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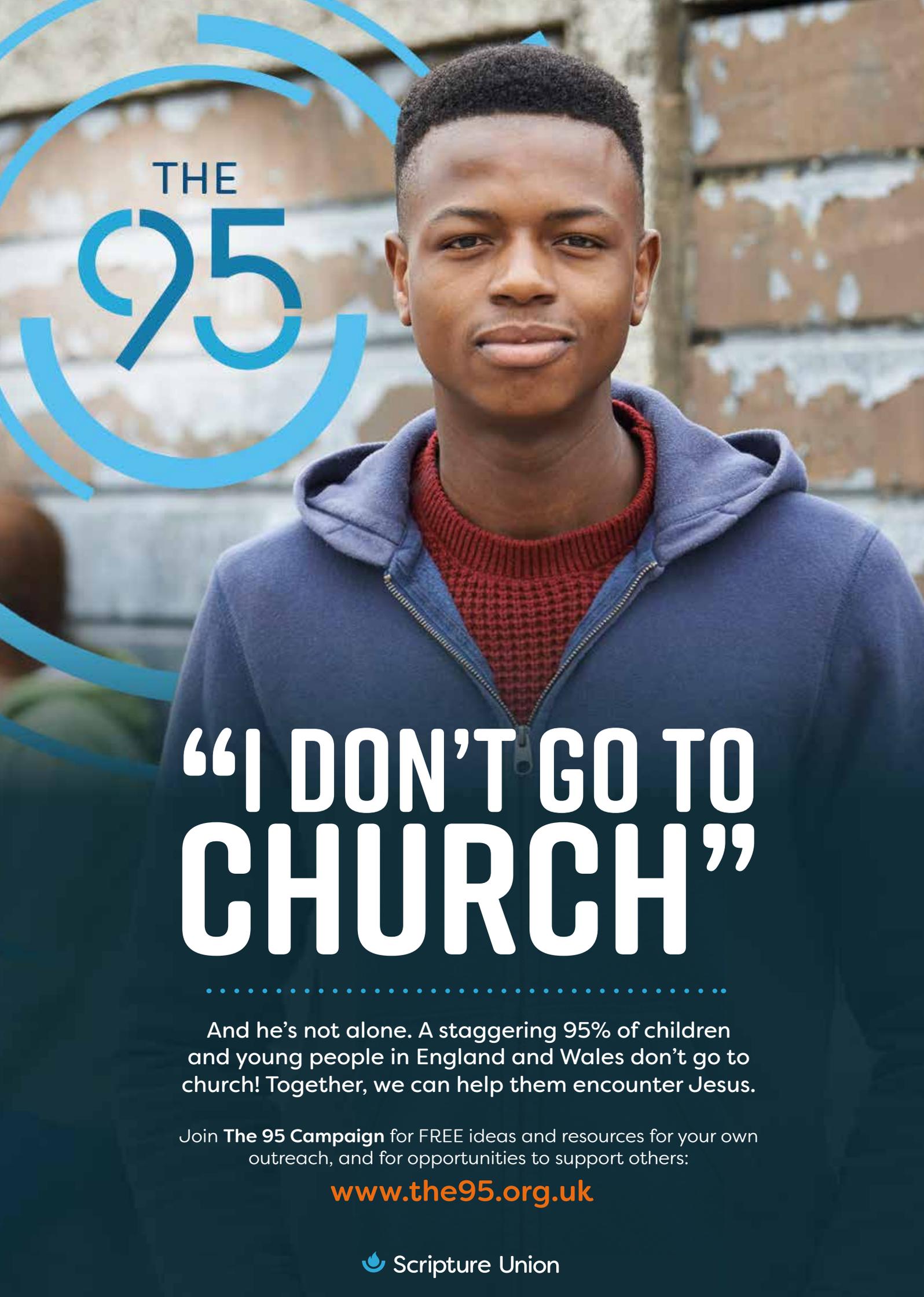
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# ALL are welcome here

I have huge admiration for people who have the gift of hospitality and welcome. I have been so blessed over the years to be welcomed and made to feel at home in ways that have truly touched my heart. I aspire to be like them, yet it is not a gift that I am blessed with in abundance! What I have tried to do over the years though, is to grow and develop my welcoming skills. The main way that I have done this is to really reflect on the hospitality and welcome that I have received, to identify what made me feel accepted, valued and at home, and then to try and imitate that in the ways that I relate to others. This is a continual learning journey, but I wanted to share an experience of welcome with you.

Many years ago, I visited a church on my own one Sunday morning. I went to sit down and, a little later, a teenage lad and his mum came to sit next to me and began to chat. It soon became apparent that this was a young man with learning difficulties. To help him to feel at home the church obviously gives him his own, very simple, guide through the order of service each week. When I explained that I was new to the church and everything was unfamiliar, he gladly showed me his service guide and explained to me what was going to happen. Later in the service, he went out to join the youth work and, as he left, he handed me the guide so that



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I would feel at home when he wasn't there to help me. It was a wonderful and profound experience.

But, of course, welcome and hospitality are not just restricted to Sunday mornings in a church building – far from it! It's not restricted to the first time you meet someone. Welcome that goes on to create a genuine sense of belonging where all are valued and released to be who they are in Christ is both sacrificial and vulnerable. In exploring the values and principles behind such a culture of welcome for this edition of *Baptists Together* magazine, we have highlighted different facets of it: a theological understanding; practical access; church culture; and community engagement. In doing so, we have worked closely with our *Disability Justice Hub*, whose input has been invaluable.

Reflecting on the hospitality and welcome that I have received (and very occasionally not received!) really helps me to continue to grow in Christlikeness in this area. I hope that by reading the different stories and articles in this edition you will be inspired to grow too. I hope that by listening to the insights and experiences of others, you will also have your heart and horizons broadened as you gain a deeper understanding of what life looks and feels like to others who may not always feel welcomed or that they fully belong. As we are welcomed unconditionally by God, may we too be a people who have an awesome reputation for our welcome and hospitality in the name of Christ.

**Lynn Green**  
General Secretary

## EDITORIAL GROUP:

Stephen Keyworth  
Beth Allison-Glenny  
Lynn Green  
Micky Munroe  
Colin Pye  
Jonathan Somerville

## PRODUCTION TEAM:

Paul Hobson  
Mike Lowe  
Mary Parker  
Tracey Vallance

## Baptists Together

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The Baptist Union of Great Britain  
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## You are welcome here

**We are simply incomplete when part of our Body is missing or afforded less honour, writes Andrea King**

When Paul painted a picture of a Body of Christ in which hand and foot, eye and ear, were equally valued and welcomed (1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12:4-8), he set forth a radical call for inclusion. It was no mean feat to bring Jew and Greek, men and women, slave and free together in one equal community, in an otherwise staunchly divided social environment. Peter's vision and time with Cornelius (Acts 10) give us a flavour of quite what a change this was. This early church community was to be forged on the shared foundation of Divine love and welcome. It faced the ultimate challenge of learning to love those who were profoundly different to themselves, as they too would wish to be loved. What was relevant then to Corinth and Rome, is just as relevant to us now.

Paul's insight was extraordinary. He recognised that some would worry that there was no place for them, whilst others would find reasons to exclude. In that kind of environment everyone feels vulnerable. He proclaimed that those perceived as less honourable, or somehow inferior, should be treated with 'greater honour'. Jesus' ministry exemplified exactly this, reaching those otherwise ignored, excluded, condemned or placed beyond the reach of religious community, resonating with the prophesied diverse new covenant community (Revelation 7:9), the 'great multitude'.

What was relevant then to Corinth and Rome, is just as relevant to us now

Loving those who were entirely different to themselves set the early Church apart. I wonder if we would describe the Church today in these terms? Diversity built strength, and resilience, in the face of real adversity. This made the Church a challenge, and at times a threat, to the political and social powers of the time.

I spent time last summer reflecting on Martin Luther King's sermons and Desmond Tutu's life. I'm a white woman, and very aware of the connotations that I carry into conversations with faith siblings of other cultural heritages, just by virtue of the colour of my skin. I can't change my ethnic heritage, but I can take responsibility for the impact my heritage has on others. I can and do, say sorry. King and Tutu's exceptional leadership echoed Paul's inspired vision, 'unarmed love is the most powerful force in all the world'<sup>1</sup> (Martin Luther King). King's was a costly and tear-stained love, offered despite the threat of punishment, torture, exclusion and death threats from people who looked a lot like me. Just as we saw faith leaders often respond with fear and condemnation to Christ's inclusive ministry, King and Tutu endured similar mistreatment. This extraordinary love found something to value in the 'other', even when that 'other' meant to cause harm.

A key principle is 'seeking first to understand' someone who is different

We have a unique opportunity as the Body of Christ to provide a place of welcome, a place of care and nurture; a place that resonates a precious Divine love to those who have never known love. We have the potential to be beacons of hope, to those who have lost all capacity for hope.

In order to do that, we're going to need to understand what welcome and inclusion mean. We'll have to proactively address public perceptions that church is a place where exclusion runs rife, where some are welcome and some are not. It grieves me that in crucial debates about racial justice, gender equality and now sexual orientation and gender, we seem to have lost

<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther King, *A Gift of Love*, p148





## Can we be friends?

**Three factors that play a part in how we exclude or include and welcome disabled people**  
By Martin Hobgen

### First impressions count

'We've got a place for people like you...' was the greeting I received at the door. If I hadn't been part of a church weekend away visiting another church many miles from home, then I might have turned around and walked (or wheeled) away. The church building turned out to be reasonably accessible to wheelchair users, despite being a Victorian building with pews. Some pews had been removed and I could sit next to my wife. Physical access to the building was not the dominant issue: I did not feel welcomed because of the actions and attitudes of the first people I met.

There are, however, ways of encouraging positive first impressions and inclusive relationships that can then enable people on the margins of church communities to be welcomed and enabled to fully participate in Baptist church community life.

I want to suggest that three factors play a part in how we exclude or include and welcome disabled people: language, understanding who disabled people are; theological perspective on disability.

### Language and disability

The greeting I received implied a number of things to me: the church had decided where disabled people should sit; there was an emphasis on 'we' and 'you', or 'people like us' and 'people like you' suggesting that non-disabled people and disabled people are part of two distinct groups, that they are 'other' to one another. This creates a distance between people that hinders the formation of meaningful relationships between disabled and non-disabled people. This in turn hinders the inclusion of disabled people, or anyone who is different, from inclusion within a church community.

The language that we use can reveal and shape our attitudes towards people who are different to the majority, in our churches and in society. It is rare for disabled people to be referred to by once common terms such as 'handicapped', 'crippled' or 'spastic'. I would hope that these terms are never used in church or by Christians. There is some debate about whether the term 'disabled people' or 'people with disabilities' should be used but either term is preferable to 'handicapped person' etc. The catch-all phrase 'the disabled' is however not helpful as it assumes that

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## There are subtle ways in which language is used that can either promote or hinder a sense of inclusion of disabled people

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disabled people are all the same and different to 'the able-bodied'/'the non-disabled'. This leads to rather general and vague relationships which are unable to transform people and communities.

There are subtle ways in which language is used that can either promote or hinder a sense of inclusion of disabled people. When we assume that everyone can stand to sing, or can see words and images projected by AV equipment, or hear what is being said then we are erecting unnecessary barriers that reinforce that sense of exclusion. One of my particular bug-bears is the request 'Please stand...' to indicate a response to something God is doing. I do not want to police the language we use, other than language which explicitly divides and excludes others; however a greater awareness of the potential impact of the language we use has potential to foster inclusion rather than maintain exclusion. It has, for instance, become common to hear 'Please stand if you are able to...' when inviting a congregation to participate in sung worship.

### Understanding who disabled people are

There are broadly three ways of understanding who disabled people are. Firstly disabled people can be understood to be people whose bodies or minds prevent them from performing a range of tasks which are considered to be required to live a 'normal' life. This suggests that disabled people need to be cured, fixed or healed in some way so that they become 'normal' able-bodied people, or they need to be provided with equipment and adaptations so that they can perform the tasks that a 'normal' able-bodied person does. In this approach the medical condition that means I use a wheelchair is seen as the cause of my disability and the solution is to cure or heal my body or provide a better wheelchair.

The second approach to understanding who disabled people are is to ignore their bodies and mind and the impact of their different embodiment. This approach understands disability purely in terms of discrimination expressed by society, through attitudes and actions, towards those it considers to be different. In this approach my medical condition and use of a wheelchair is seen as irrelevant; my disability is caused by society that refuses to adapt buildings to be accessible or change the assumptions that are made about what I cannot do.

A third way is to recognise that the experiences of disabled people are shaped both by the nature of their embodiment, the environment and by the attitudes of other people. This means that although some generalisations can be made, (for instance that wheelchair users need ramps and turning space) that the most appropriate way to include people is to pay attention to particular people in particular contexts. This approach takes account of the complex web of factors that shape someone's experience of disability and the relationships between disabled and non-disabled people. In my own experience there are some contexts, places and relationships in which I am more disabled and others in which I am less disabled.

### Theological perspectives on disability

Once again there are three broad theological perspectives that can be discerned regarding disability and relationships between disabled and non-disabled people. In reality there are many theological approaches, some of which overlap one another and others which are significantly different. The first perspective, which might be termed historical and/or traditional, is closely related to the idea that disability is located in and arises from an individual's embodiment. This can take two contrasting forms: disability is either linked to sin and impurity and the answer is seen to be in seeking forgiveness and healing; or disability is understood in terms of virtuous suffering, character development or as a means of non-disabled people learning about care and concern for others. These identify disabled people as other, either as sinner or saints, both of which restrict the possibility of developing relationships which foster inclusion within church communities. My personal experience of this is of a church which encouraged me to seek physical healing in order to be able to fulfill my role within the church community or remain a passive member of the congregation.

The second theological perspective is closely linked to the understanding that disability is rooted in the attitudes and actions of society. Since the publication of Nancy Eiesland's book *The Disabled God* in 1994 a number of related approaches have been developed that focus on how disabled people should be welcomed and included in church community life. Eiesland's image of the disabled God recognises that the risen Jesus Christ still bears the marks of the crucifixion, that these are signs that God identifies with disabled people through not having a perfect body, and that Jesus overcame death and the effects of sin through




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They say that first impressions count. My first impressions of at least one church I have visited were not very encouraging

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weakness and suffering and not through power and authority. Jennie Block's *Copious Hosting* (2002) focuses on hospitality and how we are co-hosts with God, while Beth Creamer's *Disability and Christian Theology* (2009) recognises that all human beings have limits (she stresses these are not limitations) because we are created rather than being divine, and explores why some of these limits result in some being excluded while other limits make no difference. These, and other related approaches, have contributed towards the greater inclusion of disabled people in church communities. There are three issues about these approaches which are of concern: they risk making God in our image seen through the perspective of disability; they tend to lead to general relationships between disabled and non-disabled people which are not transformative, despite the Liberation Theology approach utilised by some writers; they also fail to address the exclusion of people with learning disabilities because they rely on the ability of disabled people to be active in seeking inclusion.

This brings us to a third approach to disability which has its roots in the work of Jean Vanier, the founder of the L'Arche communities. Others, more qualified than I, are going to write about the work of Vanier and L'Arche, so I want to focus on one critical and central idea, that of friendship with God and with one another. Since the foundation of L'Arche in the early 1960s the development of friendships has been significant in the practice and theological reflection concerning the inclusion of people with learning disabilities, however it does not seem to have been explicitly applied to people with physical disabilities. Rather than the often vague relationships between disabled people and non-disabled people I want to suggest that friendship has the potential to enable greater participatory inclusion of disabled people within Baptist church communities. Rather than theorising about how this might work I close by painting a picture of how I and many other people would like to be welcomed and included in church communities.

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the most appropriate way  
to include people is to pay  
attention to particular people  
in particular contexts

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### How I would like to be welcomed?

I would like to be welcomed as a friend, or at the very least to be welcomed as a potential friend. This means that I would like to be greeted and asked my name, perhaps followed by whether I am visiting or have moved to the area. I would like to be asked where I would like to sit, if there are chairs then there is considerable flexibility, if there are pews then this might be limited. If adaptations have been done properly then they will be where I would choose to sit or I may still choose to sit somewhere else. I know if I'm causing an obstruction and I also know if I can see the preacher, the AV screen etc. Other than these practical implications regarding my wheelchair I want to be treated as any other visitor or new person. We are all friends of God through the relationship he offers us through the cross and are all united by our resulting friendship with others in covenant relationships within and beyond our local congregations.

In all but the most physically inaccessible church buildings a welcoming and friendly attitude will enable me to be included while even in the most physically accessible church building I may be excluded by the attitude of others.

I've often summed this up in the phrase: 'When I am among strangers I am most disabled, when I am among friends then I am least disabled.'

**Martin Hobgen** is a Baptist minister who is currently engaged in doctoral research at **Northern Baptist College** investigating how friendships between disabled and non-disabled people can facilitate the participatory inclusion of disabled people in Baptist church communities. He is a wheelchair user. Martin is married to Ruth, an accountant and church treasurer, does not have children, and is passionate about the church being an inclusive community.





## Inclusive principles

**Through the Roof encourages churches and the Christian community to ensure that disabled people are included in every aspect of church life, by:**

- » Adopting a can-do culture with an inclusive ethos, valuing all and addressing each person's needs on an individual basis
- » Intentionally encouraging and enabling disabled people to contribute to church life using their God-given gifts
- » Welcoming and being open to disabled people so they feel they 'belong'
- » Offering reserved parking or a drop-off point
- » Having 'step-free' access giving level or ramped entry to a building
- » Providing accessible toilets
- » Having a loop system in operation and, when required, providing sign language interpreters and/or speech-to-text (captioning)
- » Using straightforward, jargon-free language
- » Supplying written information (including that on a screen) in large print (font size 18 point) and other alternative formats (eg audio, electronic, Braille)
- » Ensuring that there are clear/pictorial signs (for people with learning disabilities)
- » Having a quiet space available during the main meeting for those who may need time-out (for people on the autistic spectrum)
- » Having good, even, glare and flicker-free lighting to benefit people with sight loss or autism
- » Offering seating (some with arms) near the entrance/exit
- » Providing a named contact to 'champion' issues and initiate training on disability
- » Speaking directly to disabled people, assuming nothing and asking them how they are best supported and included
- » Ensuring there is commentary/audio description for purely visual content to those unable to see the screen/stage
- » Ensuring the website is accessible and has information that helps disabled people access the building and activities

**For more visit [throughtheroof.org](http://throughtheroof.org)**



## A Theology of Hospitality

By Anthony Clarke

The pages of the Bible are full of examples of hospitality, many of which reveal dedication, service and cost. In the famous example in Genesis 18 where Abraham entertains the three mysterious visitors, two verses describe the preparation of Abraham, Sarah and the servants, but it would have taken hours, more even than allowed in Masterchef or Bake Off! The practice of hospitality is deeply embedded in the customs, expectations and understandings of the culture; there is a sense that here was holy ground. The concept of hospitality can be a vital and helpful image or metaphor for understanding and exploring many different areas of our faith: it resonates deeply with the biblical narrative, allows us to think about things theologically and readily connects with our own practice and experience. Hospitality can help us develop a whole way of thinking about the world and, more importantly, of thinking about God.

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**in the language of the New Testament, the same word means host and guest and also means stranger; it is *xenos*, from which we get our word xenophobic**

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When we think about hospitality I suspect we instinctively think about being a host; perhaps we recall occasions when we have sought to be a good host and perhaps it has gone well, or perhaps not! But to be a host implies there is a guest or several guests, it is always a relational term. What is fascinating is that in Greek, in the language of the New Testament, the same word means host and guest and also means stranger; it is *xenos*, from which we get our word xenophobic.

As we read the Gospels we see the way that Jesus moves easily from being a guest, with Levi or Simon or Mary and Martha, to being a host as he feeds the crowds, breaks bread in Emmaus or provides breakfast on the beach. This movement between host and guest will be important as we think about our own practice, but it is also important as we think about who God is and what God is like.

Building on these examples in the Gospels, we can talk in a very profound way about hospitality being at the very heart of who God is, because it is so deeply connected with the experience of grace. So the father of the prodigal son who runs with open arms offers perhaps the most moving image of God who graciously and lavishly shows hospitality and welcome to us. By his hospitality, the father creates space for the son, and such space not only offers presence and welcome but the possibility of real transformation.

This of course is risky and uncertain, but such is the nature of hospitality – we offer something as a gift. But we recall how one New Testament term means host, guest and stranger. Hospitality at its heart offers a welcome to the stranger, those who are other than us, and different from us, and they become guests. This again takes us to the heart of God. God alone is divine and even though we are created in God's image we are fundamentally other than and different to God; but in gracious hospitality God creates space for those who are other, for us.

But we need to push the image further. Not only is God the host, who welcomes us, God comes as the guest. This is at the heart of the Christmas narrative and the incarnation. Of course God made the world and so it belongs to him, but still in Jesus God comes as the guest, dependent on the welcome he is given or not given. To welcome a guest is to desire to enter their world not just for them to enter yours; it breaks barriers, challenges power and so is deeply subversive.

If hospitality helps us to think about who God is, it then helps us to think about who we are, and what we do. If in hospitality the stranger becomes guest, then the kind of spaces we offer as God's people to everyone, but particularly to those who are strangers, matters deeply. This might be those in our communities who are marginalised, those who come to this country as immigrants, those children in need of fostering and adoption. More than that, when we listen to someone, really listen rather than the distracted half attention, we are offering the other hospitality, a space of welcome. When we worship together around the Lord's Table, we are guests because Jesus is the host, but also have an opportunity to welcome others. When we engage in mission we are not simply giving a message of challenging injustice, we are offering hospitality, where we hold out nourishment and hope, but also where we give our very selves, as God does to the world.

Hospitality at its best  
is always a two-way  
experience,  
for host and guest

But our starting point cannot be how we welcome those with disabilities into our churches, for this instantly suggests those with disabilities are simply other than us. The starting point is to recognise that we all have degrees of disability and we are all welcomed by God

This edition of *Baptists Together* has a particular focus on experiences and issues of disability, and ideas of hospitality help us here too. But our starting point cannot be how we welcome those with disabilities into our churches, for this instantly suggests those with disabilities are simply other than us. The starting point is to recognise that we all have degrees of disability and we are all welcomed by God.

But again we need to push our thinking further. Again, I am sure we begin by thinking of ourselves as hosts. We want to offer a warm welcome to those with disabilities, that they feel welcome. This might mean changing the building, changing our language and changing our priorities. But this keeps us in

charge. Hospitality is also about being the guest in a space where others are the host. This requires us to put power down, move ourselves out from the centre of everything and be dependent on others. It involves risk and requires significantly more vulnerability on our part, but then this follows the pattern of the incarnation. Hospitality at its best is always a two-way experience, for host and guest. When I am host I offer the best I can; when I am invited as a guest I may take something as a present. But in both cases I don't impose anything – I simply offer it as a gift.

**Anthony Clarke** is Tutorial Fellow in Pastoral Studies and Community Learning at **Regent's Park College** in Oxford



### Some further reading:

Christine Pohl, *Making Room, Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, (Eerdmans, 1999)

Elizabeth Newman, *Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers* (Brazos, 2007)

Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel* (Liturgical Press, 2000)

Thomas Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality* (Brazos, 2008)



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## Meeting God in the stranger: a missional reflection on hospitality

By Mark Ord

The stranger pops up all over the Bible. An awkward but significant presence, scripture shows us an encounter with the stranger that leads to life giving change.

Take the story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10.

In this story Peter eats at the house of Cornelius, the Roman Centurion. At the time it was against the law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. Through this encounter, and the build up to it, Peter makes the surprising discovery that when it comes to witnessing to Jesus, it is never the start point to brand or define people as unclean (v28). There are no easy definitions of insiders and outsiders. It becomes a profound meeting that has huge implications for both men: as Cornelius and his followers respond to the Holy Spirit via Peter's message and are subsequently baptised, they are recorded as the first Gentiles to convert to the Christian faith. Yet it's risky for Peter – the cultural norms of the day mean he shouldn't be there, and indeed he is criticised by his fellow believers when he relays the story of the meal at the Roman Centurion's house. Despite this risk and misgivings, the encounter marks a sea change in how the gospel message is spread, and to whom it is available.

The crucial role of the stranger is a pattern seen throughout the scriptures:

- » Abraham and Sarah at Mamre: Genesis 18
- » Jacob wrestles with a stranger: Genesis 32
- » Joshua meets a stranger before battle: Joshua 5
- » Jesus meets a Syrophenician woman: Mark 7
- » The disciples on the Emmaus Road: Luke 24

At each of these meetings things begin to change. The stranger is a danger to the settled order, and continually marks the boundary of change. People like Jonah, who had problems with the other, were set up as counter examples of how not to do it.

God meets us in the stranger, and this should shape our thinking about mission. To be engaged in mission is to engage with the other: the stranger, the person you don't know. In a multicultural society that's always the case. Mission brings us into contact with people, and how we engage the stranger is crucial.

So how are we when we meet the stranger? What's our stance? Who is the guest? Who is the host?

Traditionally, maybe we have thought of mission as simply transmission: we've got something to share with you. We will get you to a place where we can hand over to you. It may be invitational and attractational. We want to encourage people into our lives, and our buildings. When we think of mission as transmission, we, the church, will shape the stranger.

But in practice, people are less pliable. They don't just want to be invited; they want to invite. And when we study these stories, we see something vulnerable at work. Jesus is both host and guest, regularly present at someone else's table. The encounter between Peter and Cornelius only happened because Peter went to Cornelius's table. There is something very necessary and vulnerable about the starting point being at someone else's table. Peter's life up to that day was organised to ensure that he never spent time, less share a table with a Roman soldier like Cornelius. Yet here they are, cultural enemies, who become instruments in each other's transformation.

As Baptists, we love the gathered community. But community is fragile – it can always be changed from the inside, which means there's a tension when we encounter the stranger: we would love to welcome them in – but we would love them to be the same. If you look at the paradigm of Peter/Cornelius, that thinking is wrong.

There's more too, when we consider the importance of the meeting in contrast with the message. When we give priority to the message over the meeting, it is suggested we have a rational rather than relational approach.



By contrast the meeting is the human thing, and there is quite an emphasis on it in scripture. The Gospel worked just as much by Peter sitting down with the mother-in-law. Both Peter and Cornelius thought they were there to speak to each other, but first they ate together, which had not been done before. After the meal, Peter started speaking, and it was then that the Holy Spirit fell. God was after the meeting.

These are key points if we consider that hospitality is a key part of mission. What does it mean if it's not only about the message? How are we thinking about mission if the meeting is the thing? What would change in your church if hospitality became the key mission strategy? What would be gained and what might be lost?

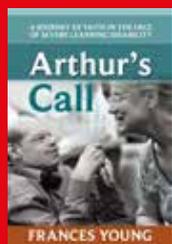
This is God's world, and God has a way of being present in God's world. God is a hospitable presence in the world. Our churches need to be out in the wider world, which means welcoming people to our place, and being out receiving hospitality. It means being as brave about our hospitality as our words.

Scripture shows that God meets us in the stranger. When we do, the Holy Spirit is at work.

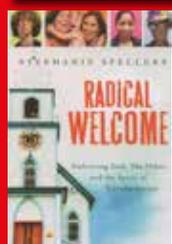
**Mark Ord** is Director for Mission Training and Hospitality at **BMS World Mission**. This is adapted from a presentation he gave in a seminar at the **European Baptist Federation** Council in September 2019



## RESOURCES



**Arthur's Call: A Journey of Faith in the Face of Severe Learning Disability** – by Frances Young  
 'A remarkable book about the call of Arthur and the response of his mother. Two wonderful people bonded together in a love which is tenderness and competence. Arthur's Call is a moving story which brings deep insights into the necessary place of people with severe disabilities in the body of Christ and in the plan of God for humanity.' Jean Vanier, founder of L'Arche  
 Published by: SPCK Publishing (2014) ISBN: 978-02810 7045 9



**Radical Welcome: Embracing God, The Other, and the Spirit of Transformation** – by Stephanie Spellers  
 At once a theological, inspirational, and practical guide for congregations that want to move beyond diversity and inclusion to present a vision for the church of the future: one where the transforming gifts, voices and power of marginalised cultures and groups bring new life to the mainline church.  
 Published by: Church Publishing Incorporated (2006) ISBN: 978-08986 9520 5



**Just Aware** is a new training resource being developed by our Justice Hubs, aiming to raise awareness of prejudice, discrimination, racism and its debilitating impact on the people with whom we live and work. At the core is a conviction that unjust relationships and behaviours have a seriously damaging impact on humanity, they are an offence to human dignity, and constitute a serious assault on the image of God in each and every one of us. Available later in 2020. See [www.baptist.org.uk/justaware](http://www.baptist.org.uk/justaware)



# Accessible Churches

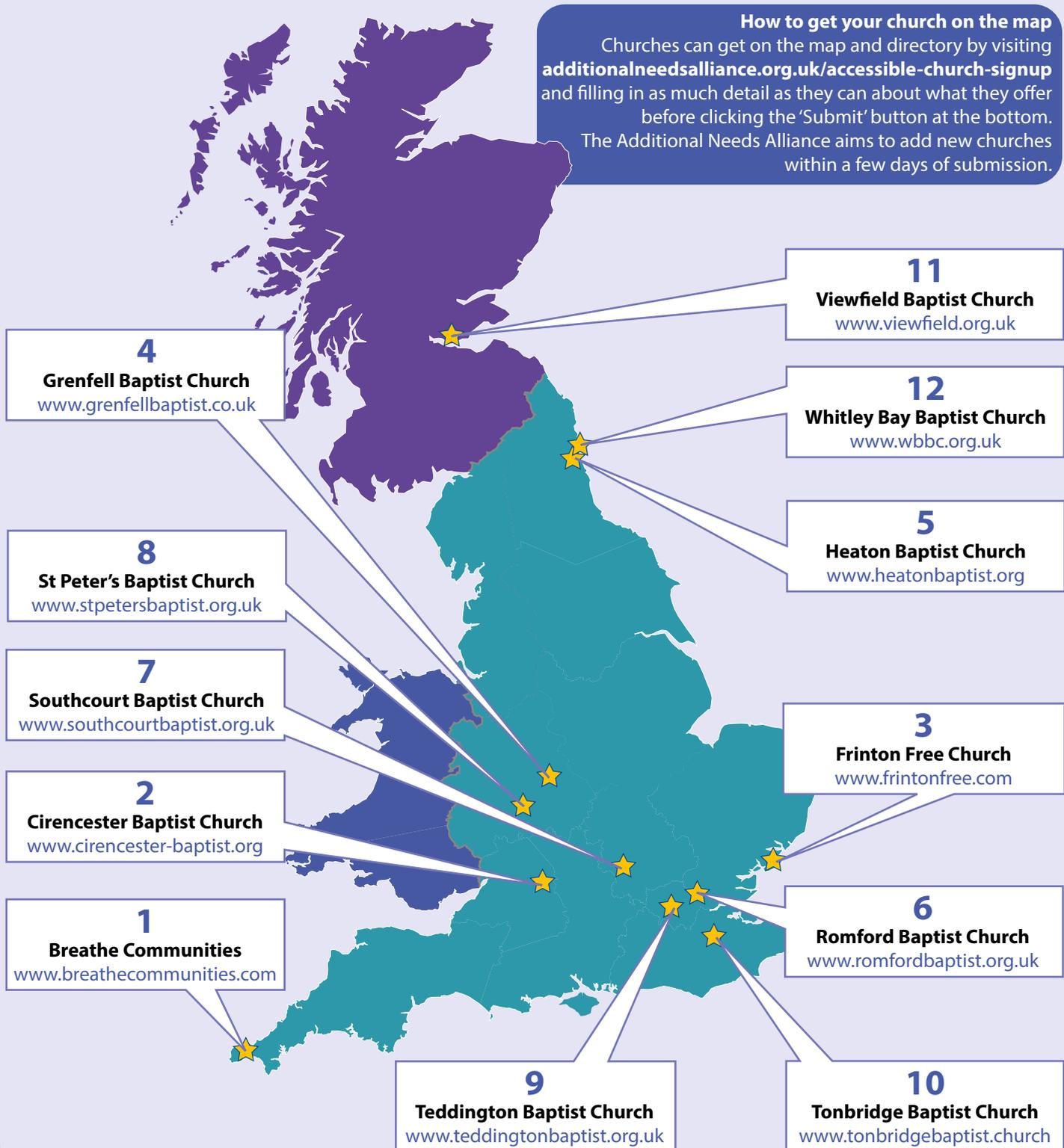
The Additional Needs Alliance is a collaboration of more than 2,000 church workers, parents and practitioners, to provide a place for conversation, support, equipping and encouragement for everyone working in a church context with children, young people and young adults with additional needs and disabilities. It was co-founded by Mark Arnold (Urban Saints) and Kay Morgan-Gurr (Children Matter!).

It is building up a database of accessible churches in the country – and a number of Baptist churches have already registered.

Mark writes: ‘We created the map and directory because we wanted to bring together accessible churches that have something to offer children, young people and young adults with additional needs and disabilities with the families themselves, many of whom struggle to connect with church or to find a church where they are welcomed and can belong.’

These Baptist churches can be found on the Additional Needs Alliance map:

**How to get your church on the map**  
 Churches can get on the map and directory by visiting [additionalneedsalliance.org.uk/accessible-church-signup](http://additionalneedsalliance.org.uk/accessible-church-signup) and filling in as much detail as they can about what they offer before clicking the ‘Submit’ button at the bottom. The Additional Needs Alliance aims to add new churches within a few days of submission.



## 1 Breathe Communities

*Accessible Service, Accessible toilet suitable for limited mobility only (grab rails and higher seat), Autism Friendly, Inclusion Leader, Ministry for adults with learning disability, Sensory room*

Breathe is a very different kind of church. We meet on Thursdays and Fridays 10:30-15:00 and Saturdays 10:00-12:30. It is a place to Breathe, Create and Grow. Most time is non-structured to create, sing, dance, etc; then every second Saturday we gather together and explore further; appreciating everyone's creations from the fortnight and learning more about God and the theme in multi-sensory ways.

## 2 Cirencester Baptist Church

*Accessible toilet suitable for limited mobility only (grab rails and higher seat), Accessible toilet suitable for wheelchair/power wheelchair users, Autism Friendly, Inclusion Leader*

We are a lively community of Christians of all ages, loving and serving God, one another and the world. We have a Through the Roof 'Roofbreaker' and as part of this role she works to include any and all that want to come along.

## 3 Frinton Free Church

*Accessible Service, Accessible toilet suitable for limited mobility only (grab rails and higher seat), Accessible toilet suitable for wheelchair/power wheelchair users, Autism Friendly, Hearing Loop, Inclusion Leader*

A large church with a very diverse feel between our four services on a Sunday. We are an active church with many areas of ministry and strive to provide an inclusive feel in everything we do.

## 4 Grenfell Baptist Church

*Accessible Service, Accessible toilet suitable for limited mobility only (grab rails and higher seat), Accessible toilet suitable for wheelchair/power wheelchair users*

We are a church of two buildings - both accessible from each other and independently.

## 5 Heaton Baptist Church

*Accessible Service, Accessible toilet suitable for limited mobility only (grab rails and higher seat), Accessible toilet suitable for wheelchair/power wheelchair users, Autism Friendly, Hearing Loop*

We are a welcoming, friendly Baptist church with a thriving youth and

children's ministry. We believe it is important that everyone can worship as they feel most comfortable and try to ensure everyone feels welcome in the service and children's groups. We have just allocated an Additional Needs Awareness leader role within the church.

## 6 Romford Baptist Church

*Accessible toilet suitable for limited mobility only (grab rails and higher seat), Accessible toilet suitable for wheelchair/power wheelchair users, Hearing Loop, Inclusion Leader, Ministry for adults with learning disability*

Romford Baptist Church is a multi-racial church of approximately 400 people from over 40 nations. We want to be accessible to all people, regardless of needs, recognising that each and every one of us is made in the image of God and to know that each is a valued part of our fellowship as we worship God together.

## 7 Southcourt Baptist Church

*Accessible Service, Accessible toilet suitable for limited mobility only (grab rails and higher seat), Autism Friendly, Hearing Loop, Inclusion Leader*

Southcourt Baptist Church has a real heart for the local community, while also serving the wider town of Aylesbury.

## 8 St Peter's Baptist Church

*Accessible Service, Accessible toilet suitable for limited mobility only (grab rails and higher seat), Accessible toilet suitable for wheelchair/power wheelchair users, Autism Friendly, Hearing Loop, Inclusion Leader, Ministry for adults with learning disability*

St Peter's Baptist Church is a community of around 400 people of all ages from a wide variety of backgrounds. Together we are discovering how to follow the example and teaching of Jesus in our 21st century world. This means being connected to God with real faith, connected to one another with real love and connected to our inner selves with real honesty.

## 9 Teddington Baptist Church

*Accessible toilet suitable for limited mobility only (grab rails and higher seat), Autism Friendly, Hearing Loop, Inclusion Leader, Sensory room, Virtual Tour, Large Print Resources*

We are a medium sized church of around 120 people. Approximately 1 in 5 of us has an additional need/

disability. We are able to provide ear defenders, fidget toys, visual timetables in groups, 1:1 support, sensory room, transition booklet for any child moving to a new group. We have a support group for all parents who have a child who has an additional need/disability, which meets once a month.

## 10 Tonbridge Baptist Church

*Accessible toilets suitable for wheelchair/power wheelchair users and limited mobility, Autism Friendly, Hearing Loop, Inclusion Leader, Ministries for children and adults with learning disabilities, Webcasting*

In our desire to be welcoming to all, we offer a variety of opportunities for those with additional needs, both on Sundays and mid-week. 'Aslan' is our Sunday morning ministry. This is offered three times a month for children/young people and once a month for adults. We use a programme, created at TBC, which is freely shared online at [aslan.tonbridgebaptist.church](http://aslan.tonbridgebaptist.church). We also have a DisAbility Social Club meeting twice a week, Prospects (affiliated to Livability), which meets twice a month and Torch Trust (for the blind and partially sighted) which meets monthly.

## 11 Viewfield Baptist Church

*Accessible Service, Accessible toilet suitable for limited mobility only (grab rails and higher seat), Accessible toilet suitable for wheelchair/power wheelchair users, Autism Friendly, Hearing Loop, Ministry for adults with learning disability*

We are a community of evangelical Christians affiliated to the Baptist Union of Scotland. Our aim is to 'enable people to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ' and therefore our desire is to be fully inclusive.

## 12 Whitley Bay Baptist Church

*Accessible toilet suitable for wheelchair/power wheelchair users, Hearing Loop, Inclusion Leader, Ministry for adults with learning disability*

We have a trained and relevant team on welcome. We have a friendly and encouraging leadership team. We have ramps to almost everywhere, including the platform in the sanctuary. Our children and youth team have vast experience of additional needs. We have had Mark Arnold visit for an All Inclusive teaching session. We have a 'Take 5 and Chat' café drop-in for additional needs families, as well as our 'Light' group for adults with learning difficulties.



## Yeovil Baptist Church: The impact of renovating our building

**“Before the renovation I can’t remember a single wheelchair user who was part of our congregation,” remarks Roger Redman. “Now we have several each week, and room for more.”**

Roger is a member of Yeovil Baptist Church in Somerset. In 2003 the church completed a major renovation of its 19th century building, transforming it into a space fit for the congregation and town in the 21st century. Roger was the treasurer at the time.

“The old building was cold, damp and had rot,” he remembers. “Although the sanctuary was never closed, various rooms couldn’t be used. The organ caught fire at one point. It was just not conducive to worship or general community use.

“So although a huge undertaking, a decision was taken to create a new building.”

The process was not straightforward. A heritage order was put on the building, meaning the church had to keep the existing walls. The initial plans were rejected and a public inquiry took place. Eventually the church received the go ahead, and the project was completed 16 years ago.



Much thought – and expense – was put into making the building as accessible as possible. Whereas previously each entrance was accessed by steps, access throughout the building is now via wide ramps and double doors. A lift was installed to reach the different floors. Several toilets were incorporated into the new design, and there is a disabled toilet on each level. The pews were

replaced by chairs in the sanctuary, and there is clearly available space for those using a wheelchair. Post-service refreshments are served in a spacious area outside the sanctuary, meaning there is plenty of room for those in wheelchairs. There are hearing loops in every room, and large print service sheets available each week.

In addition, the building is used throughout the week by different groups, some directly connected with the church and others not. A Romanian congregation gathers there on Sunday afternoons, and the NHS and the town council also use it for different events. Indeed, one of the first uses of the newly redeveloped building back in 2003 was by a mobility scooter-using local councillor who held surgeries there.

“It was important to make the building as accessible as possible,” says Roger. “We want everyone to feel welcome here, and we built that into the design. Every single room is accessible to a wheelchair user, and they all have hearing loops.

“To my knowledge, we haven’t had a single complaint about accessibility since it was redeveloped, and the building is used extensively throughout the week.”

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Photo: Contraband Collection | Alamy Stock Photo

## A taste of heaven

**Many of the Windrush generation and beyond had a poor experience in traditional churches, meeting casual and sometimes cruel racism. Some even met a closed door. By contrast, many Baptist churches kept their doors open.**

**One example is *John Bunyan Baptist Church* in Oxford: its minister in the 1980s Michael Bochenski reflects on that time, and the power of a warm and interested welcome**

*After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.* (Revelation 7:9)

If then why not now? This vision of a heaven to come where peoples from across the world unite, far beyond the temporary barriers of language, skin colour, tribal loyalties and national fervour, has long inspired me. Like many of my generation of Baptist ministers it was the remarkable ministry of Martin Luther King (Jnr) that helped to encourage me into ministry. If a Baptist minister, starting from a Baptist church pulpit, can transform communities, a nation, a world, then bring it on! Though the scale will be different, others of us too could seek to work with and from a local Baptist church to transform the communities in which God had placed us.

I remember saying to the then Area Superintendent, Hugh Logan: "I am looking for a church that has lost something of its past glory but is open to God's future. And I am prepared to go anywhere to find it". The surprise was that the call came from just three miles down the road – to Cowley, East Oxford. *John Bunyan Baptist Church* (JBBC) had been blessed by the long fruitful ministry of the



My first call to a pastorate, after ordination training at *Regent's Park College* Oxford, was a surprise.

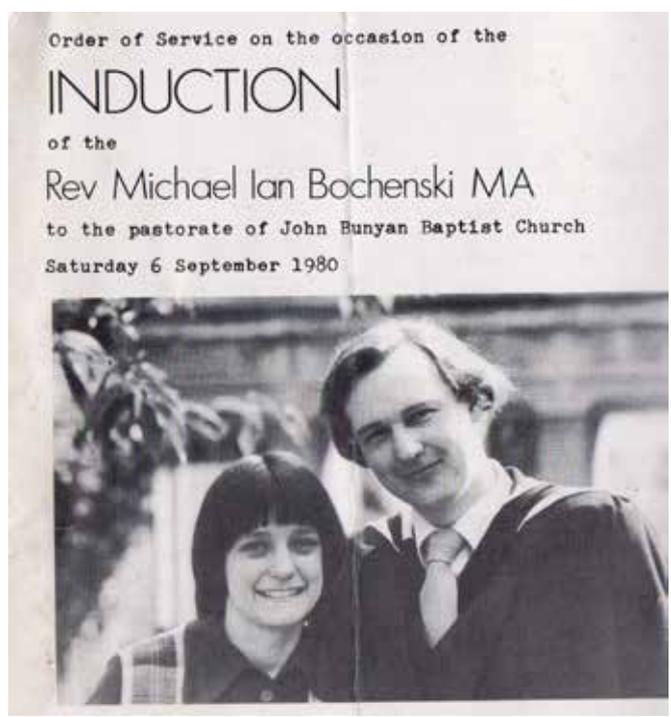
minister who rode around Cowley on a bicycle' Sydney Crowe, and his wife Ivy. The impressive 'glazier's paradise' new church they had been instrumental in building was full of light and beautiful wood. It was also dominated by a huge pulpit with an open baptistery below it and (above both) an acoustic sounding board which more than one baptismal candidate described as 'a diving platform'. By 1980, however, the church was largely an elderly white one, albeit one blessed with a few very committed young families, a handful of Afro-Caribbean Christians and a strong Welsh contingent (many of whom had come to Oxford from the 1930s to find work at the Morris Motors factory).

"When you show an interest in people they will show an interest in you and the church", a wise pastoral tutor had said to us all in College. They were words I never forgot. Visiting and praying with people in their homes has long been the best way I know to see churches begin to grow again. There is no easy alternative to the slow, patient building up of relationships. So when a few more West Indian Christians began to turn up at Sunday worship I made it a priority to follow them up. A phase of significant church growth began, I think, with Aunty Ethel - a much loved and trusted friend to the local West Indian community. As she began to make us her church so did others. Among them, Wilfred, who I led to faith and baptism, and later his wife Mary who once said this to me: "he can make a fool of himself if he wants to but you'll never get me in that pool". We did (!) after Mary went forward at a Billy Graham Mission England rally. Then there was Winnie and her young daughter Suzette both of whom I had the privilege of baptising. Suzette was a young teenager then, and is still a Facebook friend all these years on.

Some of those joining us had had poor experiences of traditional churches and trust did not come easy. In the course of the home visits and conversations a familiar picture (to anyone seeking to build a multi-cultural church) emerged. Sad stories of casual, and sometimes cruel, racism when first they sought to worship in English churches. Amelia Gentleman's recent Windrush articles in *The Guardian* reveal that seven decades on that same ugly racism towards these courageous pioneers never went away. Ah, but when a minister and a community (or indeed a nation) give a warm welcome and seek to build a genuinely integrated faith community, in contrast, vast resources of kindness and love, talent and skills, loyalty and commitment open up.



When you show an interest in people they will show an interest in you and the church



That was an experience I was also to benefit from in my most recent pastorate in Rugby, Warwickshire where the outstanding ministry of Reg and Moira Harvey in the 1970s had similarly seen a growing West Indian Christian community presence emerge in the Baptist Church. That multi-cultural dimension was to be further strengthened during my ministry in Rugby many years later, with a growing Chinese and African Christian presence too.

As a recently 'retired' Baptist minister I find myself these days learning to, in the words of Nigel Wright (in *How to be a Church Minister*), '...wrestle less and rest more...' while also working through '...inner reflections on positive and negative experiences, (and) processing disappointments and successes'. The request for this *Baptists Together* article was then a timely one. For occasionally in ministry there are times when heaven clearly touches earth. As the Baptist faith community in Cowley grew - we experienced many baptisms during the seven years I ministered there - so did our commitment to the community around us. Some Asian Christians too joined us as God continued to work. Our Church Meeting, protesting at NHS cuts in 1986, appealed for higher taxes to cover the many and growing needs of the NHS; a call that to this day remains relevant! The emergence of a pensioners' rights group, which for several years it was my privilege to lead, was another feature of an outward looking missional vision.

By the time we left JBBC in 1987 we were leaving a genuinely multi-cultural faith community which had nearly doubled in size. Throw together Revelation 7, the inspiration of Martin Luther King and a minister and church who believe in both and - well - you get a small taste of heaven.

**Michael Bochenski** is a former President of the Baptist Union. He served in four UK pastorates and was, for a time, the Rector of the Baptist Theological Seminary of Poland.





Glen Graham sharing the Bible reading at the Baptist Assembly in 2013

## Disability justice

### Glen Graham explains the aims and the story of the Baptists Together Disability Justice Hub

One of the many factors that brought me to faith was listening to stories from my RE teacher about the times he met Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther-King Jr. These heroes pointed me to a God who demonstrated generous love and justice to the poor and marginalised. This was a God I wanted to know and follow, so I did and still do.

While both these men were strong leaders, they set out to enable others to take up the fight where they lived. They didn't just do the justice, they inspired folk from the grass roots to do justice too.

But how did they understand justice? For Mandela and King, it wasn't about dominance or getting even, it was about people of colour being treated like any other human being and being given true dignity and worth.

It was about building a world where everyone is equal, where everyone belongs, and where everyone can flourish and become the people they were intended to be, totally free.

Christians would call such a world 'the Kingdom of God' or 'the place where Abba reigns'. From beginning to end, the Gospels describe such a world. The Sermon on the Mount gets down to the finer details of what true society and humanity look like.

The Church universal was always intended to be an icon or window of Abba's reign. It was to be the vehicle of bringing that reign about. A movement of all people living out God's very life for all to see as we are all made in God's image.

The Church was certainly not intended to be an institution that mirrored all other kinds of power where some have the power and others don't. We were to be a family, a community, a body with Jesus as our head and humanity being able to play our God-ordained part.

The trouble is the Church simply isn't doing that. Elsewhere in this publication, you will read of congregations and individuals facing up to our failings and doing something about it. Over the last 20 years, our Union instigated three Justice Groups, the newest of these was the **Disability Justice Group** which first met on 8 November 2011. For the rest of this article, I want to tell you something of the story so far and what I believe the future holds.

The Disability Justice Group was birthed from the tremendous work the *Baptist Union Initiative for people with Learning Disabilities* (BUild) were already doing. The aim of the new group was not to replicate what had already been done; rather we wanted to broaden the scope and find ways that people with disabilities could be enabled to play our God-ordained part in building God's new society through the body of Christ.

We began by recognising that the body is broken (you could say disabled) simply by the fact all people groups are not playing their God-ordained part. This isn't because we don't want to, it is because something is stopping us. So we set about finding out what was causing the damage and what could bring about the healing of the body.

Over time, it has become apparent that, while many churches are doing wonderful things caring for people with disabilities, very little is being done to work with people with disabilities. Folk like me don't just want to be cared for, we want to build the Church too. People like me don't just want to be served, but to serve too.

We have discovered far too few people with disabilities are serving in the local church. Very few are in leadership in the local church. Few are being consulted about the appropriateness of the care they get. Over the years, I have heard far too many disabled people who are treated like children, who can't get access to the buildings or services we offer. I have heard far too many stories about being ignored at coffee time and feeling like objects to be ministered to rather than friends in community.

Folk like me don't just want to be cared for,  
we want to build the Church too.  
People like me don't just want to be served,  
but to serve too.

The Justice Group identified reasons for this:

- » It can be ignorance just not knowing what to do.
- » It could be that we can't see past the dog or wheelchair to the real person before us.
- » It could be we are too scared to ask questions for fear of offending someone.
- » It could be that at the unconscious or subconscious level, we are not sure that someone with a disability is fully made in the image of God. The disability is a mark that God's image isn't fully formed so they need fixing. Many people like me believe our disability expresses or even magnifies God's image. We do serve a God who is almighty and vulnerable at the same time.

So over the years through seminars and training opportunities, the Disability Justice Group has sought to educate and incarnate another way of being church with people at the heart of things. We have challenged our Union at all levels about where things are at and what could be done. We have directed local churches to helpful resources. We have spoken at ministers' conferences, the Baptist Assembly, some of our training colleges and much more.

So what of the future? Well we will carry on doing what I have said above but that is a platform from which we want to build. We are now the Disability Justice *Hub*.

- » We long for each Association to have someone who speaks and works for Disability Justice.
- » We want to see disabled pioneers raised up.
- » We want to do more work to equip churches to be missional with people with disabilities.
- » We want the Church to help tackle the rise in disability hate crime and other societal attitudes that dehumanise people with disabilities.
- » We want the Church to know what it is missing out on by not having us play our part with everyone.

The world will not see the full extent of Abba's reign until people with disabilities like me are fully included in local and national Church without limits. We are an untapped resource waiting to be realised. We are children of God ready to bring in the Kingdom of God as it is in heaven.

**Glen Graham** is minister of **Cullompton Baptist Church**, Devon. He is a co-leader of the Baptists Together Disability Justice



Hub and chairs a national network called Churches for All.



**Churches for All** is a network of UK Christian disability-engaged organisations. The partners have a breadth of experience and depth of knowledge on disability issues – challenging and enabling churches to fully include disabled people.



[www.churchesforall.org.uk](http://www.churchesforall.org.uk)



## L'Arche as a place of hospitality



Photo: Raimonda Sidaraite

**Baptist minister Gerry Stanton is a support assistant at L'Arche London and represents Free Churches on the L'Arche UK faith leaders' group. L'Arche offers many ideas to the world, he writes**

'One of the marvellous things about community is that it enables us to welcome and help people in a way we couldn't as individuals. When we pool our strength and share the work and responsibility, we can welcome many people, even those in deep distress, and perhaps help them find self-confidence and inner healing.'

Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth*

Hospitality was the essence of L'Arche from its foundation in 1964. Jean Vanier, Raphael Simi and Philippe Seux moved into a rather decrepit house in the village of Trosly-Breuil near Compiègne in northern France and shared life together. Whilst two had diagnosed disabilities and one did not, this was not care provision but a commitment to one another and to see how living together would work. It was not easy. But love for each other and the desire to follow Jesus kept them together. There are now over 150 L'Arche communities worldwide in 38 countries. Hospitality is central to all these communities.

My own experience of L'Arche started in the West Norwood, London community in June 2017. I had read some of Henri Nouwen's books that mention his time at L'Arche and heard of Jean Vanier and felt drawn to experience this for myself. As a volunteer in their garden project, I was warmly welcomed by the co-ordinator and introduced to everyone there. Part of L'Arche's spirit of hospitality is to greet everyone in the room by name and introduce yourself to anyone you do not know.



Photo: Romain Staropoli

L'Arche founder Jean Vanier

Then community members started checking me out – what would I laugh at, what might upset me, how could I be persuaded into doing something for someone instead of with them? There were so many words of affirmation and thanks. Above all, I was seen as Gerry, rather than as 'the minister', no expectations and I could be myself. This was just wonderful!

Efficient planting and maximising the harvest are not the priorities here. We work together and learn from one another. I have far less gardening experience than the guy who showed me how to pot out aubergine seedlings with a firm push of the roots into the soil and a good watering.

Tea breaks and meals are where relationships have time to grow. That's where our different food and drink preferences and ways of eating help us to get to know one another. Spending good time together is the rule. L'Arche is not about getting things done but about being together, that takes time, lots of time - slow time.

After a year of volunteering, I was moving to a part-time pastorate in North London so had the opportunity to apply to become an assistant at L'Arche. I now work two days (and one sleepover) a week as an assistant. This has taken slow time to another level. I spend one day with one person, we go to his favourite music activity together and spend the rest of the day drinking coffee, eating lunch and laughing. He may be non-verbal but can communicate very clearly, once you get to know him. We happen to share a similar sense of humour which is not always helpful for those around us.

We always welcome guests for dinner. There are just three of us normally in the house (there are nine houses in total in L'Arche London) so one or two extra are welcome and change the dynamic.

As Richard Keegan-Bull, who has lived as part of L'Arche London for over 12 years puts it:

'L'Arche is a community-based organisation. It makes sure people are safe and happy, but it also offers a faith life as well. There's always room at the table. You're not just a client, you're a person who is recognised for the skills and the gifts that you have. Also you're accepted as an equal. No one is better than anyone else. Everyone is on the same level.'

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## L'Arche is not about getting things done but about being together, that takes time, lots of time - slow time

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There is always room at the table in L'Arche. As community, sometimes there are disagreements but there is always room at the table. Hopefully, that is where we can address our differences and reach a peaceful solution.

When people read about L'Arche there is a risk of glamourising learning disabilities but being with people soon brings us back down to earth. People with learning disabilities are, well, people. They have good days and bad days, pleasant and unpleasant characteristics and habits. Being with such people is not some gateway to holiness. But spending slow time with people who think and communicate 'differently' has perhaps given me a glimpse into God's great love for all people. It may also be a hint of how God feels when communicating with people.

Jean Vanier died in May 2019 aged 90. He had great wisdom and humility in letting go of any formal leadership of L'Arche over a decade ago. His influence and smile are greatly missed. As the current international director Stephan Posner said at Jean's funeral:

"In relation to his role at L'Arche, Jean wrote the following: 'Finally,' he said, 'it is often said that I am the founder, but I am simply the first to arrive'... With the departure of Jean, all of us today, members of L'Arche, people of L'Arche scattered across the world, are all in a certain way, the latest arrivals: we are the ones following. Our responsibility and our privilege is this: to take on the legacy that Jean is passing over to us, the message from the messenger, and to take this legacy still further."

Jean Vanier wrote many books. To learn more of the man and his vision I would recommend starting with *A Cry is Heard: my path to peace*, a slim 'memoir' written in 2017. To understand his theology and that of L'Arche *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John*, is a commentary with many examples of how Jesus and John's Gospel influence L'Arche.

L'Arche offers many ideas to the world, one of those is its invitation to a better, nicer, less driven way of being, but not all are ready to accept. I would encourage Baptist churches to contact a local L'Arche community, there are around 12 in the UK. See if they need any volunteers. Offer prayer. Whilst L'Arche is grounded in Roman and Anglo-Catholic traditions they have accepted my Baptist-ness quite well. Our slightly different way of relating as church may bring something useful to a L'Arche community. Certainly they will bring something powerful to our churches as we seek to be places of inclusion and radical hospitality.

**Gerry Stanton** is a Baptist minister who co-leads the **Disability Justice Hub**



Photo: Raimonda Sidaraitė

Find out more about L'Arche Communities at their website:

[www.larche.org.uk](http://www.larche.org.uk)



# RESOURCES

Photo: www.freepik.com

There are many organisations which specialise in supporting churches through resources which help with some of the practical aspects of making church accessible and welcoming to all. We highlight a few here, and recommend exploring their websites for more information and ideas.

## General accessibility

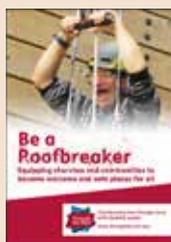


*Through The Roof* is a Christian disability charity working to transform lives in the UK and overseas and has a range of resources:

» **Be a Roofbreaker**

- a practical guide to the necessary adjustments that will enable people with a variety of disabilities to belong and participate in your church.

[www.throughtheroof.org/shop/be-a-roofbreaker](http://www.throughtheroof.org/shop/be-a-roofbreaker)



» **Removing Barriers**

- a self-assessment questionnaire to check how inclusive your services, activities and programmes are for disabled people.

[www.throughtheroof.org/shop/removing-barriers](http://www.throughtheroof.org/shop/removing-barriers)



» **A Church That Cares**

- what does good pastoral care look like for families affected by disability, and how can the needs of the whole family be met?

[www.throughtheroof.org/shop/a-church-that-cares](http://www.throughtheroof.org/shop/a-church-that-cares)



» **A Welcoming Place**

- designed to help you create an environment in your youth and children's work which effectively includes everyone, especially autistic youngsters.

[www.throughtheroof.org/shop/a-welcoming-place-autistic-young-people-in-church](http://www.throughtheroof.org/shop/a-welcoming-place-autistic-young-people-in-church)



It all adds up to



*Livability* is the disability charity that connects people with their communities. They run disability care services and community projects for all ages. Together with the people they support, they put the elements in place that all add up to liveable lives and communities.

[www.livability.org.uk/resources](http://www.livability.org.uk/resources)

**Accessible Welcome**

This toolkit for rural churches is a new resource from *Germinate: The Arthur Rank Centre*. It is designed to help rural churches work towards ensuring that their church – both the building and their worship – is accessible to all.

[www.germinate.net/mission/accessible-welcome](http://www.germinate.net/mission/accessible-welcome)



**Count Everyone In**

Count Everyone In inspires and equips local churches for accessible, effective ministry with people with learning disabilities. They offer two one-day 'Know and Grow' training days, as well as teaching, preaching and advising. You will find CEI at many of the Christian festivals, where they take the main theme of the event and run a simpler, more accessible but parallel stream.

[www.counteveryonein.org.uk](http://www.counteveryonein.org.uk)



**Churches For All**

Helping you become a Church where disabled people belong. This includes 'The Enabling Church Course': a flexible eight-session course exploring how to enrich church life through sharing mission and ministry together with disabled people.

[www.churchesforall.org.uk](http://www.churchesforall.org.uk)

**Dyslexia Friendly Churches**

A free, downloadable guide to help churches engage with dyslexic adults.

[www.stjamesandemanuel.org/sje-pcc-2](http://www.stjamesandemanuel.org/sje-pcc-2)

## Sight and hearing loss resources



### **Worship for All**

'Worship for All' is a free, online, automated transcription service which enables Christian churches and organisations to provide large print and braille resources for people with sight loss.

[www.torchtrust.org/smartweb/accessibleworship](http://www.torchtrust.org/smartweb/accessibleworship)



### **Torch Trust**

Is your church Sight Loss Friendly? Torch Trust is enabling churches across the UK to include people with sight loss in every aspect of church life.

[www.sightlossfriendlychurch.org.uk](http://www.sightlossfriendlychurch.org.uk)



### **Baptist Voice**

The talking newspaper for UK Baptists with sight loss.

[www.baptistvoice.co.uk](http://www.baptistvoice.co.uk)



### **Openears**

Hard of Hearing Christian Fellowship

[www.openears.org.uk](http://www.openears.org.uk)



### **Go!Sign**

Go!Sign supports Deaf adults and children in learning about the Christian faith, finding a Christian community and supporting local churches to improve access for Deaf people

[www.gosign.org.uk](http://www.gosign.org.uk)

## Elderly



### **Care Home Friends**

This project recruits and trains volunteers to offer dedicated friendship and support to care home residents, many of whom can feel overlooked and ignored. They want to see every care home adopted by a local church.

[www.carehomefriends.org.uk](http://www.carehomefriends.org.uk)



### **AfterWorkNet**

Helps actively retired Christians live life to the full, by exploring areas of service and understanding what discipleship means in this phase of their lives.

[www.afterworknet.com](http://www.afterworknet.com)



### **Anna Chaplaincy**

Anna Chaplaincy for Older People, part of BRF, inspires, equips and enables churches across the UK to improve the spiritual lives of older people.

[www.annachaplaincy.org.uk](http://www.annachaplaincy.org.uk)



### **Messy Vintage**

Messy Vintage is now being developed by BRF's Anna Chaplaincy team, who promote best practice in the spiritual care of older people. It is a movement that takes Messy Church values and good practice to older people.

[www.messychurch.org.uk/messy-vintage](http://www.messychurch.org.uk/messy-vintage)



### **Faith in Later Life**

Faith in Later Life exists to inspire and equip churches and individual Christians in serving and empowering older Christians, and reaching older people in the wider community, sharing the good news of Jesus. Our website holds 150 resources relating to different aspects of older age - many free to download.

[www.faithinlaterlife.org](http://www.faithinlaterlife.org)

## Children and youth

### **Urban Saints**

The aim of Urban Saints' Additional Needs Ministry is to encourage, enable and equip children's, youth and families' workers to reach, include, create belonging for, and disciple all children and young people, especially those with additional needs or disabilities.

[www.urbansaints.org/additionalneeds](http://www.urbansaints.org/additionalneeds)



### **Wonderful Youth**

Baptist youth resource for 13-16 year olds. This resource draws on culturally diverse images, exercises and activities and is unapologetically multi-cultural to enable Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic people to see their image reflected in the material.

[www.baptist.org.uk/wonderfulyouth](http://www.baptist.org.uk/wonderfulyouth)



## Bibles in different languages



### **Wycliffe Bible Translators**

1 in 5 people alive today are still waiting to get the Bible in their language. Bible translation is one of the most significant parts of world mission today. Wycliffe's vision, in partnership with their supporters, is that everyone will have access to God's word in the language that speaks to them best.

[www.wycliffe.org.uk/about/welcome](http://www.wycliffe.org.uk/about/welcome)



Help your church grasp the need for Bible translation – run a NoBibleSunday event

[www.nobiblesunday.org.uk](http://www.nobiblesunday.org.uk)

## Accessing the Bible

### **Bible Society**

#### » **The Bible Course**

New to the Bible or want to go deeper? *The Bible Course* is for you. It shows how the key books, famous characters and epic events form one BIG story, from Genesis to Revelation. An eight session course.

[www.biblesociety.org.uk/thebiblecourse](http://www.biblesociety.org.uk/thebiblecourse)



#### » **Good News Youth Bible**

Bible Society teamed up with Youth for Christ to create a Bible that meets the needs of young people and connects with their world

[www.biblesociety.org.uk/youthbible](http://www.biblesociety.org.uk/youthbible)





## Welcoming Iranian asylum seekers

How life at Heywood Baptist Church, Greater Manchester, has been transformed. By Jon Keyworth

### New arrivals

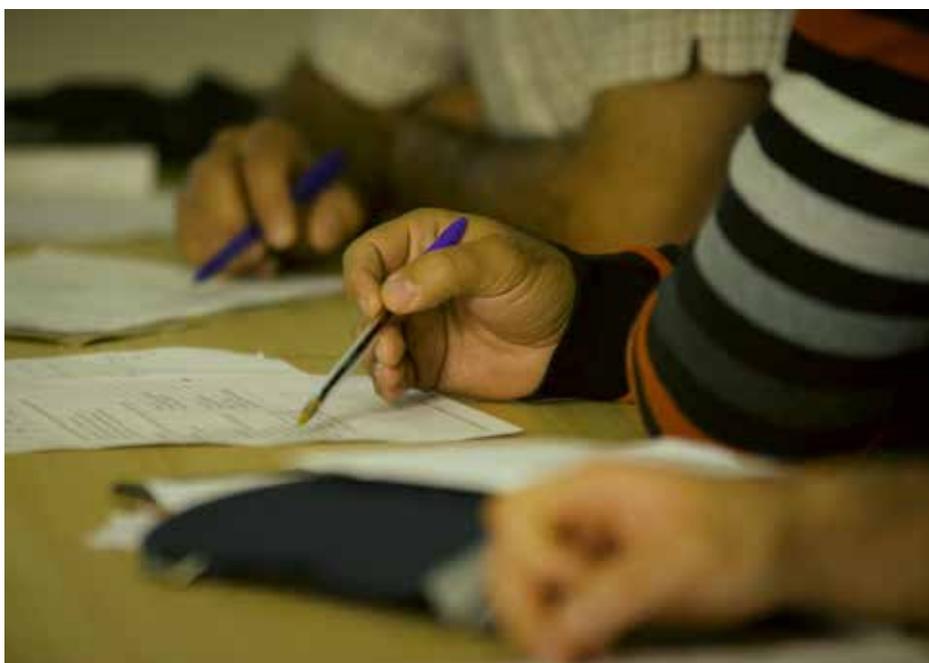
On a grey Sunday morning in November 2015 there was something remarkably different about the congregation at *Heywood Baptist Church*. Usually we had a congregation of around 50 people, nearly all of whom were white British, but on this Sunday, nine Iranian men of varying ages sat huddled together at the back of the church. They had recently been moved into Heywood by Serco (the firm responsible for providing asylum

seekers with accommodation and support), and were placed in the same house together, within walking distance of the church.

They came to us seeking a place to worship, with some requesting baptism, but ultimately, they were introduced to us by one of their friends housed in the north east, who recommended attendance at a Baptist church due to the welcome he had received at *Stockton Baptist Tabernacle*.

### Dramatic change

Little did we know it, but this would be the beginning of a new chapter in the life of the church. Our church life has been transformed. There are now almost as many Iranians in attendance on Sunday mornings as there are 'Heywoodites', and the presence of Iranians amongst us has led to the arrival of asylum seekers of other nationalities as well. Scripture readings are projected in Farsi as well as English, open prayer is now a multi-lingual experience, and we have learned a few Farsi songs. New life has been breathed into our worship, and we have had the privilege of conducting many baptisms.



We started a number of activities mid-week too. We have a Farsi language Bible study, that focuses on the sermon text from the previous Sunday, and gives a good chance to teach the Christian faith to relatively new converts, and those who are simply interested in Christianity. We introduced a weekly social evening, with the intention of helping asylum seekers and refugees integrate into the church community. We also transformed a couple of under-used rooms in the church into a classroom primarily for teaching English, and one of our recently retired members has undertaken intensive ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teacher training.

## Pastoral demands

Of course, there has been a high pastoral demand placed on the church. We have been supporting asylum seekers through a difficult time of separation from their family. We have provided assistance, as far as possible, in dealing with what often seems like an arbitrary and hostile approach to asylum claims by the Home Office. We have attended court for asylum appeals, as witnesses in 13 cases (12 of which have thankfully been successful), and as a supportive presence in other hearings too. Finally, we have provided support to those who have received leave to remain in the UK, including assistance with family reunion, finding school places, and negotiating the system to claim Job Seeker's Allowance.

## Blessing, new life and flourishing ministry

Shortly before the arrival of Iranian asylum seekers in Heywood, I had been having conversations with Justin Kennedy (pictured below), at that time a church member, about a potential calling into Baptist ministry. He threw himself into work alongside the new Iranian arrivals, and it has been incredibly encouraging to see his ministry develop and flourish.

As a church, we not only recognised his call, but were able to offer him a placement as a 'minister in training,' due to generous sponsorship from church members, and since we have gained further financial support from NWBA's 'Count me in' initiative.

Central to our approach has been open hospitality and seeking to include Iranian converts in all aspects of church life. We have been inspired by the story of Ruth, and the instruction in Deuteronomy 10:19 'to love those who are foreigners...'

Many of those who have been baptised have been brought into church membership, and in November 2017 we were delighted that two Iranians were elected onto the leadership team of the church.

## Learning from Persian culture

While the Iranians within our congregation speak of the great hospitality they received upon arrival at Heywood Baptist Church, we have actually been taught a lot more about hospitality by our Iranian brothers and sisters. If you visit their homes, then you must go with an empty stomach as you will be fed. Quick visits to drop off paperwork are practically impossible. Even as an unexpected visitor you will be expected to at least eat fruit and have a drink! Hospitality and welcome is taken to a whole new level, there is always time for a guest.

A further aspect of Persian culture is that when an Iranian enters a room they will greet every person present, with at least a handshake if possible. This can be quite disruptive during church services! Yet the reality is that to greet others properly, and depart in the same way, is a mark of respect, and all are included in that.

When we hear the testimonies of those to be baptised, they often speak of finding 'the way'. In Christianity they find a way of life rather than a set of rules and regulations. For the first time, through Christ, they have discovered that God loves them, and have found peace and forgiveness instead of judgment. They have found a God who is a caring father rather than a dictator. Many Iranians speak of dreams and visions in a way that is now often overlooked in western culture. We still have some way to go in learning how best to incorporate this spirituality in our worship. Iranians also place a high value on poetry and song. It is a sadness that poetry does not translate very well.



"We wanted to make space for them in which they would feel welcome, in which they would thrive. It's meant change and learning how to create space. It's meant an awful lot of pulling back, letting go and sacrifice in many areas.

"We realised hospitality was massive. They like to invite people round. So we have encouraged them to express that, allowing them to come in and cook a meal before the Bible study. A pastoral visit involves lots of food. We've had to embrace their culture of hospitality.

"We've also realised in terms of welcome that encouraging them to distribute the bread and wine has

been massive. It confers honour. To ask them and involve them is really special.

"It's made us re-evaluate our message, think about the nature of the Kingdom of God, and how to support people in a hostile environment. It has blessed us so much. The church has realised God is doing something. God is at work.

"But we also realised that we didn't actually need to provide for all of their needs. We have learnt that true hospitality was spending time with them."

*Justin Kennedy* is the minister-in-training at Heywood





Yet the biggest challenge that our Iranian brothers and sisters in Christ have brought to us is their sheer enthusiasm in practising their faith. There is a great appetite to learn, and this is not only from those still in the asylum process. Farsi language Bible studies are packed, there is a desire to pray, and an openness in requests for prayer. New life and fervour has been brought to a church that was in some ways tired and seeking purpose.

### Michael's story

"The first time I came here. People were very kind, friendly, beyond my expectations. I was very happy. I carried on coming and people starting sharing their life with me."

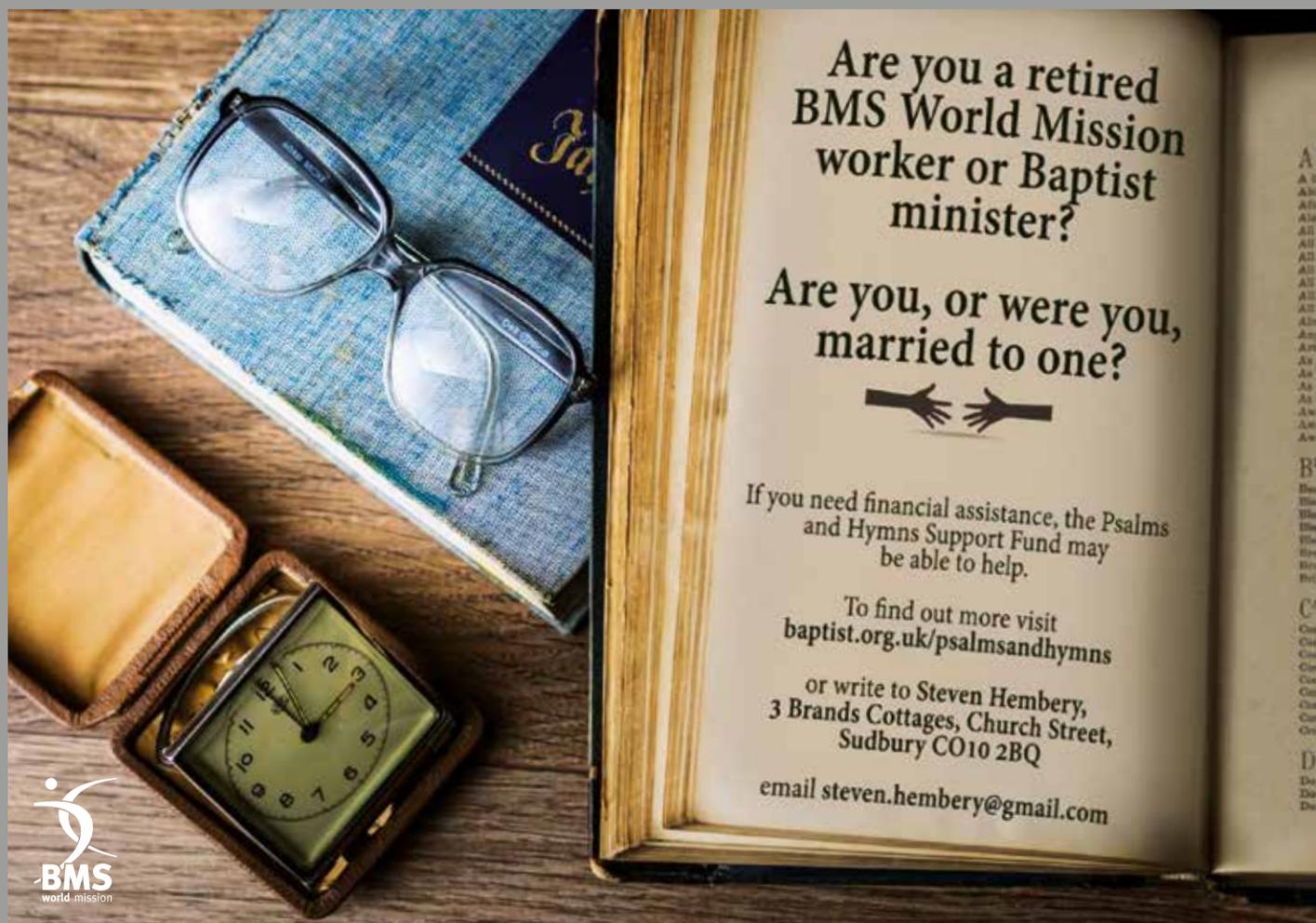
"I realised it didn't matter about generation or colour of skin. If we believe we are all God's children, and we see someone different, we have to love them. You have to love all of them. I saw it in this church.

### Concluding remarks

It has been a privilege as a church to be involved in the lives of these Iranian asylum seekers. The church has been transformed by their passion for Christ, and will continue to be transformed the more integrated they become in the life of the church. There has been disappointment, especially when families have moved on to London, yet we remain in contact with many who have left. There has been despair, when asylum applications have failed and the threat of deportation becomes a reality.

But, overall, there has been a clear sense of the Holy Spirit at work, joy at being involved in the work of God's kingdom, and delight in seeing people find faith in Jesus Christ.

This piece has been adapted from an article Jon Keyworth wrote for the Baptists Together website in 2018. Jon left Heywood Baptist Church in summer 2019 to respond to a call to *New Road Baptist Church* in Oxford. ■



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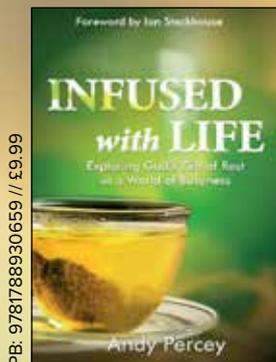
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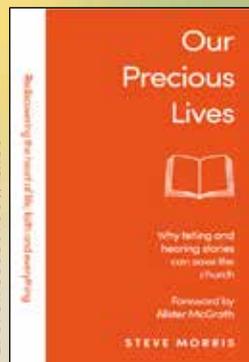
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## Listen actively, speak graciously: reflections on a recent church process

By Seun Kolade

I remember reading James Sire's book, *The Universe Next Door*<sup>1</sup>, about 22 years ago in the university. The words in the inside page have stuck with me ever since: *'for any of us to be fully conscious intellectually, we should not only be able to detect the worldviews of others but be aware of our own - why it is ours and why in the light of so many options we think it is true.'*



Sire's counsel is even more pertinent in what today has often been described as a plural, post post-modern world. If we are to communicate effectively as Christians and fruitfully bear witness to the Gospel, we need to engage the world with a mind that is at once disciplined and open, with a heart that is both sanctified with truth and rich in mercy, with our arms stretched out in love, and our garments unstained.<sup>2</sup>

This is the starting point of my reflection on a recent process in my church in which the entire church was grappling with issues around same sex relationship. Apparently, it had been a long-standing issue that had threatened to tear the life of the church apart. In a previous process, the fellowship had, after a lengthy period of arguments and counter arguments, come to a decision to, in effect, 'agree to disagree'.

A few years down the line, the matter had to be revisited as the majority of members found that the 'agree to disagree' position was not satisfactory. I was part of the consultative group that was set up for this purpose. The group was set up to reflect the whole spectrum of church memberships in its diversity relating to ethnicity, age groups and strength of views on the subject matter. My aim here is not to discuss at length the various points and counterpoints, and what decisions were made at the end of it. Instead, I think the process itself was the most significant take away from the exercise, and it is one I hope others will find helpful.

### A listening exercise

The group decided from the beginning that, if the exercise was to be fruitful, we must all undertake to 'listen actively, and speak graciously' to one another. This resolution was critical for the broadly positive and warm atmosphere maintained in the weeks that followed, and in the wake of what were often difficult exchanges with strongly held views and deep-seated emotions on both sides of the exchange.



1 James Sire's book is available from Inter Varsity Press.  
2 Some of the scriptures paraphrased here include Ephesians 2:4-5; Revelation 3:4 and John 17:17. They reflect the two sides of God's character that we are called to imitate: love and truth; judgement and mercy, etc.



In the end, our 'listen actively, speak graciously' resolution (it was more than a slogan) was underpinned by a realisation of an important Christian truth: that while precepts are important, right precepts matter only to the extent that they bring about and affirm right relationships - human to human, and human to God. We recognise that a right relationship is one that affirms the dignity of, and love for, all peoples - irrespective of their backgrounds, views, or status. Dignity and love for people are not rewards for agreeable viewpoints. They are God-given, inherent in God's creative act, amplified in God's redemptive intervention. The price - and there is none bigger - for the dignity of all humans is the Cross of Christ.

We also realise, right from the off, that to listen actively goes well beyond hearing what people are saying. It sounds a bit cliché, but it is very important, otherwise what we would have would in effect be a dialogue of the deaf. Beyond engaging with the sounds of people's voices, we needed to be willing to make a conscious journey into their world, to know, to understand - to engage not only at the intellectual level but also at the emotional level. At a practical and personal level, this entailed embracing our own vulnerabilities, recognising that to gain new knowledge and understanding is to let go of some long-held assumptions.

### Searching for knowledge

So we reached wide and dug deep in the search for knowledge on this issue. In one of the first meetings we came up with a list of recommended texts reflecting the two sides of the debate on same sex relationships. These were books offering theological expositions, pastoral insights and personal reflections. This was a hugely important part of the whole process. As we read and discussed the books, there were more than a few surprises: members realising how unfounded, and sometimes untenable, some of their long-held assumptions were. In the end every single member of the group moved from their original entrenched views - for the majority, not so much in terms of what they believed, but what they understood. More importantly, how they should engage with those who hold different views.

It became increasingly clear to us that much of the anger and divisive language that pervaded previous discussions on the issue were rooted in inadequate knowledge and the insecurities that are often associated with limited knowledge of the issues. Even when we ultimately disagree with people, a deeper knowledge of our own position, and an understanding of the other's views, can only make for more positive relationship and fruitful communication with those who do not share our views.

### How should we then witness?

This takes me back to James Sire's words quoted at the beginning of this piece. If we are to be effective and fruitful in our witness in the 21st century as Christians, we need to forgo the self-cossetting, insular approach that tends to, unwittingly, shut us out of the world. We need to first engage more vigorously and rigorously with scripture in the light of the Spirit. This is an exercise that is both devotional and intellectual - both mutually reinforcing. Armed with this confidence, we need to go out and engage more openly with the world out there. We need to know the universes next door in order to more fruitfully proclaim the message of him who holds the universe together by the word of his power.<sup>3</sup>

**Seun Kolade** is in the leadership of **Tabernacle Baptist Church**, Wolverhampton, where he is involved in a number of service and outreach activities. He is also a university academic with research interests in transformative entrepreneuring, spiritual capital and post-disaster preparedness and response.



<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 1:3

### Further reading

#### *Sexuality, Faith, and the Art of Conversation*

– by Stephen Elmes

Stephen is Lead Minister of **Bookham Baptist Church**. He has been helping churches in the South East of England to open a conversation about same-sex attraction and relationships. Steve is passionate about conversation being courageous, honest, humble and generous, and convinced that it is possible to hold our differences creatively.

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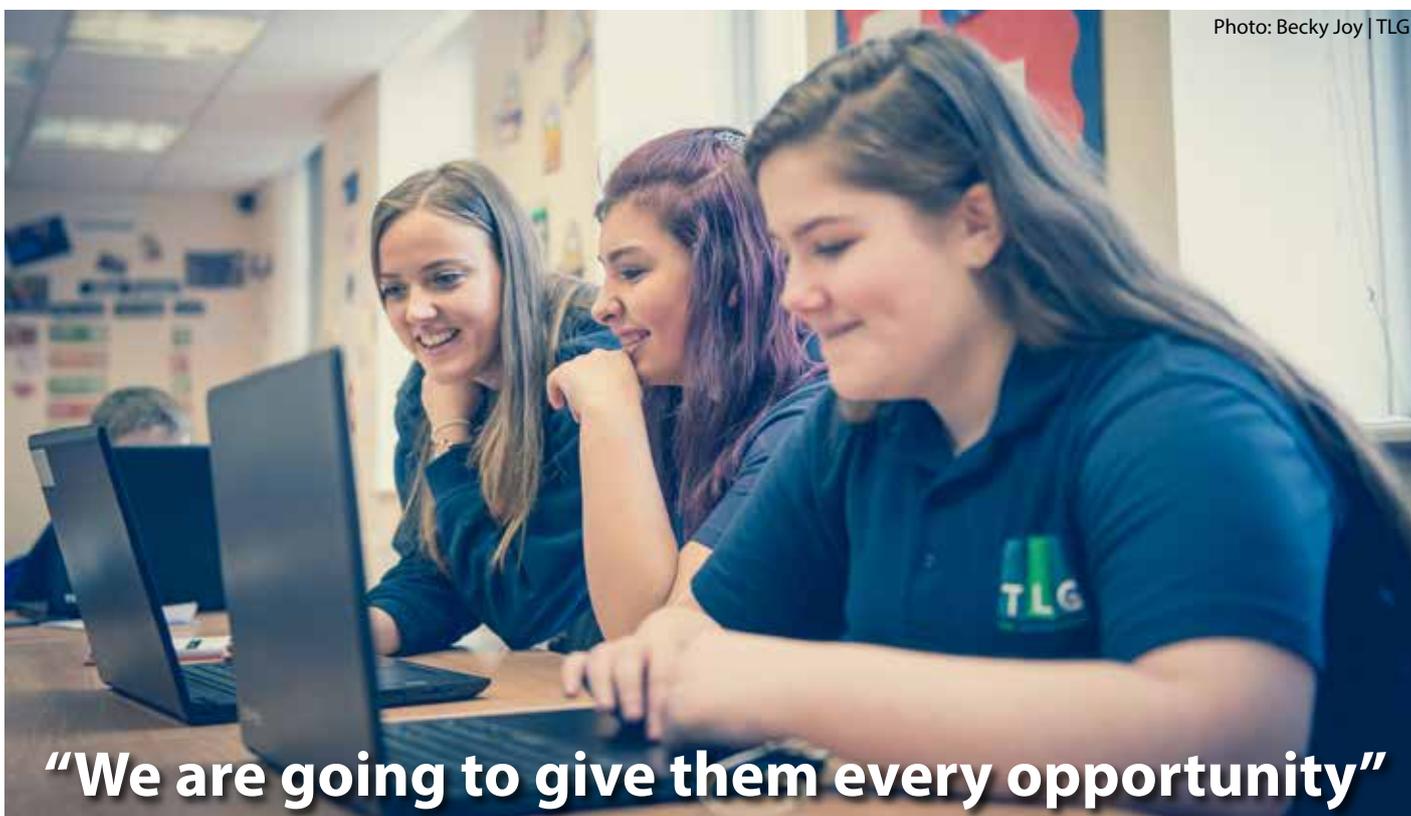
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**“We are going to give them every opportunity”**

**A number of Baptist churches run schools for children who have fallen through the cracks of mainstream education. The Gate in Reading is one**

“Every young person has heavenly value - that’s how God sees them,” says Rachel Owen. “And it’s the same with their parents. It doesn’t matter what you’ve done, where you’ve been, we will support you.

“So we are going to give them every opportunity.”

Everyday Rachel works with secondary school-aged children on the margins of society. These are people who have been excluded from school or at risk of exclusion, who are facing issues such as family breakdown, bereavement, drug and alcohol abuse, bullying, poverty, gang culture, mental or other illness, lack of parental support and many other distressing circumstances.

Whatever the reason, mainstream education is just not working for them, and their lives are at crisis point.

Rachel is the centre manager of **TLG Reading**. TLG – Transforming Lives for Good – is a Christian charity which has 20 years’ experience of helping churches get alongside struggling children. One of the ways it does this is through its Education Centres, which enable churches to bring vital support for disadvantaged young people. TLG Reading is part of the social action ministry of **The Gate**, a Baptist church. Rachel’s underlying goal is to help the young people in her care return to mainstream education, and for this to happen there needs to be a whole-life development. “It’s not just educational – we aim to bring social and emotional transformation,” says Rachel. “And it’s not simply social action – it’s bringing light into a dark place.”

TLG Centres operate with small class sizes – no more than 12 pupils. Each is referred by a school, local authority or virtual schools (the community around children who have fallen through the cracks). There’s a no one-size-fits-all approach, lessons and approaches are tailored to individual needs.



Rachel and Gareth Owen

One of the key initial tasks for Rachel and her team is to nurture focus – many of the children they see struggle to sit still for five minutes. This involves getting to the root cause of their problems.

“We do this by nurturing really strong relationships with the family,” explains Rachel. “We need to hear from the family as well. We always make sure we meet the family on their own. We are a bridge between all of them. The parents are very open – they understand we are for them. They have often felt let down by the education system.”

This support involves empowering the parents, who often feel disempowered.

Another key initial task to help build this trust is a positive phone call home.

“When they have heard from a school, it’s always for a bad reason. One of the immediate shifts is that we always give a positive first call. It’s really important to focus on the positive from the outset. It’s about a message which says – ‘you need to know you are great.’”

There is no set period for pupils to be with a TLG Centre – some are part-time, some full; some are here 16 weeks, some six months, others three years. But over time, generally there is a ‘massive transformation’.

Rachel says: “We see them go to college, or get apprenticeships. For instance, we have a good relationship with Porsche, who just give these young people a sense that it doesn’t matter about their background, but what they can do now.



Photo: Pennie Withers | TLG

### Jay’s story

“Jay was only six when he was excluded from school. He has ADHD and because of that he struggled in a mainstream environment. You’re expected to sit still for substantial amounts of time and for someone like Jay that’s almost impossible. The exclusion had a big impact on Jay. He went from being a cheeky chap to a very angry and aggressive young boy.

“As soon as he started TLG, everything changed. Now he wakes up on time because he loves school and he’s excited to go everyday.

“I think the amazing thing about TLG is that it doesn’t matter how much the kids try to push the teachers away, the teachers just respond with love. Children know if the people supporting them care about them or whether they’re just doing it for a job. That’s what makes TLG different. They really do care about these children.

“I can’t even put into words how much of a difference TLG has made in our lives.”

Louise, mum to Jay who attends TLG – The Gate



Photo: Pennie Withers | TLG

[www.tlg.org.uk/connect/stories-of-transformation/jays-story](http://www.tlg.org.uk/connect/stories-of-transformation/jays-story)

“One young woman qualified as a childcare and education worker. She got a job with the nursery she had been excluded from aged three. It’s just an absolute turnaround.

“And we’ve had some wonderful feedback from the parents. This summer we had a letter from one of the mums saying ‘you’ve given me my child back’. The mum feels empowered to set boundaries again.”

The approach is a holistic one that sees TLG and the church work hand in hand.

The church encourages its congregation to ‘adopt a family’ – to pray for them and give practical support.

The ministry of TLG Reading is crucially supported by a family support worker from the church, who builds up a relationship of trust with the family, meeting them for tea and coffee.

“She is the glue that holds us together, absolutely vital,” notes Rachel. Several events are organised throughout the year, which bring church and TLG families together, such as summer barbecues and fireworks in the late autumn. The pupils are encouraged to be part of the church youth group. The church’s youth pastor comes to the school one afternoon to lead games.

“There is lots of church engagement,” notes Gareth Owen, The Gate’s Associate Pastor and Rachel’s husband. “It’s really important to us as a church. We are partners. TLG is part of the church.”

Several Baptist churches run TLG Education Centres: others are based in Bolton and Frinton. For more information visit: [www.tlg.org.uk/your-church/education-centre](http://www.tlg.org.uk/your-church/education-centre)





Photo: Laura Moncaster

## Renew 61

**Laura Moncaster on how starting a Renew Centre – a community space where it's ok not to be ok – has impacted the church's welcome and culture**

Renew61 grew initially out of my own personal experience. Since I was 15 I have suffered with periods of ill mental health in the form of the 'black dog' depression. I have been lucky that I have always felt that I have had good support from friends and family and that ultimately my faith has been the light that has always shone (if at times very faintly) to bring me out of those times. Having been in the village of Aylesham for a few years I recognised that there weren't any services in the village for those suffering with ill mental health, and therefore felt compelled to start a group that would be a space where it was ok to not be ok.

I wanted to provide a space for people to come and be who they are and take part in activities that promote positive mental health. A place to find friendship and support, and so Aylesham Mental Fight Club was born. The name was controversial. I knew some people would love it; others would hate it.

In the name I was trying to convey that we ALL have mental health, it's just sometimes we are in a good state of mental health other times we are in a poor state of mental health, we all therefore need to do things to promote positive mental health.

However good my initial intention, over time I realised that this had become 'my' initiative rather than the church's initiative, and this wasn't right! Ultimately my heart is for the church as a whole to become a place where people know it is ok to come as they are. Our churches really should be places where it is ok to not be ok.

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starting Renew 61 has helped our Sunday services become more inclusive and welcoming

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This is when I heard about **Renew Wellbeing** and got in contact with Ruth Rice about becoming a Renew centre.

I apologised to the church (something I have to do every so often!) for making it 'my' initiative and asked them to get behind Renew. Being the gracious and loving community they are (I LOVE my church) they got on board and Renew 61 was born.

I have to admit it hasn't always been easy to create a genuinely welcoming community, as with any group there is a balance between being a close knit community and not becoming 'cliquey' when new people come. Unfortunately I don't think we always get it right but our aim is to make sure we recognise who is new and make sure someone (particularly the role of the host) engages them in conversation, offers them a tea or coffee and introduces them to some other people.

I actually don't think creating a welcoming space is rocket science. The problem is our human nature is to 'protect the group we already have' and to 'look after number one'. We therefore as 'host' need to make sure we put others' needs before our own and are aware of the needs of others.

Jesus is the best example of this; he was so secure in who he was in the father that he didn't need to look at himself and could devote his attention to others. Part of our problem is that we are not secure in who we are in Jesus, meaning our focus is on ourselves rather than others. As a minister my desire is to make sure that I, and the people in my church, know who we are in Christ - that we are secure in this, so as to shift our focus from ourselves to others.

Another focus I have had within my preaching in order to make both Renew 61 and our Sunday services a place of inclusive welcome is the practice of hospitality. The Bible is full of examples of hospitality and Jesus himself is the best example of being hospitable. He made people feel

welcome, he made people feel at home in his presence and so much of his time was spent eating with people.

I myself have been trying to model this practice, we must practice what we preach! Every month or so I cook a load of food before the service and after the service welcome people to come and eat in the Manna. My prayer is that this hospitality will spill over into the church and this has already happened with one of our house groups sharing a meal together every week.

As a small church we want to do a few things and do them well and therefore Renew 61 is our main focus. I believe that starting Renew 61 has helped our Sunday services become more inclusive and welcoming, and for this I am thankful. My prayer is that they will continue to overlap and have a positive impact on each other.

**Laura Moncaster** is  
minister of **Aylesham**  
**Baptist Church**



**Renew Wellbeing** helps churches open spaces of welcome and inclusion in partnership with mental health teams to improve mental and emotional wellbeing. Each renew space is run by a local church who give their time and share hobbies and skills in a homely welcoming space.

The first Renew space, Renew 37, was created by **New Life Baptist Church** and its pastor Ruth Rice in Nottingham in 2015. Such was

the interest in and growth of the movement Ruth stepped away from being the New Life pastor to become the full-time director of the charity Renew Wellbeing.

Dozens of centres have now opened, many in Baptist churches including Doncaster, Mansfield, Huddersfield, Chipping Campden, Worcester, Nailsea, Chesham, Sudbury and Broadstairs.

**For more information visit**  
**renewwellbeing.org.uk**

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Photo: WAVE

Celia Webster on the 10 year anniversary of WAVE

*But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.*



In September we held a celebration day to celebrate 10 years of WAVE - We're All Valued Equally, which is a movement for change. WAVE hopes to break down the attitudinal and practical barriers that can result

in people with learning disabilities being socially segregated. We believe God wants people with learning disabilities to be at the very heart of his church, and that God will heal us, bind us together and help us put aside our differences through them. We try to create spaces and opportunities for those of all abilities to mix with the belief that we are all made richer by being together and depleted without one another. It hopes to break down the barriers of fear and prejudice and demonstrate God's valuing and love. Sadly, so often even we Christians don't share God's values, and we don't put kindness, love, gentleness and humility above academia and success and what the secular world views as beautiful.

It was not until I had a little girl with learning disabilities that I realised quite how fearful and prejudiced towards this particular group of people I was. I felt so alone and isolated and depressed. I wrestled with God and prayed so

much for him to heal her. In fact he was to choose my daughter and Bernice's daughter as vessels to show his love and power and valuing to so many, and bring his kingdom to earth. Years later I understood that he would in fact heal me and so many others through her. I asked God many times to provide me with a place to go where I wouldn't feel so alone. But over months and years I kept hearing him call me to start a group called The Challenge Group. I told him he had let me down and I had no energy or confidence for that.

Then one night I had a dream that I was in a cold, grey, stark room. I was fishing from the shallowest of puddles with a cane rod with just a string on it and no hook. I said to my husband: "What's the point? There's just no point". Then I felt this hand on my shoulder, which I believe was Jesus. He said "You've got to change your perspective. Step over to the other side of the puddle."

I did this and began to reel in fish after fish. They were brightly coloured tropical fish. The next day I said yes to God. I would start this group. Two days later Bernice, a mother of a daughter with Down's Syndrome who I knew only by sight at church, called me. She said I might think it was weird, but she felt God had prompted her to telephone me, and let me know that he was calling her to start a church for people with learning disabilities!



From this moment on, God sent people and funding our way. I felt as if I was on ice-skates rather than climbing up the steep icy mountain I had previously been climbing. He was the driving force. We began The Challenge group: a playgroup and support group for children with additional needs. We provided free massage, tea and coffee and home-made cakes, and an open welcome to all.

Mothers come who have not left their houses for weeks, even months. They find a place where their child is truly celebrated and seen as beautiful. It feels like a family and many start coming to the Sunday school. Others just experience God's love and valuing. Recently a Muslim man said to me in tears, "This place is love".

It means that before each group starts, I often think of the verses: *You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy... my cup overfloweth.*

Bernice then began **WAVE Church**, which now has 40 regular members. Wave Church provides accessible worship meetings once a month for adults with a learning disability, their parents/carers and friends. We are a mixed abilities team and welcome members from all Christian denominations. We use craft, drama, music, Makaton signing and sensory illustrations to learn more about Jesus, grow in friendship with him and each other, and have fun together. Space and time to chat over tea and home made cake is an important part of our meetings. It is held at a Methodist church. Baptists and Catholics and members of other denominations all attend.

Later Bernice began **WAVE Club**, for older young people. This has now morphed now into **WAVE café**. It pops up every week as an arts café and local artists run workshops and people of all abilities from the community come - which is amazing.

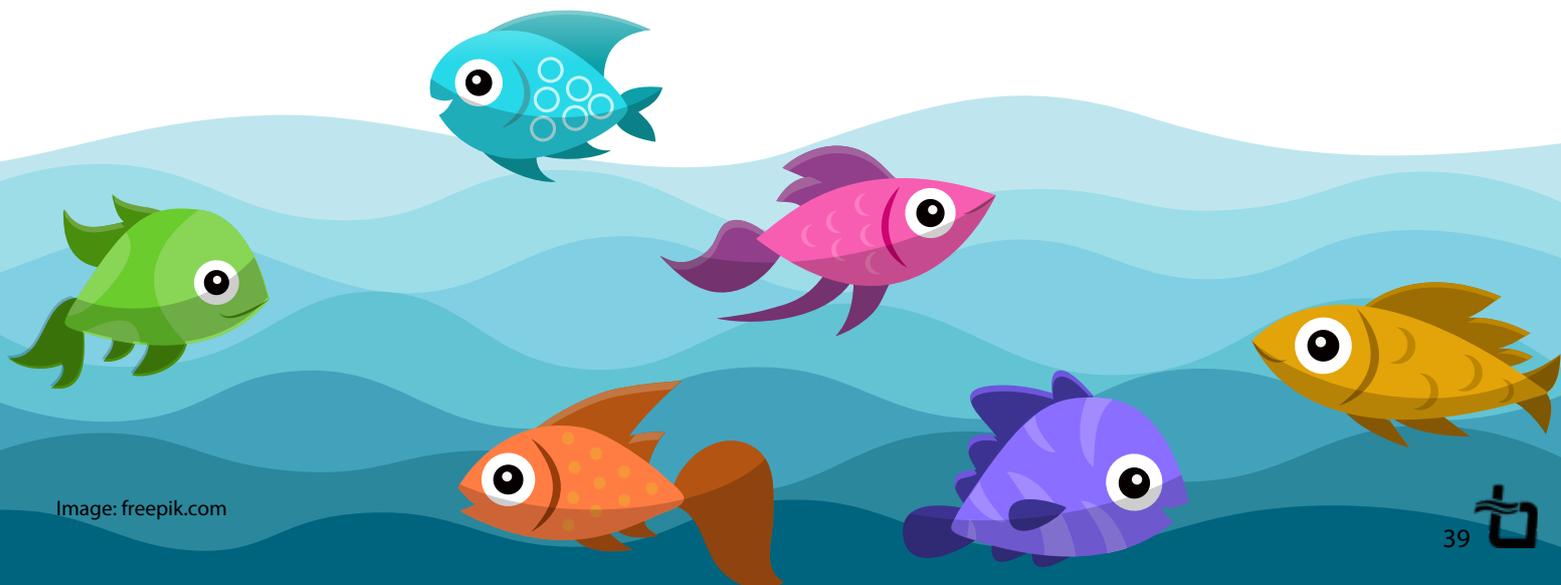
We find that one of the greatest gifts is vulnerability, which is enriching and healing us all. People have reflected how WAVE is a place they can let down their barriers and be totally themselves. Like in the story of the Good Samaritan, we have come to expect to receive the most from those apparently able to give the least. As God came down to earth to dwell **with** us, our ethos is about being with one another.

We would so love anyone who might feel called to start a Challenge Group, a WAVE church or a WAVE Club to please get in touch as we very much believe Jesus wants all the little children and adults to come to him! We believe God has a plan to send out ripples or perhaps even a tidal WAVE to other churches across denominations. We believe he wants to demonstrate his good news through those we might see as the weakest. It's a place of standing at the foot of the cross, where suffering and hope and love meet. A place of healing and transformation.

#### Contact

Celia Webster [celia@wave-for-change.org.uk](mailto:celia@wave-for-change.org.uk) or  
Bernice Hardie [bernice@wave-for-change.org.uk](mailto:bernice@wave-for-change.org.uk)

Also see [wave-for-change.org.uk](http://wave-for-change.org.uk) for more information.



# Valuing children in our churches

Children have a part to play, writes Andrew Ginn.  
How do we truly express unity with our younger folk?



Image: freepik.com

Jesus took unity seriously. As he prays in the moments before the crucifixion drama unfolds, he uses some of his final words as a free man to pray for unity among those who would believe in him, praying (John 17: 20-21):

*"... for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one - as you are in me, Father, and I am in you."*

As Baptists, we tend to put an emphasis on that belief as a reasoned, informed response to God's grace. As such, there may be a risk that we tend to think of that community of believers as rather adult-ish and somewhat intellectualised ... But maybe Jesus' intention behind his prayers was somewhat wider? He talks of 'little children' as 'those who believe in me' (Matt 18:6), and he welcomes their noisy praise (Matt 21: 15-16), even to the dismay of the religious elite. Is our unity as believers inclusive of children and others who might express their faith in ways other than spoken sentences? That's not the same as asking whether children or those with additional needs can come along to all things church. The question is: will they receive a welcome as believers, with whom we share church and Kingdom as equals?

Just as the eye cannot say to the hand 'we don't need you', so adults cannot say to the children "we don't need you". If the body is to encompass all those whose belief is acceptable to Christ, it will have to involve children and adults of ages and abilities. Children have a part to play. Not so that we can all become the same, but precisely because of our differences; the variety of our combined testimony as church united across generations will be a better witness to the character and

activity of the Godhead than any adult-only expression. Our claims as to the nature of God-in-us are only enhanced by including those who need help in joining, as we walk the Jesus way. If we are to give witness of the inclusive love of God to the world, then it starts with living that witness among us first. Just like the cross, we reach out from side to side in our unity and fellowship to include the whole spectrum of ability; remembering that the vertical line matters too, as we reach from oldest to youngest.

Expressing unity with our younger folk is about more than having children's songs, or pictures to go alongside the Bible reading (although that might be important too!): this is about authentically valuing children and their belief, even as they are being formed, in much the same way that we do with adults, as we all grow as disciples together, before our heavenly Father.

What makes you feel valued and included within church? Having a role? Being greeted by name? Being asked your opinions and taken seriously? Being invited to pray for others? What could you do to include those 'such as these', as together we see Jesus' heart-cry for unity being fulfilled among us, today? At Bunyan Baptist (Stevenage), we're tussling with these questions too! We're making changes to our practice and ethos, exploring ways of helping families take on volunteering roles together, encouraging folk of all ages and abilities to offer testimony or extemporary prayer within our gathered worship, and more besides... but crucially, it's about deliberately shaping our culture to include and value every individual, understanding that responsibility for such a culture is borne by every member in every encounter with every person.

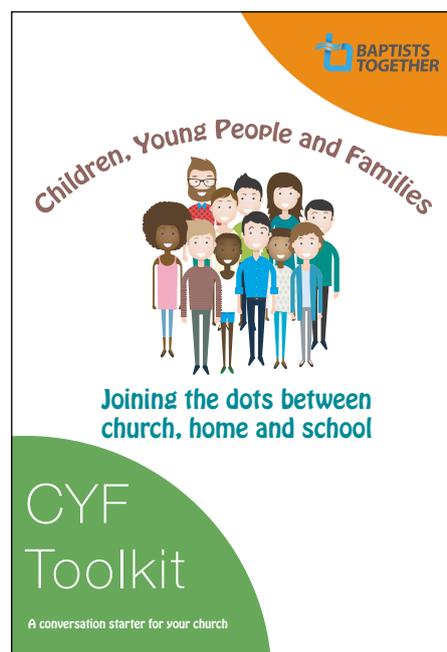
If you're looking for practical ways to express your unity with children, or to help consider your church from a child's perspective, do have a look at the toolkit available from the Children's Youth And Family Round Table (CYF), under the resources section at: [www.baptist.org.uk/CYFresources](http://www.baptist.org.uk/CYFresources)

But maybe it all starts with getting down on your knees alongside a child, addressing them by name, asking what they think, and engaging seriously with whatever follows!

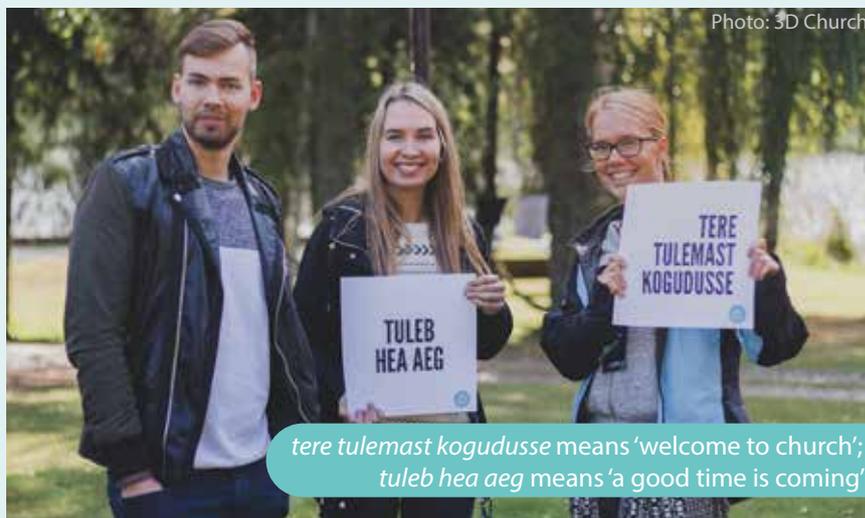
**Andrew Ginn** is the Lead Minister at **Bunyan Baptist Church**, Stevenage.



He is a member of the Baptists Together **Children, Young People and Families Round Table**



A conversation starter for your church



*tere tulemast kogudusse* means 'welcome to church';  
*tuleb hea aeg* means 'a good time is coming'

## “We wanted something that would speak to them”

**How a focus on welcome and belonging has helped a Baptist church in Estonia develop a growing and significant ministry among young adults.**

With polls revealing that fewer than 18 per cent of its population believe in God, Estonia has been described as ‘the most godless nation on earth.’<sup>1</sup> Agnosticism, the Soviet repression of religion during the 20th century occupation years, institutional distrust and interest in other spiritualities have contributed to this seemingly bleak landscape. However, this is not the full picture. The small Baptist Union (the *Union of Free Evangelical and Baptist Churches of Estonia*) is in good heart with more than 80 churches and around 6500 members. On becoming President of the *European Baptist Federation* in September, Estonian Baptist pastor Meego Rimmel spoke of his hope and belief that one day all of Europe will be ‘saved and blessed’. It’s a belief founded on the ‘compelling love of Christ’, as well as the reality he has witnessed in his own church.

Meego is a pastor/teacher in *3D Church*, a church founded in 2010 by his son Jakob Rimmel. Recognising that young people found the way a traditional church was structured ‘irrelevant’, Jakob, ‘a gifted evangelist’ set about creating an environment they would find more welcoming. “He wanted something that would speak to them,” says Meego. Music, film and alternative methods of baptising have all played a part in making the whole church experience ‘three dimensional’ Jakob explained.

Venues have included a cinema and a nightclub. There was no money to start with, just faith and a vision to ‘share the life-changing message of Jesus, to baptise those who believe in him, and to learn to follow him together’. As funds came in they have been invested in high quality technology.

There is a strong culture of welcome, with people urged to ‘come as you are’ and members always on hand to talk to and include newcomers. Alongside there is an even stronger culture of discipleship. Church life happens in small communities in people’s homes throughout week (the church has established a missional community school and trained leaders for these communities, which is always one man and one woman), and even smaller cell groups of three. The whole church meets together for a celebration event once a month.

It has now grown to more than 200 people across five locations, the majority in their 20s. (“We’ve just had our first children and are working out children’s work,” says Meego).



Meego Rimmel receiving the EBF Presidency gavel from predecessor Jenni Entrican

A number of members have in the past suffered with drug and other addictions, and self harm. The acceptance they’ve founded at 3D and the progress they’ve made in living with their problems has in turn proved a witness to many.

“The main focus of the church is disciple-making,” continues Meego. “We realised we needed an environment where disciple making happens, and we’ve found that this is small communities.

“Most of the people in the church are first generation Christians. Their parents don’t have a faith, so for members of 3D, this is their first experience of church. Many have said they’ve never before sensed such love and welcome, and this of course interests others.”

Jakob says that the messages shared by 3D are not so different from those taught by the more traditional churches. However, he believes it’s the way the 3D Church goes about delivering these messages that has attracted young Estonians to take part.

“There were so many people, including my own friends, that were kind of interested in the message of Christianity, but were not willing to come into the church building.

“We focus on the topics that people are already thinking about and give – from our perspective – a biblical view of them.”

<sup>1</sup> [www.stuff.co.nz/travel/destinations/europe/63549554/the-most-godless-nation-on-earth](http://www.stuff.co.nz/travel/destinations/europe/63549554/the-most-godless-nation-on-earth)



An interview with

# Anthony Reddie

Professor Reddie is a participative educator and liberation theologian who specialises in undertaking action-research with predominantly poorer Black communities in the UK.

The author of 18 books, numerous journal articles and editor of *Black Theology: An International Journal*, Professor Reddie is one of the foremost Practical Black theologians in the world. In January he took up a new role as Director of the Oxford Centre for Religion and Culture, based at *Regent's Park College*.

## Can you tell us about your background?

I was born in Bradford, West Yorkshire to parents who had come from the Caribbean (Jamaica) as part of the Windrush generation. I studied History at Birmingham University.

I was youth and community worker in north Birmingham, as a result of which I did a doctorate in education and theology.

I observed grandparents bringing their grandchildren to church, but the parents weren't there. I was both curious about that absence, and concerned. I wanted to know more. When I looked for any literature that explained something of this, there was virtually nothing.

My project aimed to develop new forms of material that would better connect and speak to these Black children. The project was a success, and morphed into my wider research, including Black Liberation Theology, Christian teaching and faith formation of African-Caribbean people. I have subsequently explored questions of power, belonging and inclusivity.

## Can you explain what Black Liberation Theology is? Where did your interest in it come from?

Black Liberation Theology is the attempt to reinterpret faith in light of the black struggle. It sees God in Jesus Christ as the basis for the fight for transformation – both for individual transformation and wider societal transformation. It is similar to Latin American Liberation theology, but much more focused on race. It's an attempt to use faith and the scriptures to apply to the Black struggle. The most famous contemporary exponents are Martin Luther King and Desmond Tutu.



It can be traced to the 1960s, when an advert was taken out in the *New York Times*. It said that the rise of the Black Power Movement wasn't anti-Christian, but an expression of the gospel in seeking to battle against poverty and injustice.

I discovered it in the early 1990s, when there were very few exponents of it in the UK (there still aren't many!). I could see its relevance in terms of the angry black young people I was working with. They needed better self-esteem, more positive images. I was looking for resources that could connect with these angry black young people.

I grew up in a very pleasant and supportive Methodist family. But what it lacked was visible black people in terms of how I understood and interpreted faith. I was in Sunday School, aged 11 or 12. The image of Jesus looked more like Bjorn Borg than even Bjorn Borg did! I thought: "If that's Jesus, then what am I?" It wasn't that I didn't believe, but I questioned why all the symbolism was white.

Once I began to become conversant in Black Liberation Theology, it helped me connect with my own history. It became very personal for me. I found it interesting from an academic point of view, but it's also tied up in my faith and identity.

## How does Black Liberation Theology apply to Baptists Together?

Baptists have had an important role in the development of Black Liberation Theology. Your former President Kate Coleman played a leading role in the 1990s in the development of Womanist Theology, which is parallel to Black Liberation Theology.

In 2017, for the 10th anniversary of the *Apology*, I was involved as a co-editor in the book *Journeying to Justice*. It was a coming together of Black British Baptists, Jamaican Baptists and white Baptists to reflect on this issue.



The book did two things. It recognised the problematic relationship between the Baptist Unions of Jamaica and Great Britain in terms of slavery, as well as celebrating that partnership which is now 200 years old, united in Christ. It recognised you can't have a partnership if you don't have justice.

Secondly the Baptist Union is much more diverse than it was 100 years ago but, in some respects, how power is held and by whom has not changed as significantly. It points out issues of power.

### **What attracted you to the post of director for the Oxford Centre for Religion and Culture? What are your dreams and hopes for the Centre?**

I've had a long connection with *Regent's Park College*. I've preached there a number of times, and launched *Journeying to Justice* there. I've always found it both a creative, academic, friendly and spiritual space.

When I saw this post advertised, I prayed about it, spoke to friends about it, and decided to apply. It seemed like a great opportunity to reignite my academic and scholarly work. I see my task to build on the existing work done by Nick Wood, and augment it with my interest in post-colonial Christianity. I'd like to broaden the base of people who participate. Regent's is a very successful college in one of the world's great universities in the middle of Oxford. However, it's not as diverse as it could be.

When I applied for the job, I made a commitment to diversity: I want to bring different voices to the table, different cultural lenses.

### **How do you think God is calling you to use your gifts and skills in the Baptist family?**

All through my adult life I've been an ecumenist. I have many close friends and colleagues in the Baptist tradition. I feel like I'm a critical friend of the Baptist Union – both an insider and an outsider, someone from a fellow historical tradition, who can offer some insight to help the family reflect critically on the challenges they face.

Back in Jamaica my parents were members of the *Jamaican Baptist Union*. My mother has died, but my father is still a member of a Baptist church.

I've always sought to embrace and live out a radical expression of the gospel, that reaches those on the margins and says: "There is something here for you." I've wanted to find the right cultural context.

My parents instilled in me the values that you make a difference, and central to all that work is the Christian faith. I want to give people confidence that they can make a difference.

Regent's Park College has always had a place that stems from the dissenting tradition. I want to stand up for those on the margins, those who have been suppressed.

There's an African American saying that states God is 'making a way out of no way'. I see in Regent's an opportunity to continue that work. ■



Photos of Anthony speaking at Catalyst Live  
- BMS World Mission | Alex Baker Photography



# An Ordinary Office

The Ordinary Office is an online, accessible liturgy produced by the campaign group *Disability and Jesus*. Every liturgy is available in clear print, Widgit symbols, on video, and in audio.

*Disability and Jesus* is a user-led group which aims to bring together those on the margins and deliver resources on all aspects of disability to the church and the world. It launched the Ordinary Office in 2018, to provide an office that is more inclusive, less complex and that will be there for people who for whatever reason feel estranged from God and his church. Find out more on the *Disability and Jesus* website [disabilityandjesus.org.uk](http://disabilityandjesus.org.uk) and from [anordinaryoffice.org.uk](http://anordinaryoffice.org.uk)

Widgit symbols have been developed by Widgit Software in collaboration with language and communication experts. For more than 30 years, Widgit Software has been a pioneer in the field of developing materials for people who have difficulty in understanding and using text. They provide a visual representation of a concept, making the text easier to understand.

 **MORNING PRAYER**

 We  praise  You,  Lord,  because  we  are  ALL  fearfully

 and  wonderfully  made.

 In  our  Father's  house  there  is  room  for  all,  there  are

 no  rejects.

 There  are  no  able-bodied,  there  are  no  disabled:

 there  are  only  His  beloved  children

 who  are  all  made  in  His  image.

 We  are  beautiful  in  His  eyes.

 We  believe  Jesus  himself  ascended  in  to  heaven,

 carrying  his  wounds  on  our  behalf.

 Jesus  does not  hide  these  wounds:

 they  carry  no  shame  for  him  but  he  shows

 them  to  us  willingly  as  proof  of  his  eternal  love.

 Jesus  does not  hide  these  wounds:

 they  carry  no  shame  for  him  but  he  shows

 them  to  us  willingly  as  proof  of  his  eternal  love.

 He  calls  us  this morning  to  do  the  same,

 to  stand  before  him  in  our  brokenness

 trusting  in  him  for  our  care.

 I  hear  footsteps  in  the  garden  and  I  know  my  Lord

 is  near

 and  He  calls  me  by  name  saying

 "why  are you  hiding  from  me,  why  are you  hiding  from  me,

 why  do you  hide  from  Me  when  I  love  you  so?"

Those who cannot see he walks along side as our guide.

He whispers softly to those who cannot hear.

He soothes those whose minds are troubled.

He rides with those who cannot walk.

He sees the pain of those whose pain cannot be seen

and brings insight to those who appear not to understand.

He is at the heart of every lonely room

and is present in every stranger who sits at our hearth.

His love is new every morning.

His love does not depend on our fragile form.

His love is enough for this coming day.

We accept the calling to bring that love to those we

meet today:

Lord when I hear you calling help me to say

here I am.

Only You can meet the longing of my heart.

Only You knows every hidden part.

Show me the gifts I have

Show me the gift I am

Let my whole life be lived in love of You

Bringing great joy to Your Heart.

### Morning prayer

We praise you, Lord, because we are ALL fearfully and wonderfully made. In our Father's house there is room for all, there are no rejects.

There are no able-bodied, there are no disabled: there are only his beloved children who are all made in his image. We are beautiful in his eyes.

We believe Jesus himself ascended in to heaven, carrying his wounds on our behalf. Jesus does not hide these wounds: they carry no shame for him but he shows them to us willingly as proof of his eternal love.

He calls us this morning to do the same, to stand before him in our brokenness trusting in him for our care. I hear footsteps in the garden and I know my Lord is near and he calls me by name saying "why are you hiding from me, why are you hiding from me, why do you hide from me when I love you so"?

Those who cannot see he walks along side as our guide. He whispers softly to those who cannot hear. He soothes those whose minds are troubled. He rides with those who cannot walk. He sees the pain of those whose pain cannot be seen and brings insight to those who appear not to understand.

He is at the heart of every lonely room and is present in every stranger who sits at our hearth.

His love is new every morning. His love does not depend on our fragile form. His love is enough for this coming day.

We accept the calling to bring that love to those we meet today: Lord when I hear you calling help me to say here I am.

Only you can meet the longing of my heart. Only you knows every hidden part.

Show me the gifts I have Show me the gift I am

Let my whole life be lived in love of you Bringing great joy to your heart.

This next section is for when we feel we can not pray.

**CAN'T PRAY**

Today I cannot pray.

There are no words.

I feel no hope.

I am broken.

I am alone!

God, I feel estranged from you.

Today you seem hidden from me.

Your voice is out of reach.

I stretch out my hand but can not reach your hand.

I cry out but my voice echoes back in the darkness,

there is no answer.

I am alone on this mountainside

With the howl of the wind and the cry of the wild wolf.

I am alone.

But I shall wait for your voice knowing that it will

come as it always has before..

For now I shall borrow this prayer until once again

I am able to pray in my own words.

**Can't pray**

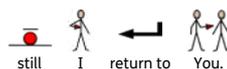
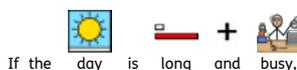
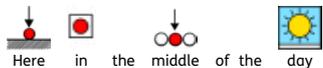
Today I cannot pray.  
There are no words.  
I feel no hope.  
I am broken.  
I am alone!

God, I feel estranged from you.  
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But I shall wait for your voice knowing that it will come as it always has before..

For now I shall borrow this prayer until once again I am able to pray in my own words.



*Disability and Jesus* began with the premise that much of what has been written on disability theology has been written from an observational view point, not from someone living within a disabled body, struggling with the day to day of all that that can bring. It grew out of a need to give disabled people licence to tell their stories.

For more on its journey, ministry and resources, visit [disabilityandjesus.org.uk](http://disabilityandjesus.org.uk), including links to the Ordinary Office ([anordinaryoffice.org.uk](http://anordinaryoffice.org.uk))

Every Sunday evening at 21:00, *Disability and Jesus* leads a live Twitter service, based around elements of the Ordinary Office. Follow and participate at @DisabilityJ.

### Middy prayer

Here in the middle of the day  
I take a moment, pause  
and pray:

Each breath you give me, God.  
You know my heart,  
and know its every beat.  
You are closer to me than breathing,  
nearer than hands or feet.

I matter to you more than many sparrows.  
You catch each word I frame.  
You care about my day,  
design new patterns with my name.  
If the day seems dull and empty,  
I will gather it to you.  
If the day is long and busy,  
still I return to you.

## Baptist Union Council: November 2019

How Baptist ministerial formation is funded was a major topic at the latest Baptist Union Council gathering, which took place at the Hayes Conference Centre in Swanwick, Derbyshire (6-7 November).

Our Baptist colleges have a 'curious' position in Baptists Together, council members were told: we rely on them to train the people who lead our churches and other forms of ministry such as chaplaincy and pioneering; we ask them to be flexible to make training accessible to a wide range of people; however, we don't fund them, apart from a Home Mission contribution of £128,000, which is distributed as bursary funding to students by the Colleges.

Though they are offering a huge breadth of training and pathways for people who have sensed a call to ministry, it's unlikely that our colleges can provide training that specifically meets each context a minister may encounter. They are attempting to embed foundational theological skills for whatever context the students will be in.

Tim Fergusson, Ministerial Development Adviser, said that the whole Baptist family should accept responsibility for formation, a point underlined by Richard Wilson, Support Services Team Leader. Richard explained there are three 'troubling' gaps in our training system. The first concerns supply and demand. As recently as five years ago there were two ministers in settlement for every church actively looking. However, the ratio of ministers in settlement to churches actively looking at each meeting of the Settlement Team has halved, which means there are often churches who are unable to receive nominations as there are not enough ministers available.

Currently there are around 120 people training for Baptist ministry, and we actually need between 180 and 200. How do we inspire more people to consider Baptist ministerial formation?



A key issue is finance, which accounts for another of the troubling gaps. A typical student needs to find £15,000 living costs per year, on top of the £9,000 fees. Other denominations such

as the Anglicans and Methodists are investing significantly in raising up their next generation of leaders. As a result, young people from Baptist churches are choosing to train elsewhere.

The session also highlighted the financial costs involved for our colleges. Colleges broadly spend twice as much to deliver the training as what they bring in from each student. A number of our colleges are running at a loss, though all bridge the funding gap in varying degrees. The cost of delivering courses is rising.

Council members were told that the scale of the challenge is 'as big as the pension crisis'. In order to raise up godly leaders for the present and the future, we need to respond in similar way, by seeking to find 'a family solution'.

Members approved the commissioning of a working party to urgently investigate options and make proposals.

For this and other Council reports visit:

[baptist.org.uk/council](http://baptist.org.uk/council)



## A Sight Loss Friendly Church

Last autumn Christopher Brown became pastor at *Market Harborough Baptist Church* – one of the earliest members of Christian sight loss charity Torch Trust's Sight Loss Friendly Church. He has spoken about his experience of coming to a church with a rich heritage of sight loss friendliness and why it still strives to do more.

"Coming into a church where there's already been a lot of work to make it sight loss friendly was a real eye opener, especially for my preaching," he said. "Previously I would probably use quite a lot of visual components, whether that's through the PowerPoint or physical props or whatever else.

"I try to make sure that I'm not always saying "Look at this, look at that" but actually being very much more descriptive in my preaching."

He emphasised how scary it is for people who are beginning to lose their sight – and how a congregation can help.

"If they're a part of a community that is aware, that is sensitive, that already has a collective communal wisdom and support framework, then that is a tremendous help."

It's therefore important have things in place now.

"Don't wait for someone to come, because they might come and find no provision and end up leaving," Christopher said.

To start your journey with Torch's Sight Loss Friendly Church, visit [sightlossfriendlychurch.org.uk](http://sightlossfriendlychurch.org.uk)

For the full version of this interview visit [baptist.org.uk/market](http://baptist.org.uk/market)

## Wendy is first Baptist Anna Chaplain

The first Baptist Anna Chaplain has been commissioned.

Named after the faithful widow Anna, who appears with Simeon in Luke's gospel, Anna Chaplaincy is a community-based network that supports older people and their carers.



Wendy Gleadle was commissioned in a service at her church - *Chipping Campden Baptist Church* – in the autumn aged 79.

"It's so exciting becoming an Anna Chaplain," she said. "At this age you never know what's about to come, but as long as I'm fit and well I'm going to love doing it, and I hope it will grow. God has opened many doors."

Anna Chaplaincy is a ministry of BRF which began in 2014. For more visit: [www.annachaplaincy.org.uk](http://www.annachaplaincy.org.uk)

## First Baptist church awarded Church of Sanctuary status

*Six Ways Baptist Church* in Erdington, Birmingham has become the first Baptist church to be awarded Church of Sanctuary status.

The accreditation recognises the church's commitment to being a safe and welcoming place for all, especially those seeking sanctuary. This includes people who have had to flee their homeland in fear of their lives.

The idea of a Church of Sanctuary has evolved from the City of Sanctuary movement, which aims to build cultures of welcome, hospitality and safety. Sanctuary awards recognise and celebrate mainstream organisations' commitment to City of Sanctuary values and vision of welcome and inclusivity. *Six Ways* is the second church to receive the Church of Sanctuary award.

Over the past decade the church has sought to welcome and include sanctuary seekers and refugees in its activities.

Many members of its worshipping community are refugees or asylum seekers. It offers various social clubs and activities to those who have sought safety from other countries in Erdington and the surrounding areas. This includes classes to help people learn and improve their English, and support for the charity *Restore*, which offers a befriending service to refugees.

At a meeting last March, its church members committed to being a Church

Gerard Goshawk (right) prays at the ceremony marking the Church of Sanctuary award



of Sanctuary and affirming the value of each individual human being as made in the image of God.

The award was presented to Solani Muleya, one of the church's 'Sanctuary Advocates', herself a refugee from Zimbabwe, by Barbara Forbes from the City of Sanctuary Network.

Barbara said, "The Birmingham City of Sanctuary committee was impressed by the support already given by the church to asylum-seekers and refugees, and their commitment to extend and continue this work."

Minister Gerard Goshawk said, "It's great to see the brilliant work by our congregation towards welcoming and supporting those seeking sanctuary recognised.

"The award also presents a renewal of our commitment to continue and extend this welcome and we are all excited for the future."

For more on Church of Sanctuary, visit <https://churchofsanctuary.org>

## Through the Roof events in early 2020

Christian Disability Charity *Through the Roof* is hosting a series of events across the country in early 2020 to help equip churches and disabled people to serve Christ together.

The events will include new ideas and resources, inspiring real-life stories and inclusive experience.

They take place:

1 February - **Ashted** - KT21 2DA

29 February - **Edinburgh** - EH10 4HR

14 March - **Manchester** - M20 2GP

21 March - **Bristol** - BS32 0BD

"Thank you, one of the best training days I've been to for ages."

*Feedback from attendee, 2018*

Tickets: £10 each or £15 for two.

More information is available at: <https://www.throughtheroof.org/forchurches/events>



## LICC role for Ken Benjamin

Current Baptist Union President Ken Benjamin is to become Director of Church Relationships with The London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC) – the first Baptist in the role.

Ken has long been an associate speaker for LICC and advocate of its whole-life discipleship message.

He will leave *Chichester Baptist Church*, the church he has served for 23 years, in May, the month in which his Presidency term also ends. He will take a sabbatical before the LICC role begins in September 2020.

Ken said there is a mixture of excitement at what lies ahead alongside sadness at leaving the church, but he believes God's hand is on the appointment.

"I am delighted and honoured to be taking up the position at LICC. Their

whole-life discipleship message and agenda has been a vital part of my 'where do we grow from here?' theme as President of Baptists Together.

"But my wife Sue and I will miss being part of the church family at Chichester Baptist Church very much. For more than 23 years this has been our brilliant,



encouraging and loving church community."

LICC Executive Director Mark Greene said he was 'thrilled' Ken was joining the team 'to take up such a strategic role at this moment of enormous opportunity in the cause of whole-life mission'.

General Secretary Lynn Green said she was delighted Ken was taking the role. She added, "The LICC whole-life discipleship emphasis fits so well with our Baptist understanding that every Christian is equally called to the service of God, in the world. This appointment gives Ken the chance to develop and expand the connections he has already made as our President with so many Baptist churches who want to fuel and sustain a whole-life disciple making culture in their congregations."

For the full story, visit: [baptist.org.uk/kenlicc](http://baptist.org.uk/kenlicc)

# Events

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



## Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 18-25 January

Theme: 'Unusual Kindness', prepared by churches in Malta and Gozo  
[www.ctbi.org.uk/weekofprayer](http://www.ctbi.org.uk/weekofprayer)



## Baptist World Alliance Day 1/2 February

Baptists are encouraged to worship together and pray for one another  
[bwanet.org/resources/worship-resources/bwa-day](http://bwanet.org/resources/worship-resources/bwa-day)



## BMS World Mission Day of Prayer 9 February

Praying for the work of mission, with BMS staff in the UK and around the world  
[www.bmsworldmission.org/dayofprayer](http://www.bmsworldmission.org/dayofprayer)



## Church Action on Poverty Sunday 23 February

A day to focus on working together to close the gap between rich and poor  
[www.church-poverty.org.uk/sunday](http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/sunday)



## Fairtrade Fortnight 24 February – 8 March

Events and promotions highlight Fairtrade  
[www.fairtrade.org.uk/fortnight](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/fortnight)



## Whitley Lecture

Dates and venues starting 25 February  
Robert Parkinson on 'Finding a Friend: The Baptist Encounter with Judaism'  
[www.baptist.org.uk/whitley20](http://www.baptist.org.uk/whitley20)



## Lent

26 February – 9 April



## Christian Resources Exhibition 4-5 March

Stoneleigh Park, Coventry  
[www.creonline.co.uk](http://www.creonline.co.uk)



## Women's World Day of Prayer 6 March

Theme 'Rise! Take your mat and walk!', written by women from Zimbabwe  
[www.wwdp.org.uk](http://www.wwdp.org.uk)



## Renewal and Rebellion

The JPIT National Conference  
**Saturday 7 March 2020**  
The Riverside Centre, Derby  
[www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/conference2020](http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/conference2020)



## Baptist Union Council

17-18 March  
Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick  
[www.baptist.org.uk/council](http://www.baptist.org.uk/council)



## Easter Sunday

12 April



## Baptist Assembly

8 - 10 May  
Bournemouth International Centre  
[www.baptistassembly.org.uk](http://www.baptistassembly.org.uk)



## Christian Aid Week

10 – 16 May  
Support and pray for the work of Christian Aid  
[www.caweek.org](http://www.caweek.org)



## David Goodbourn Lecture 11 May

Luther King House, Manchester  
Speaker: Prof Dr Isabel Apawo Phiri, Deputy General Secretary of the World Council of Churches  
[www.theologyjustice.org](http://www.theologyjustice.org)



## In the Cross-hairs: Biblical Violence in Focus

14 May  
Bloomsbury, London  
Symposium of the Centre for the Study of Bible and Violence - speaker Paul Copan  
[www.inthecrosshairs.eventbrite.co.uk](http://www.inthecrosshairs.eventbrite.co.uk)



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# *baptist assembly*

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Friday 8 - Sunday 10 May

Bournemouth International Centre

[www.baptistassembly.org.uk](http://www.baptistassembly.org.uk)

