

BAPTISTS

Summer 2014

TOGETHER



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News / Interviews / Prayer / Comment / Events
The magazine for the Baptist Union of Great Britain

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Seeing, thinking, living differently

Sometimes it's easy to forget just how shocking Jesus would have been to the society he lived in 2,000 years ago. His miracles and emphasis on forgiveness; his concern for the vulnerable and attitude to money; his servant heart and foot washing - you can understand why his contemporaries found him so unsettling. Though Jesus' words and teaching may be more familiar now, they are no less dislocating when we contrast them with the values and messages of the modern world.

When we reach out and let him in, our whole perspective changes and has the potential to transform everything we do. It's this impact of Jesus' encounter with us, this invitation to go deeper and play our role in fulfilling God's purposes, that we have attempted to explore in this latest issue of *Baptists Together*.

The New Year brought much attention to the so-called invasion of people from Romania and Bulgaria to the UK. It's fair to say most coverage was less than positive. But how as Baptist Christians do we reflect on this? Phil Jump gets behind the headlines and asks some deeper questions. Staying with contemporary issues, and austerity Britain: the reality is that local authorities have never been so open to working alongside the church, say our two correspondents. So if **they** are thinking differently, how might **we** live differently in the light of this opportunity?

Sometimes simply getting out of our comfort zones enables us to travel further in our faith journey. We feature instances where Baptist churches have harnessed the creative arts to look at or reflect God from different angles, and found missional and serving opportunities as a result. Sian Hancock's explanation of Godly Play offers another approach to our work with children, while our Big Question feature invites the clarity and wisdom children bring. A brief look at Facebook gently suggests that online cannot so easily be dismissed as second best.

The theme of this edition is clearly related to the Higher, Deeper, Wider message that Chris Ellis will be sharing, both at the Baptist Assembly and during his year as President. We invited Chris and fellow Nottingham-based Baptist church pastor Ruth Rice to take part in a filmed conversation, and there were such nuggets of wisdom it has now been developed into a small group resource. One thing that jumped out was Chris's admission that he still feels a beginner. An experienced minister, a former Baptist college principal, yet still with a restlessness and yearning for more. Even close to retirement, as Chris is, there is no sense of arrival.

Living with Jesus calls us to do things differently, and will take us to places we didn't expect. Shocking, yes, but may our eyes and hearts be open as we journey with him.

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Write to the Editorial Group at media@baptist.org.uk or using the Baptist House address.



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Hats on for New Council

Making paper hats may seem a far cry from poring over a business agenda, but was something that the new Baptist Union Council found itself involved in during its March meeting. There was a serious point to it though as organisers recognised how easily people can simply perceive each other through the particular role that brings them to Council. In reality, many find themselves 'wearing different hats' within our Union as wives, fathers, musicians, children's workers as well as serving in sometimes more than one way within our structures.

The session was facilitated by General Secretary Lynn Green and North Western Baptist Association Regional Minister Phil Jump, and was intended to further develop the significant work already done in exploring the nature and implementation of a new culture in our shared life.

"The purpose of meetings can often be seen as simply defining what we need to do," said Phil, who chairs the culture working group. "Through our culture discussions we have recognised that it is equally important to consider how we should go about doing them too."

Making hats was an icebreaker, recognising that many on Council are relatively new to the role and therefore one another. Inevitably some found the task easier than others, but by helping one another, working relationships were forged that carried into the more regular items of business.

For Council's key role is to draw together the diverse experiences and insights from across the Baptist family into the core vision and strategy for our shared life. The Baptist Futures process was a serious commitment to bring change and renewal across our Union;



a redefined Council was a key element in that, with a commitment to explore how we can truly become a missional movement at the heart of that.

Debating chamber it certainly is not, but through prayer, conversation, deliberation and the odd spot of hat-making a real sense of God's leading is increasingly emerging. As part of challenging participants to move from talk to action, Lynn invited them to post on an 'accountability wall' a commitment to what they would do personally to achieve change before Council next meets.

Another first for this Council was the introduction of a live Facebook stream

through which Baptists across the UK could follow and participate in the discussions. More than 350 people had signed up by the end of the gathering, offering a broad range of opinions and interaction. Further thought will be given to how to develop this, for one of the aims of our Union's renewed culture is that we feel like one team, included and listened to.

Danielle Leigh is among the influx of new members. "My experience of Council has been incredibly encouraging," she said. "The folk here come from a wide variety of places, backgrounds and ministries and the focus is firmly on discerning God's will and direction. There is a genuine desire to serve God and share the Good News, and to enable others to do that more effectively."

Read more about the detailed proceedings of Council by visiting the Baptists Together website www.baptist.org.uk/council

Visit and join the BUGB Council Facebook Group at <http://on.fb.me/1iYCoW8>

New urban mission training and research centre to launch

A new training and research centre into pioneering mission will launch in May, thanks to significant funding from our Baptist Union of Great Britain.

The initiative, prospectively called *Urban Life: Encouraging Mission in Marginal Places*, brings together the church-planting agency Urban Expression in partnership with Bristol Baptist College, BMS World Mission and BUGB. The latter has provided the funding for the first five years of the initiative.

Mike Pears, an accredited Baptist minister and member of an Urban Expression team in Bristol, will be responsible for facilitating *Urban Life*.

Urban Expression founder, Bristol tutor Stuart Murray Williams, said it will focus on delivering training and developing capacity for 'innovative and pioneering approaches to ministry and mission in marginalised and deprived places'.

This will include providing courses for colleges at degree and master's levels with the intention of encouraging stronger missional approaches to training. PhD students who have a vision for researching key areas in relation to urban mission will also be recruited.

General Secretary Lynn Green said, "When I came into my post I said we needed an explosion of pioneers. We are delighted to be supporting this centre, which will help equip those already in pioneering situations as well as would-be pioneers looking to explore a call to mission in the most marginalised communities."

Stuart added, "We are extremely grateful to the Baptist Union for providing substantial funding.

"Mike will, of course, be very keen to talk to anyone who shares this sense of vision and would like to encourage people to get in touch from May onwards". (Contact Mike at: pears@pobox.com).

grateful to our churches and members who have given sacrificially in 2013.

"We are excited by the new missional opportunities this will enable – work that has the potential to be transformational in local communities around the UK."

Home Mission is used in many creative ways: a selection of stories can be found at www.baptist.org.uk/homemission

Thanks for Home Mission

The Home Mission appeal in 2013 raised just less than £4m, a drop of two per cent on the previous year.

The result was seen as a positive one in the context of a transitional year for our Baptist Union, the ongoing challenges for churches of the pension deficit recovery payments and the general

economic climate.

Home Mission is the Baptist family purse which enables Baptist churches and individuals to reach their mission potential and demonstrate the love of God to their communities.

"This is a result that we give God thanks for," said David Locke, the Support Services Team Leader. "We are very

Bicentenary celebrations for Jamaican and British Baptists

The rich 200-year association between Jamaican and British Baptists will be marked by a series of events this year.

The links began when Jamaica invited British missionaries such as John Rowe to support the growth they were experiencing under George Liele, a freed slave from the US who planted the first Baptist churches in the island country.

They continued in the ensuing 200 years, forged through years of slavery, colonisation and the arrival of the Windrush from the Caribbean to the UK.



JAMAICAN & BRITISH BAPTISTS TOGETHER

www.200years.net

In more recent years the ties deepened further still with the slavery apology in 2007, delivered personally by a Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) delegation the following year, and the Sam Sharpe Project, which explores the legacy of Sharpe, the Baptist deacon and slave who was instrumental in bringing about the abolition of slavery when he instigated a rebellion in 1831.

Karl Johnson, General Secretary of the Jamaica Baptist Union (JBU), said the friendship had stood the test of time and represents "a powerful testimonial of mutuality, collaboration, respect and continuity." It has, he continued, enjoyed a revival "primarily linked to the journey you have been on arising out of the Apology", and should be embraced and studied.

Wale Hudson-Roberts, the BUGB Racial Justice Co-ordinator, said the partnership models what healthy

multicultural relationships should be like - respecting and embracing difference. "We have been on an intentional and sometimes painful journey to relate with our differences. This model is far deeper than compromise. It is a commitment that seeks to embrace compromise."

Celebrations and theological reflections are being co-ordinated by the JBU, BUGB and BMS World Mission, and will be launched at the Baptist Assembly in May 2014.

The first event then takes place on 19 May at Spurgeon's College, exploring the relevance of Black Theology to contemporary Britain with leading theologian Anthony Reddie. Further events take place next autumn.

For full details visit www.200years.net

For further reflections on the relationship between Jamaican and British Baptists, visit www.baptist.org.uk/jamaica



Karl Johnson

Northern Ireland, peacemaking and the Bible

Recent debates about 'on the runs' in Northern Ireland rekindle memories of arguments surrounding the Good Friday Agreement, writes Peter Stevenson (Principal, South Wales Baptist College). Back in 1998 public debate about the early release of prisoners was heated, and many writing to the local press used the Bible to support their views on the matter.

Those debates formed the background to the first of the Edwin Stephen Griffiths lectures at the South Wales Baptist College in Cardiff given by David McMillan in March. Grounded in his ministerial experience in Newry and Belfast during 'the Troubles' David spoke engagingly about the conflicting ways in which people used the Bible to justify responses to the early release scheme.

Reflection on the ways people use and abuse the Bible in moral decision making was followed by another lecture exploring 'just peacemaking'. This prompted discussion about how to embed the practice of peacemaking in the life of the church through worship, and through covenant relationships.

The Edwin Stephen Griffiths' lectures are an annual event in the life of the Baptist College at Cardiff. David, this year's lecturer, is currently Transition Project Officer for IBTS, overseeing the Seminary's move from Prague to Amsterdam.

Downloads of the lectures can be found via the website: www.swbc.org.uk

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General Secretary Lynn Green:



I am glad to say that I often hear disciples of Jesus Christ talking about wanting to go deeper in their relationship with God. For many people though, there is an uncertainty about where to start and I have found myself in that place in the past. When I came to faith I was encouraged to have a daily quiet time where I would study Bible notes and pray. I found it hard to read my Bible notes every day. My prayer was a bit like a shopping list of requests. I didn't feel like I was going deeper in my relationship with God and I did feel guilty about my out-of-date Bible notes! I know I am not alone in that experience. We have been having a conversation as a family about what has helped us to go deeper with God and here are the key things for us:

For me the important development in my spiritual life was a shift from needing to 'do my quiet time' to understanding that what is important is being with the Lord, receiving his love and grace, getting to know him better and responding in love, worship and following. In other words, spirituality is

not a tick needed on my daily 'to do' list, but a relationship to be enjoyed.

When I asked my husband what had helped him go deeper in his relationship with God, he said that for him it was all about putting yourself in places where you needed God and needed to grow! In the film, *Evan Almighty*, Evan's wife leaves him because she cannot cope with the ark building weirdness anymore and she ends up unwittingly meeting God (aka Morgan Freeman) as a waiter in the diner, and this is what he says to her: "If you pray for patience, does God give you patience or give you the opportunities to be patient?" As we follow Jesus we need to be getting out of our comfort zones into places where we need to depend on God and then we will have the opportunity to go deeper with God.

My eldest daughter shared that what had helped her was realising that she needed to find a way to pray

spirituality is not a tick needed on my daily 'to do' list, but a relationship to be enjoyed

that worked for her. Often we have a narrow understanding of prayer as sitting quietly with our hands together and our eyes closed. A book by John Pritchard, *Beginning Again* helped her to discover different ways of praying, and this has opened up new possibilities and resources for going deeper in her relationship with God.

My son has been finding out more about who God is by reading the Bible. This is such a vital part of our going deeper in our spiritual lives. Like with the best of friendships, to truly know, love and follow him we must become familiar with his character and his ways. I have been reading the Bible for many years now but I am still learning more about my Lord and being challenged to be more like him.

These are some of the things that have helped us navigate the challenges of going deeper with God. Why don't you start a similar conversation with others?

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“Let’s talk about Worship”... a conversation between Chris Ellis and Ruth Rice

What’s it like reaching out to God at your lowest point? Which particular Bible passage does an experienced Christian go back to again and again? Is worship that thing we do at the start of the service – or something more?

These were just some of the subjects that came up when we invited two Baptist pastors in Nottingham to take part in a filmed conversation. In May Chris Ellis will become the President of our Baptist Union of Great Britain. Ahead of this he was interviewed by his neighbour Ruth Rice, a member of the leadership team of Fresh Streams, the Baptist Word and Spirit Network.

Ruth: What’s your focus for your presidential year?

Chris: The theme I’ve chosen, and it’s been picked up for the Assembly, is ‘Higher, Deeper, Wider’. That’s my take on the second half of Ephesians chapter 3, a half chapter I continually return to. It’s been very important for me, it’s a well from which I drink, and I felt this was something I wanted to share with other people. These words convey a sense of being rooted in Christ, being strengthened by the power of God’s Holy Spirit. There is a sense of knowing the love of Christ, though it’s beyond what we can know.

R: So with many years experience in local church leadership, being principal of a Bible college, people might think you’ve already gone higher, deeper and wider, and you’re going to teach us how to do that. What is it about your own journey that keeps you hungering for more?

C: There are two things there. The hungering one, that’s the constant part of who I am as a Christian. My spirituality is about yearning. I believe that’s the moving of the Spirit within me, that I yearn to know more about God, to be closer to God. I want to understand more, I want to share more. That’s a constant thing - that

restlessness, that seeking after God.

But it’s not about arrival, it’s about continuing to seek. It’s not ‘high, deep, wide’ - it’s **higher, deeper, wider**. It’s about continuing to reach out, to stretch out in these dimensions of the gospel.

The other thing is that somebody asked me a few days ago about how I might describe myself. The word that came to me was the word ‘beginner’. I’ve got grey hair: in human terms, I’ve been in ministry quite a long time, but I still feel a beginner. In my Christian life I still feel a beginner. In my understanding of theology, in my leisure pursuits,

and art is a passion of mine, I still feel a beginner. I want to do better, I want to go further. That's just how I'm made, and it seems to me that 'Higher, Deeper, Wider' is inviting other people to go on that journey. The deadliest thing is complacency, or a sense of arrival. No, there is much more; God is so much bigger.

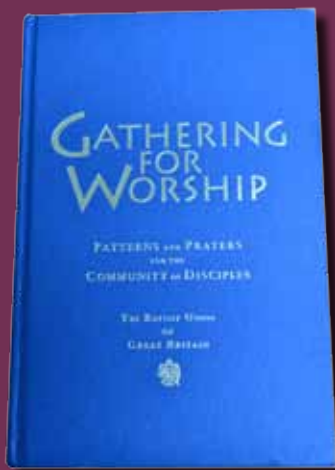
R: We'd like to have a chat about worship. Ask people what it is, and they might say "My whole life is worship" or "It's the singing at the start of the service". Could you define for us, as a writer of many books on this subject, what you think worship is?"

C: I want to say two things about worship. Firstly it is the community of God's people encountering God, seeking God in worship.

Secondly it is seeking God's kingdom. It is about praying for God's kingdom. When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, it begins: 'Our Father who art in heaven', which is about our relationship with God. And, secondly, it's about praying that God's will be done and be made manifest in the world today, praying for God's kingdom. So worship is immediately focused on God, but is also spilling out into the whole of life to the rest of the world.

Gathering for Worship

Edited by Chris Ellis and Myra Blyth, this popular book includes outlines and worship resources to help prepare various types of worship events and includes a CD-Rom of the text.



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R: You coined a phrase in your book 'worldly worship'. Can you explain what you mean by that?

C: Many people have been brought up on a sense that worship is where you withdraw from the world: "We have come away from the world. Help us Lord to put the world behind us so we can just focus on you." I can understand the intentions behind that prayer, which is to focus on God. But the God we focus on is a God who created the world. The gospel we preach is based upon God's love for the world – 'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son'.

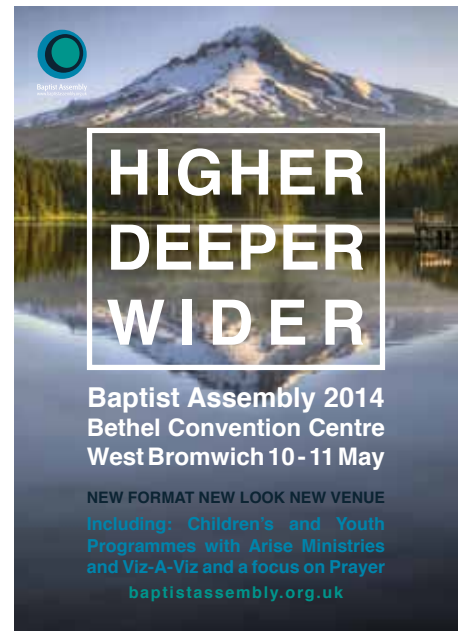
So we can't separate ourselves from the world in that way. Our forebears did - back in the time of the Puritans and the early Baptists they spoke about the church as a kind of walled garden, and people were kept holy by being kept away from the world. I understand why that was so, but if you separate worship and the world, the world is left to be completely secular.

So worldly worship is about our seeking to engage worship and our concerns and our lives in the world, and bring them together.

R: Worldly worship - it still fascinates me. I love this fact that we have a God who loves the world. But some people would still be saying: "Isn't worship the thing we do to get us ready to go into the world?" Could you unpack worldly worship a little bit more, and how that's going to develop in a church?

C: The God who is in worship, the God we encounter in worship, the God whose kingdom we have prayed for in worship, is the God who is present and at work in the world. Part of the theme 'Higher, Deeper, Wider' is about trying to unpack what we might mean by going out into the world. For me, an important part of that is the recognition that we don't take God with us, God is there waiting for us.

Missiologists in recent years have talked about the 'missio dei' - it's not our mission, it's God's mission. Our role is to be open to the Holy Spirit, that God might use us and work through us, but also that we might discern what God is doing and seek to be available to the Spirit in those situations.



You prepare for that in worship, you rehearse that in worship. The way we are shaped in worship, to become more Christ-like, to become 'more Christian', is one of the ways we can be salt and yeast when we are out in the world. When we pray for the world in worship, we're preparing for that journey and for that witness as well. So the need that worship has to look outside itself is very important.

R: I know you helped me quite a lot at the beginning of my ministry, which I came to through a degree of ill health, having tried to burn the candle at both ends as a primary school teacher and a lay preacher and leader. I found myself needing more depth than I ever had in the 40 previous years as a Christian. Things that I learnt about contemplative prayer and the need for depth have really affected your life through times of ill health as well. Can you explain a little more about that?

C: Yes, I think that in some ways I'd put my ministry in two halves. That's not taking anything away from the first half, but there was something that changed about 20 years in. I found myself in the early 1990s seeking in a way that resulted in my going on a renewal journey: charismatic renewal was very important for me. And then, within a year, I found myself having cancer surgery. Those two things together were very significant because they interacted with one another.

The renewal journey gave me resources for facing up to and enduring and dealing with concerns about whether I had very long to live. It was very challenging. I was keeping, and still keep, a personal journal. I can remember a few days after coming out of hospital writing, 'I'm being tempered on the anvil of God's love' and 'God's hands are strong but they're rough'.

I don't know the whys and wherefores of that cancer, but it brought me to the place where life and death were very real. And spiritually, by the grace of God, I felt I was able to go deeper. I was able to go deeper because of my need. When I read of the account of Jesus talking to the Pharisees, he says it's not the healthy that need a doctor, but the sick. He's saying to them: "You are so complacent you don't think you have any needs, therefore I can't help you."

I can remember that the week before I went into hospital for surgery somebody was preaching in the church where I was pastor - it was a church anniversary so I wasn't preaching that day - and they quoted something that somebody had said to them in their ministry years before: "Remember in

the dark what you learnt in the light!" I took that with me into hospital and that remained very important for me.

What I found afterwards was that the vulnerability and weakness enriched my ministry because I was able to be alongside other people who were in similar situations of extremity. It doesn't provide you with the answers, but it puts you in a different place - and that place is where you are more reliant on God.

When we face our weaknesses and when we face the things that really stretch and challenge us, then we rely more upon God and God has elbow room in which to do things with us.

R: I know from Chris Duffett's presidential year, people are still treasure hunting and walking the red carpet and loving people out in the community. What would you hope to leave as your legacy in the denomination when you finish this next year?

C: Oh dear - legacy! I can't give one answer to that. If people went more and more to the second half of Ephesians 3 then they could do a lot worse. If people just hold onto those words 'higher, deeper, wider', there's something there that's an invitation that could be for the whole of life: the greatness and the wonder of God and God's grace.

Chris Ellis is a Baptist minister and former college principal who was the co-author of *Gathering for Worship*, the book which offers outlines and worship resources for the Baptist community. He is the minister of West Bridgford Baptist Church.



Ruth Rice is a member of the leadership team of Fresh Streams, the Baptist Word and Spirit Network, and pastors New Life Baptist Church in West Bridgford.



Let's Talk about Worship

A small group resource has been created based on this conversation. Visit www.baptist.org.uk/ltaw for more.

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The art of seeing differently

Want to broaden your understanding of God and reach others with the message of Jesus? The creative arts offer all sorts of possibilities.

Neil Roberts says he is blessed with a congregation that is happy to approach God from 'different angles'. Exploring faith in creative ways is a key feature of life at **Chelmsley Wood Baptist Church** in Birmingham, the church Neil has pastored since 1994.

The church organises several activities for spiritual seekers under the catch-all description 'Tree of Life': its website introduces these as activities that are 'open to atheists, agnostics, believers and people with no label... a journey together to seek out and find God using old and new spiritual pathways.'

"The Tree of Life is kind of our outreach," explains Neil. "People are scared of mission, but this is about exploring spirituality for church people and people outside church. It's trying to find a halfway house for everyone, and creative ways for people to do that. It's a middle place, where we can find God."



Photo: Chelmsley Wood Baptist Church

Using an artist in residence is one way the church has connected with the community. One year this was Baptist evangelist and former President Chris Duffett who introduced a range of projects that involved many in the area. More recently current artist in residence, Ruth Goodheir, painted portraits of people in the community, having spent a couple of hours with each person. There was such an interest that she wasn't able to get round them all, and the portraits will result in an exhibition, complete with reflections.

At other times the church has arranged work with a sculptor. The group may have been complete beginners but at the end of the week they had all produced works of art. They loved

the connection with the art, earth and creativity, and subsequently set up a stone-carving group that meets regularly.

Neil describes activities such as this as "a neutral, natural meeting place", and "a great way of growing friendships within the community." More generally he believes the arts offer a new dimension to meeting God that is different from a traditional Sunday service or mid-week house group. "On a spiritual level, the arts have the potential to connect directly with our soul. It can get through in ways that a 'rational' approach can't, and get straight to our heart.

"Also, when you do it, art is more interactive. You don't just open your brain and expect someone to pour something into it, you have to engage with it. It encourages engagement with God's Spirit."

Elsewhere Lesley Sutton is convinced of the potential of the arts as both a missional tool and a means of deepening worship.

Lesley helped to pioneer a monthly seeker service at **Altrincham Baptist Church** in Cheshire, where she and the team used music, drama and visual art to create services that were relevant to the non-church goer. The services were both performance-led and feature a Christian talk on the issue. They followed a general theme, like love or money, and controversial themes, such as abuse, were regularly tackled.

Photo: Chelmsley Wood Baptist Church



“We tried every form of creativity,” explains Lesley. “People engage in different ways. Some engaged with theatre, songs, visual arts – all sorts of things could be used. Playing around with different sounds – and smells. There was one service on bread, and we filled the church with loaves of freshly baked loaves.

“If the theme was fear, we would think of showing a clip of a film that showed fear. We didn’t just use Christian music, but secular music too, if it tied into the theme.”

The different format would regularly attract those who wouldn’t come to a more a traditional service.

“It wasn’t what people were expecting. We insisted on it being really professional – sometimes church doesn’t aim for the best. As it wasn’t a traditional service, we were able to market it quite heavily. People were very happy to invite their friends. And because it was monthly, people got confidence in it.”

Alongside, the church ran a ‘Just Looking’ group, a course similar to Alpha which was being launched around the same time. With nurture

groups too, there were a number of places for people to explore further. Many would regularly come to faith as a result, 50 people in the first year alone. The service ran each month for 17 years. Lesley is now trying to engage churches in community art projects, explaining that people “really open up when they are doing something creative. Rather than going to have a cup of coffee, which can be very intense, it’s a very gentle way of getting alongside someone. All you need is a sink and a table.

“I’ve worked with women who have been abused, who have alcohol problems. In a church setting you can offer to pray for them, link them up. It can be a wonderful way of doing mission.”

There are countless examples of churches harnessing the arts to serve those around them. The Ark T Centre at **John Bunyan Baptist Church**, Oxford believes that creativity through the arts can allow people to discover new things about themselves and others, and so ‘unlock the potential for change’. It features art workshops, dance classes and a music studio; there are also artists in residence, an outdoor creative playspace, a gallery and a cafe.

Opened in 1997, the Centre now works in partnership with many agencies who refer people to its different programmes for training and creativity, and each week sees hundreds pass through its doors.

On a smaller scale, **Stockport Baptist Church** has run a weekly creative art therapy session since 1999 in partnership with Stockport MIND, an organisation which supports people with mental health problems. Stockport MIND refers those who they feel would benefit from a ‘hands-on’ activity such as water colour painting, encaustic art (working with hot waxes) or needlecraft. It’s not an evangelistic project, but one that serves those who are vulnerable.

Back to Neil at Chelmsley Wood, and he explains the response to exploring God in creative ways has been profound for his congregation.

“It has strengthened us as thinking disciples. It’s trained us not to think we have all the answers, but how do we find God in this? How do we make sure people understand what we see?” ■

Chelmsley Wood artist in residence Ruth Goodheir (left) created portraits of people in the community, which subsequently formed an exhibition in the church



Photo: Chelmsley Wood Baptist Church





Into the breach

As local authorities face up to the reality of reduced funding, there is an increased openness to working with the church, writes Roger Sutton.

A chief executive officer of a local council recently described the current round of austerity cuts hitting local government as “the greatest crisis affecting local communities since the war”. Many councils have already reduced their spending by up to 33 per cent, and are now facing another 50 per cent cut over the next five years. These levels of reductions are also being felt in the police force, the Third Sector and other social institutions, with education and health likely to follow. Many local authorities are wondering how they will be able to meet even their statutory responsibilities to the young and the elderly.

Into this growing vacuum in social support the church has an opportunity to increase its service to its local area. Unlike other organisations, the church relies less on grant funding and more on the generosity of its members. The Church is essential to the warp and weft of social capital in every area with its pastoral care, toddlers’ groups, elderly support, youth provision, food banks and many other expressions of our mission and calling.

For many years the door to more significant partnership with statutory agencies was often closed. Suspicion, ignorance, and sometimes even hostility, were the experience of churches as they approached their civic authorities. However, now the door in most places is well and truly open. If civic authorities are to survive they must partner and outsource as much as possible and the church is one group

that is increasingly being courted as a key partner for the future. We are increasingly being seen as an effective way to reach local communities that others find hard to reach, with a long-term track record in neighbourhoods, concrete resources in buildings and staff and a significant voluntary force at our disposal.

Over the last five years there has been much evidence of churches taking this opportunity: costly civic buildings are being asset transferred, youth services are being outsourced, work among the most needy families is being commissioned - and much more besides. The landscape has changed and will be changing for at least the next five years - never, over the last few decades, has there been such an opportunity for churches to engage in civic life.

With opportunity of course comes risk, and Luke Bretherton¹ is right to warn us to avoid the dangers of being co-opted to serve others’ agendas that we may not be comfortable serving, or being forced into competition for funding against other churches, or being coerced into losing our faith dimension in order to gain more funding. We may also become part of the new establishment and distance ourselves from our independent prophetic calling. Pride and power will be the new dangers for this next period, following several decades of marginalisation and impotence.



Gateshead Foodbank

¹ Lecturer in Theology and Politics at King’s College, London

In a recent 'Gather' consultation² a number of key practitioners working with civic authorities met to draw up a list of top tips for civic engagement. Here are some of those words of advice:

1 Do it in unity

Approach civic authorities as a group of united churches and not just as individual churches. The authorities want one phone number to ring, one group to deal with, not several individual churches all competing for time and resources.

2 Start at the top

Take the initiative. Fix a meeting between church leaders and the leader and chief executive of your council, or other senior roles in civic organisations. Build from the top down and you will find it easier to work with those in the local area.

3 Ask them what they need

Don't focus on your needs as churches, but go to the authorities and engage them in a conversation specifically asking them about their key priorities.

4 Deal with the elephant in the room

There are usually two negative perceptions civic authorities may have about working with Churches. Firstly you are using public funds to proselytise and secondly your services are not open to all the community. Assure them you are here to serve the whole community and that people will not be forced or coerced into your faith.

5 Building relationships is vital

A long-lasting, fruitful engagement will only be achieved through building strong relationships with the key civic leaders in your area. This is more about making friends than strategy.

² A missional network of relational prayer-based unity movements across 100 cities and towns in UK www.wegather.co.uk

6 Get the right attitude

Most civic authorities expect local community groups to be negative, perhaps demanding and at times critical. If you can be positive, appreciative, thankful and respectful you will go a long way in enabling a long-term relationship to produce some significant fruit.

7 It's a marathon not a sprint

The dream of seeing our communities fundamentally changed over the next 30 years is not a quick fix. It will involve long-term commitment from churches and their leaders: this is not a hit and run exercise.

8 Remember the poor

When the opportunities begin to grow and the options of service multiply we need to make sure our greatest contribution is towards those who are most vulnerable in our community. It's the calling from scripture to serve the least, the lost and the last, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked and visit the prisoner.

9 Focus on the big picture

Our engagement is not only about being part of the plans and actions of the statutory authorities it's about being part of the greater purposes of God. We are drawn into God's mission to this world to bring about the establishment of his Kingdom to see a new heaven and new earth, a renewed neighbourhood and transformed borough, a changed city.

Roger Sutton, formerly Senior Pastor of Altrincham Baptist Church, is an Executive member of Trafford Borough Strategic Partnership. He is Leader of Gather www.wegather.co.uk and Ambassador for the Evangelical Alliance.



Claudine Reid MBE, a renowned adviser to churches on social enterprise, explains how even the smallest church can make a difference

Are local authorities open to working alongside churches? In my experience local authorities want results, meaning they are not usually precious about who they work with. It's all to do with best value, and this has never been more evident than in recent times. They are very clearly driven by costs. Are you able to keep the lowest cost but still provide excellent service? This places churches in an interesting position, because they have a strong volunteer base.

But for a church to engage with a local authority, it has to understand the community language and the language of transformation. I'm not talking about the church losing its values, but it cannot talk about winning souls for the Kingdom. It has to be able to talk of how people are impacted. How are people's lives and circumstances being changed by the intervention of the church? This is the language they understand.

Anyone wanting to work alongside a local authority needs a good understanding of a working business model. For example, if they incur any costs, then can all those costs be recovered? What legal structures are in place to support the church? What training programmes are in place for the staff and management?

Don't get me wrong - when we started in 1992 we were motivated by faith to make a difference, to deal with some of society's most challenging problems. But we were able to use business models and frameworks. →

Are you aware that having served the Baptist family over many years, some ministers find themselves unable to buy their own home in retirement?

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RBMHS, an independent charity which receives no central funding, has been addressing this challenge for over 30 years to ensure ministers can enjoy a peaceful retirement in a home of their own.



RETIRED BAPTIST MINISTERS HOUSING SOCIETY

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If you are in a position to make a donation or would like further information about the Society, please contact Stewart Green, RBMHS. Call 01202 548890 or email: sgreen@rbmhs.org.uk

We won 11 local authority contracts, and have employed more than 1,000 people over a 22-year period.

I believe that whatever the size of a church, there is something it can do. The area it can work in is determined by the overall vision of the leadership and the congregation, the grass-roots activists who have the passion and inclination to undertake a particular project and to serve. They are motivated by their faith and value system to make something happen.

At the Cinnamon Network we highlight a range of projects. Take the *Make Lunch* project, where churches provide a meal a day during school holidays



for children who might otherwise go hungry - you only need a few committed individuals to make this happen.

There are many others: Christmas lunch, meeting ex-offenders, Cap Job clubs, Romance Academy, Mega Fitness (visit www.cinnamonnetwork.co.uk for more). I would encourage churches to do a talent audit – what skills do people have in your congregation? What time do they have? People want to use the skills they've honed in a secular environment for a sacred purpose. This is faith as a motivation, it's missional work.

In real terms it's all about a solution for a problem. If the churches can work out what they're offering, then they can speak in terms of social transformation. That's the language local authorities understand – their remit is to create a safe, working community. Christians can play a major role.


Claudine Reid MBE is Director of PJs Community Services - a multi-award winning




social enterprise based in Croydon. She is an ambassador for the Cinnamon Network, which exists to help the local church serve those most at need in its community through information about projects it can set up and micro-grants.


For further engagement on social action:


 **Cinnamon Network** is trying to make it as easy as possible for local churches across the UK to help those people most at need in their communities. It highlights projects churches are involved in, and provides microgrants to help set them up. www.cinnamonnetwork.co.uk


 **The Evangelical Alliance** produced its Faith in the Community report last year which gives many examples of church engagement with local authorities, as well as the barriers. <http://bit.ly/1cYONcO>

 **20 Golden Nuggets** of advice on civic engagement can be found on the Gather website <http://bit.ly/1ilo7ma>

What about social justice?


 The **Joint Public Issues team** of the Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed Churches aims to promote equality and justice by influencing those in power. Its recent work has highlighted the selective use of statistics by politicians and media around changes to the welfare state. www.jointpublicissues.org.uk

 **Church Action on Poverty** is a national ecumenical Christian social justice charity, committed to tackling poverty. It works in partnership with churches and people in poverty to find solutions, locally, nationally and globally www.church-poverty.org.uk

 **Christian Action Research and Education (CARE)** is a mainstream Christian charity providing resources and helping to bring Christian insight and experience to public policy and practical caring initiatives. www.care.org.uk

Going deeper, read:
Luke Bretherton: *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness*

The Future of Welfare – a Theos collection - available from the Theos website: www.theosthinktank.co.uk/research/theos-reports

 Religious think-tank **Theos** invites some of the country's leading thinkers on welfare to explore the logic of, and hopes for, a welfare state. www.theosthinktank.co.uk



Baptist Union Deposit Accounts

Deposit Account monies are part of the fund utilised by the Baptist Union to make it possible for churches to finance their redevelopment and improvement projects and helping them with the purchase of new church sites and manses.

This is a way in which churches with surplus funds can support those in need of finance to make it possible for them to develop their mission in the community.

Churches with savings and reserves can lodge these funds with the Baptist Union Corporation in a Deposit Account which is currently paying 0.6% per annum.

For more information visit

www.baptist.org.uk/loan_funds

Immigration: truth and justice

Struck by the negative portrayal of Romania as it became a full member of the European Union, Phil Jump reflects on the Kingdom values of truth and welcome.

New Year's Day 2014, and had it not been for the underlying prejudices, the scene was almost comical. A young man, who by his attire was clearly no stranger to the designer brands of the west, found himself 'mobbed' in the arrivals hall of London Heathrow airport. With a mixture of indifference and bewilderment he shrugged off the attention of a frenzied media explaining he had "just come to work". It was a reception that more befitted an international criminal or celebrity superstar, not an ordinary guy just coming to start his new job. So why, of all the thousands arriving at the airport that day, was he picked out for attention? It just so happened he was Romanian.

The power of story

In the preceding weeks, Britain had been told to brace itself for a tidal-wave of economic migrants once Bulgaria and Romania became full members of the EU, putting unprecedented strain on our already over-stretched welfare system. One report claimed that Wizz-Air had already sold 5000 one-way tickets; others spoke of entire Romanian villages preparing to uproot and relocate in our green and pleasant land. Rumour has it that in fact there were three Romanian nationals on that first flight over, two of whom had been living in the UK for ten years and had to be hastily removed from camera shot to prevent reality from spoiling the story.

The issue of immigration and the increasing racial diversity of Britain's population is not a new one. Yet what struck me about this latest episode, was the ease with which the British media was able to so negatively portray the inhabitants of a couple of nations just a few hundred miles away from our



Photo: istockphoto.com

shores. In a society where the racist insults that were sadly commonplace on the streets of my childhood, are now deemed a criminal offence, there are some, it seems, who remain 'fair game'.

Remembering who we are

But what has all this to do with Baptist Christians? We might remember that Romania is home to one of the largest Unions of Baptist churches outside of the USA. Many of us prayed fervently for the 'Soviet Saints' in my formative years – now that the freedom for which we yearned has become a reality, the UK is being increasingly encouraged to tear down the welcome signs and buy into caricatures of migrants seeking to scrounge every last penny out of our nation's already struggling economy.

This is a point not lost on Gale Richards, chair of our own Baptist Union Racial Justice committee. She reminds me that a generation ago, droves of western Christians rushed into Romania, appalled at the discovery of state orphanages whose conditions defied description. Now that the children we were so keen to rescue have grown up the narrative, fuelled by UKIP, other right-wing groups and an increasingly mainstream contingent of the British press, is 'don't come here'. Sadly, in some instances, it is a narrative that we have too easily allowed ourselves to join in with.

Getting to the truth

"Why would we come?" smiles Emilian, a highly effective and much respected Romanian minister in one of our larger UK Baptist churches. "The weather is much nicer in Spain and Italy!" There is a serious side to his argument; with significant Romanian communities already resident in these two countries, and far greater similarities of language, any mass migration that did result from the relaxation of EU border controls is likely to be to there. As someone born outside the UK, Emilian is perhaps better positioned than many to recognise the realities of British culture. He sees immigration concerns as a symptom of an increasing tendency within the UK's collective psyche to over-react to every issue that is thrown our way. "Everything here results in a panic" he notes.



Emilian Cirtina

Minister of Lancaster Baptist Church



It is comments like these that remind me why I am writing this piece. Our calling as a Gospel people is to not be those who simply 'go with the flow' or, as the Apostle Paul more eloquently expresses it, 'conform to the standards of this world'. This was very much the thrust of the recent publication *The lies we tell ourselves*, produced by the Joint Public Issues Team of the Baptist Union along with the Methodist and United Reformed Churches. Although not so much aimed at the issue of immigration, and avoiding any particular political stance, it makes the point that an increasingly alarming amount of public opinion is formed around inaccurate and misleading statistics and anecdotes.

And this is more than just a swipe at tabloid journalism, it highlights how information compiled for Government reports and policy statements can be equally misleading and one-sided.

And there is evidence, within some quarters of the Christian Church, that the negativities are rubbing off on us. I was appalled to hear of one story of a Romanian couple who, in the midst of personal tragedy, were subjected to unspeakable racial abuse by individuals who claimed to be their sisters and brothers in Christ. Even if there is a stream of economic migrants entering our country, we might do well to remember that our Biblical bearings are intended to be set by a vision of society in which the 'alien and stranger' are welcomed and provided for.



Photo: Emilian Cirtina

Sorin (pictured above) is a Romanian immigrant in Lancaster who has been supported by members of Lancaster Baptist Church who have given him jobs around the house, etc. He is a Christian who hopes to raise enough money to be able to bring his wife and one year old child to the UK.

At the moment he sleeps in a rough place and is fed regularly by the homeless centre in Lancaster. He demonstrates the Romanian spirit with a 'do anything, whatever it takes' attitude to support his family.

Otniel Bunaciu

President of the European Baptist Federation



Belonging together

Tony Peck, who for many years was a Regional Minister in Yorkshire now works as General Secretary of the **European Baptist Federation**. EBF was founded shortly after the Second World War and is an important symbol to Baptist Christians of our deeper common identity in Christ, often in the face of political situations that might have suggested otherwise. He speaks of Romanians as a warm and generous-hearted people, yet reminds us that this is a nation on which has been inflicted invasion, poverty, persecution and totalitarianism for most of the last half-century.

Romanian Pastor Oti Bunaciu sees this as the main reason for Romania's enthusiasm to be part of the EU. "This was a crucial step to a more secure future" he tells me. "We are now part of one of the most democratic unions of countries in the world."

Baptists have good reason to celebrate Dr Bunaciu's ministry; he is currently president of the EBF, and has some very different perspectives on migration. *"The new multicultural situation in Europe brings with it many challenges such as: migration, poverty, human trafficking, religious conflict and growing nationalism and exclusivism in reaction. I believe that these issues can also become opportunities to minister to those in need and be witness for Jesus Christ in our world."* Oti also reminds me that Romanians have been migrating to the UK for decades, many particularly to work as doctors and pharmacists – *"We rely on one of the poorest countries in Europe to train and educate them, and then one of the richest nations benefits from their skills."*

Remembering our common humanity

Oti has also played a key role in the establishment and development of 'project Ruth', a charity that works with Roma children. This highlights another element in the current debate. Many of the news reports about migrant people have tended to confuse the Roma community with Romanians in general. Whether or not this is deliberate, it underlines the importance of basing our own opinions on truth. We do well to remember that this is a community that Amnesty International has specifically highlighted as being subject to significant persecution and discrimination. Oti comments that many of the children of the infamous orphanages were from the Roma community. There is deep gratitude for the work done by British and other European Nationals in the wake of Romania's liberation. At the time, many expressed deep concern about how the Roma community had been marginalised and persecuted within Ceauşescu's Romania yet, a generation on, we seem in danger of doing the same.

Pear Tree Road Baptist Church in Derby is one that has a better understanding than most of the identity and presence of Roma people; around 300 Roma young people now attend a youth club at the church. Elizabeth Pinder-Ashenden, who has been minister there for just over a year, is somewhat surprised by the attention their work is generating. I caught up with her just as she finished an interview with BBC Radio Derby. The work is rooted in a simple desire to put into practice that basic Christian principle of refusing to see fellow human beings as 'other'. This spirit of generosity and grace was not lost on the local Roma community, and as a result many have been attracted to the church.

An important part of its work now is to seek and encourage integration between young people particularly who come from other non-British cultures. At times this has meant actively challenging stereotypes and

prejudices, but more often than not it is more straightforwardly a matter of giving people the space to share and listen to each other's stories. "Allowing people to tell their story is crucial," she insists. "So many barriers can be overcome by simply creating the opportunity for that to happen."

... put into practice that basic Christian principle of refusing to see fellow human beings as 'other'.

In the current political climate, the issue of Britain's place in Europe is likely to remain a significant issue in our public debate. Our response and attitude must be shaped by the values and principles of Kingdom faith, and not simply the latest exaggerations of single-issue politicians or a populist press. For me, learning to foster and promote such attitudes strikes at the very heart of what it means to be called a Holy People.

Phil Jump

is Regional Minister Team Leader of the North Western Baptist Association, and a member of the Baptist Steering Group



We'd love to hear your insights - join the conversation at: www.baptist.org.uk/immigration

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Sponsored Feature

Church furniture with a futuristic feel

Fullers Finer Furniture introduces The Canterbury and York Lecterns. These lovely pieces have something about the shape of things to come as they have both been designed with a fully adjustable gas strut height control, internal wiring to take a microphone and even an LCD monitor for use during presentations, hymn singing, for sermon notes and the like. As more and more churches are using IT equipment these days, this kind of product is a must not just in the future but right now.

The award winning Canterbury and its larger sister The York are available in a range of finishes and you can even have your church logo on the front. Both lecterns are on castors for easy movement around the church.

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“I would pray for myself, but no-one ever taught me.”

Hanging helplessly in outer space Dr Ryan Stone, played by Sandra Bullock in the Oscar-winning film *Gravity*, makes a statement that might also be a wake-up call for today’s church. Do we tell people to pray – or teach them how to?

With this in mind *Baptists Together* wondered what our children and young people had to say about prayer. The following responses are all from people aged 4 to 16 in Baptist churches to the question:

How do you pray?

Megan: Thank you God for this lovely day, thank you for all of the wonderful things you do, and for being you. Amen.

Isabella: You just talk to God everyday to say thank you, and when you need help. You say Amen at the end.

Joshua: I normally pray to God at different times of the day because I love him and I think he answers my prayers. Once I prayed for my mummy and she got better straight away.

Isaac: I pray in bed at night time. I say sorry sometimes, I pray for mummy and daddy.

Aaron: To pray you stay quiet and thank God for your day and ask him to bless you and people you know. You can pray in your mind.

Photo: istockphoto.com



Elliot: I pray on my own, I think of something I could do better and ask for it to be better tomorrow. I also ask him to look after my friends, especially people finding it hard at school.

Will: Prayer is kind, prayer is peaceful, prayer doesn’t have to be long or short - take your time to pray. Pray every day. Amazing things happen when you pray - people get healed, people get to know God, and lots more.

Alicia: I sit calmly on my bed and look at my prayer wall to help me pray. My prayer wall has photos, post its and notes on it and this reminds me who to pray for each day. I pray on my own or with my mum or dad each day. I also know that I can pray anywhere or at anytime. I pray in my head quite a bit too!

George: To help me know when to pray I have a diary, I usually pray at night. The sort of things I pray for are: to help me get my homework done, that I do well at school, and to have a good football match. I also read my Bible to help me pray.



Photo: istockphoto.com



Photo: istockphoto.com

Cameron: I pray whenever it comes into my head, I address him to get his attention and then I tell him either what I'm sorry for or what I'd like to happen and then another sorry and something else I want to happen. I call it a prayer sandwich. It's just me, what's burning inside me I need to get out.

Augustine: I pray to God, by kneeling and closing my eyes. Then I have a conversation with God about anything on my mind.

Christabel: By focusing quietly on God and talking to him like I'm talking to my friend.

Darius: When I pray, I thank God for what I've got and I ask him to help me.



Emmanuel: I pray by closing my eyes and putting my head down.

Jiela: I pray by sitting down and talking to God, sometimes alone, or with others.

Ellen: I pray in my room, quietly, so I can reach God. I shut my eyes and think about what I've done that day and pray.

Brady: I talk to God like he is anyone I know. I give him all my questions, then I thank him for listening.

Megan: In my head, whenever, wherever.

Khaya: I pray after reading my Bible. I will pray when I need or look for something. I usually pray aloud by myself.

KJ: I close my eyes and talk to God.

Chelsea: You can pray in a number of ways, by singing, kneeling down, talking. You can pray by grouping with people and just praying.

Isaac: Close my eyes, hold my hands together and pray, either at home, school.

Serena: By closing my your eyes and imagining God and myself having a conversation.

Callum: I pray by just telling him how things are, he knows how I feel and I just come to him and ask, thank and seek forgiveness. He gives me strength to carry on.



Photo: istockphoto.com

For more:

Children Changing Nations

Children Changing Nations is a network whose aim is to see children equipped and ready to carry and release God's love and goodness in their communities and in the nation.

It has seen children aged 9-13 praying in creative and prophetic ways in places such as Downing Street, Westminster Abbey, the BBC and St Thomas' Hospital. A group from Headington Baptist Church, Oxford are key members.

www.childrenchangingnations.org.uk

Do you have any 'Big Questions' you'd like us to consider in future editions of *Baptists Together*? Please email media@baptist.org.uk and let us know your ideas and suggestions.





Photo: istockphoto.com

Godly Play is a creative and imaginative approach to Christian nurture that can enable all of God's family to encounter him more deeply. By Sian Hancock

Godly Play - what is it?

The words Godly and Play are an interesting pair. Individually they have significant meaning that we all probably understand. 'Godly' means to be deeply religious and 'play' is a process that has no beginning, middle or end. So what happens when the two words are brought together? They suggest a way of being in which some have discovered a creative and imaginative approach to Christian nurture. First developed in the USA, it is a pattern of spiritual formation that is increasingly of benefit in the UK too.

Godly Play begins at the door where the children are greeted by name and enter the room to gather and form a seated circle. There is a settling in and getting ready time as the group is getting ready to hear the story.

The storyteller will use objects to tell the Bible story. The objects will mainly be wooden or fabric, natural and simple in their design. This allows for the children to project characteristics, emotion and feelings onto them rather than that being predetermined for them. There are three types of story in Godly Play; sacred stories are about God's people from the Old Testament; parables are as Jesus taught; and the liturgical church stories focus on aspects of church life like baptism, communion and the church year.

The story is followed by a time of wondering. This is a reflective time that uses socratic open questions that encourage the children to move between recalling detail from the story – "I wonder which part of the story you liked the best"; to life application by considering, "I wonder where you are in the story".

After the wondering questions, there is a response time enabling the children to continue to process and respond to the story as they work with the resources available to express their thoughts. This is where it is important that the room is equipped to support the process. A range of art materials, books, natural objects and items from the story enable the children to explore further.

The session finishes with the children reforming the circle to share a 'feast' of thanksgiving. Before leaving, the children are thanked for their participation and dismissed individually by name again before being sent back out.

Why use it?

Although I write about Godly Play with children, and have mainly used it in that context, it is used widely in schools, hospitals and with the elderly as a means of spiritual care. My experience of Godly Play has taught me the importance of creating a sacred space



Photo: istockphoto.com

for children to meet with one another, to hear and respond to scripture and for the adults to trust the Holy Spirit to work with us all through the process. The role of the adult is much more about facilitating the session rather than teaching. Circle time isn't a new experience but in Godly Play the value of sitting at the same level, everyone having sight of one another in the circle, and the tangible sense of connection that creates a space in the centre for the story to unfold, and across which the wondering can occur, is a deeply spiritual place. There are moments of awe and wonder as children watch and listen intently.

I have seen children as young as five reflecting on and engaging with scripture, and meaningfully discovering God for themselves through this process. I have seen mixed aged groups (5-14 year olds) working together at their own levels.

If nothing else, by using the resources in the room and giving children the autonomy to work with them as they choose how to respond to the story, I have seen a range of creativity, concentration and insights that exceed their years and have enlightened my understanding of the passage. It would be true to say that at times the connections aren't apparent, and whilst children shouldn't be asked to explain or justify their work, if they choose to talk about it there usually is a link. This can sometimes reflect the chaotic way



children are sifting and sorting the different images in their heads, those that come from the books they read, the television programmes they watch, the things they are learning as well as the things they are being told. It can be quite a montage!

It's when children select for themselves a story basket from the shelf and use the objects to retell it to their peers (or even to themselves) there is a realisation that they are not only remembering scripture but that they are also learning the connections between the different stories, or the practices they see in the worship in their church and their grasp of some deep theological concepts.

Godly Play places a higher emphasis on discovering God and starts from the preface that there is already a relationship between God and the child. It encourages a wider perception on sharing the bible with children and it seeks to help children learn the religious language of symbolism, gesture and imagery. Altogether it fosters a deeper encounter with the living God.

- » I wonder which part of Godly Play interests you the most.
- » I wonder how you might apply this to your children's ministry.
- » I wonder what you need to help you develop this further.

Sian Hancock is Godly Play Trainer and Tutor at Bristol Baptist College



For more visit www.godlyplay.org.uk

For further reading:

- Teaching Godly Play* - Jerome Berryman
- Godly Play Volumes 1-8*
- Children's Spirituality: what is it and why does it matter* - Rebecca Nye



Photo: istockphoto.com





Can a nation be changed?

History suggests so – even in a country like North Korea, writes David Kerrigan



Stepping off a plane in Pyongyang is an unnerving experience. I have visited over 70 countries, so a different location is nothing new. But this is different, and you sense it immediately. “Sir, you’re not allowed to take photographs out of the plane window” needs to be said only once.

‘What are you carrying in your suitcase?’ is not unsettling because the question was expected. I’m worried whether the ‘Project Cyrus’ plaque ‘Praying for North Korea’, which I had specific permission to bring, would be problematic. I knew the consequences of getting these things wrong may be more than a ‘tut tut’ from the official facing me.



But all was well and we were off to the University where we will have our first people serving in March, with others already accepted and heading to the country at the end of the year.

Let me digress at this point. British Christians generally, and Baptists amongst them in great measure, have had an inordinate influence around the world.

Yes, the spread of the gospel was often ‘on the coat-tails of empire’. From Constantine to the Raj, the unholy alliance between faith and power was a mixed blessing.

But nations have been changed, and changed for the good. People have come to faith and worked to see the Kingdom of God take root. Unjust practices have been directly challenged and overturned. Suttee (widow burning) in India, foot-binding in China, and slavery in the Caribbean were crimes against humanity: God’s people were at the heart of their dethronement. British Baptists played key roles.

Today, the landless widow in Uganda has Christian advocates speaking for her. The trafficked girl in Bangkok has Christian outreach workers who offer the possibility of freedom. The under-aged boy in a garment factory in Bangladesh has the presence of Christian business consultants who seek to get these children into schools. The Serbian outcasts who lost the Balkan war and find themselves in

enclaves in a now-foreign land have Christian workers dedicated to helping them rebuild their lives.

These are BMS stories; each an example of the transformation of communities and nations happening on the very day you are reading this article.

North Korea is different, or so it would seem at first glance. But history tells us otherwise. Has God given up on North Korea? Is the Holy Spirit at work in that land? Is there any evidence of God opening doors into this land? You know the answers to these questions.

There is a famous reunification arch in Pyongyang (pictured above), just a mile from where I stayed. Several days I swept underneath it and reflected on the desire for the two halves of Korea to be reunited. One day it will happen.

But in my imagination I also saw two angels, and the possibility of a deeper reconciliation. That too will happen. That is why Project Cyrus calls us to pray for North Korea.

David Kerrigan is
General Director of BMS
World Mission



Find out about Project Cyrus at:
www.bmsworldmission.org/cyrus



Thank God for Facebook

Though we all might struggle to keep up with the ever-growing array of digital devices and new ways of using the internet, new media is a reality which churches need to recognise.

Paul Hobson shares examples of those who are doing just that

“We must learn the new languages required for engaging the digital world. This is not just to keep up with the times, but precisely in order to enable the infinite richness of the Gospel to find forms of expression capable of reaching the minds and hearts of all.”

The words of a digital evangelist? They were actually uttered by the octogenarian Joseph Ratzinger just weeks before his Papal term came to a tired end in early 2013. A less elegant but punchier message came from Justin Wise, the author of *A Social Church: A Theology of Digital Communication*, in February. ‘How often have you talked about ‘reaching people where they are’; he wrote ‘and realised that much of the time, they are on the internet?’

A cliché it may be, but for many being online and communicating across social networks is an integral part of life. Facebook celebrated its 10th birthday earlier this year and now has more than 1 billion users. Twitter numbers are almost equally staggering, and that’s not to forget platforms such as Instagram, Google+ and LinkedIn, where innumerable interactions are taking place between people in different places each day.

With so many of us social networking on a personal level, *Baptists Together* wanted to discover examples of how churches are weaving this - still relatively new - technology into their lives.

Clearly one of the great benefits of social media is the ease of access and the availability it gives. For Jonathan Somerville, pastor of **Tabernacle Baptist Church** in Wolverhampton, being online allows him to connect with his congregation in the middle of their working day.

“I could be sat in my office and in the space of half an hour have a couple of really meaningful conversations on Facebook Messenger with people at work,” he says. “Something has happened and they’ve checked to see if I’m there. I’m able to pray for them, and explain what I’ve prayed. It’s a place where people meet and reach out for support and encouragement.”

Jonathan is quick to add that lots of human contact still takes place, both with the Sunday gathering and seeing people for a pastoral chat and coffee. “But it’s not the only way anymore.”

Offering encouragement was a key theme of Emma Boylan’s research into how youth workers are using social media to connect with their young people.

Emma, a youth worker herself, is currently doing a dissertation on the subject at Bristol University and carried out a survey – shared via social networks – of youth workers of all denominations around the UK.

“There were lots of responses saying it was an amazing form of communication: some are using it as part of a mentoring relationship, through the Facebook chat mode, while most are sharing material, stimulating discussion and simply for encouragement. In fact, using Facebook as a means of encouragement was one of the main themes I found,” she explains. ➔



Interestingly her research revealed that though many youth workers were using Facebook and other platforms, they didn't feel particularly confident about how best to do it. This was particularly in relation to safeguarding issues.

"I think some are fearful of it, but essentially people are coming to the conclusion that it's here to stay - how best do we use it?" Emma continues. "Statistics show that teenagers spend up to eight and a half hours a day online. Young people I'm in contact with, it's just a massive part of their life - so most youth workers want to use it more."

The interactive nature of social media can certainly widen a church's pastoral reach and contact, both for the minister and between members of the congregation. For the church's Tuesday morning prayer meeting, Jonathan invites requests through a simple message on Facebook. "A whole bunch of prayer requests come through online. Some people now even send me prayer requests the previous evening, because they know we are praying. And it's not just people from

the church - it's wider too. It means we are receiving lots of things that we otherwise wouldn't have known about. Tuesday morning has been hugely enriched by making it open. It's all part of the life of the church."

Jonathan also shares about the house group at his church that conducts most of its business online. It was set up around four years ago because a number of people worked long hours and out of the city and struggled to commit to meeting every week.

The group does gather physically once a month to pray with each other. But in between they are regularly in contact through email or Facebook, sharing prayer requests as well as conversing about a text they are studying.

"We place a high value on small groups at our church - it's the first line of pastoral and missional care," says Jonathan. "And with this group there is a constant conversation, they are in contact with each other every day, and their depth and level of fellowship is incredible."

As well as pastoral contact, the sharing of information and giving people a voice are key features of social media.

At the time of writing the ever-expanding Baptist Collaboration Group on Facebook had grown to more than 500 members, a fine example of how a social media platform can connect people with a shared bond without the need for physical contact. Every week questions are posed, responses given, ideas shared and issues discussed by Baptist Christians across the UK and beyond. In a one-week period in February subjects included advice on starting up a church café and what to charge at weddings and funerals, to a discussion on the merit of sabbaticals and requests for nominations for trustees of our Baptist Union. You sense that the collaborative potential of this group is huge.

It seemed only natural in researching this article to ask for information from the group - and sure enough a number of responses came back. They included Stephen Sutton of **Coulby Newham Baptist Church**, Middlesbrough who wrote that as well as the usual 'updates/event notification/newsletters/blogs and church family socialising, mission-wise the church has set up and run a local community Facebook page - with lots of local info and events, news and good stories'. In addition, he said, a church friend has set up and runs 'for free' Facebook pages for posting free items on.

Also in the North East Ian Britton of **Beacon Lough Baptist Church** in Gateshead knows how quickly modern technology can mobilise people. Last year at short notice he was able to organise a 24 hour prayer circle for a much-loved church member stricken with cancer: emails and a Facebook page connected contacts from around the world. More generally it has allowed him to deepen relationships with others both in his church and wider community.

And an even more down to earth example came in the form of the grandparents who said to a Baptist Regional Minister recently: "Thank God for Facebook". They explained how it keeps them in contact with grandchildren who live many miles away, and enables them to share something of their faith. →

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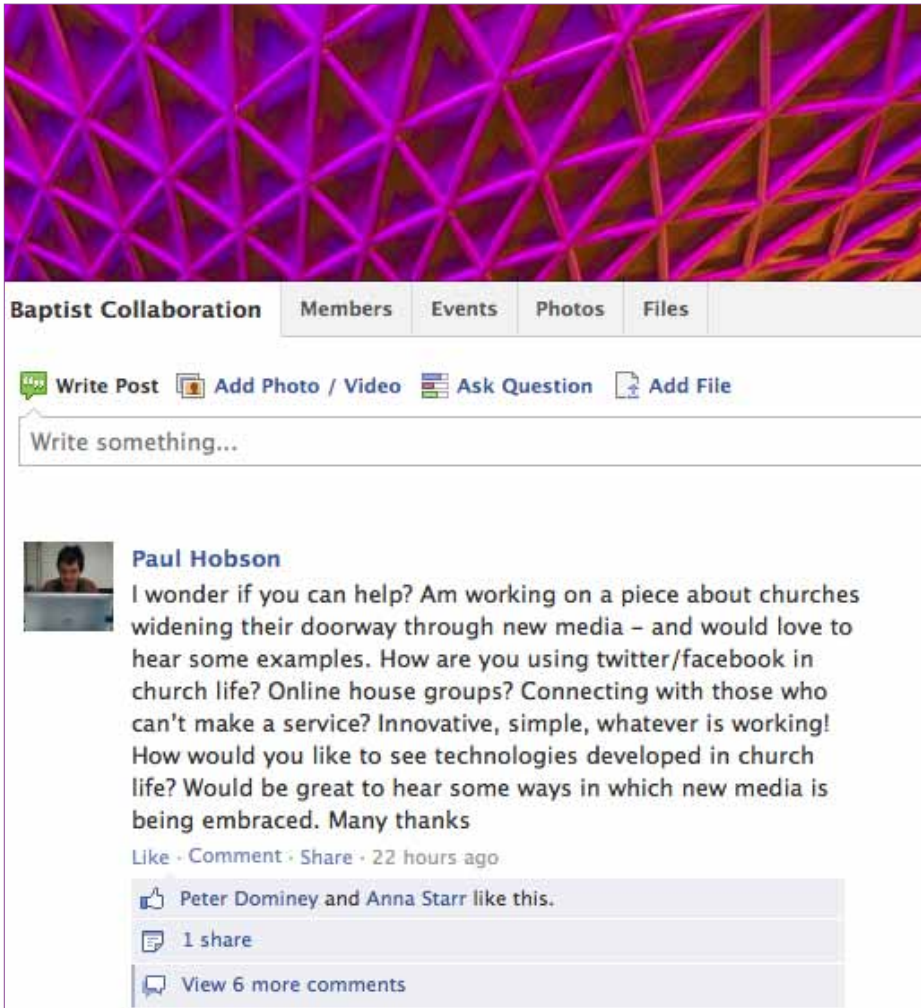
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Of course, social media can have its drawbacks – most users could point to instances when they should have pressed the pause button before bashing out a particular post – but that’s probably the subject for another day. And in the same way this article only really scratches the surface of social media use, one senses its presence and potential in our Christian lives is still at an early stage. One thing is certain: it is connecting people in ways not possible beforehand, and that is a reality churches would do well to grasp.

“I think the biggest thing churches need to get their heads around,” says Jonathan Somerville, “is that online is a location. Some think it is second best. But being online is a geographical location where you can do church life.”

Paul Hobson
 is a member of the
 Faith and Society Team



Photo: istockphoto.com

Consider your church’s social media presence

Is it simply an advertising feed? Why don’t you invite feedback and responses and make it much more two-way?

Youth workers and social media?

Youth Work Resource recognises the important role that social networking websites play in the ways in which young people communicate and the effectiveness of these groups within youth ministry. However, there are potential safeguarding issues regarding social networking and so Youth Work Resource has created some guidelines for youth workers. Visit <http://bit.ly/1hiyZPa> for more.

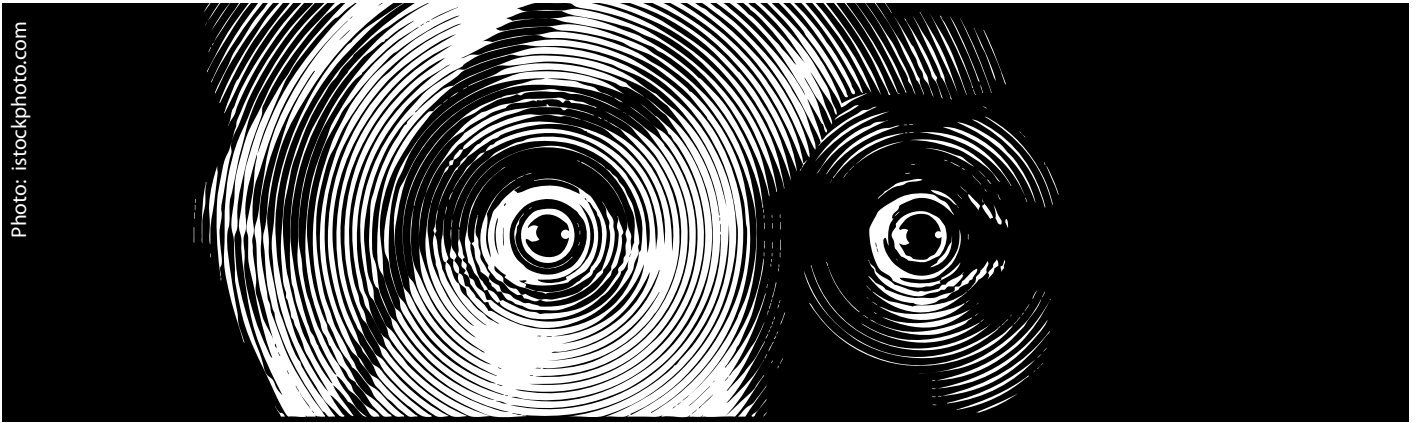
Want to be added to the Baptist Collaboration Facebook Group?

Email media@baptist.org.uk and we’ll add you.

Not online?

Then pray for those who are. Many Christians are actively engaged in the digital world – pray for wisdom and grace as they share the Gospel.

We’d love to hear your insights - join the conversation at:
www.baptist.org.uk/facebook



Where the sacred and scary meet

Is God really in the unexpected places ... like horror films? By Peter Laws

Author Lint Hatcher says that some people have 'The Spooky Gene'. For whatever reason they're fascinated with the creepier side of life. Maybe it's scary movies, the paranormal or gritty crime fiction. You'll see it at the Tower of London when the crowd perks up just as the guide gets to the grisly bits.

As a Baptist minister it's fascinating spotting who has this gene and who doesn't. Like the kindly, flower-arranging pensioner who leans in closer during a reading of the tent peg scene in *Judges*. Or the mum in the Parent and Toddler group whose eyes glaze over when I talk about church but who sparkles if someone mentions a haunted house.

And then there's me, who has a long-term case of the spooky gene: a love of horror films (which, incidentally, doesn't always mean gory or violent) and a fascination with the paranormal. When I became a Christian I was told to bury such freaky interests - which I did - until my Master's thesis on 'Religion in Horror' got me wondering: what if God might be found in the *really* unexpected places.

So I took a leave of absence from the pastorate. And while I still preach lots of non-horror sermons in various churches, I now have time to explore where the scary and the sacred meet. I write a monthly column for the secular print magazine *The Fortean Times*. I present a horror theology podcast called *The Flicks That Church Forgot*. I've written a scary, theological thriller novel which my agent is currently pitching. And I receive regular

emails from the thousands of, often unchurched, people who read or listen to my reviews worldwide. Sometimes when I attend horror press screenings in London, fellow critics spit out their drink when they spot the word 'Rev' on my twitter handle. But then they ask for my email address. 'What do you believe, then?'

It's controversial of course. I get that. To those without the spooky gene it's nonsensical - dangerous even. Better to watch *Toy Story 3*. Good for them. But what about the millions who are drawn to this stuff, some of whom are in your church, attending your Alpha courses? Do we write them off, tell them to change their personalities? Especially when horror is one of the few genres to take the supernatural and objective evil seriously?

Case in point: *The Exorcist* (1974). William Friedkin's box office phenomenon terrified audiences and repulsed many Christians, who struggled to find any merit in watching a tale of a young girl possessed by the Devil. Being a little too young to have caught it in cinema (I was six months old) I eventually tracked down a copy in the late 80s. As an unchurched teenager I remember feeling something like a spiritual charge slipping the tape in and bracing myself. Because it wasn't the gore or spectacle that was making my heart race, but the unashamed presentation of a life-changing idea: that maybe there really is such a thing as objective good and evil. Yes there

was blasphemy (hardly surprising given the subject) but it was one of the few films I can think of where the priests were the heroes. In this, the devil wasn't some enticing, figure of liberation but a horrifying hate-filled juggernaut. Some might call it an evil film, but all I can say is that I've met several Christians whose spiritual journeys began with it.

Some of you reading this will be shaking your head. Yet, others wonder if God's fingerprints might be found in the unexpected areas of culture. Where wider really means *wider*. Beyond the reaches of what we previously thought. I'm not evangelical about horror. If you don't have the spooky gene, then avoid it. It'll only creep you out; give you nightmares.

But those who do have it are often like I was: searching for spiritual answers in a disenchanted world that insists there is nothing beyond the physical. Bizarrely, horror movies said something different and I think, growing up, they set me on the path to God. These days I'm discovering what I always suspected: I'm not the only one.

Peter Laws is an accredited Baptist minister currently on Leave of Absence and working as a freelance writer and speaker



To read more from Peter visit www.peterlaws.co.uk His horror theology podcast can be found at: www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com He tweets from @revpeterlaws

We'd love to hear your insights - join the conversation at:
www.baptist.org.uk/film

An interview with

Dotha Blackwood

Chaplain and tutor in Practical Theology at Spurgeon's College

A big interest in your life is music. How did this begin?

Growing up in Jamaica, church was always a big part of my life. My parents and friends all loved to sing. Someone used to say something and we would burst into song. So singing is basically where it all started.

Then one Sunday I went to a different church to my parents, and the long and short of it, there was a guy on the drums and he looked great! That's when I started learning the drums. At another Sunday evening service back at our church the drummer didn't turn up. Somebody shouted my name to step in. I was so nervous, but I did it, and I ended up playing the drums at our church for about six years.

What happened next?

I also started playing the organ, and was in the choir as well, and decided I wanted to take it further. I went to the Jamaica School of Music.

Not long after I started there, the drum tutor decided he wanted to go back to playing. They didn't have any tutors and asked me if I could step in! I was a tutor without being taught. No other provision was made. But I finished with a diploma.

And for a period after that you freelanced as a drummer?

I used to play for six months of the year, and then come back and find a job. I played *Cats* and *Grease* in theatres in Jamaica, and shows in the US, in places like Boston, Massachusetts.

This went on for a few years - 1988-93. At the time I was also very much involved in church - one of the deacons - and led worship in church. We set up choirs and crusades all over the country. I caught up with sleep on a Friday night. When I reflect on it, I wonder how I fitted it all in!

What's the relationship between music and your faith? How has it helped you to grow spiritually?

Through music in general you can express yourself, and the drums are particularly expressive. Every time I get up to lead music, there is this buzz. People tell me I come alive.



Photo: Ian Britton

There is a little 'Je ne sais quoi'. So I feel that I'm expressing my faith when I play and lead.

And there is also the relationship between worship – sung worship – and doctrine. You soak up a lot of theology that's sung, and take on the challenges. You learn the bad things too. Songs sit deep in your soul, and encourage you. Hearing them in times of difficulty, those songs resound.

Whether deliberate or not, I reflect that a lot of the foundations of my faith were taught through the music, the theology in the songs. (But don't get me started on the drivel in some worship songs!)

You're both a gifted preacher and teacher, and worship leader. Can you talk about the relationship between the two?

Worship and teaching go hand in hand. We speak our worship, and God's word is proclaimed. Someone once said, "Worship is ploughing the ground for the seeds to be sown", and I like that description. Certainly doing both helps me to appreciate the symbiotic relationship between the two.

One of the things I would wish for is that preachers who are not musical appreciate what worship leaders do - their skill levels, the sensitivity.

I believe worship is going to be a very important part of the future of the church. Songs are easier to remember than sermons. I still love preaching, but music touches and reaches us at another level. It helps us to remember who we are, and God's promises to us.

Favourite hymns?

King of Kings, Majesty (Jarrod Cooper)
'Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus (Louisa Stead)

Who would you like to see featured here?

Send your suggestions for the *Baptist People* section of a future edition to media@baptist.org.uk



**Baptist Assembly: Higher, Deeper Wider****10-11 May** - Bethel Convention Centre, West Bromwichwww.baptistassembly.org.uk**Christian Aid Week****11-17 May**www.christianaid.org.uk/getinvolved/christianaidweek**Crucible Course – Creating New Churches****17-18 May** - IMC, Birminghamwww.cruciblecourse.org.uk**Fiddling While Rome Burns**

Bicentenary event

19 May - Spurgeon's Collegewww.200years.net**Big Church Day Out****24-25 May** - Wiston House, West Sussex

Celebration of faith, music and worship

www.bigchurchdayout.com**Street Pastors Practitioners' Conference****29-31 May** - Manchester Cathedral

Working Together: Bringing together everyone with a concern for their community

www.streetpastors.org**The Biggest Birthday Party Ever 2014****30 May – 8 June**

Local UK churches host creative party events for their local community to celebrate Pentecost.

www.sharejesusinternational.com**The Big Lunch****1 June**

Lunch with your neighbours - a simple act of community, friendship and fun and great opportunity for churches to be involved.

www.thebiglunch.com**Refugee Week****16-22 June**www.refugeeweek.org.uk**Keswick Convention****12-18 July, 19-25 July, 26 July-1 August**

Lake District

<http://keswickministries.org>**Sea Sunday****13 July**www.sailors-society.org/seasunday**New Wine****26 July – 1 August and 3-9 August**

Royal Bath and West Showground, Shepton Mallet

www.new-wine.org**Soul Survivor****15-19 July** - Thainstone Centre, Aberdeen**25-29 July** - Stafford Showground,**12-16 August, 17-21 August** - Royal Bath and West Showground, Shepton Malletwww.soulsurvivor.co.uk**Greenbelt****22-25 August** - Boughton House, Northantswww.greenbelt.org.uk**Slavery Memorial Day****23 August**

International Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition

www.unesco.org.uk**Creation Time****1 Sept-4 Oct**

A time for prayer for the protection of creation and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles that reverse our contribution to climate change

www.ctbi.org.uk/295**Racial Justice Sunday****14 September**www.ctbi.org.uk/CBC/644**Peacemaking Sunday****21 September**

This year's resources are being written by Baptist minister Simon Woodman

www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/peacemakingsunday

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Sam Sharpe Lecture

15 October - The House of Praise, Easton, Bristol
www.200years.net



Bicentenary Celebration Services

19 October - Cannon Street Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham
www.200years.net



Black Theology Symposium

23 October - Regent's Park College, Oxford
 Faith across the Atlantic: Remapping the Theological Discourse
www.200years.net

Resources

Worship and Prayer Resources

Monthly Baptist Union prayer diary; seasonal prayers, community engagement, worship files on prayer, the Lord's Supper, Psalms and much more.
www.baptist.org.uk/prayer

Women in Leadership Bible Studies

An invitation to explore together some important issues relating to ministry and gender. Produced by the Baptist Union Women's Justice Working Group.
www.baptist.org.uk/womeninleadership

The BIG Welcome

Resources for this year are available to order.
www.baptist.org.uk/bigwelcome

BMS World Mission resources

Videos, latest publications, something for a special festival, ways to help you fundraise.
www.bmsworldmission.org/resources

Christian Aid – Prophetic Church resource

Designed to empower and inspire Christian leaders and churches to engage in campaigning for the global poor.
www.christianaid.org.uk/thepropheticchurch

World War I

As part of HOPE Together's focus on 2014 as a year of mission, resources have been prepared with HOPE's partners, to help churches to mark the centenary of World War 1 at the heart of local communities.

- » **Greater Love** – A new, high quality DVD resource for churches from Christian Vision for Men. Lead your community in commemorating WWI.
- » **A replica version of John's Gospel given to WW1 troops**
Produced by SGM Lifewords.
- » **Hear my Cry** - a book of relevant poems and readings relating to WW1 has been published by Bible Society.

www.greaterlove.org.uk/greater-love-resources.html

Youth for Christ have resources in their RE:Quest website for schools to use re Christianity and WW1.
www.request.org.uk



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Prayers for Pentecost

Becoming present to God

Holy God,
whose power is known
through wind, fire,
and still small voice,
be present with us now,
that as we pray,
our hearts
may burn within us.

Celebrating the presence of God

**Living Spirit,
present in creation,
present in Christ,
present with us now
we worship you.
We greet you.**

For each place
that has made us wonder,
every moment
that time has stood still,
we praise you.

For each word
that has spoken truth,
every deed
that has made peace,
we praise you.

For each life
that has touched ours,
every chance
to show your love,
we praise you.

**Living Spirit,
present in creation,
present in Christ,
present with us now
we worship you.
We greet you.**

Acknowledging our humanity

Lord Jesus,
you say to your disciples,
'Peace be with you',
and you breathe
your Holy Spirit upon us.

When we find no peace
within ourselves ...
Lord have mercy,
Christ have mercy

When we fail to build
the unity of your Church ...
Lord have mercy,
Christ have mercy

When we are complicit
in the violence of the world...
Lord have mercy,
Christ have mercy

**Risen Lord,
in your forgiving love,
show us again your wounds,
and remind us of the cost
of true discipleship,
that with all God's people
we may commit ourselves
with body, mind and spirit,
to struggle for the peace
you died to bring.**

Bringing our concerns

Holy God,
we offer to you
our prayers for the world:

for those who long for good news
and for those
who no longer believe
that good news is possible ...

for those who yearn
to break out of their prisons,
and those who do not realise
the prisons that hold them ...

for those who seek
for truth and wisdom
and those who have
given up the search ...

for those who labour for justice
and those who are
tired of the struggle ...

for those who need to know
God loves them
and those who are hurt
by the Church's failure to love ...

Going to love and serve

God of wind and fire,
as your Spirit was poured out
upon the first disciples,
by your love, rest upon us
as upon all your Church.

**Enlarge our dreams,
and enthuse our minds,
inspire our faith
and empower our resolve,
that growing
in the likeness of Christ,
we may be unafraid to live this day
to your praise and glory.**

Taken from the
Order for Baptist Ministry.
Daily prayers are available from:
www.orderforbaptistministry.co.uk

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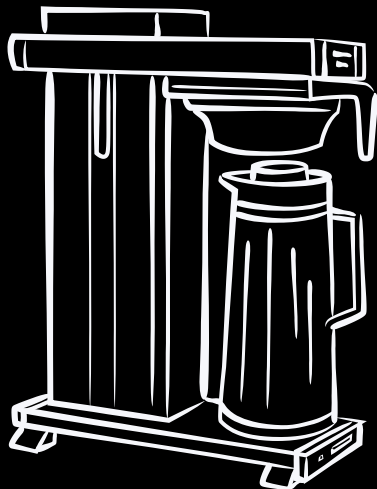


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