

Lent: 40 acts of generosity?

SAY thank you, create a generosity toolbox, share a skill and always talk to strangers: these are just a few of the 40 acts of generosity which will feature in 40acts, the Lent campaign which will run for the fourth consecutive year in March.

Instead of giving something up, 40acts challenges participants to give something 'out'. During the forty days of Lent, participants will be invited to take part in 40 simple acts of generosity which will challenge them to 'do Lent generously' in 2014.

More than 13600 people have already signed up to take part in 40acts 2014.

'40acts began as a simple idea that asked, 'What if Lent could be about more than simply giving up chocolate? What if it was a preparation for a lifetime of big-heartedness?'" said Debbie Wright, head of content at Stewardship, the Christian charity behind the campaign.

Individual participants can sign up via 40acts.org.uk and will receive the daily challenges via email from 5 March to 19 April 2014. Challenges will also be posted on the 40acts website, and social media sites on a daily basis.

New for 2014 is the introduction of 40acts Together, which helps groups to collectively take part in 40acts.

Visit www.40acts.org.uk for more information

BMS Day of Prayer

INDIVIDUALS, small groups and churches have been invited to take part in the annual BMS Day of Prayer, which this year takes place on 3 February.

BMS mission workers are involved in securing justice for women and children in Uganda and planting churches in France, to teaching English in China and training leaders in Peru.

The day of prayer focuses on them and the countries they serve.

'Prayer is central to the work we do at BMS,' says David Kerrigan, BMS General Director.

'I love the Day of Prayer because, sometimes against our instincts to always keep busy, it gives us the opportunity to pause and refocus on God.

'It's a great time to give thanks for the past year, to seek guidance for what's ahead.'

Last year churches used the BMS prayer PowerPoint in their Sunday services, arranged special times of prayer and even got creative (one church made colourful cardboard balloons to help focus their prayer on different countries)

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

JOBS

Full-time leader for youth and children's work, Woodley Baptist Church

For more details visit: <http://bit.ly/1eS6Ay9>

NOTICE

Christian affordable rental accommodation in south Devon

The Fairfield Trust is a registered charity (Charity Number: 266699) which owns two large houses in Torquay. They have recently been converted into modern flats to accommodate those who have worked or do work and given their lives to or for Christian organisations and, as a result, have been unable to buy a home in this country. The Trust is a non-profit making charity.

The unfurnished, self-contained flats have bedroom, kitchen, bathroom and sitting room. All have access to large communal gardens with views of the sea in Torbay, laundry facilities and car parking or garage. There are also a few flats for residents' family and friends to visit.

Full details of the history and aim of the Trust, its founder and the accommodation available can be found at: www.fairfieldtrust.org

BAPTISMS

Fernhill Heath Baptist Church, Worcestershire: Rachael Baldwin 1
Loughborough Baptist Church: Eduarda Ponticelli 1
Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, Northampton: Mary Percival, Shirley Mabbutt, Teleri Jardine 3
Tabernacle Baptist Church Wolverhampton: Rosemary Belcher, Rosalind Fearnough 2

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

THE BAPTIST TIMES weekly NEWS ROUND-UP

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Home Mission thanks

THANKS have been expressed for the 2013 Home Mission appeal, which has clocked in at just below £4m.

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.

The figures for 2013 have just been released and although there was a drop of two per cent on last year's figure, the response was described as 'positive and encouraging' by David Locke, Support Services team leader.

Mr Locke cited 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.

'This is a result that we give God thanks for,' he said.

'We are very grateful to our churches and members who have given sacrificially in 2013. We also give our thanks to all the Association staff who have worked tirelessly behind the scenes to promote Home Mission 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.'

Mr Locke's thoughts were echoed both by the Revd Lynn Green, general secretary of our

Appeal.'

In the context of the overall accounts for our Union, the Appeal has helped us to be 'much closer towards our goal of achieving a balanced financial position,' said Mr Locke. The accounts also

include legacy, investment and subscription income, and will be finalised in February. Our Union also has lower costs due to the restructuring last

year. 'This means the appeal has given us an excellent springboard for growth and development in 2014,' said Mr Locke.

There was a mixed picture in giving across the Associations, with four showing an increase on their 2012 figure (Northern, Yorkshire, Southern Counties and Heart of England). There was also an increase in direct giving.

Home Mission is used in many creative ways, and through it hundreds of lives have been affected and many have found faith in Jesus. A selection of stories is featured on the Baptists Together website, in the regional sections of *The Baptist Times* and Baptists Together Magazine.

Visit <http://bit.ly/1hLU0TD>



Bringing cheer on Blue Monday

CHURCHES in Huddersfield in West Yorkshire have been marking the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity by setting up a shop and offering to listen to people's needs on Blue Monday.



The Huddersfield town centre churches have a tradition of meeting to pray at noon each day in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, but this year they decided to take it on the streets. The churches took over an empty shop unit in the town's Packhorse shopping centre for the week, and have been praying together each day at noon, led by different church leaders.

The rest of the day they have been inviting people to use the shop space as a place to be quiet. People from the churches have been on hand to listen to people and to pray with them.

The shop's first day was also

the day recognised as "Blue Monday", the most depressing day of the year. This was a day to get alongside those who needed a word of support and the churches gave out gifts of flowers and chocolates to raise people's spirits.

Other days there have different activities such as building a big tower out of Lego to speak about God as a place of refuge, and giving out fruit labelled with the nine virtues of the Fruit of the Spirit.

The Revd Wayne Clarke, minister of New North Road Baptist Church and one of the leaders of the initiative, said that it had been an excellent week, demonstrating Christian unity and God's love. 'We've grown together as believers in our witness, and shown our town that we can have hope, and it can be seen though the local church.'

Fresh expressions impact

FRESH expressions of church are having a major impact on growth in the Church of England, according to new research.

The detailed study, released on Thursday (16 January) showed that on average fresh expressions make up 15 per cent of the churches within a diocese and 10 per cent of the attendance.

Additionally there has been marked growth in the last three

years - 44 per cent of the fresh expressions in the research were launched between 2010 and 2012.

A fresh expression of church is a new form of church that serves those outside the existing church.

Canon Dr George Lings, who led the study, said, 'Nothing else in the Church of England has this level of missional impact.'

MBE honour for Joy

A MEMBER of a Baptist church who has played a key role in a local credit union has been awarded an MBE.

Joy Park helped to initiate the Waltham Forest Community Credit Union (WFCCU) ten years ago, and this was reflected by her presence in the New Year's Honours list.

Joy was nominated by five people including Waltham Forest MP Stella Creasy, credit union chairwoman, and Leytonstone United Free Church Minister, the Revd Alison Mackay. She has been a member of Leytonstone United Free Church - part of the London Baptist Association - since 1984.

Her involvement with the credit union has had an impact both within the Church and in the wider community of Waltham Forest.

'She has given her time and energy unstintingly from the first tentative meetings within the Church; building the confidence amongst the congregation to encourage their investment,' said church administrator Fiona Buddell.

'Through all the changes and challenges of sustaining support from the Borough Council and from investors she has devoted hours of unpaid voluntary labour to the cause.

'Many residents of Waltham Forest, faced with poverty and deprivation, have struggled to obtain any sort of financial service on the kind of terms they could afford.'

Prayers for Syria peace conference

ONLY an inclusive political settlement will end the violence and enable the people of Syria to rebuild their lives.

That was the message from Christian Aid ahead of this week's international peace conference in Geneva, which is looking to find a solution to the Syrian crisis that has left 100,000 people dead and driven 9.5 million from their homes.

Elsewhere Tearfund asked for prayer as delegates from Syria's government and opposition along with representatives from 30 countries, including the UK, came to the table on Wednesday (22 January).

Two months ahead of the third anniversary of the start of the crisis, these are the first direct talks between both sides in the conflict.

Christian Aid says it is essential that civil society is also represented at the talks. Christian Aid's Head of Middle East Janet Symes said, 'Only an inclusive political settlement will bring the violence to an end and enable the people of Syria to rebuild their lives.'

'Civil society has a crucial role to play in supporting non-violence within the process. It is essential that appropriate mechanisms allow



Hannah Maule-finch/Tearfund

them to engage fully, and represent a broader number of Syrians.'

She added, 'There are many grassroots initiatives for peace and reconciliation already taking place, including inter-faith dialogue, and locally negotiated short-term ceasefires that demonstrate the commitment of so many Syrians to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict.'

Meanwhile Tearfund requested prayer as it released a report warning that refugees outside formal refugee camps are in danger of being overlooked.

Up to three-quarters of the 2.3 million refugees who have fled Syria are living in sheds,

overcrowded flats or makeshift tents, not in large formal camps.

'Life is incredibly difficult for the Syrian refugees we are serving in Lebanon and Jordan,' says Justine Nola, Tearfund's Syria Crisis Manager.

She also called for prayer for the millions of Syrians trying to bring up their children or care for elderly relatives in Lebanon, Jordan and many other countries, and for peace to come to Syria:

'Please pray with us that this week's peace talks bring an end to the devastating conflict, bombings, fear and violence that have plagued the lives of so many millions of Syrian people.'

From the www. baptisttimes.co.uk

Recent stories and comment pieces on *The Baptist Times* website

> 'An atmosphere where being a "Charismatic Baptist" is celebrated and not just

tolerated' – a reflection from last week's Fresh Streams conference

<http://bit.ly/1fZpk40>

> In May I have to leave the church and area to which I feel a sense of call because of finance. Moving on doesn't seem right

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

> There are times when it seems that God has stopped listening to our prayers. What next?

<http://bit.ly/1cUrJ88>

> An Israeli band whose complex blend of musical cultures is popular with young Christians, Muslims, and Jews. Who are Orphaned Land?

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