

Making its mark

MORE UK adults now understand about the true meaning of Christmas, research carried out by the Christmas Starts with Christ campaign shows.

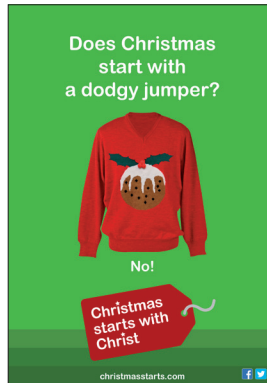
A new ComRes survey shows the annual advertising campaign is raising awareness: when it launched six years ago, 51 per cent of adults thought the birth of Christ had no relevance to Christmas.

But now ComRes says 67 per cent of people thought that the Christmas message was conveyed effectively and 49 per cent of people felt that the advertising made them think more about the true meaning of Christmas.

Christmas Starts with Christ is run by ChurchAds.net and is aimed at “helping churches to make Christ and the amazing story of his birth the focus of the nation’s favourite time of year.”

Each year it provides free resources for church use, including posters, radio ads, web banners and social media images, and is backed by a number of agencies and denominations including Baptists Together. A number of Baptists are involved in the design process.

A record number of 4,500



churches joined the campaign last year, and it is hoped 10,000 churches will make use of this year’s material, which has just become available.

David Elcock, the Creative and Community Work Coordinator at Leigh Road Baptist Church, Leigh-on-Sea, said the campaign has been having an impact in his community.

‘We’ve been using the excellent free Christmas Starts with Christ publicity resources since its launch,’ he explained. ‘The posters, radio ads and online media do provoke comment and discussion from those in our neighbourhood.’

‘We place the ads on the front

page of the town’s newspaper, delivered to 18,000 homes, and hand deliver invite postcards to 2,000 homes in our surrounding community. Last year we gave away the Christmas tree prayer tags to hundreds of people at the town’s light switch on. All of these things help us to have many relaxed conversations about the real reason for the season.’

Last year there were 22,000 downloads of posters, 9,000 downloads of the radio advertisements and 140,000 page views of the website.

Francis Goodwin, of ChurchAds.Net, said, ‘When we started this campaign we were worried because 51 per cent of adults thought that the birth of Christ had no relevance to Christmas but research has shown that we are reversing this, especially among the 18 to 24-year-olds.’

‘If Christian organisations and churches remember just one thing, all of the material is FREE, FREE, FREE. There is nothing to pay, no permission to be sought, no rights sign-off to be had, just download them and use them.’

Visit www.ChristmasStartsWithChrist.com

“Very positive” Oslo meeting

RELIGIOUS leaders from Russia and Ukraine had a ‘very positive’ meeting in Oslo last week which resulted in a desire for continued dialogue.

Christian, Jewish, and Muslim representatives had been brought together by the Norwegian Bible Society in an attempt to foster mutual acceptance and understanding in the midst of the conflict engulfing their respective countries.



After three days of talks a communiqué was issued which stressed the need to continue an ‘in-depth dialogue’.

The communiqué made clear that there were differences of opinions to the causes of the current crisis. However, the representatives all have a joint goal ‘to be witnesses to the truth and to contribute to peace’.

A number of Baptists were represented. They included Vitaly Vlasenko (Moscow), Director of External Church Relations for the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists.

He described the meeting as ‘a

very good beginning, but not yet a breakthrough.’

‘We had gathered together and now we are together. We have stated clearly that we regard each other as brothers in Christ.’

He added, ‘After the big let-down following the (strictly Protestant) Ukrainian-Russian meetings in Jerusalem on 10 April, this new spirit is significant.’

The Russian Baptist Union, in contrast to the Ukrainian one, had not been represented in Jerusalem.

Mr Vlasenko conceded that the war is experienced much

differently in Eastern Ukraine than in distant Moscow.

‘Sometimes we don’t really know what was going on – information is often partial. But it is not our task to assign amounts of guilt. We must bind up the wounds of the hurting and communicate to our governments our longing for peace.’

The Ukrainian Baptist Union was represented in Oslo by Gregori Komendant and Igor Bandura, while Mr Vlasenko was joined by Sergei Debelinskiy. Terje Aadne from the Baptist Union of Norway was also in attendance.

Encouraging start in new building

THE Lighthouse Community Church in Sheringham, Norfolk is planning a special celebration to mark a year in its new building.

The celebration, simply called ONE, takes place on Sunday September 21, one year to the day after the opening ceremony.

There has been a Baptist church in Sheringham since 1929, but the fellowship had been seeking to move or expand for around 20 years as its 1952 building had become cramped and dated. Structural problems which emerged in 2009 prompted the

purchase of a new site on Cromer Road which was nearly three times the size of the old plot.

The striking modern building is known simply as “Lighthouse”. Following the opening ceremony the church’s activities, which are all open to the public, have been thriving.

These include the table tennis club, Kaleidoscope social club, Jigsaw toddler group, Art club, Youth Football clubs, School’s Out after school club, Mix youth club, Lighthouse Café, and of course the main meeting

on Sundays at 10.15am. The Lighthouse building has also been used by many community groups, including Slimming World, Little Theatre, and several local choirs and societies.

‘We’ve had a really exciting year since we crossed over that road into this wonderful building,’ said Senior Pastor Bryan Pickard.

‘We’ve seen significant growth in nearly all areas of church life, and we have been in the rich streams of God’s blessing, especially since the beginning of 2014.’

Above and beyond

Playing a key role in a dazzling London production that retells the Bible as never before is a dream for Holly-Anna Lloyd

Holly-Anna plays Mary, the mother of Jesus in *Love Beyond*, an exciting new production at Wembley's SSE Arena next month, and is therefore involved at some critical points.

'In the nativity scene, the music is just beautiful - it sums up how majestic and dramatic that moment is,' she says. 'We all go to nativity scenes at Christmas time, and you never really get the full impact from Mary's point of view. It's really exciting to be part of.'

Holly-Anna, a worship and



From the www. baptisttimes.co.uk

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

> 'God wants a covenant in partnerships rather than just a bit of collaboration' - Spurgeon's



youth leader at Ruislip Baptist Church in North West London, is a member of the 30-strong cast of *Love Beyond*. Described as "the greatest love story of all time", it has attracted a clutch of West End stars and one of the biggest live orchestras of any musical theatre show in London.

Unlike other musicals which take Bible stories as their starting point, *Love Beyond* relays the full Gospel message of creation, loss, restoration and healing. And that makes it even more exciting for a professional singer with a strong Christian faith like Holly-Anna.

'It attracted me because it shows God's love in a way that hasn't been shown before,' she

says, 'It's from a Christian point of view, which other musicals like *Jesus Christ Superstar* (which features Jesus' death but not the resurrection) aren't. *Love Beyond* is written by a Christian and the production company ideally wanted people who are Christian.

'It's a really good representation of God, very accurate, so it seemed like a really perfect thing to get into.'

For full story visit
bit.ly/1u1bJ28

Love Beyond takes place on 1 and 2 October. For more visit <http://www.lovebeyondmusical.com/>

College-based conference exploring how the majority world can partner with local Christians
bit.ly/1r1eNjr

> Pennies from Heaven: Wendy Reakes stopped gambling when she became a Christian - and has had several reminders it was the right decision
bit.ly/1Dk4qW1

> Pause and be thankful: the custom of saying grace is dying out... and that's a shame
bit.ly/1pjAa39

> Laughing for the Kingdom: an encouragement to use your gifts creatively for God
bit.ly/1uHoJry

Prisons Week

CHURCHES are being encouraged to support a national annual prayer initiative focused on "crisis-hit" prisons.

Prisons Week is run by a broad alliance of Christian denominations and leading faith-based charities working in the criminal justice system, and this year its annual week of collective prayer is on the theme of 'Building Hope'.

It is asking congregations to pray for prisoners, their families, victims and all those who work to support them.

'By raising awareness and support amongst congregations, we believe the Church can shine God's light into some of the darkest places and help bring healing, restoration and more positive futures for those behind bars,' it said in a statement.

'With prayer at its root, we hope that the Church will be motivated to engage in practical support for those affected by imprisonment such as volunteering and offering financial support.'

The Building Hope campaign is being launched at Westminster Central Hall on 13 October with special guests, including Fiona Bruce MP and the Rt Revd James Langstaff, the Anglican Bishop to Prisons.

The week of collective prayer is to be held from 16-22 November and there will be a range of awareness raising events taking place across the country throughout the week.

More information and resources can be found at:
<http://www.prisonweek.org/>

A prayer for Scotland

We pray for Scotland and its people at this time of referendum and ask for wisdom and discernment as we look to the future ...

We pray for respect for each other in our differences, and a genuine desire to listen and learn why others think differently ...

We pray for patience and courage for the people of the land as we face uncertainties and adjustments, whatever the outcome ...

We pray for new energy to meet the challenges of poverty and injustice in our society that have come to light in our debates and discussions ...

We pray for those who govern, that they may do so creatively and wisely for the good of the nation and the wellbeing of those beyond our shores and our borders ...

We pray for those who feel hurt or dishonoured by the opinions of others, and for those saddened by the outcome ...

We pray for the churches (and other groups - faith or non-faith) that in continuing to work for unity among themselves they may bear witness to the richness that comes from reconciliation and acceptance of difference ...

We pray for all in our communities who are in need at this time, because of illness, unemployment, poverty, lack of opportunity or the experience of rejection, and pray that we may continue to work towards a society where all are valued and given their place ...

Almighty God, Father of Mercies, hear our prayers, offered to you through and with Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen.

JOBS

Part-time Regional Minister, South Eastern Baptist Association Leadership development programme, secondment opportunity, Baptists Together

For more details visit: www.baptist.org.uk/jobs

MINISTERIAL

Shenley Christian Fellowship is pleased to announce the induction of their new Senior Church Leader the Revd Ross Dilnot, on Saturday 20 September, 2:30pm at Shenley Brook End School theatre, in Milton Keynes. Ross was Associate Pastor at Stony Stratford Community Church in Milton Keynes for the past seven years. For more information please refer to www.scf-mk.org.uk

BAPTISMS

Beulah Baptist Church, Oldham: Azeena Kamran, Philip Talyor, Julie McBride 3
Newport Pagnell Baptist Church, Bucks: Tiria Barnes, Rebecca Greenfield, Etive Eelbeck, Jodie Gunn and Maria Kingham 5
Spalding Baptist Church, Lincs: Gordon Gooding, Lawrence and Becky Parson, and Julie Walton 4
Tabernacle Baptist Church, Penarth: Anna Bailey 1

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