

Extra JPIT conference tickets

EXTRA tickets have been made available for those wishing to attend the Archbishop of Canterbury's keynote address at an upcoming conference organised by the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church.

Full day general tickets for the 'Love your neighbour: Think, Pray, Vote' conference – to be held at Coventry Central Hall on Saturday 21 February – have now sold out.

However, demand for spaces was so high that the organisers have worked with Coventry Central Hall to make extra tickets available for those wishing to attend the Justin Welby's keynote address, the following Q&A and the opening worship – which will set the scene for a day of reflection, discussion and Bible study.

The conference will focus on the ways in which churches and individual Christians can help create a more just society in the build-up to the UK's general election on 7 May 2015.

Tickets for Archbishop Justin's keynote address and subsequent Q&A are available at bit.ly/1wuyQBQ.

These sessions will run from 10.30am – 11.45am

Global greetings

A short film sharing Christmas greetings from Baptists around the world has been released.

The film has been created by the US-based *Ethics Daily*, and features a diverse group of Baptists, with voices from Liberia and the Philippines plus David Kerrigan, General Director of BMS World Mission, Estonian Helle Licht (pictured), Assistant General Secretary of the European Baptist Federation, and Stephen Holmes, Lecturer at the University of St Andrews.



Robert Parham, Executive Director of *Ethics Daily*, spoke of hoping for the "impossible possibility: On earth, peace".

He added, 'We give thanks for our global Baptist partners who, committed to the Prince of Peace, pursue the things that make for peace. We hope this Christmas season that all of us can join together and proclaim with the heavenly host "On earth, peace".'

To view the film visit:
<http://vimeo.com/113642542>

A number of tickets remain available for the Fresh Streams conference in January, despite strong demand (12-14 January).

Fresh Streams, formerly Mainstream, is the Baptist Word and Spirit network.

Danielle Strickland is a speaker in three plenary sessions. Other options include two sessions from Roy Searle on key issues for senior/sole leaders, exploring civic engagement with Roger Sutton, and Paul Newman on emotionally healthy churches. Eddie Lyle, Open Doors CEO will be there, plus worship from Nicole Brown.

Visit <http://freshstreams.net/conferences/conference-2015/>

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THE BAPTIST TIMES weekly NEWS ROUND-UP

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Feeding Britain

THE MOST extensive report into the causes of food poverty in the UK was published this week (8 December)

Feeding Britain, funded from the Archbishop of Canterbury's Charitable Trust, said it was clear that 'demand for emergency food assistance is increasing, and sometimes increasing dramatically.' It made a series of recommendations with the aim of eliminating hunger in the UK by 2020.

The 56-page report is the result of the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom, which launched in April. The inquiry drew on a large body of evidence, both from a series of regional sessions and from written submissions by more than 200 organisations, including our Baptist Union.

It found that the biggest (but not the only) contributor to food bank referrals was problems with benefits.

One of its main recommendations was the establishment of a new national network – Feeding Britain – which would see food banks, supermarkets, local councils and government departments



Picture: Ian Britton/Gateshead Foodbank

work together to eliminate food poverty. A fairer and speedier benefits system, a national living wage and greater redistribution of surplus food were also highlighted.

While the government has denied there is a link between its austerity measures and the rise in food banks in recent years, Work and Pensions Secretary Iain Duncan Smith said he would respond positively to what he described as a serious report.

As part of the Joint Public Issues Team, our Baptist Union, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church submitted joint evidence to the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry.

The submission spoke of 'the huge and unacceptable rise in the use of food banks and other forms of emergency food support in the UK today.'

It noted the 'real concern' among clergy and those running foodbanks that their charitable service will become an essential part of the welfare state.

It argued for the restoring of low income families' access to emergency credit, prioritising the creation of decently paid stable work, and that benefit levels be set at the income required to avoid hunger.

For full story and reaction visit bit.ly/1691YYN

Change of name for Northern Baptist College

The Baptist college in Manchester has reverted to its former name as part of a series of developments relating to its future



The Northern Baptist Learning Community (NBLC) will once again become Northern Baptist College, with the strapline “A Learning Community”, it has been announced.

Other changes agreed by college governors include a new statement of vision and values and a new logo. In addition a much-upgraded website will be launched next year, Co-Principals Clare McBeath and Glen Marshall, and Chair of Governors David Warrington, explained in a statement.

The decision to return to Northern Baptist College (NBC) was in response to ‘the struggle that many people have had getting their heads and tongues around the change of name,’ they

said.

Northern Baptist College was formed in 1963 when the Baptist colleges at Rawdon and Manchester amalgamated. The college adopted the name Northern Baptist Learning Community five years ago.

Incorporating the ‘learning community’ element into the new strapline indicates ‘we are still very much committed to being and becoming a community of learners, discovering together what it means to follow Jesus today in the light of scripture and the rich theological tradition of the Christian Church,’ the announcement said. The reworking is therefore ‘same reality, simpler name’.

The new logo is part of a

whole new look to accompany the upgraded website.

Other key elements are the new vision, values and strategy, which were outlined in the announcement.

After inviting feedback, the statement continued, ‘Throughout its history NBC has developed and adapted in response to changing opportunities, new challenges and, we believe, in response to the prompting of God’s Spirit. Our own times offer new opportunities and present fresh challenges.

‘We pray that as we seek to serve the churches of our region, playing our part in the mission of God, we will be faithful to our heritage and responsive to the leading of Christ.’

Film resources for *Exodus/Unbroken*

EDUCATIONAL charity Damaris has created free community resources for two films due for release on Boxing Day.

The first is *Exodus: Gods and Kings*, directed by Ridley Scott, which it describes as ‘a wonderful example of art inspired by the Bible.’

‘Ridley Scott draws us into the mind and heart of Moses in a way that will challenge and inspire audiences,’ it said, ‘and

the free official resources from Damaris at www.damaris.org/ *exodus* are designed to help everyone to reflect and respond – including digging into the Bible for themselves.’

The second film is *Unbroken*, which tells the story of World War II prisoner Louis Zamperini, who went onto become an inspirational Christian speaker after attending a Billy Graham rally, openly forgiving his Japanese captors.

Unbroken is directed by Angelina Jolie, and ‘encourages people to engage with the themes and ideas it raises – redemption, resilience and forgiveness,’ said Damaris. ‘We are confident that churches will understand the nature of the film and the opportunity that we provide to help them engage with the wider community in this way.’

The free official resources are at www.damaris.org/unbroken

Book review: Walking Backwards to Christmas

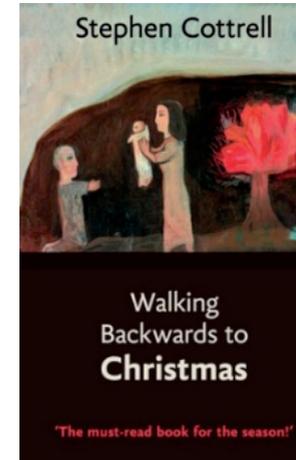
Clever retelling of the Nativity story in reverse

With a title that echoes a festive nonsense song by Spike Milligan and a writing style reminiscent of David Kossoff, Bishop Stephen Cottrell takes a far from straightforward look at the Christmas story - but it is nevertheless one which beguiles and enchants.

The path he has chosen is similar to watching *Who Do You Think You Are?* - tracing a lineage from the present back into the past, but not always showcasing the usual suspects. So, for instance, when the infant Jesus is presented at the temple and is recognised by Simeon as the one who was foretold, it is given to the prophetess Anna to describe the moment: “...the sun will rise tomorrow, but on a different world, one into which a greater light has come.”

A wise man, a shepherd, even Joseph, are all given a voice, together with the inn-keeper’s wife, here identified as Martha.

Mary herself, bearing a son who would be the light of the world, sums it up simply. “I am the Lord’s lantern. He has



Walking Backwards to Christmas
By Stephen Cottrell
SPCK Publishing
ISBN 9780281071477
Reviewer: David Stuckey

kindled a fire within me.”

And this topsy-turvy book ends at the start with the prophesies of Moses and Isaiah.

This exercise in retelling the Nativity in reverse (“for all those who thought they knew the story well” as Bishop Stephen suggests in his prologue) is clever, dramatic and thought-provoking. But does this roundabout approach lead anywhere?

A young shepherd called David muses “if this child is king how will anyone know? Will he lead an army to victory? Will he kick out the Romans and

establish an empire? I can’t see it - not in this manger ... (but then) this is a different sort of king.”

And this is indeed a different sort of book. You may never look at the Sunday School Nativity in the same way again.

David Stuckey is a journalist and member of Maghull Baptist Church

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