



23 September, 2015

Courage... and encouragement

Nine Baptist churches founded in 1640 gathered for a 375th celebration at Broadmead Baptist Church in Bristol on Saturday (19 September). It was both a time of looking back but also ahead, explains the Revd Paul Burnish, minister of one of the churches

The 1640 churches are: Abbey Baptist Church, Reading; Broadmead, Bristol; Alcester, Warwickshire; Kingsbridge, Devon; Castle Hill, Warwick; Dagnall Street, St Albans; Newbury; Kings Stanley, Gloucs and Berkhamsted, Herts

The day dawned misty but dry and large coaches, small coaches, mini buses and cars set out from all our nine 1640 churches to join together for our special joint anniversary service.

Heavy traffic, road works and finding parking places caused a number of last minute headaches but members of all our fellowships eventually made it to Broadmead Baptist church in the centre of Bristol.

What a delightful welcome we received and what a beautiful setting to share this special time together. We sang, with gusto, some wonderfully uplifting hymns and we were treated to hearing stories of the last 25 years - we had last gathered together for the 350th anniversary - of ups and downs of some of our fellowships.

Most of us were able to empathise with these stories as we had experience some, if not all, of the same ups and downs within our own fellowships.

Former Baptist Union General Secretary the Revd Jonathan Edwards, a member of Newbury Baptist Church in Berkshire, took the theme of "Courageous Faith" as his message and said that like our forefathers we needed to be courageous in our faith.

Courage, not in our case, to stand up and risk imprisonment, but for us to stand up against indifference, against injustice, against faiths without Christian truths. Courage to leave our comfort zones, both as church fellowships and as individuals.

To truly seek where God wants us to be, as we move forward into the next 25 years and to always remember that when we do this we are never alone, but that God will walk with us and graciously bless us along the way.

He also asked that as we go forward, we do so as encouragers. Encouragement is such a wonderful gift to give, and we should strive to give it as often and as fully as we can, one to another within our own fellowships and to each other's Fellowships as we journey together in the coming years.

Next we had the thrill of singing for the very first time [the hymn written specially for us by Graham Kendrick](#). How good was that!

Graham had adapted a hymn originally written by Benjamin Beddome (1717-1795), the son of John Beddome, the minister of Alcester Baptist Church. Benjamin was a prolific hymn writer and minister of Bourton on the Water Baptist Church.

The third verse recognised that the task of "Making Jesus known" is still unfinished.

It recognised our fellowships are small and so our workforce is limited thus making the task harder.

But, if we ask God to help us to renew our vision, faith and obedience, together we can reap a greater harvest for God. Indeed, one of the aspects of our time together was the sense of "What next? In what ways can we take the encouragements of today and continue to support each other?"

During our prayers we were encouraged to say together The Lord's prayer – but not mumbled into our shoes, as is often the case, but with joyful "shouts" – to raise up all those precious words in a truly meaningful way.

So many things to share together and to take back to our fellowships in Warwick, Kingsbridge, St Albans, Berkhamsted, Reading, Kings Stanley, Newbury, Alcester, Bristol.

Our afternoon was rounded off by sharing together a time to chat over platefuls of beautiful sandwiches and cakes, for which we thank our Broadmead hosts.

The party had to end and at 6.00pm we set off back to our respective home towns, uplifted, challenged, encouraged and determined that, as the present custodians of our churches, we would strive to do our utmost to grow our churches and make Jesus known as widely as possible within our communities, in the years to come.

This wasn't just a celebration of the past, it was an encouragement for the future.

Further reflections

The Revd Paul Burnish, minister of Abbey Baptist Church, Reading: "The

historic influence of these churches is fascinating and truly global from Britain to the Caribbean, to the Sub Continent, to Africa, to Australia, taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. They have produced theologians and practical Christians who have been united in a common aim to share Christ.

'The churches themselves are full of history; for example Broadmead sent out and supported William Knibb to Jamaica who was influential in the abolition of slavery and also Joshua Marshman who went to India with William Carey and they still support Serampore College which he helped to found.

'The churches are also still active in their communities seeking to bring light into darkness and freedom to the oppressed. Our aim of bringing new life in Christ has remained the same over the last 374 years.'

The Revd John Houseago, minister of Broadmead Baptist Church, appreciated the following:

1. The genuine good will through the planning stages
2. Jonathan's meticulous preparation and excellent address
3. The ordinariness of God's faithfulness in the life of the churches
4. The conversations shared before and after the service
5. The number of people who remembered the 350th anniversary

The Revd Peter Burns, minister of Castle Hill Baptist Church in Warwick said, 'How great it was to hear real life stories of churches that have known their struggles over the last 25 years (undoubtedly in common with previous generations) and yet have come through with strength and renewed passion to see God at work in ordinary communities served by an extraordinary God.

'It was tremendously exciting too to receive Jonathan's challenge to go on encouraging one another with thankfulness for the blessings of the past.'

Stephen Ashby, minister of Berkhamsted Baptist Church, Herts, said, 'For those who attended 25 years ago at the 350 Anniversary - It was a poignant time of reflection on how God had been faithful in the challenges of life and the life of our churches.

'Jonathan Edwards sermon was both forward looking, inspiring and practical in its application

'Most commented on the balance of traditional and modern forms of worship representing the diversity of the nine churches In spite of the distance to travel it was well worth the effort - a milestone in our own church's life. Everybody was pleased they had come.

'Talk in the mini bus on the way home about the 400th Anniversary - we

wondered!

**The Revd Paul Burnish is minister of Abbey Baptist Church,
Reading**

Baptists join Refugee Welcome Board

As the refugee crisis deepens, Baptist involvement continues to grow

A [National Refugee Welcome Board has now been launched](#) (15/9), which will provide practical support to help councils and communities to resettle people who arrive in Britain fleeing war and violence, as well as finding them accommodation.

Several days earlier (11/9) the Revd Lynn Green, General Secretary of our Baptist Union, had issued [a statement calling for the creation of such a board](#) to enable a co-ordinated response to the refugee crisis.

Because of this support and involvement, Baptists have been invited to join. Regional Minister the Revd Phil Jump, currently a member of the Joint Public Issues Team, will attend its first meeting in October.

The Refugee Welcome Board has been formed by the campaigning groups [Citizens UK](#) and [38 Degrees](#).

It will 'make sure Britain doesn't miss any opportunities to help', said 38 Degrees on its website, by coordinating refugee families with empty buildings, finding school places for children, and connecting volunteers with foster and adoption agencies for orphan children.

'If we work together, we can make sure refugees are welcomed into the UK with dignity,' it added.

Baptists are encouraged to ask their local councils to link with the Refugee Welcome Board. There have been similar co-ordinated responses in previous refugee crises, such as the displacement of Ugandan Asians and the Vietnamese boat people in the 1970s.

Elsewhere all [the Baptists who have offered spaces to Syrian refugees](#) have been encouraged to work with the [Positive Action in Housing Ltd agency](#), which has a refugee hosting scheme. More than 300 spaces have been offered following a grassroots campaign.

If your church could offer to take someone in temporarily or for an extended period and want to find out more, contact refuge.host@gmail.com, and visit the [Take Refuge Facebook group](#) for more information and updates.

Currently the Government has insisted that spare rooms will not be used in housing the 20,000 Syrian refugees it has pledged to take in by 2020, but it is not known whether that policy would change if the crisis deepens further. Moreover the policy doesn't reflect the goodwill of the many British people who want to help.

The European Baptist Federation Council meeting takes place in Bulgaria this week, and on Thursday afternoon there is a session dedicated to the refugee crisis. Members will be sharing experiences and stories of the crisis, which will determine what the EBF focus should be in offering help.

Lynn Green will also talk about the British Baptist response to the crisis.

There is also a summit of European Union leaders this week in Brussels dedicated to the refugee emergency.

For more information on responding to the refugee crisis, visit <http://www.refugees-welcome.org.uk/>

Christianity far from being extinct, new report reveals

The biggest research of its kind into perceptions of Jesus, Christianity and evangelism in the UK is released

Despite negative media portrayals, most people actually like the Christians they know, while the vast majority of the population still identify with the Christian faith.

Fifty-seven per cent of people in England call themselves Christians (though a fraction of those would be described as "practising") and one in five of those who don't is open to finding out more about Jesus after hearing Christians talk to them about their faith.

These are some of the findings of [a new study](#) looking at perceptions of Jesus, Christianity and evangelism.

Church 'well connected'

Organised by ComRes and Barna Group, on behalf of HOPE, the Church of England

and the Evangelical Alliance, the survey was conducted among 3,000 people living predominantly in England.

The coalition of church groups, supported by the majority of the mainstream denominations in the UK ([including Baptists Together](#)) commissioned the first-of-its-kind survey in the hope it [will be a major catalyst for effective and focused evangelism in the years to come](#). It intends to track the data over the next 30 years.

The survey found that the majority of non-Christians know a Christian and think well of them: they are most likely to describe them as ‘friendly’, ‘caring’, ‘good-humoured’, ‘generous’ and ‘helpful’. And one in five non-Christians is open to finding out more about Jesus after hearing Christians talk to them about their faith.

However, just nine per cent of those Christians would be described as ‘practising’ – reporting regularly praying, reading the Bible and attending church at least monthly.

Dr Rachel Jordan, national adviser for mission and evangelism for the Church of England, said, 'The survey shows that the Church is well-connected throughout society. This connection is through the myriad of relationships that Christians have with the majority of the population in normal, everyday ways.

'What is more, people like their Christian friends and family members and they enjoy being with them. This is a different view of the Church and Christians to the one often portrayed in the media but this survey shows it is the one held by the majority of the population.

'Followers of Jesus are good friends and they are fun. It is here in these relationships that we have conversations about faith, in a place of trust and friendship, and 20 per cent of our friends and family members want to know more about our faith in Jesus.'

'Worrying lack of religious literacy'

The survey highlighted, however, a worrying lack of religious literacy among the general English population, raising calls for religious education in schools to be better supported.

Two out of every five people in England (39 per cent) do not know Jesus was a real person who actually lived. And under-35s were more likely (25 per cent) than older people to think Jesus was a fictional character.

In total, 22 per cent of people think Jesus was a mythical figure, while 17 per cent are unsure whether he was real or not.

Of those who consider Jesus to have been a real person who walked the earth, three out of five also believe in his resurrection from the dead, as documented in the New Testament. Overall, some 43 per cent of English adults believe in the resurrection, the survey found.

When asked to pick words to describe Jesus, non-Christians were most likely to say

he was 'spiritual', 'loving' and 'peaceful'.

Steve Clifford, general director of the Evangelical Alliance, said, 'There is overwhelming evidence in the New Testament and independent, non-biblical sources indicating Jesus was a historical figure and any historian worth their weight will agree with this.

'That nearly 40 per cent of people in this country are unsure of this or think Jesus was a mythical character paints a worrying picture of our education system. While it's great to see that non-Christians think positively of Jesus, it would be even better if they realised the significance of his life, death and resurrection for their own lives today.'

Dr James Carleton-Paget, senior lecturer in New Testament Studies at Cambridge University, said, 'The argument that Jesus never existed, which has had a number of advocates since the 19th century, was not one that the enemies of Christianity in the ancient world ever used.

'While technically, we shall never be able to prove that Jesus existed, the real difficulty with arguing that he did not lies in explaining how it was that the central character of the New Testament was dreamed up by those who became his followers.

'The tale of a crucified Jewish saviour, in spite of arguments to the contrary, is simply too unlikely, even outrageous a story, to have had its origins in no more than the frenzied imaginations of a group of ordinary Galilean Jews.'

Survey a 'game-changer'

Roy Crowne, executive director of HOPE, said, 'It is the first time that a study like this has been done. The results are a game-changer for churches wanting to share the good news of Jesus.

'Church leaders can often get discouraged by reports of declining numbers. But these results show that Christianity in Britain is diverse, full of life, and many people are passionate about sharing their faith. The research also shows there are some big challenges for churches to face if we are to see loads more people becoming Christians and joining the Church.'

Yemi Adedeji, associate director for HOPE and director of the Evangelical Alliance's One People Commission, added, 'This invaluable research will give confidence to churches from across denominations, regions and ethnicities and the insight it provides will enable us to answer the questions people are asking of us, not the ones we think they are.'

For more information on the research, visit www.talkingjesus.org

The unexpected impact of Christmas shoeboxes

Packing shoeboxes with Christmas gifts for needy children around the world is having far reaching and surprising consequences for Tonbridge Baptist Church

The arrival of a young Slovakian woman to lead its children's ministry led [Tonbridge Baptist Church](#) in Kent to re-engage with [Operation Christmas Child](#) in 2012. Daniela grew up during the ethnic conflict in Serbia and was deeply encouraged when she received a shoebox of gifts as a child.

Later on the church her parents led was involved in distributing shoeboxes. Years later, Daniela's story inspired her new church family in Tonbridge to prepare 300 shoebox gifts.

A remarkable chain of events ensued, leading most recently in 2015 to the departure of the church's Operations Director, [Nick Cole to take up the position of UK Director for Operation Christmas Child](#).

Nick, who continues to serve as an elder at Tonbridge Baptist, explains, 'Between Daniela's arrival and my departure, the world mission commitments of Tonbridge Baptist were overhauled and reinvigorated, with Operation Christmas Child making a key contribution.

'As we reviewed the overall vision of our church, we discerned God leading us to do fewer things better.

'In the area of world mission, we had no less than 18 commitments to different missionaries or ministries. We decided we should focus our energy and resources, both to increase our impact in fewer areas and also provide clearer more accessible opportunities for newcomers and those with little or no previous interest in global mission to get involved.

'No missionaries were dropped or their financial support cut, but we did identify and initiate three major partnerships that offer a wide range of compelling opportunities for our members to engage and we began actively promoting those.'

One of these is Operation Christmas Child, which sends shoeboxes full of gifts to children in need overseas. Since 1993 it has delivered gift-filled shoeboxes to more than 124 million children in more than 150 countries.

'We couldn't think of a simpler or more winsome way to invite someone to start a journey into world mission than [Operation Christmas Child](#),' adds Nick.

'We asked church families to pack shoeboxes to show God's love to children in contexts of poverty and crisis.

'But we also included a shoebox packing party at our annual Christmas Craft Fair so people from our local community could hear about and join in the project as they browsed the craft stalls.

'We registered as a drop off point for schools and other groups to bring in their boxes and receive invites to our Christmas events. As a result we packed or collected 400 boxes in each of the last two years.'

Operation Christmas Child is just one programme of the Christian relief and development charity, Samaritan's Purse.

So Tonbridge Baptist included in its partnership supporting their [Raising Families integral mission programme](#) that helps vulnerable families raise themselves out of poverty in one central Asian nation.

Shoebox distributions in that country have built relationships that opened up the way for local churches to develop services for the elderly, vulnerable and disabled children, the homeless and drug and alcohol users.

Tonbridge Baptist's 2014 harvest gift enabled Samaritan's Purse to support and train 50 families in need.

A team of six from Tonbridge, including Nick Cole followed up with a vision trip to central Asia in April 2015. 'We met grace-filled believers and served alongside them in outreach events sharing the gospel with children from marginalised communities as they received shoebox gifts,' he says.

'One small congregation with very modest resources showed us an outbuilding in the yard of one of their member's home.

'They'd converted it into a safe living space for four women struggling with alcohol addiction. We noticed there was no heating. What happens in the harsh winter? They quietly explained that they moved the women into the main house to live with the rest of the family.

'Such acts of sacrificial love cropped up regularly in the stories we heard from all the projects we visited, as did testimonies of dozens of individuals and families coming to faith in Jesus.'

Back in Tonbridge, three members of the vision trip have since gathered around them half a dozen others from their church and other churches in the West Kent area.

This core team has discerned God's leading to take the next step and run a processing centre in Tonbridge to collect, check and prepare for shipment a lorry-load of shoeboxes (11,000) for Operation Christmas Child this November.

With the support of local church leaders, they're seeking to mobilise several hundred volunteers from the churches and the community to come into the warehouse for a few hours each to check boxes.

Nick Cole points out how this is a missional project, 'We're encouraging local Christians to invite friends and neighbours with little or no church connection to pack and check shoeboxes together. It's a purposeful activity together where friendships can grow, and misconceptions about church and Christian faith can be dispelled as people serve and pray together.'

As for Nick personally, he sensed God's conviction to focus his ministry on engaging UK Christians in world mission.

He continues to coordinate global mission activities for Tonbridge Baptist, but now through his leadership of Operation Christmas Child he also gets to encourage other churches around the UK.

His aim is to energise their people for mission through the simple first step of preparing a shoebox of Christmas gifts, so children in need can experience God's love shown in a tangible way through his people.

This year's Operation Christmas Child aims to reach one million children. To get involved visit: www.samaritans-purse.org.uk/bt

Big crowds and changed lives at 'I Heart Netherton'

A community festival hosted by Eden Netherton brought hundreds from the local area together for five days of fun, games and good news this August

'I Heart Netherton' took place under a huge blue and white circus tent in the park in the heart of the Merseyside estate.

A kids' holiday club, community fun day, gig and comedy nights, sports and social action projects all helped the team (joined by enthusiastic members of partner church Emmanuel Baptist) to share their faith and bless the community.

The brand new Eden Bus for Merseyside was also on hand for the entirety of the

event.

‘I felt God talking to us about doing this tent event and the vision for “I Heart Netherton” was born,’ says Eden Netherton team leader Tom Grant.

‘We called the event “I Heart Netherton” as our original aim was to change the perceptions of people in Netherton towards their community. That’s because we have found that many people, especially the young, have a negative perception of where we live.

‘But as we planned the event, we felt God saying that it was bigger than that. We sense that God was saying that he loved this community and that through the festival, people would come to know God’s love for them as a Father. We haven’t been disappointed!’

The festival was a massive success with every event well attended. Many stories of God working in people’s lives emerged during the week. Message Trust bands Brightline and Vital Signs drew large crowds of all ages to the tent to hear their message of hope.

‘It was fantastic to hear the bands boldly sharing faith with the people gathered those evenings,’ reflects Tom. ‘It was so inspiring to then see people being prayed with across the park with God moving to heal people. It was an incredible moment and I could sense the Kingdom of God being built in our midst.’

An Alpha course has now begun off the back of ‘I Heart Netherton’ and the team are exploring new discipleship groups for youth and young adults.

'Welcome the strangers in their midst'

Migration, corruption and relations between Christians and Muslims were top of the agenda in the closing ceremony of the fifth African Biblical Leadership Initiative (ABLI) conference in Malawi today (17 September).

The event’s moderator, Lord Paul Boateng, a member of the House of Lords, read from the declaration that the 150-strong gathering had backed.

‘We appeal to all African societies to welcome the strangers in their midst,’ he said, ‘particularly migrants and refugees fleeing persecution.

‘Equally, we challenge the oppressive regimes of this continent to respect the right to life, the rule of law, freedom of belief and freedom of speech.’

Currently, there are some 3 million people displaced within Africa, because of war,

insurgencies and poverty.

Christians 'offered their hands' to Muslim communities, he said, but called on Islamic groups and governments to allow freedom of religion.

'Let there be no compulsion in religion, let each person follow their conviction and let us live in peace,' he said.

His words came against the backdrop of continued violence in Nigeria, where Boko Haram abducted 209 girls from their school in 2014.

Following the scathing attack on ['corruption as a way of life' in African society earlier in the week by anti-corruption campaigner, Patrick Lumumba](#), the forum declared that members would 'commit ourselves to the highest standards of biblical integrity.

'We refuse to be complicit in corruption in either personal or professional lives,' it said.

Some 150 people from 20 African nations attended the event in Lilongwe this week. The sixth ABLI conference will be held next year. Plans are underway to choose the host country.

ABLI was established in early 2009 as a partnership between a coalition of Bible Societies and Christian ministries, working together with the Africa Area Office of United Bible Societies (UBS).

Baptisms:

Brownhill Road Baptist Church, Catford, London: Noel Pinnock

Leigh Baptist Church, Leigh, Lancs: Dianne Berwick, plus 4 from another church. (Names withheld)

Margate Baptist Church, Kent: Anthony Waite

Winchmore Hill Baptist Church, London: Esther Potter

Death:

ELLIS, the Revd Geoffrey

Passed away in Stepping Hill Hospital, Stockport, on September 8th, aged 88. Loving husband of the late Cathy. Much loved father, grandfather and great-grandfather.

Committal at Dukinfield Crematorium @ 11am 28th September, followed by thanksgiving service at Woodley Methodist Church, Chapel Street, Woodley, Stockport at 12 midday. Family flowers only please, but donations can be made in memory of Geoff's favourite charities via Brian Sharples & Son Funeral Directors, 0161 430 6231.

Jobs:

Communications Enabler, The Baptist Union of Great Britain
Finance Director/Team Leader Support Services, The Baptist Union of Great Britain
Legal and Property Officer, The Baptist Union of Great Britain

For more information on these positions, visit

<http://www.baptist.org.uk/jobs>

Events/resources:Vision and culture cards/bookmarks

Two new resources are now available for you to use with your church.

Vision and Culture cards - outline our Union's vision to grow healthy churches in relationship for God's mission

Beacons of Prayer bookmarks - using artwork specially commissioned from Chris Duffett as a reminder of Lynn Green's call to prayer.

Both are free. Order here:

http://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/446362/New_Free_Resources.aspx

Welcoming the Stranger

An updated and abridged edition of Welcoming the Stranger, a free 20 page download that aims to help us engage theologically and practically with the plight of refugees, has been published.

Visit

http://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/448817/Welcoming_the_Stranger.aspx

Film resources

In March 2005, Ashley Smith made headlines around the globe when she talked her way out of the hands of Brian Nichols, after he took her captive for seven hours in her home. She read to him excerpts from Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life* and The Bible. It's now been made into a film *Captive*, which is released in UK cinemas on Friday. Follow the link for a free, downloadable viewer's guide:

<http://ethosmedia.org/captive/>

Dealing with Conflict – Christian advances is this year's topic for the **Faith and Thought Symposium** (10 October, Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church)

A forum for those who wish to hold together Christian faith and advances in scientific knowledge

For more information (and details of previous symposiums) visit:

<http://www.faithandthought.org.uk/Symp.htm>

Multiethnic Church – a new, six-week course for small groups, written by Baptist minister Malcolm Patten, to help develop healthy, integrated churches which reflect the richness and diversity of the Kingdom of God.

http://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/447072/Multiethnic_Church.aspx

For more visit www.baptisttimes.co.uk