

BAPTISTS

Spring 2015

TOGETHER



**PURSUING
GOD'S
JUSTICE**

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News / Interviews / Prayer / Comment / Events
The magazine for the Baptist Union of Great Britain

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- ◆ New buildings or extensions
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Please visit our website at www.baptistbuildingfund.org.uk where you can view more pictures from some of the projects which the Fund has been able to assist.

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Pursuing God's Justice

Motivated by faith, Baptists have long been involved in seeking to create a more just world.

From the very beginning more than 400 years ago, our forebears were champions of religious freedom. The impassioned speeches and compelling evidence of Baptist missionary William Knibb contributed to the ending of slavery. The movement spearheaded by Martin Luther King, a Baptist minister, did much to bring about greater freedom and equality for millions of black people in the United States. Faced with soaring unemployment and extreme poverty in east London in the early 20th century, Baptist minister Rowntree Clifford and Sister Hettie – later to be his wife – gathered a team to provide food, shelter, medical and social services under the guise of West Ham Central Mission. Among his many achievements in India, William Carey, the BMS World Mission founder, played a significant role in the banning of Sati, the Hindu custom which required widows to burn themselves to death on their husband's funeral pyre.

This long tradition of sharing a hunger for God's coming kingdom continues today: whether it is in hosting nightshelters for the homeless; setting up foodbanks, jobs clubs or credit unions; welcoming asylum seekers and economic migrants; championing fostering and adoption; providing great youth work; petitioning the Government or involvement in bigger advocacy campaigns such as Make Poverty History... Baptist Christians are there.

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The views of individual writers expressed in this magazine do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editorial Group or Baptists Together.



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Image: Lorelyn Medina / istockphoto.com

This edition of *Baptists Together* is, in one sense, a celebration/affirmation of that. In the following pages we catch a glimpse of how churches and individuals are using their gifts and determination to build a fairer world.

But there is more. Each story, past and present, is united by a shared desire to understand God's character and be in step with his purposes. So there are articles looking at why pursuing God's justice is important (p5), what is meant by God's justice (p12), and how we might discern our own role in working towards it (p14).

Lynn Green (p16) shares thoughts on daily living (and how she can no longer use a major online retailer). There is a fresh look at what would make the world a fairer place from the eyes of children and young people in our Baptist churches (p26). And talking of children, Linda Hopkins takes the horror of Rotherham, Manchester and other recent revelations of abuse to highlight the never-more-pressing need to place the well-being of children at the heart of our shared life (p24).

Baptists have always had a heart for justice. As we read and engage with the pages that follow, our hope is that everybody who is part of a local Baptist church will be helped to better discern how we might respond to God.

The Editorial Group

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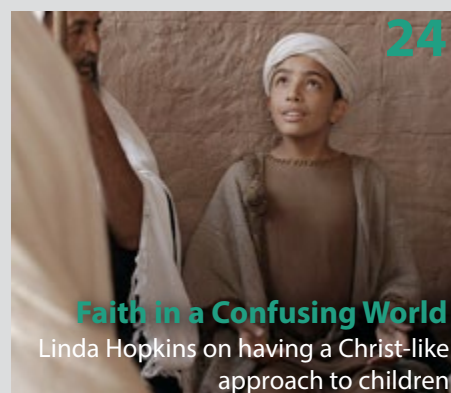
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He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
 And **what does the Lord require of you?**
 To act justly and to love mercy and to walk
 humbly with your God.

Micah 6:8

Five reasons why justice matters

Krish Kandiah shares biblical snapshots that show why pursuing justice, however hard, is crucial for the church

This week I listened to a man tell me how he and his family were forcibly removed from their home and forced to settle in a ghetto on the opposite side of the city under the apartheid government in South Africa. I have met Kosovar refugees whose family members were rounded up and shot because they were from the wrong ethnic group. My wife and I have fostered children who have experienced domestic violence, yet they were the ones who had to leave their family home and live with strangers. Injustice is not far from any of us if we have eyes to see it and ears to hear people's stories.

It may be hard to believe, but there are still Christians who don't think pursuing justice is worthwhile, and essential, for churches. Less hard may be that some churches which preach about the justice of God still do little to demonstrate it. Easiest of all is that those Christians who are spending themselves on behalf of the poor, quickly feel tired out and disillusioned.

But there is hope: let us look at five biblical snapshots that show why pursuing justice, however hard, matters for the church.

There is a clear expectation that
 God's people will be in contact with
 the poor and needy



Photo: Vernon Wiley / iStockphoto.com



Photo: Ed Stock / iStockphotos.com

1 God is a just God

*He is the Rock, his works are perfect,
 and all his ways are just.
 A faithful God who does no wrong,
 Upright and just is he.*

Deuteronomy 32:4

There are numerous examples we could look at to demonstrate that the God of the Bible is the God of Justice. For example, in Deuteronomy the appropriateness of his actions are all related to God's steadfast character as one who behaves and acts justly. For Christians our concept of right and wrong is not ultimately based on social norms, or even democratic decision. Our understanding of good and evil, justice and wickedness derives from the very character of God himself.

God has made known his character to us through his words and actions in scripture and they reveal a God who is fundamentally concerned about a rightly ordered society, about laws that ensure peace and equity and protect the vulnerable. If we are to be a godly people, imaging his character to a watching world must demonstrate this same concern for justice.

Imaging God's character is one of the many reasons why we launched **Home for Good**: around 6,000 children await adoption, and more than 9,000 are in need of fostering. The Church is uniquely placed to offer its help to meet this need and give justice to these children – both in terms of finding families to foster or adopt, and providing an excellent community of support to wrap around those who do.

2 God commands us to act justly

The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern.

Proverbs 29:7

There is a clear expectation that God's people will be in contact with the poor and needy and that they will help ensure justice for them. In fact this essential concern is what separates those who are rightly related to God from those who are far from him. It is to be outworked practically in enabling the needy to work and eat (see Ruth and Deuteronomy), to be treated fairly in a court of law or in a place of worship (Exodus 23), or to belong to a family or a community (Galatians 6:10). God's people are commanded to do this as a demonstration of true worship. Social justice is as important in our worship as sacrifices, gatherings and fasts (Isaiah 1, Micah 6:8).

We have been on an eight-year journey in fostering and adopting, and the support of our local Baptist church has been invaluable – we have been really encouraged by the passion with which they have grasped their role as a whole church to care for the vulnerable children in our community.

3 Christ died to satisfy the justice of God

For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Romans 8:3-4

At the heart of the Christian faith stands the cross of Christ. The cross is the supreme symbol which demonstrates that justice is central to our faith. If God was not concerned about justice, the cross would not be necessary. God could simply ignore our sins. The cross only makes sense if God is a just God. Paul describes the death of Jesus as fulfilling the righteous requirements of the law. In other words, for God to forgive humanity – his justice needed to be satisfied.

The cross is also the place where the decisive victory over evil was won (Colossians 2:15). For Christians to live cruciform lives, with this same concern for justice and demonstrating Christ's conquering of evil, we should be passionately concerned with fighting for justice in our world.

4 Seeking justice gives a foretaste of the coming kingdom of God

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven

Matthew 6:9

Some argue that working for justice now makes no sense when only human souls and the word of God are going to leave this planet. Everything else is going to be destroyed and then a new heaven and earth are going to replace them.

But seeking justice is a way we demonstrate in this world the breaking in of the coming kingdom of God. This is what we are called to pray in the Lord's Prayer. We ask that our heavenly Father's name would be honoured as God's kingly reign is revealed in the world. God is brought honour as God's reign is demonstrated in our fallen and broken world in the same way that God's perfect reign is demonstrated in heaven. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount Christians are sent into the world to shine like lights and to fight corruption like salt.



Photos: hidey and jessicaphoto / istockphoto.com

As we do shine and fight we draw a watching world to honour our Father in heaven.

Think of this: through its web of connections, **Home for Good** has a voice into approximately 15,000 churches. If one family in each of these churches chose to foster or adopt, there would be no children in the UK without a home.

5 One day justice will prevail

*Away with the noise of your songs!
I will not listen to the music of your harps.
But let justice roll on like a river,
righteousness like a never-failing stream!*

Amos 5:23-24

We long for the day when God's justice is finally revealed. Our longing prompts us to action but our action is not in vain. One day God's kingly reign will



At least 10 children are trafficked every week in the UK, forced into slavery and abuse.
UNICEF figures



be fully established, his character fully revealed and his justice will rule over all the earth. The prophet Amos writes about the coming of the day of the Lord, when God's justice will be finally revealed. At that stage, it is not singing or music that will be of value to God, but a people that will pursue justice.

There are so many reasons to pursue justice as a Christian, and my hope is these five scripture passages will encourage you to look for more. My prayer is that your love of God and your hunger for his word will motivate you to give attention to the cries of the poor and the oppressed around us all.

Krish Kandiah is the President of the London School of Theology and Founder and Director of the adoption and fostering charity **Home for Good** (www.homeforgood.org.uk) Krish and his family belong to **Cornerstone Church** in Thame, a café-style Baptist church.



We'd love to hear your responses to Krish's article. Join the conversation at: www.baptist.org.uk/justicematters



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 humbly with your God.

Micah 6:8

Following through

What does it look like when Christians are seized by a gospel imperative to respond to something they know is unfair? Three stories of how Baptists are bringing God's kingdom to their communities (with a little help from Home Mission)

Chelwood Baptist Church, Stockport

Members of **Chelwood Baptist** in Stockport reckon they belong to a church which 'punches above its weight', and it's not hard to see why. Chelwood has a small congregation (membership around 30), is based next to an area with high indicators of social deprivation, and is supported by Home Mission funding. Yet in recent years the church and its members have become involved in a range of activities to help huge numbers of people in genuine need in their community. Launching a foodbank in 2012 has proved a catalyst for much of

This is all part of being the gospel in a practical way.

the work. The inspiration and driving force was the late Marc Godwin, described as 'a champion of the underprivileged and homeless in Stockport' when he died last year. In a short film on the Chelwood Foodbank website, Marc can be seen explaining how the Foodbank came about.

"Initially the idea was going to be very simple," he said. "People would come along, need a little bit of food. If we had a bit of food in stock we would provide it for them."

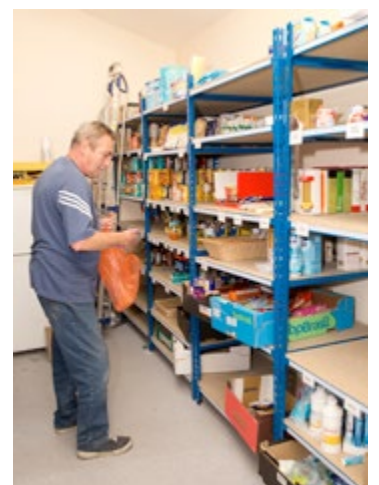
"But it mushroomed into a giant project. We became aware of other factors and decided it was in our calling to do something about it."

Chelwood has now become the foodbank hub for the Stockport South region. Opening each weekday across three locations, it serves up to 700 people each month and works with more than 60 referral agencies.

Called **Chelwood Foodbank Plus**, it's not simply in tins and packets of pasta where the church and its volunteers assist. As they learnt more about poverty and its causes, the foodbank began to provide pots, pans, plates, cutlery and electrical items for those in need, plus sleeping bags and warm clothing. From April 2013 members began to pitch up in Stockport town centre to serve food to homeless and disadvantaged people as part of a street kitchen initiative called **Loaves**



Photos: Terry McPhotography (www.terrymcphotography.co.uk)



We decided it was in our calling to do something about it

and Fishes. From small beginnings around 20 to 45 people now turn up. There is a small worship time where the team prays for the homeless community, especially for those who want a church, but not a traditional one. They are also in the process of launching new projects, such as a jobs club with *Inspired* and a money management course.

All this in spite of Marc's tragic death, aged 55, on a business trip to Glasgow to raise funds for the work in 2014.

"Marc's death was a huge shock, and we've all been trying to pick up the pieces," said Chelwood member and volunteer Anne Jones.

"But we are – we see it as God's work. We are doing it because God has told us. You don't have to look too far to find poverty and people who are struggling.

"It's easy to become complacent about troubles and pain, but we are following a need and trying to do something about it. We are a small church but this is what we can do."

The church has received a number of anonymous and extremely timely donations, underlining the sense of truly living out its strapline of *'Serving God in the Community'*. A cheque for £12,000 enabled the building of a storage room to house the food, which has proved vital.

"The scale and speed of the growth of the foodbank has amazed us," said Steve Hough, former minister and project manager of the foodbank.

"We're still coming to terms with it - where it's going, what it means.

"But what we keep on saying is that we're living out Matthew 5 ('In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven').

"This is all part of being the gospel in a practical way."

To view a longer article by Anne Jones visit www.baptist.org.uk/chelwood



Photo: Luminary Bakery

Luminary Bakery, London

Bread is one of life's staples, and baking your own one of its pleasures. But for a number of women in east London it has come to represent so much more.

The **Luminary Bakery** is helping those for whom the basic ingredients for a life of dignity were once an unattainable goal. Yes, it produces high quality baked artisanal goods, but its main focus is to give opportunities and purpose to vulnerable women who have experienced crime, prostitution, and abuse. This became a reality when in September it launched its first six-month baking training course, which teaches everything needed to obtain a job in a bakery or other food establishment and hopefully a long-term stable and alternative source of income.

Luminary's vision is "to see all women in east London provided with opportunities to leave their vulnerable situations and be released into a positive future", explains co-ordinator Alice Boyle.



Photo: Luminary Bakery

"Luminary is a welcoming and safe environment where women can nurture their innate gifts and grow holistically – encouraging ambition, restoration and second chances.

"We aim to empower and equip these women to hope for a future, and give them the tools to obtain it. By investing in and releasing them to realise their dreams we can break the generational cycles of abuse, prostitution, criminal activity and poverty."

Luminary is a social enterprise birthed from **Kahaila Café**, a creative church planting initiative in a commercial coffee shop. Since it opened with Home Mission funding in Brick Lane in 2012, it has always been more than just a place that serves great cakes with a warm welcome: in many ways Luminary is a natural outworking of the Gospel at its core.

"How do you make disciples in a place where people are unchurched?" says Baptist minister Paul Unsworth, the man behind Kahaila.

"We really felt that to achieve this was by keeping to the Great Commandment: Love the Lord God with all your heart; love your neighbour as yourself.

"But what does that mean? When we hear stories from Alice about vulnerable women, we can't just say "thanks for sharing, have a nice day." It was: "What can we do?" And how do we empower the people called to Kahaila into what God has called them?"

This commitment to the Gospel means Alice's passion and ideas for helping vulnerable women have in effect 'become flesh', something real.

Currently Luminary's creations are sold in Kahaila and a number of other outlets. At the time of writing it is operating two days a week, but there are hopes it will become a full-time, sustainable business which over the years will empower hundreds of vulnerable women to escape the chains of prostitution and abuse and live the lives they were intended to live. There are links to Pret-a-Manger, which has shown an interest in employing the first graduates of the course.

It has really grown since January 2014, and Alice says she is in her 'dream job'. As the first course began, she said, "It's such a privilege for us to be able to be a part of this process alongside them."

"We're excited for what the future holds."

For more visit:
luminarybakery.blogspot.co.uk
kahaila.com

Amigos Project, Norfolk

Low pay, long hours, cultural differences and language barriers can combine to make life difficult for the economic migrant to the UK – not to mention the prevailing political wind that seeks to be ever tougher on immigration.

In these conditions the Gospel mandate to welcome the stranger is both entirely appropriate and counter-cultural, and a Baptist-led initiative in Norfolk is showing what happens when this is lived out.

In the course of the new millennium a large Portuguese-speaking community was being attracted to the region by jobs in farms and factories. When they heard about this growing community at the Baptist World Congress in Birmingham in 2005, Brazilian-born church planters Jorge and Hermelinda Damasceno felt called to work among them.



Photo: Jorge Damasceno

Arriving in the market town of Dereham in 2006, they quickly became aware of their needs. They set about creating the **Amigos Project** with Home Mission and BMS funding, an initiative providing services and Bible studies, a food programme for those facing financial difficulties or new to the country, English language lessons, and just generally a listening ear for people to share their problems and concerns.

The focus has always been to help people integrate, as well as provide for their spiritual needs.

"If they don't integrate, it's difficult to assimilate themselves, to find their way around the UK, to understand something about the place in which



Photos: Dereham Baptist Church



they now find themselves," Jorge said at the outset of the project.

"We have met many Christians who have spiritually gone downhill and feel far from God since moving to the UK. But many of the people we meet are not Christians. We're not here to Christianise anyone and tell them they have to go to church. We are just here to share what God may do in the life of anyone who believes. I hope by our deeds they may be able to see God in our lives."

That has certainly been the result. People have not only settled in the UK, but found faith. Jorge and Hermelinda planted a Portuguese-speaking congregation right away at **Dereham Baptist Church**. Over the years this has grown and flourished, and has its own pastor. There are further congregations in Bishop's Stortford and Great Yarmouth, with another potentially to come in Norwich. Many who belong to these congregations were not Christians in their country of origin.

In addition, "working so closely with Jorge has impacted Dereham Baptist Church and its awareness of the marginalised", says minister Chris Densham.

"The whole process has helped us to have more understanding of the outsider, it has really helped us to reach out," he explains.

"It must be incredibly difficult being an immigrant these days, especially with the rise of UKIP. Here they have found somewhere that has welcomed them, and allowed them to express their culture. Missionally this has been very effective."

All three stories feature Home Mission, the Baptist family purse. For more examples of how Home Mission is helping Baptist churches and individuals reach their mission potential and bring the love of God to their communities visit: www.baptist.org.uk/hmstories To support Home Mission, visit: www.baptist.org.uk/hmgiving

We'd love to hear how you are putting justice into action - share your story at: www.baptist.org.uk/justiceaction



Exciting things are happening in the Algerian Church – and it continues to grow and grow.

Currently there are 48 registered churches in Algeria, with more waiting to be registered. Around 200 house church groups meet unofficially and 2,000 new Christians are baptised every year.



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To act justly and **to love mercy** and to walk
humbly with your God.

Micah 6:8

Is God's Justice Different from Ours?

It is not just that God's justice is different from ours; our justice is different from ours, writes **Stephen Holmes**

In 2009, Abdelbaset al-Megrahi, who had been convicted of involvement in the 'Lockerbie bombing' of Pan-Am flight 103, was released by the Scottish government on compassionate grounds, as medical advice suggested that he was dying of cancer. The transatlantic reaction was striking: even reliably liberal commentators in the USA professed themselves to be horrified and appalled by the release, while almost no mainstream voice in the UK criticised it. In Europe, we were convinced that justice meant allowing a dying man to die at home, with his family; in the USA, justice required a criminal to remain in prison until his sentence was served or he died.

My instincts on this matter, as on most such points of transatlantic dispute, are straightforwardly European. I know, however, that this is mere instinct; I do not have a developed theory of justice which demands the release of a prisoner who is dying, just a deep sense of what feels right and just to me. Listening to comment from 'across the pond', I could not doubt that people who I respected and normally agreed with, but who happened to have been to school in Cambridge, Massachusetts rather than Cambridge, England, had an equally deep sense of what felt right, that pointed in the opposite direction to mine.

God's justice is an ideal, a vision, a standard, against which we measure our best efforts and acknowledge our failures



Photo: danielvfung / istockphoto.com

God created all people; God loves all people; God's concern extends to all people; our justice must reach all people without fear or favour

Justice across cultures and history

The UK and the USA are rather similar cultures, sharing common history, a common language, and much cultural interchange at every level; if there is a difference in the idea of justice between these two cultures, then it will be no surprise that ideas of justice differ enormously across the whole spread of human culture - and across history. For St Anselm, justice required the upholding of God's personal honour; for John Calvin, it required the implacable application of a universal law; their differing views on what Christ accomplished on the cross owe much to these different views of justice.

In some human cultures justice greatly respects the social status of the two parties: in medieval European law, to murder an archbishop was a far greater offence than murdering a mere priest. We would see such distinctions as fundamentally unjust. Here, I think I can see an argument as to why we are right and they are wrong; I suppose they would have arguments as well, though. Tribal societies often see justice primarily in restoring the harmony of the tribe; hierarchical societies see it in the maintenance of good order; late modern societies see it in the maximising of individual liberty - our justice is different from ours...

God's justice

...what, then, of God's justice? We could try to argue that it is the perfection of one or another of our different theories of justice: God really is the perfect law-giver and judge, or the perfect restorer of community, or the giver of ultimate freedom. I don't find it hard to think of theologies that have been built on each of these proposals - but I think the God who calls us is rather bigger than that. All of our theories of justice are various gropings towards the perfect justice that is God's. Some may be better than others, but we cannot write any of them off, nor can we elevate any of them to a fundamental place.

So far, I have not mentioned the Bible. 'Justice' in the Pentateuch is something that must not be withheld from the disadvantaged, orphans, the poor, and widows. The judges, Samuel, and the kings are called to administer justice, and criticised when they do not. Job pleads God's justice in his cause; the writers of the Proverbs insist that God loves justice; through Isaiah, God demands justice from Israel - and then, after the return from exile, promises to fill them with justice himself. The references to 'justice' in the New Testament are surprisingly sparse. I would find it hard to offer a biblical definition of justice; the Bible seems to assume we know what is meant, and then insists that it must be properly applied.

A promise...

The Bible is certainly concerned with justice reaching those who might be excluded or marginalised by society: widows, orphans, immigrants, the poor.

We should similarly be concerned that justice is not impeded by sexism or racism - or by a denigration of the humanity of those who are disabled, who are LGBTQIA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual) or, well, whatever. None of this is a definition of justice, however; it is an account of how justice must be applied impartially to all. God created all people; God loves all people; God's concern extends to all people; our justice must reach all people without fear or favour.

We strive to do right, to do well, by all whom we meet. Generally, our laws, our distillations of the best of our wisdom, enable that; sometimes they inhibit it - the best of our wisdom is very far from perfect. God's justice is an ideal, a vision, a standard, against which we measure our best efforts and acknowledge our failures. God's justice

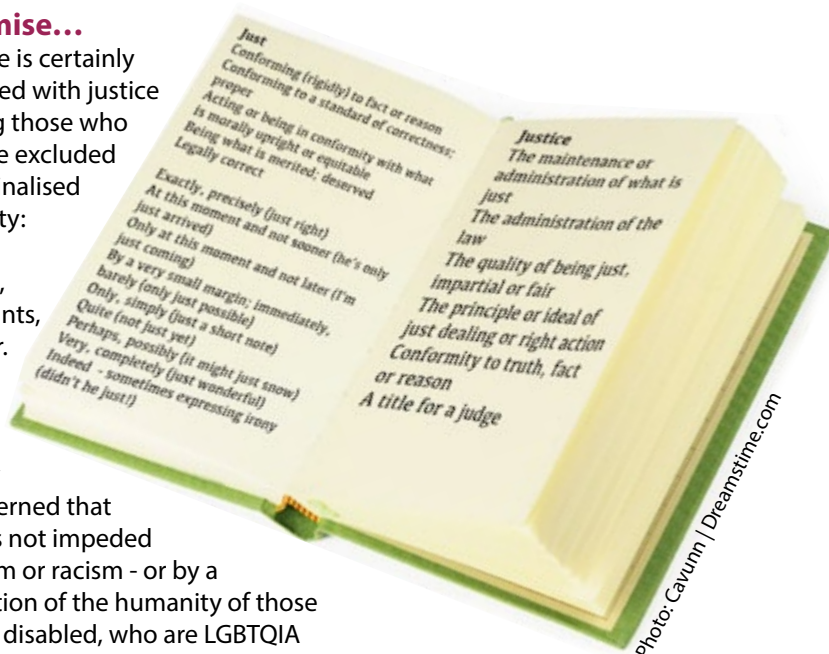


Photo: Cavunn | Dreamstime.com

is also, however, a promise: a promise that a Kingdom is coming, when every tear will be wiped from every eye, and when every pain shall cease. A promise that one day we shall awaken in God's Kingdom, and experience God's justice. I am convinced that on that day we will be astonished by the righteousness of God's justice, and that we will be astonished by the depths of God's mercy, and that we will see all God's judgements, and not have the slightest regret for any one of them.

Stephen Holmes is a Baptist minister and Senior Lecturer in Theology at The University of St Andrews



We'd love to hear your responses to Stephen's article. Join the conversation at: www.baptist.org.uk/realjustice



Photo: GlobalStock / istockphoto.com



He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy and **to walk humbly with your God.**

Micah 6:8

So many causes – so little time

Many wrongs demand our attention, so where do we devote our time and energy, asks Sarah Fegredo?

I am a feminist; I have been since my late teens and it means that I often notice things through a lens of the inequalities that exist between men and women. I get cross when the news comments on a female politician's appearance rather than her policies, or when I hear news of the indignities and worse that Indian women are subjected to on public transport. My husband on the other hand is an eco-warrior: we have recycling bins, he turns lights off, he uses a bike rather than a car whenever he can, we get our energy from a 'green' supplier. My daughter is concerned about animal rights; she insists that we eat organic, non-factory farmed meat and won't use any beauty products tested on animals.

Each of us is passionate about the causes we support, and, if I'm honest, a little less passionate, although supportive, about the causes the others get behind. What we do share is a belief that these issues are important because they are, at root, to do with justice, and so our passions are inspired and informed by an understanding that these issues matter to God because he is a God of justice. We also believe that just feeling passionate is not enough; our passion for justice has to be worked out in practice. We are required not only to think justly but to 'Act justly' (Micah 6:8), to be 'doers of the word, not just hearers' (James 1:22).

The trouble for all of us is that we are bombarded with calls for us to engage with justice issues, and not just by the Christian community. Politicians want our votes, animal charities show us pictures of kittens, aid agencies ask us to support disaster relief, we are urged to buy fairly traded goods. At church we are asked to bring tins for the food bank, money for BMS, pray for refugees, pack shoeboxes for Romania. The list goes on...

So how do we choose? Our money, energy and time are limited and sometimes we can feel overwhelmed.

Our passion for justice has to be worked out in practice.

And with the advent of social media the flow of new causes has multiplied – Facebook is awash with calls for people to click 'like' to express their support for a homeless family, or to pour a bucket of iced water over their heads to raise awareness of a disease. It's spawned a new word: 'Slacktivism'. This means expressing support for an internet cause by just clicking on 'like', retweeting, or commenting, and it means you can kid yourself that you've done something, when actually nothing much was achieved – you're an armchair warrior!



Photo: vm / istockphoto.com



Photo: BMS World Mission

So how do we choose? Our money, energy and time are limited and sometimes we can feel overwhelmed




Photo: Gateshead Foodbank

What then should our Christian response be?

There isn't a single answer but maybe there are a few things we could consider:

- » **Ask God** – pray and seek his guidance. God has a specific call for each of us; ask him to show you what yours is.
- » **Follow your passions** – a desire for justice always has its origins in God's heart so, if a particular injustice always makes you really mad, ask God to show you how you can get involved.
- » **Be open** – take a moment to listen to the notice about the night shelter, or read the BMS leaflet; God might be showing you a new thing to support.
- » **Investigate carefully** – don't waste time and money on something that turns out to be a hoax or not well organised.
- » **Is the cause in line with God's aims?** Does this organisation work in ways that are honouring to God, whether or not it's a Christian organisation?
- » **Don't feel guilty about what you don't get involved in** (and don't try to make other people feel guilty when they don't support your cause).
- » **Engage your MP** – keep him or her informed of the issues; give praise when they vote in favour of an issue.
- » **Whatever you do, be wholehearted in your support** Attend events, marches or demonstrations. Join collaborative groups working for justice such as www.citizens.org. Meet up with others who share a similar passion, discuss ideas, work together. This is not empire building, but Kingdom work

We all share a concern for justice because we all worship a God whose nature is always just, but we express that concern in different ways. The result is that many causes get support from passionate, committed people. Not only that, but the church becomes more fully a sign of the Kingdom of God where justice will roll like a mighty river.

Sarah Fegredo is Youth and Children's Pastor at West Bridgford Baptist Church in Nottingham 

Are you aware that having served the Baptist family over many years, some ministers find themselves unable to buy their own home in retirement?

WE ARE HERE TO HELP

RBMHS, an independent charity which receives no central funding, has been addressing this challenge for over 30 years to ensure ministers can enjoy a peaceful retirement in a home of their own.



RETIRED BAPTIST MINISTERS HOUSING SOCIETY

YOU CAN HELP TOO

If you are in a position to make a donation or would like further information about the Society, please contact Stewart Green, RBMHS. Call 01202 548890 or email: sgreen@rbmhs.org.uk

General Secretary Lynn Green:

Photo: Ian Britton



how seeking God's justice shapes daily decisions

Sharing a hunger for God's coming Kingdom is part of the renewed culture that we want to see become part of who we are as a movement. What does that mean for you personally?

The way we are as a movement springs from our hearts and so it is only as our hearts and lives are increasingly in step with our Father's heart that we will become what we want to be. I am still on the journey on this one and there is a lot I still need to learn, particularly when it comes to justice.

Can you give us an example of what God is challenging you about at the moment?

I am a regular reader of *The Week* and earlier this year there was a piece about the founder of Amazon and his business model. Frankly, I was shocked. Here was I happily buying books and

gifts at amazing prices while turning a blind eye to the allegations voiced in the article that it intentionally drives others out of the market place and has questionable staffing policies¹. So I have decided to buy books and gifts from other suppliers where I can. I believe that we have to challenge the 'idols' of money and speed. After all, God's values of justice are more important than me getting a good deal.

But doesn't this make life difficult for you?

Yes, it is a pain but principles demand sacrifices or they don't mean anything! Similarly, at a time when our family income was tight we had to think carefully about our commitment to buying Fairtrade food where we could. In the end we kept buying Fairtrade but

be faithful to what God is asking you to do

had to content ourselves with less to keep to our budget. In doing this we realised that we were

merely having a little taste of what life is like for many people in other parts of our world.

How do you keep God's justice as part of your family life?

Well, we do talk about things as a family like buying Fairtrade and why we still support the Nestle boycott. I think that it is important as parents that we share God's heart for justice with our children and that we live that out as best we can. Another thing we do as a whole family is collect for Christian Aid. I believe that this is a prophetic opportunity to give voice to the needs of the world's poor to our neighbours and it can also give you a chance to prayer walk at the same time.

principles demand sacrifices or they don't mean anything

What would you say to individuals who feel overwhelmed by the needs in the world?

All you need to do is be faithful to what God is asking you to do; nothing more and nothing less. Just think of the amazing role that a carer has offering gentleness, respect and just care to the elderly. And what about the manager who is able to influence his company to implement a fairer sick pay scheme? And the parent and the toddler who choose something at the supermarket for the foodbank? All these faithful offerings are caught up together like the loaves and fishes and, together in God's hands, they make an amazing difference.

¹ *The Week* condenses topical articles that appear in newspapers and online media, such as the *Huffington Post*, which carried this piece on Amazon in January 2014: <http://huff.to/1zGrCfE>



David Kerrigan (BMS World Mission) and Lynn add their voices to the 'bring back our girls' campaign at our Assembly 2014

Photo: Ian Britton

The Big Question



Responding to injustices, whether direct or indirect, aligns us with God's will and achieves extraordinary results.

What follows are answers to the question:

How have you experienced injustice – and what did you do?

Ben Cooley

I grew up in the North East of England, in a little town called Yarm and I moved over to Manchester to train as an opera singer, to wear tights and to sing arias. It was here I learnt about human trafficking at an event which local Baptist, Marion White was running at the Town Hall.

I was absolutely devastated by what I heard - 1.2 million children are sold into exploitation each year, which is about two children every minute. I had just become a father for the second time and I remember walking out of the building and thinking, 'If that were my daughter I'd do something'. The next thought I had was, 'It's always someone's daughter'.

So I did what any passionate young Christian (I was a member of **LifeChurch**, formerly **Sale Baptist Church**) would do: I booked the NEC Arena and rallied almost 6,000 people to take a stand against modern slavery! Along with Rob and Marion White and the Mainstream Network (now Fresh Streams), we started an organisation called **Hope for Justice**. That was 2008. Our work has grown ever since.

Hope for Justice identifies and rescues victims, advocates on their behalf, provides restorative care which rebuilds lives and trains frontline professionals to tackle slavery. From five offices across three continents we operate a proven multi-disciplinary model based on years of combined experience.

Our team is helping victims as young as three months old to get out of exploitation. In September 2014 we joined forces with *Abolition International* and *Transitions Global* to become one organisation in the fight against human trafficking. We have a shared passion to restore victims and end slavery in our lifetime. Together we're even stronger.

I had just become a father for the second time and I remember thinking, 'If that were my daughter I'd do something'.



Photo: Hope for Justice

Ben Cooley

Hope for Justice is a Christian organisation, and we want to inspire the Church to play its part. The service we deliver is not evangelistic, but our directors hope that our work, and the good that comes of it, speaks of the love of God. We have a great vision, which I believe is God's vision, to see freedom in our country.

Ben Cooley is the CEO of Hope for Justice. Find out how you can be involved by visiting hopeforjustice.org



HOPE FOR JUSTICE

Gary Serra di Migni

In September 2011, Munir Farooqi was given four life sentences for radicalising two undercover police officers and recruiting them to fight against Coalition forces overseas. Within 24 hours of the sentencing, his family received notice from the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) of their intention to confiscate and sell their home, and to use the proceeds to pay towards the defence costs.

When this action came to my attention, I was incredulous that such a grave injustice could take place in England in the 21st century.

I partnered with the Manchester based human rights organisation, *RAPAR*, in the Campaign to Save the Family Home, and provided the family with pastoral care; the family were isolated from their own community owing to the community's fear that by associating with them they, too, would come under suspicion.

Many Christians, including those at the North Western Baptist Association, the Ministry Department of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, and Urban Expression affirmed my support of this devout Muslim family. However, some thought that, though innocent, the family should be punished as a deterrent, and some thought that my time would be better spent ministering to people other than Muslims.

I was astonished that any Christian would sanction the punishing of innocent people, even as a deterrent, and that they would object to a Christian ministering to Muslim people. My understanding of Jesus is that He wants justice for all; that we are to love our neighbour as we love ourselves; and that there is no restriction on who we are to consider to be our neighbour.'



Gary Serra di Migni



In spite of the support of the local MP and councillors, the media, and a 10,000 word petition delivered to the CPS Manchester offices by Munir Farooqi's then nine year old daughter (about to be made homeless), the CPS decided to press on with the confiscation action. In September 2013 the Court of Appeal upheld the original conviction, and the CPS pursued their application to confiscate the family home. The dice were loaded heavily against the family; they were going to need a miracle.

In the week before the hearing, I emailed 195 praying friends and asked them to pray that the Lord would soften the judge's heart, 'so that he would not find it in himself to punish four adults and two children for crimes of which they were not guilty'.

On 23 May, after nearly four years of uncertainty and anguish, the judge ruled that it would be 'unfair to take away the home of innocent people'. What is impossible with men is possible with God!

Gary Serra di Migni is a Baptist minister who pioneered the Urban Expression Victoria Park ministry in Manchester



Photo: Zulaikha Farooqi

Do you have any 'Big Questions' you'd like us to consider in future editions of *Baptists Together*? Please email media@baptist.org.uk and let us know your ideas and suggestions.

Justice and gender based violence

The Memorial at Runnymede commemorates the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215

A speech at the House of Lords, delivered by a Baptist minister and BMS World Mission Trustee, highlighted the need for justice in the field of gender based violence (GBV)

When Baptist minister and BMS Trustee Lindsay Caplen hosted a lunch for international lawyers and their partners at the 2014 *Opening of the Legal Year* in October, she took the opportunity to give a speech on the subject of justice and GBV.

Referencing the Magna Carta, Mrs Caplen, whose husband Andrew is current President of the Law Society, challenged her influential guests to a global response while highlighting the new BMS project **Dignity**.



Andrew and Lindsay Caplen

An excerpt from her speech follows:

Lord Denning described Magna Carta as “the greatest constitutional document of all times – the foundation of the freedom of the individual against the arbitrary authority of the despot.”

The signing of Magna Carta at Runnymede in June 1215 marked the first time that limits were imposed on an English monarch’s powers. No-one should be above the law.

So where are we today? 800 years on from Magna Carta, how are we doing in terms of equality of access to justice within England and Wales? How are we doing globally? And is there further together that we should go?

If we have a dream for shared prosperity, especially in developing world markets, we cannot, we must not, ignore the lack of access to justice for the poorest and most marginalised – often women and

children. In many developing countries, aid alone will rarely be more than a ‘sticking plaster’ because it fails to address the institutionalised violence that more often than not underlies presenting poverty.

Sexual violence, forced labour, land theft, illegal detention and police brutality are the status quo... the way things are in the home, the school, the orphanage, the streets and even places of worship – that has to stop!

I have the privilege of being a trustee with BMS World Mission and we are launching a project called Dignity this year looking specifically at GBV at home and abroad. In many places, public justice systems are in a state of near collapse and there is nothing protecting the world’s poorest from violence.

I want to suggest that the principles enshrined in Magna Carta – principles of freedom, democracy and the rule of law – should challenge us today to a global response. Without such guiding principles we will never see effective public justice systems, effective delivery of aid and empowered communities.

This poses important questions for lawyers and non-lawyers alike, for if the humanity of our sisters and brothers at home or abroad is diminished, so too, I believe, is our common humanity.



BMS' Dignity initiative

BMS launched *Dignity*, a campaign to fight GBV at home and abroad, at the Baptist Assembly in Scotland in November. It brings together actions for UK churches and what BMS workers and partners are doing to combat GBV around the world.

Overseas, BMS is:

- » enabling a co-ordinated education and advocacy outreach in Uganda (UCLF), Mozambique (AMAC) and Zimbabwe (Family Impact)
- » tackling the problem through established BMS projects in Thailand (NightLight) and India (Freeset)
- » co-funding the launch of Ella's Home, a safe house and rehabilitation project in the UK
- » raising support for mission personnel who are active in this area
- » involved in advocacy work as part of the *We Will Speak Out* coalition
- » equipping leaders, individuals and congregations to understand the level of abuse encountered in communities worldwide, and to think through their response



Annette Ttendo heads BMS legal work in Mozambique



Photo: BMS World Mission

UK churches can be a part of Dignity too. Just:

- » sign up to the BMS' weekly email update to receive *Dignity* updates, related stories and news of BMS
- » mobilise your church by using the *Dignity* DVD resource. It includes a theological overview of GBV by Stephen Holmes, small group discussion material from David Kerrigan and others, and stories that unpack how GBV is affecting women and girls in a cross-section of countries where BMS operate
- » join the BMS 24:7 Justice Partners scheme
- » get updates on the initiative by liking the BMS Facebook page and following the *Dignity* blog <http://dignity-gbv.tumblr.com/>

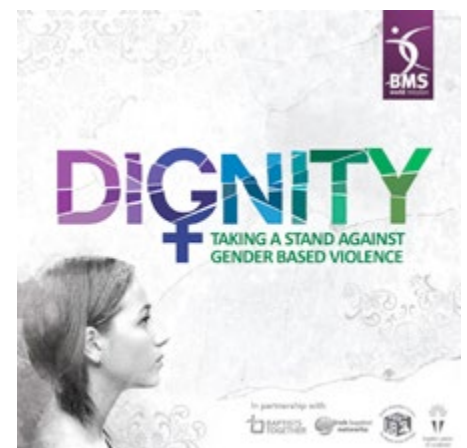
For more information on all of these action points, go to bmsworldmission.org/dignity

Lindsay Caplen's full speech can be read at <http://bit.ly/lindsaycaplenspeech>.



Photo: BMS World Mission

Youth Alpha course in Zimbabwe



The Justice Generation

Those born in the 1980s and 90s belong to a generation for whom 'ethics is the new spirituality', according to *Fusion*, a Christian ministry to the student world.

In its White Paper *Discipleship and Gen Y*, author Hannah Bowring writes: 'They are a generation passionate about justice, whether or not they have a faith. For Christian 'Gen Yers', justice is part of their holiness and they will value being challenged and will bring challenge around that area.'

BMS World Mission is one organisation providing that challenge for young Christians. With its **Action Teams** and various placements around the world, it gives space and opportunities to channel this heart for justice and help young people grow in discipleship. The following three stories explain more...



Photo: Chantelle Baker

Uganda is a country where suspects can languish for years in prison without a trial, where there is no right to a lawyer in court, where remand periods are exceeded and corruption is rife. **Robert Dunn** is delighted to be there.

Legal graduate Robert, 22, travelled to Uganda in September 2014 to start an internship with the **Uganda Christian Lawyers' Fraternity (UCLF)**, a BMS World Mission partner.

"My main motivation for undertaking this internship with UCLF is to serve God and his desire for justice," he explains. "The God of the Bible is a just and holy God, and his yearning for justice is clear throughout the Bible: 'Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy in court' (Proverbs 22:22).



Photo: Robert Dunn

The team from UCLF prepare for a session with villagers at which Robert gave a talk on Land Rights in Uganda

"Consequently, I am tremendously passionate about justice."

One of his roles is to work closely with prisoners on their cases and advise others how to represent themselves before the court.

More generally he is teaching legal and human rights in prisons ("vital for increasing awareness of the standards by which the State should be abiding"). It's difficult and frustrating work, but exactly where Robert wants to be, "for UCLF is changing this unjust culture in Uganda's legal system". Through efforts of interns and local staff alike, the average jail term pre-trial has fallen to three years, hundreds of people have been freely represented and an action challenging the corrupt practice

of 'court fees' in additional to bail succeeded in Uganda's highest courts. "The lives of the world's poor and needy are truly being bettered," Robert says. "But there is a long way to go.

"This internship therefore is something I was so desperate to be a part of. It is a fantastic opportunity for God to use me to make a difference in the Ugandan legal system, and in the lives of those who rely upon it.

"I am under no illusions about the issues I will face, but I have been given the gift of an array of legal abilities and wish to best use them to serve God. UCLF's mission statement is to 'act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God' (Micah 6:8) and this is what I hope to do in Uganda." →



Photo: Robert Dunn

John Osapiri from UCLF gives a talk on succession law to villagers and village leaders in Buikwe District



Photo: Michael David - www.michaeldaviddigital.com



Christina Howell (left) with fellow Action Team Members Matthew Cant and Leah Ninsiima

Right from an early age **Christina Howell**, 24, had an acute sense of right and wrong. "It wasn't just worrying about people - I remember as a child asking, "Mummy, why do animals have to suffer?" I was really concerned!" This sense of fairness has continued to exercise her thoughts, both through schooling and into adulthood. After studying law, Christina is now serving with a BMS Action Team in Kolkata, where she is working predominantly with the **Good News Children's Education Mission (GNCEM)**, which runs several mobile schools for street and slum dwelling children around Kolkata. She is also working at **Entally Girls' Hostel**, where she is getting to know the girls living there, and at **Freeset**, an organisation that takes women out of Kolkata's sex trade and gives them a job making bags and t-shirts.

Beyond Kolkata, other plans are unfolding. One of her great loves is advocacy and Christina will begin a Masters in Corporate Law and Governance at Portsmouth University in September. She would eventually like to return to her native Jamaica and plough her training and gifts into a business or charity there. In her home country the politicians "are good at elections, and campaigning, but not when it comes to running the country."

"It's plagued with bad governance," she explains. "The money is used on elections, not infrastructure." Put simply, injustice pains her. "When I think that God has blessed each country with enough, but there is such cruelty, I really struggle. Is God comfortable with all this injustice? Is he upset when he sees how we treat each other unjustly?"

But crying out to God has both deepened her faith and strengthened her own resolve to be part of the solution, she admits.

"I talk honestly to God about it - I cry sometimes. But I have to remember this is a God of justice. He made us in his likeness. We have a unique value. "I know God is upset. I know that he is faithful. He is still in the business of righting wrongs and raising up his people. It strengthens my faith and I commit to do what I can: I try to be kind, compassionate, show love, encourage and motivate where I can. I think about how can I use my gifts advocating to help those who are disadvantaged."



Christina working with children in Kolkata

Photo: BMS World Mission



Photo: BMS World Mission

Going on a BMS Action Team aged 18 was pivotal for **Mark Ulanowski**. Mark is the minister in training at **Woodbridge Quay Church** in Suffolk and traces his route towards Baptist church leadership to that time spent in Thailand 13 years ago.

“When I was there, that was the time I really felt a call, though I don’t think I would have expressed it at the time. If someone had said “you are going to be a minister”, I would have said “no way”, but looking back at what’s happened, that’s where it started.

“You go on an Action Team to discover what God has for you. It just gave me that space. It gave me a heart for the vulnerable, and opened my eyes to how most of the world lives.”

In Thailand he was involved in both agricultural projects and teaching, and on his return wanted to channel that energy and experience. The ‘logical’ next step was to get into youth work, and he later took up a role with *Youth for Christ*. His desire to help the disadvantaged led him into work with autistic children.



Photo: BMS World Mission

Mark serving with an Action Team in Thailand

Still, none of these positions had a sense of permanence about them. “I had a real sense of call about going to Thailand; then over the years I longed for the same sense of call again. I never stayed in a long term, full time career. For a lot of the time I felt lost. I had the sense of call but didn’t know where to take it.”

There were times when Mark felt like selling all his possessions and “going to Africa to help the poor.”

But while some people are called to that, he began to realise a greater truth: responding to the injustice in the world meant seeking Jesus with all his heart. “It’s about the underlying reasons why the world is as it is: the world is unjust and divided because of sin. The only person who can turn that around is God.

“So when you get back to basics it’s all about God: doing what he wants you to do, giving everything to him. I need to find the exact place God wants me to be; be doing what he wants me to do.”

The place was full-time ministry – and Baptist ministry at that (“this is the church family I grew up in and there’s something special about being part of this family;” he says).

“When I was on my way to the Ministerial Recognition, I just had that sense that it was going to be ok; that this was the fulfilment of my time in Thailand.

“The fact that I’m here at Spurgeon’s College makes sense of the last ten years. It’s an incredible witness to the power of Action Teams to people. God knows, and he has a plan for you.”



Photo: BMS World Mission

For further reading:

Discipleship and Gen Y – Hannah Bowring (Fusion)

For more on BMS Action teams visit: www.bmsworldmission.org/actionteams





Photo: SandraKavas / istockphoto.com

Learning from Rotherham

What does it mean to place the needs and well-being of children at the very heart of our shared life?

By **Linda Hopkins**

The reports of cases of child sexual exploitation (CSE) in Rotherham should have shocked us all. In Alexis Jay's independent report it was estimated that between 1997 and 2013, 1400 children were victims of sexual exploitation and abuse in the Rotherham area. While what has been uncovered in South Yorkshire is shocking, sadly it is not the only place such things occur. In a response to the Rotherham report Camila Batmanghelidjh, the flamboyant director of the charity *Kids Company* challenges us to look wider when she says that 'currently thousands of girls and boys are being harmed in street gangs, used as sexual trophies, violated without being afforded protection'.

There are many things that are saddening from the findings in Rotherham; one of these is the blame that was put on the victims, the children, for their own abuse, which caused professionals to overlook the

Have we placed children in the centre of all that we do?



Photo: www.istockphoto.com/jane

crimes being perpetrated. Some of these children were labeled 'out of control' or 'slags' and were deemed to have got themselves into their own mess. Yet what these cases highlight is the vulnerability of the young girls caught up in a cycle of abuse and sexual exploitation. Some were as young as 11 years old, many lived in care, others had troubled home lives.

In Mark 10 we read the account of Jesus welcoming the little children that parents were bringing to him for a blessing. The disciples wanted to move them along out of the way, but Jesus rebuked them for doing this, instead taking the children into his arms and blessing them. In his actions Jesus takes these vulnerable and weak children, with no importance or status in their society, and shows how important they are, not only through the act of blessing but also in his profound words that 'the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these'.

Sometimes we may forget that children are vulnerable in our society, particularly young teens who, quite rightly, at a time of transition are finding their way into adulthood. We need to allow children to take risks, to explore and to take increasing responsibility for themselves, but whilst they are still children (and into early adulthood), they need protective, parental care. When we recognise the vulnerability of children, including those that we or society may label as ‘troublesome’ or ‘problem’, we will remember that the call of the Gospel is one to care for the weakest and most vulnerable, to seek justice for them, to bring liberation from oppression and to seek their wellbeing.

In the story of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:40) Jesus said, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me”. Compare this to his placing of the child in the centre in Mark 9 and saying “whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me”. When did we see one of the ‘least of these’ hungry, thirsty, sick, in trouble? When did we have concern over the behaviour or wellbeing of a child or young person? Have we placed children in the centre of all that we do? Our Christian response should be one of compassion and

It requires us to see in often challenging people and situations the person of Christ.

often involves practical action towards the least of these in our society. This requires eyes, ears and hearts that are open to see, hear and respond to what the most vulnerable are saying; taking their actions and cries for help seriously. It requires us to see, in often challenging people and situations, the person of Christ.

Rotherham’s CSE cases highlight that some of the most vulnerable in

our society are children who through no fault of their own have been labeled as ‘problematic’ and their plight overlooked. It also highlights that many children will not readily say that there is a problem because they are too scared to do so, or feel that what is happening to them is their own fault. Children need to be able to have adult figures that really listen to them, that they can trust, and who have their best interests at heart.

Children need to be able to have adult figures that really listen to them

Of course all of this should make us more aware of the need for safeguarding policies and practices in our churches that are robust. Yet a policy in itself is not enough if it is seen as a set of dry rules and regulations, or just there to protect those in positions of power. Our policies towards working with children and young people in our churches must be driven by a Gospel desire for justice and love towards the least of these, seeing Christ in the children in our churches and in our communities. And our practices should be shaped around placing the child at the centre, welcoming them, and doing the absolute best that we can to protect them and seek their wellbeing.

Linda Hopkins is a Tutor at the Northern Baptist College. She co-authored *Starting from Scratch in the Grove Youth series*



Photo: Mark Stay / istockphoto.com

How are you welcoming, protecting and putting children at the centre? Share your story at: www.baptist.org.uk/justicechildren

Through a child's eyes

As explored earlier in this magazine (p12-13) many people have different views and theories of what justice means, based on their own experiences and understandings of the culture and society in which they live. With perhaps a more instinctive grasp of right and wrong, how do our children view the world?

The following responses are all from children and young people in Baptist churches to the question:

If you could ask God to change anything to make the world a fairer place, what would it be?

Photo: Sally Bradshaw / freeimages.com



World peace, and general equality in everything: food, housing, money, water

Everyone to be able to go to school, whatever colour they are and if they are male or female

If everyone could have turns at the same time, rather than having to wait

Everyone had the same things

Enough money for everyone

Equal rights

Sharing food, water and education

A home for everyone

No homeless people

Everyone would share food so we would all have enough

That people have equal opportunities in spite of their circumstances

Give us a willingness to share what we have

People should have equal opportunities to happiness and success and more understanding and accepting attitudes towards others

If there were no losers and everyone was a winner

Everyone had lots of toys

Everybody share toys when friends visit

Give us more empathy so that we can understand what it's like being in other people's shoes

Remove poverty and conflict

Stop suffering

Stop my brother from fighting with me

Stop war

No killing animals

No child cruelty

Domestic violence and rape to stop. It is brutal and destroys the lives of the victims

Letting people be Christians if they want to be

I would want to ask God to make people more accepting of others.

No prejudice and judging of anyone

The right to be who you want to be, and to be accepted for that

We want God to give us the ability to see differences in others as a good thing, not a reason to judge

To make the world a fairer place we want everyone to value people the way God values them and to value the differences in other people

Give us a willingness to change, and an acceptance of other people's mistakes

That the world would be a more accepting and selfless place to live in

People's patience levels: if people were more patient, a lot of the world's problems would be resolved

I would ask God to give everyone a permanent smile. So even when people are sad we can still share smiles. This might stop people doing bad things to each other round the world

Less/no hopelessness, because with hope, you can endure even the worst things

Remove flags, so people unify around the world

That God would make every single thing in the world free

The important thing is to change people's mindsets. If you change the way people see it, the situation will change, but if you only change the situation and not people's way of thinking, it will quickly revert to how it was

Give us a willingness to listen and acknowledge everyone's opinions

We want God to give us a vision to see the whole picture

More peace, love and happiness for every individual

To ponder – how would you respond to the question: 'If you could ask God to change anything to make the world a fairer place, what would it be?'



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Open to God?

It was just another normal working day, and as is so often the case in Regional Ministry, you rush from appointment to appointment without always recognising the significance of what you are doing. This was a regular gathering of our newly accredited ministers; it was for them, not for me, but it's important that as a Regional Minister you're there – there to show your interest and support – even if your mind is really elsewhere.

The theme was the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit – good topic I thought; good for them to reflect, a year or so into their first pastorates, on where and how their ministry is empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit. But then, just when I was least expecting it – God decided that this session was for me too.

I'd been pretty busy in helping steer through some quite significant changes in our life as Baptists Together. Not all of those have been easy, some were painful, many were not fully understood, but even in all of that, there was general recognition of the need for a new and different beginning. Our plans were broad and wide ranging – new structures; new strategies, new publications; new appointments; new ideas, new roles – we were indeed making all things new!

But then came that moment of encounter, it was not that any of these ideas were particularly wrong, but God's people are not primarily changed and renewed by plans and strategy, they are, they always have been and they always will be, renewed by the Spirit of God. If our Union is to become that to which we aspire, that which we believe God has laid it upon our hearts to become – it will not be through any programmes that we have devised, but through the anointing and renewing of God's Spirit upon us.

My journey to faith took place against the backdrop of what is often called the 'Charismatic renewal' of the 1980s – my early days of ministry were shaped and influenced by a further renewal movement, often associated with what came to be known as the 'Toronto Blessing'. Such events have often been the source of as much concern and dispute as they have blessing, but what each taught me was that the building of God's church is first and foremost God's business.

I have great hopes for our Baptist Union; I cannot escape a deep sense of privilege to have been included in God's purposes as we have moved forward. Yet I would argue that if there is ONE question that emerges from all we have sought to do in the last couple of years it is this – how can we truly become and remain a people who are anointed, shaped and led by the Spirit of God?

Phil Jump is the Regional Minister
Team Leader at the North Western
Baptist Association



Jamaica British Baptist bicentenary celebrated

"A time of great moment and pause"

A series of events to mark the bicentenary of the relationship between Jamaican and British Baptists took place in the autumn.

They began with the Annual Sam Sharpe Lecture, delivered by Baptist theologian Delroy Reid-Salmon in Bristol, and ended with a celebration at Perry Rise Baptist Church in London, a multi-cultural church which is an embodiment of the flourishing partnership between Jamaican and British Baptists. Various discussions and reflections took place throughout the country, and a special service was even broadcast live on BBC Radio 4.

Karl Johnson, Jamaica Baptist Union General Secretary (pictured), was part of a Jamaican delegation to mark this milestone.



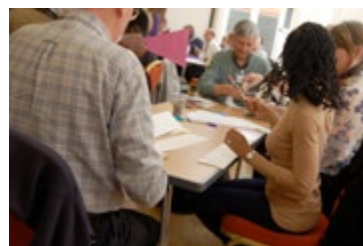
Mr Johnson said, 'My colleague, Karl Henlin, and I felt privileged to share in some of the events planned by the Baptist Union and BMS in the United Kingdom to mark the bicentenary of the partnership between British and Jamaican Baptists.

'It was for me a time of great moment and pause. In an age blinded by the disease of 'now-ness' I couldn't help but be struck again by the reminder that life doesn't begin and/nor end with us. It challenged me anew to be thankful for those upon whose shoulders we now stand and to be ready to provide our shoulders for others to do so in the future.'

For full details and report visit www.200years.net

Baptist Union Council

The latest Baptist Union Council took place in November when almost 80 people, drawn from local Baptist Churches, Associations, Colleges and Specialist Teams gathered for two days to discuss and reflect on a range of issues facing our Union.



It was the third time Council has met since the reforms of the Futures process, which encouraged a move from the parliamentary-style debating culture towards one that intentionally makes space to listen deeply to God. To this end substantial time was spent in worship, prayer, silence and openness to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

The agenda covered a wide spectrum of items, including retired ministers' housing and the future of ministry to our understanding of covenant and freedom of conscience.

A review of the role of the President was shared and agreed. Nominations have been sought for the President 2016-2017 (Vice President 2015-2016).

Rounding up, General Secretary Lynn Green reflected that, as we have prayed together and taken account of our context, two key priorities have emerged for us as a whole movement: mission, especially pioneering, and equipping churches and leaders through the Ministries Project.

A full report can be found at www.baptist.org.uk/councilnov14

How should I vote?

The General Election is the focus of the latest resource from the *Joint Public Issues Team*

2015 will be a General Election year which means that thousands of Baptist Christians will be among those who are involved in the selection of our next Government. Should being a Christian make a difference to the way we vote, and if so how?

Asking questions like these is just one of the ways in which our Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) supports, challenges and represents local churches as they engage in public life – and is the focus of its new resource.

Our sense of justice lies at the very heart of our human existence - 'It's not fair' is one of the earliest complaints that we recite in childhood. That sense of fairness is something that can easily be open to manipulation when we allow ourselves to be fed particular perspectives and 'spin' on matters of concern. Nowhere has this been more evident in recent months than in the political arena, and signs are that, as the election campaign gathers momentum, if anything it will escalate. Issues of migration, welfare benefit, public sector pay and the like have all been presented to the electorate in terms of 'them' making unfair demands on 'us'. Being a people of justice is not simply a matter of speaking out when we sense that things are unfair, but also asking ourselves questions about how our opinions have been formed in such circumstances.

Ways to engage with JPIT:

Visit www.jointpublicissues.org.uk

Sign up for the JPIT monthly newsletter:

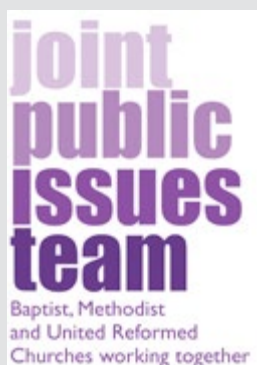
www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/newsletter

Follow on Twitter: @publicissues

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Subscribe to the JPIT blog:

www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/subscribe-to-praxis



LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR
THINK, PRAY, VOTE

NEWS



Without seeking to represent any party-political view, or indeed predict how Jesus might cast his vote in the forthcoming election, this is what lies at the heart of the forthcoming JPIT resource 'Love Your Neighbour - think, pray, vote'.

Taking the words of Jesus, it seeks to help us remember that how we conduct any aspect of our lives is not simply a matter of Christians acting in self-interest: our call is to seek the purposes and values of God's Kingdom and act for the common good of all.

The resource will be launched in February and is available for churches to use during the election campaign.

JPIT was set up in 2006 to draw together the combined expertise of our Baptist Union, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church, and exists to promote equality and justice, both by influencing those in power and by energising and supporting local congregations.

"We believe that justice concerns belong at the heart of our faith," said Stephen Keyworth, who in his capacity as Faith and Society Team Leader is directly involved in JPIT's work.

"Consequently I believe the Joint Public Issues Team to be an invaluable resource for Baptists. Injustice plagues our society and beyond, and through the work of JPIT we have access to research and thinking that not only better informs us, but gives us the space to discern our own response as disciples of Christ on many important issues."



Events



Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

The theme for 2015 is 'The Well is Deep' which comes to us from the churches of Brazil

18-25 January

www.ctbi.org.uk/CGE/681



Education Sunday

A national day of prayer and celebration for everyone involved in the world of education

1 February

www.educationsunday.org.uk



BMS World Mission Day of Prayer

A day to set aside time to pray for the work of mission, along with BMS staff in the UK and mission personnel around the world

2 February

www.bmsworldmission.org



Church Action on Poverty Sunday

A day to focus on working together to close the gap between rich and poor

15 February

www.church-poverty.org.uk/sunday



Lent

18 February – 2 April



Love your neighbour: Think, pray, vote

Joint Public Issues Team Conference to help us engage effectively on social issues in the run up to the General Election

21 February

www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/loveyourneighbour



Fairtrade fortnight

Two weeks of events and promotions to make sure the message of Fairtrade is getting a national voice

23 February – 8 March

www.fairtrade.org.uk



Women's World Day of Prayer

This year's service has been written by women of The Bahamas

6 March

www.wwdp.org.uk/resources



Mothering Sunday

15 March



Baptist Union Council

16-17 March



Easter Sunday

5 April



Christian Aid Week

An opportunity to support and pray for the work of Christian Aid throughout the world

10 – 16 May

www.christianaid.org.uk/getinvolved/christianaidweek



Baptist Assembly

Join us with a group from your church at the 2015 Baptist Assembly in Peterborough

16 May

www.baptistassembly.org.uk

Prayer Requests

Do you have a prayer request or update to share with the wider Baptist family?

Share them at

www.baptist.org.uk/prayerrequests



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Resources

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Prayer

The prayer section of our website has now been expanded to include links to topical prayers, and an opportunity to submit your own prayer requests. Please see www.baptist.org.uk/prayerrequests

For links to **general prayer resources** see www.baptist.org.uk/prayerandworship

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The Call

'Let justice roll down like a river, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.'

The call of God – we hear it in our worship, it cries out to us in our communities, it challenges our nation, and echoes round our world.

'Bring in justice and righteousness, work for a world that is better, and never give up, never give in, never let the process stop.'

Here, in prayer and worship, we wrestle with the call. With no easy answers, no instant promises but the words that tell us what is required of every one of us: 'Act justly, love mercy, walk humbly with your God.'

The Justice of Jesus

You said: "The Spirit of God has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor."

You sat with the outcast, shared with the needy and stood by the side of the lowly:

This is your justice, Jesus.

You said: "God sent me to proclaim freedom for those in prison."

You offered forgiveness to those who could not forgive themselves, you broke that which bound and constrained and brought the relief of liberation:

This is your justice, Jesus.

You said: "God sent me to proclaim the recovery of sight for the blind."

You gently opened eyes that were tight shut, poured light into dark places and made the sick whole:

This is your justice, Jesus.

You said: "God sent me to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

You shared your treasures with women, did not judge others and helped people believe in a God of hope:

This is your justice, Jesus.

You are the Christ – the grace of God made flesh for us.



© Mike7777777 | Dreamstime.com - Waterfall, Cullin Mountains, Isle Of Skye, Scotland Photo

A Kingdom Litany

When the world is weary of doing what is right and good:

Your kingdom come through us we pray.

When war, aggression and violence seem to be spiralling out of control:

Your kingdom come through us we pray.

When people around us feel lost and don't know where they belong:

Your kingdom come through us we pray.

When hope is hard to find and despair is knocking at the door:

Your kingdom come through us we pray.

When families struggle to know where the next meal will come from:

Your kingdom come through us we pray.

When prejudice seems to be the easy way and injustice its result:

Your kingdom come through us we pray.

Jesus taught us to pray for the coming of your kingdom; through our willing hearts and hands may your kingdom come and your will be done.

those who seek to offer pastoral care for those facing the prospect of months or years in the interminable wrangling of a legal system they struggle to understand:

God, hear us.

Hear us, gracious God, and let your Spirit working in us inspire us to new leaps of faith and love as we seek to make your love and care a reality in this world.

A New Year, a New Hope and a Blessing

Ever hopeful God, in Jesus Christ and his resurrection you teach us never to give up hope, even when life brings us to a cross. At the beginning of this new year, fill our hearts with hope for increasing justice and peace in our world, and give us the strength and determination to work with your Spirit in changing the world around us.

May eyes to see things differently be yours;
 May ears to hear stories in new ways be yours;
 May mouths to speak fresh hope be yours;
 and in this new year may God bless you.

David Warrington is Pastor Grove Lane Baptist Church, Cheadle Hulme

Praying Justice into Being

Gracious God, at our time of need you came alongside us in Jesus, sharing our flesh; help us to come alongside those in need so that they might know you as a God who cares, when life throws them little but unending difficulties.

We pray for all those who go on a journey to find a different life for themselves and their families, for asylum seekers fleeing attack and hostility, for economic migrants simply seeking something better:

God, hear us.

We pray for those who struggle to find life's basic needs, food, water and shelter; we pray for foodbanks and all those who seek to help:

God, hear us.

We pray for all those who live life on the streets of our cities and towns, encountering danger and finding themselves in situations of risk; we pray for all street pastors and street walkers:

God, hear us.

We pray for all who seek to make justice a reality in this country and abroad, for solicitors working for little or no money, for legal aid workers and for all



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An interview with

Stuart Blythe

Stuart became the Rector of the International Baptist Theological Study Centre in the summer of 2014, the first former graduate to do so. Previously he was a lecturer at the Scottish Baptist College. He has also had ministries in the Scottish Baptist churches at Springburn and Kirkintilloch.

Can you talk about how you became a Christian?

I was brought up in a family who didn't attend church, but they sent their kids to Sunday school on a Sunday afternoon. At the age of 10/11 my dad died, and clearly that had a big impact on me as a young child.

One summer not long after that I was attending a children's club in a local Nazarene church, and somehow the message on the Friday night connected with me. In hindsight I know now it was a Gospel message: it captured my heart.

You describe yourself as a 'convictional Baptist' – what do you mean by that?

I think the way we do church actually matters. In Baptist and, for me, Anabaptist practices, there is a way of doing church that resonates with the gospel. There are practices within Baptist and Anabaptist churches that are ways in which we can be a witness to the world. In that sense it's convictional, it's something that resonates with me as being important and true, and therefore I adhere to them.

Can you describe the impact IBTS has had on your life, and did you ever think that one day you'd be in this position?

No, I never thought I'd be in this position! When my wife Susanne and I went to study in Rüsclikon – the original IBTS – it was a huge culture shock, because we were suddenly exposed to a huge variety of Baptist ways of doing church. It helped us to re-explore what we believed, and why we believed it. I'd say it was the most formative period in my life.

I had gone there because I wanted to do a BD. It was the only real option in a Baptist context in Scotland at the time, so at that point, thinking that one day I'd be the rector of this institution never entered my head. I think I'm an accidental academic – I'm interested in academic study in relationship to practice.

And how would you describe IBTS' importance to the wider Baptist family?

That's something I keep reflecting on. Historically it has helped produce and provide leaders, particularly in Europe, both in Unions and in churches and some of our colleges. At present it offers an opportunity for people to study in issues related to their own context, but to do that with an international perspective.



The other thing IBTS does is look at Europe as an entity. Folk can either come and look at that European perspective, or they can come to study locally, but in the light of the international. They are exposed to the variety of views of teachers and students from a variety of contexts.

What role can Scottish churches play following the referendum on independence?

When the referendum was announced, I thought it provided an opportunity for Baptist churches to try and work out how they think the issue of mission and discipleship relates to the wider social/economic/political context. I'm not sure how many of them did that.

A number have talked about being involved in reconciliation. I hope what it has done is raise for Scottish Baptist churches that the socio/political environment is one in which we have to try and do our mission.

You wrote about Baptists not discerning their thoughts on independence through the church meeting ... do you think the church meeting has lost something?

I don't know whether it's lost something, because I'm not really sure what 'it' ever was! I think it needs to discover something: what does it mean for us to meet together and to try and discern what the living Christ is saying to us in our context? I think that should include issues of mission and ministry, rather than simply the practicalities of how we manage church, or how many cupboards should be in our new kitchen.

It is an exciting opportunity that folk in Baptist churches have.

What's your favourite worship song/hymn?

It's an old one - Be thou my vision – but probably played to a little bit of Celtic beat!

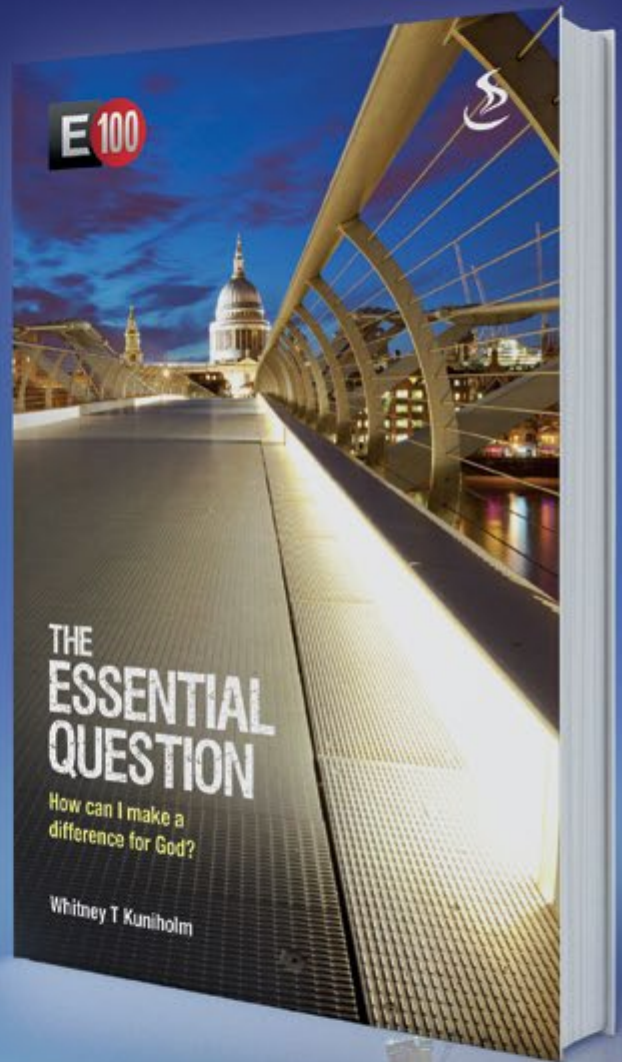
View Stuart's interview at: www.baptist.org.uk/sblythe

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