

Christmas hope in hard times

A joint Christmas from the six presidents of Churches Together in England...

Together we wish you a Christmas full of peace and hope.

Two thousand years ago God became part of our world in a unique way at the birth of Jesus Christ. God loved us so much that he became a helpless, vulnerable baby, born to a family that had to escape from persecution and live as refugees.

Christmas is a precious, important time of celebration because God is still in the midst of our lives, sharing in all our joys and difficulties.

God is not remote, but still very close to women, men and children, and because of Jesus he understands us completely. His presence gives us strength and hope, and the ability to overcome our misfortunes.

We have found this to be wonderful good news, at times of celebration, and especially in hard times.

Whatever your circumstances, our prayer this Christmas is that you too discover how much God loves you and longs for the best for you and the world we share.

May God's presence, peace and love be yours this Christmas.

Please note the next edition of the BT Weekly Round-up will be 8 January 2014

Giving an owl wings

STORYTELLING, social media collaboration and a willingness to pool resources have contributed to a Baptist minister publishing a charming book for a children's charity in double-quick time.

The Tale of the Little Owl, a children's story of love, loss and friendship, was written by Richard Littledale on 29 September and available to purchase just 66 days later.

The speedy turnaround happened thanks to the creativity and generosity of all who responded to Richard's plea for collaboration through his blog and Twitter feed in early October.

These included DJ Sara Cox, a contact through Richard's BBC Radio 2 Pause for Thought work, illustrators Rachel Morse, Carol Morse and Danielle Somerfield, overall book design by Annette Peppis and printers McKnight and Bishop. All donated their expertise free of charge, meaning that any funds raised from the sale of the book go directly to Momentum, the charity that supports children

with cancer and life-limiting conditions.

Momentum had asked Richard to help after hearing about his book *the Littlest Star*, a similarly creative collaboration instigated by the minister of Teddington Baptist Church in 2011 in aid of Shooting Star Chase.

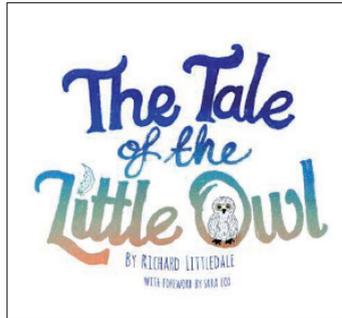
Richard, was only too happy to help. 'I'm a great believer in using whatever gifts God has given us,' he said.

'I cannot run a marathon or dive from a plane, but I can write stories, which is what I have done.

'Everyone contributed their time and talents for nothing. To be out in time for Christmas is a stupendous team effort.'

And DJ Sara is in doubt the story is a winner. 'My 3 kids love the story of Mo, Jenny & Patch,' she writes in the foreword. 'It's become a firm favourite before they get tucked up.'

To buy *The Tale of the Little Owl* visit <http://shop.moment-um.org/collections/merchandise>



THE BAPTIST TIMES weekly NEWS ROUND-UP

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A change of voice

TWO stalwarts of a Baptist audio ministry to those who are blind or unable to attend a Sunday service have recorded and distributed their final programme.

The December edition of the audio magazine *Baptist Voice* is the last produced by Geoff Pratt and Gilbert Payne, a duo who have clocked up countless hours in serving the ministry established by the Baptist Men's Movement (BMM) as Tapes for the Blind in 1986.

Each edition of *Baptist Voice* is around 90 minutes long and features a mix of news drawn from *The Baptist Times*, BMS World Mission's *Engage* magazine and other Baptist sources, plus hymns, prayers and a reflection. The recordings are made using a loyal team of readers, and the resulting tapes and CDs are posted to around 85 subscribers. It aims to keep people in touch with the denomination who could otherwise be cut off.

Gilbert came on board as a recording operator in 1989, when production moved to Abingdon Baptist Church, Oxfordshire.

Geoff joined the team in 1997,

alternating with then co-ordinator Bill White in selecting material and producing scripts.

When Bill died in 2006, Gilbert and Geoff were appointed by the BMM as joint co-ordinators.

Under Geoff and Gilbert's

spiritual guidance and sharing the Good News. And a lot of people who subscribe depend on carers, so it's going beyond that person.

'There have been many good moments. I have a feeling that a lot more people would appreciate it. I pray it keeps on growing.'

Baptist Voice will now be produced by Ralph Birtwistle, a member of Greenfield Baptist and Congregational Church in Urmston and someone with many years experience with BBC local radio in Manchester.

Commenting on Gilbert and Geoff's contribution to *Baptist Voice* over the years, Tony Aylward, chair of the BMM said, 'There is much work involved in putting together the programme each month and it is a tribute to them that they have kept going for so long and an indication of their passion for this medium to reach out to those with sight disabilities.

'We wish them every blessing in their 'retirement' and for their future ministry.'

To listen to the December edition of *Baptist Voice* visit bit.ly/IVlp9t (Part 1) and bit.ly/18WJ2bh (Part 2)



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Send notifications of baptisms, ministerial changes, deaths and testimonies to phobson@baptist.org.uk

2013: The Year in Review

January

The search for a new secretary of our Baptist Union of Great Britain begins in earnest, as full details of the role are made public and letters sent to church secretaries and ministers explaining the process.

The 2012 Home Mission figures show a small increase, up by 1.89 per cent on the previous year's figure to £4,089,159. Baptist minister Steve Chalke announces he has changed his opinion about committed homosexual relationships. The month also sees the launch of two significant campaigns: IF, calling for an end to global hunger and targeting the G8, and **fleshandblood**, encouraging the church to increase the number of UK blood and organ donors.

February

Many church-operated winter night shelters have been seeing an increase in demand over the winter, through a combination of bitterly cold weather, fewer jobs and the impact of changes in benefits.

A new report shows hours spent by UK churches on social action initiatives has increased by 36 per cent in two years, earning Government praise.

March

Truth and Lies, a hard-hitting report showing how statistics are misused and misrepresented by politicians and media to stigmatise those claiming benefits, is released by the Joint Public Issues team. The report would become a major media talking point over Easter at the end of the month.

The last Baptist Union

Council before it took its new form as part of the Futures process, is held. During this gathering new emerges that former BUGB General Secretary Bernard Green has died, aged 87.

Churches of

all denominations are urged to identify ways of proactively ensuring the presence of women at the highest levels of decision-making, in a significant new report launched at Monmouth Baptist Church on International Women's Day.

April

Project Cyrus, an initiative to encourage prayer for North Korea, is launched by BMS World Mission. Six months in the planning, its arrival coincides with escalating tensions in the region. We report on how Ross Baptist

Church is praised for saving a popular youth centre under threat from closure, and how the UK church sends its prayerful support to US Baptist minister Rick Warren and wife Kay following the suicide of son Matthew.

May

Lynn Green is unanimously elected as the new General Secretary of our Baptist Union of Great Britain. There are no votes against and only a handful of abstentions when Baptist Assembly delegates appoint Lynn to the role.

Elsewhere at a packed Assembly in Blackpool, outgoing General Secretary Jonathan Edwards receives a

standing ovation as he makes his final Assembly address, urging Baptists to focus on prayer, mission and gracious partnership. New president Ernie Whalley calls on Baptists to 'shine like stars in the universe' as he introduces his presidential theme, based on Philippians. A discussion on same-sex partnerships takes place.

June

The G8 meets, and the messages of the IF campaign are heard through 1.4m signatures delivered to 10 Downing Street, and 45,000

people attending a rally in Hyde Park, a sizeable proportion of whom are Christians. Though commentators say much more needs to be done, issues such as tax dodging are now firmly on the political agenda.

A service to mark the 65th anniversary of the arrival of the Empire Windrush takes place at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, where a campaign to have a national holiday to celebrate the contribution of those who have come from overseas officially launches. People interested in exploring new forms of church and ministry can now be accredited as pioneers by our Baptist Union of Great Britain, thanks to the Equipped to Pioneer course. June also sees '5 questions to save Baptists', a series of pioneering/mission questions posed by the Incarnate Network.

July

1,500 people take part in a Bollywood dance session in Faversham to raise funds for a charity set up by a Baptist minister's teenage daughter after she had visited Kolkata with BMS World Mission. Christians are more likely to donate organs, according to research from **fleshandblood** to coincide with National Transplant Week.



August

Jonathan Edwards' seven-year spell as General Secretary officially coming to an end, as well as feature Baptist minister Chris Lewis' involvement in a campaign against the excessive interest rates charged by payday lenders, a campaign that mirrors that of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

September

September sees the arrival of a new Baptist logo, website and magazine. Lynn Green officially begins her role as General Secretary and is inducted at a service at Sutton Coldfield Baptist Church. The Church Urban Fund praises church involvement in foodbanks – but challenges them to tackle causes of food poverty.

October

Baptist World Alliance General Secretary the Revd Dr Neville Callam delivers the second annual

Sam Sharpe lecture, urging Baptists to take the strongest possible stance against racism. A new Welsh language missional community launches in Cardiff's Rhiwbina Baptist Church. A group of Baptist ministers take part in a stand-up comedian course, and perform in the Liverpool Comedy Festival. Roger Standing is inducted as the new Principal of Spurgeon's College. Churches could be doing more to help people who are unemployed, according to a new report by the Evangelical Alliance.

November

Prayers are sought for the families of a new UK Filipino Baptist Church, commissioned just days after Typhoon Haiyan. Stuart Blythe is appointed rector of the International Baptist Theological Study Centre. Catalyst Live, a two-day theology conference organised

by BMS World Mission and featuring Jurgen Moltmann, is a sell out. The first new style Baptist Union Council takes place. The Rooftop, an evangelistic Baptist-led ministry, begins.

December

The Pioneer Collective, an initiative to identify and support 400 new Baptist pioneers, launches. Tributes are paid to Nelson Mandela, who dies aged 95.

More than 5,000 take part in The Narnia Experience, a stunning piece of interactive theatre with much Baptist involvement in Leeds.

