

‘Completely irresponsible’

A BAPTIST minister is supporting a community after it was the subject of an ‘intentionally distorted’ Channel 4 documentary.

The Revd Steve Chalke was due to chair a public meeting on Wednesday for residents of Winson Green in Birmingham - the neighbourhood featured in the controversial *Benefits Street*.

The series follows the lives of those who live in James Turner Street, and hit the headlines after appearing to show acts of criminality and anti-social behaviour. The first episode (6 January) coincided with the street’s primary school becoming the latest school in the Oasis stable, the Oasis Academy Foundry. Oasis is a charity founded by Mr Chalke and responsible for 39 schools across the UK. Wednesday’s meeting was being held in the school, and was, he told *The Baptist Times*, an opportunity for the residents to have their say.

‘Of course we are not saying they are all saints, that crime doesn’t happen - but this is what you find on many streets up and down the country. This is a good community.

‘I am determined that the local

community - which Oasis works in - has its chance to put the record straight and celebrate what we love about Winson Green. This community deserves a right of reply.’

The series has revealed benefit



fraud, theft, drug taking and anti-social behaviour, and has been the most popular show on C4 this year. It has divided opinion and led to death threats to participants.

An online petition calling on the broadcaster to axe the series has been signed by 30,000 people. In a statement C4 described it as a ‘fair and balanced observational documentary series... a fair reflection of the reality of life on a street where the majority of households receive benefits.’

But Mr Chalke said it was ‘a completely irresponsible piece of television’ designed for ratings and advertising revenue - and would leave an unwanted legacy for the community.

‘The programme is intentionally designed to misrepresent, denigrate and distort the image of the local neighbourhood,’ he said.

‘The very real point is that Ofsted will come to this school.

They will be asking - do these kids have hope? Do they believe they can achieve? And they’ve just been told they live on one of the worst streets in Britain. It’s our job to give them hope. And it does happen.’

Elsewhere the programme was criticised by the Joint Public Issues Team of our Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist and the United Reformed Church.

It highlighted a popular but false stereotype of benefit claimants: the belief that being on benefits is about ‘tattoos, Sky TV, cigarettes and an obligatory widescreen telly’, wrote Paul Morrison in a blog on Tuesday... yet ‘it wasn’t even representative of the people on the street.’

‘Just one example of this is that entirely predictably the majority of people on the street who aren’t in work are pensioners, the next are the sick and disabled and after that are the unemployed - yet the programme equates benefits with those who are unemployed.’

BBC 5 Live to broadcast from church drop-in centre

A BAPTIST church that runs a drop-in centre for the most vulnerable in its area will be the venue for a national radio programme at the end of the month.

BBC 5 Live’s Breakfast will be broadcast from Pier Avenue Baptist Church in Clacton, Essex on Friday 31 January from 6 - 9am, with a phone-in the following hour.

BBC presenter Nicky Campbell will visit the church on the previous day. There he will interview people involved with the Enfold Project, which each week supports around 55 people with a cooked breakfast and access to a wide range of services.

The project is the reason for the broadcast, with the programme wishing to shine a light on deprivation in coastal towns. The BBC approached the local council, which in turn suggested Pier Avenue.

The church has been running the Enfold Project for the last two years, which launched as it redeveloped its buildings with



The church atrium where the Enfold Project is based

a desire to its community. The project was developed alongside Tendring District Council using Big Society Funding, and other service providers.

Each person who visits is offered a cooked breakfast, shower facilities and help from a number of support groups based there on a Thursday.

Around 12 volunteers from the church are involved each week, from a rota of 20.

Initially around six people used it, but this has grown to 55 users each week.

‘Of these, there is a regular core of around 35 and the rest come and go,’ said elder Duncan Wood. ‘The Project usually sees

four to five new faces each week, so there are probably 200 -250 new faces over the year.

‘There is a very relaxed atmosphere, and the support groups love coming to us.’

The Project has been widely praised. Tendring District Council Leader Peter Halliday said, ‘The Enfold Project has had a direct and significant impact on improving the lives of a significant number of people in the Pier Ward and is making a real difference to many lives.’

Both Mr Wood and minister Sean Fountain will be on the panel during the phone-in. ‘We’d certainly value prayer,’ said Mr Wood.

Chilling reality for children in poverty

MORE than three million families are likely to cut back on food so they can pay their energy bills this winter.

And more than half of the five million families that are likely to turn their heating down because of the cost are worried that their children will become ill as a result, according to a nationwide survey, jointly produced by The Children’s Society with *The*

Daily Mirror.

For many families turning the heating on is driving them into debt. About 500,000 families said they would likely have to take a loan out this winter in order to help them with the costs of heating their home.

The Children’s Society is calling on the government to help tackle this problem by making the Warm Home Discount - a

£135 discount on energy bills for low income families - automatically available to all families with children living in poverty.

Its new report, *Behind Cold Doors: The chilling reality for children in poverty* shows that nearly two million children in poverty are currently living in families who do not get this crucial support.

Faith link to lower criminality

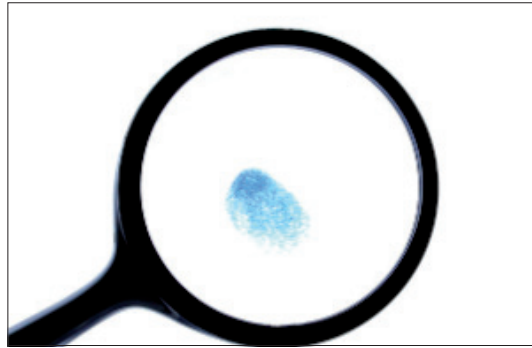
People who regularly visit a place of worship are less likely to be involved in low level crime and delinquency, according to new research.

The project, led by University of Manchester PhD student Mark Littler, involved the analysis of new survey data and in-depth interviews with young members of the UK's major faiths. Mixing with believers who encourage better behaviour is the key influence, he said.

'This research implies that the act of visiting a place of worship may trigger a significant reduction in the likelihood of involvement in certain types of criminal and delinquent behaviour,' said Mr Littler.

'In line with existing American research, my results suggest that it is the act of mixing with fellow believers that is important, regardless of whether this is via formal worship, involvement in faith-based social activities or simply through spending time with family and friends who share your faith.

'The important thing is exposure to people who encourage pro-social behaviours, and can provide sanctions for their breach.'



The study, which is the first time this type of analysis has been carried out in the UK, is to be published later this year. It was funded by the Bill Hill Charitable Trust.

The survey data comprised responses from 1,214 18 to 34-year-olds and was collected last July. It gathered information on eight measures of delinquency: littering, skipping school/work, using illegal drugs, fare dodging, shoplifting, music piracy, property damage and violence against the person.

Though most measures showed some relationship, shoplifting, the use of illegal drugs and music piracy

evidenced the most significant correlations.

More serious crimes were too rare for the data to be able to show a significant pattern.

Mr Littler added, 'These results suggest a more positive picture of Britain's religious life than the doom and gloom you might read about it in the newspapers.

'But they are not necessarily a blow to the proponents of atheism: religious practice is just one way of gaining exposure to the pro-social behavioural norms that are at the heart of this relationship; other, more secular, activities may equally serve a similar role.'

response

<http://bit.ly/Kjimba>

> 'The challenge is to love them'. How can local churches best support their young people? A response by Gavin Calver

<http://bit.ly/Le0FLs>

> We live up to the labels people give us - which is why

we try to compliment our Girls' Brigade on their abilities and talents, not appearance

<http://bit.ly/KDYMHI>

> How can Christians respond when there are issues of conflict in the workplace? Four responses

<http://bit.ly/1dQMG4V>

12 Years a Slave - free resources

THE Damaris Trust has produced a range of resources ideal for church use exploring the important film *12 Years a Slave*.

This powerful film is based on the true story of one man's fight for survival and freedom. In the pre-Civil War United States, Solomon Northup (Chiwetel Ejiofor), a free black man from upstate New York, is abducted and sold into slavery.

Facing cruelty (personified by a malevolent slave owner, portrayed by Michael Fassbender) as well as unexpected kindnesses, Solomon struggles not only to stay alive, but to retain his dignity. Eventually, Solomon's chance meeting with a Canadian abolitionist (Brad Pitt) forever alters his life.

The resources are built around clips from the film and interviews with the stars, and will stimulate discussion about human nature.

They consider how Solomon did not just want sympathy - he needed someone to take a very simple action on his behalf.

The film was released in British cinemas on Friday, and on Sunday won the Best Motion Picture in the Golden Globes awards. It is hotly tipped to receive a number of Oscars in March.

The resources are available at www.damaris.org/12years

A reflection by Israel Olofinjana: <http://bit.ly/1eSHTC7>

Introduction of Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill - guidelines

THE Faith and Society Team has produced some notes which are offered as general guidelines for churches and ministers concerned about the implications of the introduction of same sex marriages in 2014.

They are provided in response to the introduction of this Bill

and should not be read as an opinion. Some more detailed guidelines for churches and ministers will be available once the final legislation regarding registered buildings is published.

To find out more visit <http://bit.ly/1eDswNk>

THE Spring edition of *Baptists Together* magazine has been making its way to churches and subscribers this week.

This edition contains a mix news, features, interviews and opinion, with contributions from General Secretary Lynn Green, current President Ernie Whalley, Nabil Costa and Ruth Rice.

The centre of the magazine, contains Transform, with the latest guidelines and advice for deacons and treasurers.

Further copies of the magazine are available for purchase either as individual copies, in packs of 10, or by annual subscription. It can also be viewed online.

Visit <http://bit.ly/1aoONiv>

BUNGALOW

Great Sampford Baptist Church - Homes for the Aged, have a small two bedroom bungalow available. The bungalow is let rent-free with the condition that the occupant supports Great Sampford Baptist Church. The bungalow is available to any one over the age of 60 years and is suitable for a single person or a couple. It is situated in the village of Great Sampford, near Saffron Walden, Essex.

If you are interested in or for more information about this property please call Ann Wolstenholme on 07970 450491 or e-mail Ann at peter@wolstenholme10.orangehome.co.uk

DEATH

CHAPMAN - The Revd Wilfred - Died 12 January aged 97 years old. His pastorates included Bethany, Pontypridd (50-61), Langley, Free (61-67), Bluntisham (67-76) and Oswestry and Welshpool (76-81). Funeral at Bluntisham Baptist Church on 24 January at 11.30am.

BAPTISMS

Amptill Baptist Church, Bedfordshire: Emily Ward, Dennis & Dorothy Noble 3
Chipping Campden Baptist Church, Glos: Hugh Buttrick. 1
Oakes Baptist Church, Huddersfield: Angus Froste. 1
North End Baptist Church, Portsmouth: Emily Warden and Wilson Wingu Ngwa 2

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

From the www. baptisttimes.co.uk

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> You want to pray, but have nothing left to give. Simply focusing on God's word is one