, through a combination of responses to the charity's 95 census which detailed church-led activities with children and young people, and monitoring mission activity carried out by Scripture Union staff. Success was defined in terms of engagement with 'the 95', and the extent to which projects met their objectives and sustainability.

The study found that prayer makes a significant difference to a mission's success, identifying clear links between teams that met their mission objectives and those who dedicated time to prayer for the work. Alongside the obvious benefits of God answering prayers, respondents also reported the positive psychological impact of knowing others were supportive of the work. Prayer was also cited as an effective way of increasing support for the mission, providing involvement opportunities for those who couldn't help practically.

The research also discovered that mission initiatives that were sensitive to specific local issues were usually most successful, which presents a clear challenge to many well-established programmes that adopt a more generic approach to children's and youth work. It stated: 'Many successful missions had spent time carefully researching and understanding the context. Although missions often sought to address universal needs based on well-established models of youth and children's work, they sometimes failed to address particular local needs because their approach heavily relied on what youth/children's work typically looks like.'

Tim Hastie-Smith, National Director for Scripture Union England and Wales said, 'It is vital that God is not hidden in the heart of our church buildings. We need to go out into our communities, listen to the real needs of those around us and respond accordingly. This research reminds us that prayer is vital to success in God's work, and that programmes and missions are meaningless unless they meet real, felt needs.'

'Mission cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach to community engagement. While theory and best practice can provide helpful foundations, we have to learn, adapt and be agile to those in the community.'

Appointing the right people was another key finding. The most frequently cited factor for the success of a mission in the short term was an excellent leader. Many successful missions had leaders 'with staying power, who were based locally and had a visible presence in the local community'. A wide range of volunteer ages were recorded among successful projects, 'challenging the myth that you have to be young to work with children and young people,' note the report.

Having a visible presence in the community was another key factor. The report stated, 'Missions were more likely to succeed if the Christian community was already known within the local area and had a positive presence. This could be hard work, and it would often take a long time for the church to earn the trust of the community.'

The support of the wider Christian community and leadership was one of the most frequently cited factors that contributed to the success of a mission.

The full report can be downloaded from www.su.org.uk/missionpossible

Social media and mental health issues

A recent mental health survey has revealed almost 8 out of 10 people believe social media has a negative impact on the mental health of young people and their families, with respondents calling for greater investment in mental health education and parenting support

The results have been published by the Christian charity Fegans to coincide with World Mental Health Day on 10 October, which this year carries the theme of “young people and mental health in a changing world.”

Fegans, which provides professional children’s counselling and parent support services to families across Kent, Sussex, Surrey, London and Oxfordshire, ran a survey over a period of eight months this year. They asked why people thought mental health issues are more prevalent today and what they thought could be done about it. A staggering 82 per cent of respondents cited social media as a cause, which was closely followed by increased academic pressure (72 per cent), the fact that we have better understanding of mental health today (56 per cent) and family breakdown (44 per cent).

When asked what could be done about it, preventative measures were a strong theme, with 79 per cent of people believing that better education and support for parents would make a difference, and 76 per cent calling for greater investment in education around mental health issues. Over three quarters of those surveyed said that increased government funding was needed to deal with the mental health crisis affecting children and young people today.

Fegans also took the opportunity to encourage participants to think about what they could do personally to help make a positive difference in their communities. Practical suggestions which proved popular included learning more about mental health illness (58 per cent), scheduling in “me time” (55 per cent) and playing more with their children or grandchildren (51 per cent).

Despite doubling the number of counselling sessions Fegans provides for children in schools and its centres over the past two years, demand for its services continues to rise and the charity is constantly recruiting more counsellors. This is reflective of the national picture, with Public Health England reporting that only 25 per cent of children needing professional therapeutic support actually receive it.

Fegans CEO Ian Soars said, 'At Fegans we have faced a huge escalation in both numbers of young people being referred for counselling and the level of complexity of their needs. As a charity we are doing all we can to ensure that we reach as many children and families in need as possible, but more collaborative work needs to be done at all levels in society to meet the mental health needs of young people in a changing world.'

'We believe that the rising tide of children's poor mental health can - and should - be pushed back. The answer is not more protection - nor is it molly-coddling our children - the answer is prevention and education, which was very much reflected in our survey.'

'As a nation we need to collectively invest in making quality time for parents to spend with their children. We need to hold the social media giants to account. And we need to accept that family breakdown can cause deep hurt to children and think about how we address this openly as a culture.'

To find out more about the work of Fegans, or to access advice on young people and mental health in a changing world, visit www.fegans.org.uk

Building intergenerational relationships

Bewdley Baptist Church has embarked on a year of building relationship between differing generations

Film charades relay, paper aeroplane making, 60 second challenges and telling two truths and a tall tale are not things usually associated with church away days. However, these were all part of the programme for Bewdley Baptist church on their away day in the summer.

Using the 'Today not Tomorrow' resource, launched by Baptists Together and Arise Ministries in 2014, the church sought to imagine a church where different generations actively seek to support and learn from each other.

The day was organised by a steering group from different generations within the church. As well as lots of games the day included opportunities to explore what it meant to be an intergenerational church.

The outcome of the away day was the production of a mandate, which everyone at church has signed, committing the church to specific steps to develop intergenerational relationship in the next year. This includes opportunities for all-ages to share communion together, a commitment to developing opportunities for

different generations to be together, and a commitment from all generations to actively seek to get to know each other.

Minister Simon Harry said, 'Different generations have so much to offer each other, and everyone is enriched when generations come together.'

He added, 'As the church continues on this journey we would be interested to hear from any other churches who are trying to encourage intergenerational relationship in their church.'

Contact Bewdley Baptist Church on office@bewdleybaptist.org.uk

Berwick Baptist Church NBA

- A church seeking to deepen its discipleship, develop leaders and transform its engagement in God's mission
- Breathing new life into mission through the Re:imagine initiative

Life is being re-imagined in the most northerly church supported by a Home Mission grant. Berwick upon Tweed Baptist Church is committed to a transformation that is bearing fruit in the life of the church as it develops a greater sense of being God's family and a greater commitment to become more outward looking and mission-focussed.

At their Church Anniversary in September, there was a palpable sense of excitement and real encouragement as they gave their focus to an NBA initiative that has been borrowed from the West of England Baptist Association called 'Re-Imagine'. This is a process that enables a church to deepen its discipleship, develop leaders and transform its engagement in God's mission.

Berwick Baptists have described Re-Imagine as one of the most positive and yet challenging things the church has embarked on. The opening weekend was spent on retreat with other NBA churches, who similarly want to breathe new life into mission to bring God's kingdom into our communities. The practical, relevant teaching and group sessions were thought-provoking, and provided the opportunity to be able to spend invaluable time as a church leadership looking critically at their church, praying together and giving time to listening to God. They sensed God speaking to them in a very powerful way that resulted in changes being made and new plans being put in place.

As the Re-Imagine programme says, they adopted the aims to 'Inspire discipleship, infuse culture, ignite mission and integrity in leadership.' The leaders were inspired

following the first training session and returned to the church determined to ignite mission within the fellowship. They were strengthened as a leadership, and found a real sense of purpose. They began to engage the whole fellowship with clarity and wisdom and enabled others to catch the vision to become a more mission-focused church which brought renewed enthusiasm and a refreshed sense of purpose.

As a small fellowship they are well aware of the challenges ahead but Re-Imagine has enabled them to think creatively, while making them take a long hard look at how they share the Kingdom of God in an ever changing culture. As Helen Hulme, one of the leadership, said, 'This process of self-evaluation is not an easy one but is vital if we want to be open to God's leading for our church. We are looking forward with anticipation to see what God has in store for us over the coming 18 months. Everything we intend to do will be thoroughly grounded in prayer and based on God's word but what and how we do it must be accessible to those living in a very different culture to ours.'

Arising directly out of Re-Imagine, the church is exploring ways of deepening their discipleship, starting with the leaders providing an example of mutual accountability with a commitment to grow in Christ. They are also starting a 'Well-being Arts Group' at the end of October which is aimed at using art to help people with mental health problems.

The engagement with the Re-Imagine programme continues, but it is already bearing fruit.

Supported directly by a Home Mission grant and the Association which is hugely dependent on the Baptist family purse, Berwick Baptist Church is developing as it seeks to engage in mission in the very north of England.