



26 October 2016

News:

Baptist Union Council: October 2016

A report from the October 2016 meeting of Baptist Union Council

Overview

Baptist churches as Beacons of Hope in their communities, the future of the Baptist Assembly, Ministerial Recognition Rules and some further reflection on Same Sex Marriage were among the main agenda items at the latest meeting of Baptist Union Council.

Council members met at the Hayes Conference Centre in Swanwick on 13-14 October. Worship was led by Iain Pope, minister of Holly Lodge Baptist Church in Ipswich. He cited the early church as described by Luke in Acts 2. 'I hope and pray that that's how we approach Council,' Iain said. 'Yes we are here to do business. But we are here to do church, building God's Kingdom.'

Beacons of Hope reflections

'Our desire is that all our churches in Baptists Together may be 'beacons of hope', sharing the good news of Jesus in the places they are,' said General Secretary Lynn Green.

She explained Beacons of Hope is being developed out of the Beacons of Prayer call issued to churches last year. We live in times of challenge, uncertainty and political change and we have a distinctive role to play in our communities.

Lynn believes that churches that are Beacons of Hope in their communities are:

- * Inspiring a longing for God
- * Inspiring a longing for mission
- * Inspiring a longing for relationship

This was expressed through a venn diagram visual which also pointed to the practical outworking of these things in 'loving service, holiness and Holy Spirit empowering'.

‘We want our churches to have the confidence to be out in their community, sharing the Good News of Jesus.’

She said that Beacons of Prayer – a call to prayer to wait on God and make space for Him to move - had resonated with many people. It is hoped that Beacons of Hope would provide a visual focus that would continue to inspire and challenge us to be all that God is calling us to be.

Council members were encouraged to identify a church that is a Beacon of Hope in their area – and were then invited to pray for them.

Earlier Lynn had spoken about how God is on the move in so many areas of the country.

She mentioned the Yorkshire Baptist Assembly where ‘everyone I spoke to, people were talking about seeing baptisms.’ She also highlighted Stockton Baptist Tabernacle further north, which had seen over 100 baptisms. A number of churches like Stockton are working with refugees, which was resulting in baptisms and impacting the whole church, challenging and encouraging congregations.

She also highlighted The Turning, the street evangelism ministry which began in Reading. There had since been a Liverpool Turning, and there were plans in a number of different towns and cities. She said there was a general openness to the spiritual, she said with ‘phenomenal numbers of people in the street willing to be prayed for, open to knowing about Jesus.’ In a four week period in Reading 1850 people were prayed for, with many first time commitments and rededications to Christ.

Citing all this activity, Lynn added, ‘I think it shows God is working in all sorts of ways. He is on the move. We need to be reflecting on that.’

New churches

Four new churches that have already been accepted into membership by their Associations were welcomed by Council. Three were from the South Eastern Baptist Association: Community Church, Robertsbridge; Grow Church, Ashford; St John’s Baptist Church, Bexhill (all SEBA) The fourth – Dickens Heath Church – is from the Heart of England Baptist Association.

The Baptist Assembly

A large portion of this Council was devoted to beginning to reflect on the future of the Baptist Assembly. Stephen Keyworth explained the Futures Process had recognised the need to do something different with Assembly, due to factors such as falling attendance, its growing cost, and organisational changes. There had been a commitment to three one-day Assemblies for 2015-2017, with a review after the second year. A wide-ranging survey has now been undertaken, with 1,000 responses.

The survey had asked people about programme, what they would do without, why have an assembly, and the future of it and what they would support.

The survey had revealed the Assembly demographic to be white British (97 per cent), over 45 years old. As many want it to be a celebration as a deliberative event, with debates over serious issues, Stephen said. One of the key things to emerge from the survey was connecting, physically being together.

He highlighted a number of quotes from the survey:

“Assembly is not working in its current format. Stop making it appealing. It is too essential to be popular.’

“Less of a jamboree and find room for serious debate on major issues whether in a Baptist context or outside of it”

“Be bold, throw a vision of what the Assembly could be out to the movement and see who gets on board with it”

He said that while there had been much to be proud of about the last two Assemblies, we had been ‘tinkering at the edges of a four-day Assembly’. In order to really re-envision Assembly, we need to start a bit further back, ‘with a blank sheet of paper’.

He encouraged members to have discussion around tables the following questions:

- * Why? Should we as movement that is Baptists Together have an Assembly?
- * What? Does that mean in terms of what’s required?
- * How?

Stephen said a decision needs to be made at the next Council about the Assembly in 2018. The final one-day Assembly as planned in the three year cycle will take place in Harrogate in 2017. A ‘broad direction of travel’ is needed in March for what happens in 2018 and beyond.

Fit4Mission

Stuart Davison, Regional Minister Team Leader of the South Eastern Baptist Association, gave an update on the Fit4Mission survey findings. The survey had given a range of information about churches’ membership and mission activities.

It had revealed that around half our union’s churches are middle class, around a quarter are working class. There is a difference between churches’ perception of growth, and what is actually happening, he continued. While there are ‘some really good signs of growth’, around half of the churches which identified as being constant are actually declining.

Tailored reports will be sent to each Association, and the full Fit4Mission report will be uploaded to the Baptists Together website. Alongside will be useful material for

local churches. In determining whether our churches are fit for mission, they need to be able to self evaluate, said Stuart. He added this is 'not just about numbers'. There will be a self-help tool for churches that unpacks areas under the banners of Faith, Hope and Love.

He is calling for changes to the annual return forms to give more useful data for both local churches and Associations, such as identifying new members (were they 2nd generation conversion; transfer; conversion; restoration; or other?)

Council members were invited to discuss what big themes were emerging.

Stuart said that we talk about being missional movement, which provokes two questions: are we missional? And are we moving?

Same Sex Marriage reflections

The previous Council in March had seen members agree the statement Baptists Together and Registration of Buildings for Same-sex Marriage. A portion of this Council was devoted to reflecting on the response to that statement, including in relation to ministerial conduct rules.

Stephen Keyworth explained how the statement, alongside a letter from Lynn Green, had been communicated to around 4,500 people. He had subsequently received 108 responses: 22 had welcomed the statement; two were concerned it was not strong enough; while 84 had been disturbed/disappointed. The vast majority of these responses had come before the end of April; there had been very few since he had made a statement at the Baptist Assembly in May.

Respondents had raised a number of issues. Some had questioned whether it was contrary to the Declaration of Principle, the assumption being that the statement prevents a local church from discerning the mind of Christ 'and thereby limits a pastoral and missional response only to that which Council "urges".' 'That was the assumption; I don't believe it was the intention,' said Stephen.

He explained that the inclusion of the section concerning ecclesiology acknowledges that there will be differing pastoral and missional responses by local churches. What Council did was to provide a wider context for discernment as part of our 'walking together' and 'watching over each other'. This has always been a part of Baptist shared life at its best and does not run contrary to our DoP, Stephen said.

He continued, 'Council was very clear in affirming traditional marriage and in using the language of 'urging' and 'refraining' Council acted (in my understanding) in an entirely appropriate manner, having listened to the discernment of others, but at the very limit of Council's authority.'

Ministerial Recognition Rules

In the light of the Historic Cases Review and recommendations of the Ignite Report, Council approved a number of changes to the Ministerial Recognition Rules. The key areas of change include the requirement that ministers have regular training in safeguarding which is relevant to their context. The Ministerial Recognition Committee (MRC) has agreed some guidance notes regarding safeguarding training and DBS enhanced disclosures that will soon be made available to all ministers.

Following on from the last Council and the statement regarding the registration of church buildings for SSMS, Council considered a paper from the MRC regarding guidance for ministers. The general direction of travel is that Council did not believe it would be helpful to add any new rules, but that further consultation was necessary with Associations before guidance notes are brought by MRC in March 2017.

Trustees

Chair of the Trustee Board, Rich Webb, minister of Upton Vale Baptist Church in Torquay, shared highlights from the board's report. These included the move for the Baptist Union of Great Britain to become an incorporated organisation. At the moment this is at a consultation stage, said Rich, and will need to come back to Council.

There was also an update on the future of Baptist House. After exploring a number of options, a decision had been made jointly with BMS to modernise and refurbish, and free up space for letting. Work is due to begin next month. 'This was the most cost effective and best stewardship option,' said Rich.

Nominations committee

Council members voted to elect Christine Carter to the Baptist Union trustee board. Christine is an administrator in the NHS, has been a street pastor for six years, and is married to Matt, a Baptist minister. Their church is in Hastings, Sussex.

Her name was brought by Rupert Lazar of the Nominations Committee. Following this vote Rupert spoke about how the committee had sensed a call to change, as it wasn't achieving the ideal levels of diversity. There will be a new name – the Baptists Together Key Role Nominations Team – and it will operate through a network of relationships, which will hopefully lead to discovering a wider balance of people within the family. A list of groups and individuals are being developed.

'We need a new way of working,' Rupert said. 'We've had a sense from the Lord that this is a better way of what we're being asked to do.

'We hope we will go to these networkers and they will point us in the right direction.'

John Levick, our Union's treasurer, said a number of people with great expertise and who had not served before, had been identified for finance roles.

'The (nominating) group can only do so much. It's the responsibility of all of us to put forward people who can do the roles. There are people out there.'

Roy Searle appointed as Baptist Union Northern Pioneer Co-ordinator

Statement on behalf of the Yorkshire Baptist Association, Northern Baptist Association, North Western Baptist Association and the Baptist Union of Great Britain

We are delighted to announce that Revd Roy Searle has been appointed as the Baptist Union Northern Pioneer Co-ordinator. This exciting new part-time post has been jointly funded by the Baptist Union of Great Britain and the Northern Baptist Associations (Yorkshire, Northern and the North West).

In these challenging and opportune days, the post has been created to encourage, inspire and help churches, Associations and the Union to engage missionally, in particular through pioneering, planting and Fresh Expressions.

At a national level, Roy's responsibilities will be to advocate and creatively communicate stories and help individuals and churches to pioneer but he will have a primary focus on the North of England, across our three Northern associations.

He will seek to inspire, encourage and equip both established and emerging pioneers, church planters and people engaged in missional communities as well as helping churches to relate and communicate the gospel to their own and other unreached places in the North of England. Building hubs and networks, training, mentoring and coaching pioneers is a critical task if as Baptists, we are going to face the missional challenges and embrace the opportunities of ministry in a changing world.

Roy will be working as the Northern Pioneer Co-ordinator as well as continuing his role as one of the leaders of the Northumbria Community. Roy is well known to many across the North, the wider Union and other denominations. A former President of the Baptist Union, he has been involved in training and mentoring leaders for many years and has considerable experience of helping churches to think strategically, imaginatively and creatively about how to relate to those beyond the 'walls of the church'.

A committed northerner, Roy was born on Tyneside, educated in Harrogate and from an unchurched background came to faith while training to be an Outward Bound instructor in Scotland.

He was the first full-time pastor of Portrack Baptist Church on Teesside, pioneering a growing church on an urban local authority housing estate before moving on to become the team leader at Enon Baptist Church in Sunderland.

Since 1992, he has been full-time with the Northumbria Community, which he founded with others in the late 1980s. A monastic missional community, with companions and friends across the world, the community has had a significant influence upon many Baptist ministers and churches over the last 20 years.

Roy is the Northern Baptist College Hub Tutor at Cranmer Hall, Durham, where as a Fellow of St John's College, he has helped to pioneer a Free Church Missional Leadership Course as well as establishing the opportunity for people to train for Baptist ministry in the north-east, with a particular emphasis on pioneering.

He is an Associate Tutor at Spurgeon's College, London, and a visiting lecturer at other colleges and leadership training institutions. He has travelled throughout Britain and Europe, encouraging people to love God and live generously. He is passionate about spirituality and missiology, the renewal and reimagining of the church in the changing world and how the gospel engages with contemporary life.

Roy will bring to the role his visionary 'apostolic' leadership and his 'prophetic' voice will speak into the challenges and opportunities that we face here in Britain and particularly the North of England.

Commenting on his appointment which begins in January, Roy said, 'I am delighted by the opportunity and the prospects of working with others across our Associations and Union to encourage pioneering, planting and to refreshing ministries in order to make a difference missionally with the love and compassion of God to individuals and communities.

'I hope that, alone and together, we will listen and learn, discern, locate train, resource and see the pioneering, planting and fresh expressions of ministry and mission bring transformation, hope, healing and life to many.'

'Churches demand action on Aleppo'

The Baptist Union of Great Britain has joined the Church in Wales, the Church of Scotland, Quakers in Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church to release a statement calling upon the Syrian and Russian Governments and other forces to stop their bombardment of Aleppo.

Baptist Union General Secretary the Revd Lynn Green has joined leaders from the five churches, which together represent more than one million people in the UK, in signing the statement (below). The statement condemns the attacks on the civilians of Aleppo, but also highlights the failure of the international community to protect the civilians.

'We claim no simple solution to a complex political reality,' the statement concludes, 'but offer the simple message of our faith: that every life is valued by God and that the slaughter must end now.'

United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, has stated that in the two weeks following the collapse of the ceasefire, 376 people have been killed, one third of whom were children, and a further 1266 were wounded.

The international humanitarian organisation Medicines Sans Frontieres **said recently that there have been 23 recorded attacks on Aleppo's eight hospitals since the end of July .Seeking medical care has become a danger in itself.**

The statement in full:

The destruction of Aleppo must stop.

We are appalled by the attacks on civilians by the Syrian Government, Russian and other forces. Life is a gift of God. The targeting and killing of civilians can never be passed off merely as a consequence of war. Aerial strikes on homes, hospitals and aid convoys are never acceptable, under any circumstances.

The responsibility for such attacks lies first and foremost with those who have carried them out. But the frequency of such attacks in Syria also underlines a failure on the part of the international community to uphold long-established principles concerning the immunity of civilians in conflict. Member states of the United Nations should seek to hold to account the parties responsible for indiscriminate attacks on men, women, children, hospitals, humanitarian and rescue workers, which could be construed as war crimes.

The world cries out for an end to the death and destruction in Syria that daily adds to the largest flight of refugees since the Second World War. We join with our brothers and sisters of other churches and other faiths in praying for the people of Syria. We claim no simple solution to a complex political reality but offer the simple message of our faith: that every life is valued by God and that the slaughter must end now.

The signatories to the statement are:

The General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain – the Revd Lynn Green.

The President of the Methodist Church – the Revd Dr Roger Walton.

The General Secretary of the United Reformed Church - the Revd John Proctor.

The Moderator for the Church of Scotland - the Right Revd Dr Russell Bar.

Recording Clerk for Quakers in Britain - Paul Parker

The Bishop of Swansea and Brecon – the Right Revd John Davies.

Remembering the Aberfan disaster

Baptists are among many to be participating in events to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Aberfan disaster

On 21 October 1966 116 children and 28 adults were killed when a colliery spoil tip in the Welsh village near Merthyr Tydfil collapsed and unleashed a torrent of slurry down the mountainside which engulfed a number of houses and Pant-glas Junior School.

The East Glamorgan Baptist Association marked anniversary of the disaster with a special service on Wednesday (19 October) that included children from Welsh and English speaking local schools.

On this occasion it was felt to be really important to hear the voices of local children and include them in the act of remembering. Speaking at the event the Revd Simeon Baker, Director of Mission for the Baptist Union of Wales, took an old miners lamp to illustrate the importance of the light that shines in the darkness.

‘Even in such a tragic and sad event we remember the One who journeys with us even through the valley of the shadow of death and shines His light in the darkest place,’ he said.

The service is one of a number of important events in South Wales to mark the mining disaster that affected so many communities in the South Wales valleys.

Professor Paul Ballard – a Baptist minister, and Professor Emeritus at Cardiff University, where he taught practical theology – gave a lecture in Cardiff on Friday night (21 October) about his experiences as a young Baptist pastor in Aberfan.

In 1968 Prof Ballard became involved in the work of Ty Toronto, the churches’ community work project in Aberfan. This was followed up by a wider programme, The Valleys Call, from 1974-5.

‘The village was still reeling when I arrived in 1968,’ he said. ‘Stunned. But there was a determination, especially around the removal of the tips.’

The lecture was entitled Aberfan Fifty Years on – a Practical theological reflection. It covered areas such as pastoral care, community recovery and the nature of the disaster itself (including a theological note about the place of humanity in creation).

The final section featured observations about the participation of churches in the events. Prof Ballard spoke about how Christians were found in the thick of the challenge; but did not relate it to their faith.

‘They just helped, they didn’t think about it,’ he said. ‘They just knew they had to do it. But they didn’t particularly relate it to their faith.’

He also said that while the churches worked closely in the aftermath, there was very little change ecumenically. 'People worked together, but there was no ecumenical coming together – people just reverted to normal.'

The Baptist Times report on 27 October 1966 carried the headline Angry Wales Mourns For Her Children.

It told how the eldest son of the Revd Kenneth Hayes, minister of Zion Baptist Chapel in Aberfan, was among the dead – and how the minister had responded:

For 36 hours he was working non-stop either at the school, or going round comforting bereaved and stricken families. Despite their own sorrow, Mr and Mrs Hayes kept open house for many who came seeking news and comfort.

Eighteen children from the Sunday School at Zion were lost in the disaster, the newspaper reported. It also told of the growing anger towards the coal board, which people were blaming for the tragedy. 'Some very bitter things are being said about warnings having been ignored,' said the Revd GH Williams of Merthyr Tydfil. But it was chiefly among the church goers that bitterness was being expressed, according to Mr Williams. 'The church people have taken it in a wonderful spirit, without bitterness.'

On the Sunday following the disaster, according to his obituary in The Independent in 1998, (the day after his son's body had been found), Kenneth Hayes preached in his chapel to an audience of journalists, 'many of them in tears throughout.'

In the awful months that followed, he and his wife kept the community afloat. They ran an appeal for toys for the surviving children of Aberfan that generated a huge and emotional response, as did the main disaster appeal. Kenneth Hayes' manse became the office in which the local solicitor took the statements that would confirm the Coal Board's culpability for the disaster.

Dementia cafe hosted by Baptist church

A dementia cafe hosted by a Baptist church in Yorkshire and run in partnership with the Alzheimer's Society has officially opened

The Mexborough Memory Cafe had its first session on Tuesday, 11 October at Mexborough Baptist Church and Community Centre when the Civic Mayor of Doncaster, Cllr David Nevett declared it officially open.

The Mayor stayed for the afternoon, chatting with people living with dementia and their relatives and carers. One of the Mexborough councillors, Andy Pickering, also attended, as did the Revd Mary Taylor, Regional Minister of the Yorkshire Baptist Association.

There were about 40 people there - users of the cafe, staff and volunteers from the Alzheimer's Society, invited local dignitaries and representatives of the church.

The Memory Cafe will be a monthly event, run by the Alzheimer's Society, to provide an opportunity for people living with dementia and their relatives/carers to meet together for activities, conversation and mutual support. Essentially the church is providing the venue and the Alzheimer's Society is providing their trained staff and volunteers to run the cafe.

The dementia cafe came about by networking really,' explained Paul Lancaster, secretary for Mexborough Baptist Church. 'Eileen, one of our members, had been to a social group in Denaby and there met an Alzheimer's sufferer and his carer.

'The carer said to Eileen that she really wished there was something similar in Mexborough, specifically for Alzheimer's sufferers. Eileen mentioned this to someone else, who mentioned the local Alzheimer's Society, and Eileen then realised that she knew the local co-ordinator from something else that they had both been involved in.

'Eileen contacted Shaun and arranged a meeting between the three of us. There are a number of dementia cafes in the Doncaster area; Shaun had identified that there was a need for one in Mexborough as well and was beginning to look for a venue.

'The church members agreed that this was a good thing for the church to support.'

BMS responds to Hurricane Matthew

BMS World Mission has just authorised a grant for £22,150 to help provide cholera treatment in the hard-hit south of Haiti

Widespread flooding and poor sanitation are predicted to cause cases of cholera to surge in the wake of Hurricane Matthew, which hit Haiti last Tuesday (4 October 2016). In fact, some have already reported three times the number of incidences of the infection following the disaster.

BMS World Mission has been in touch with partners on the ground to find out the most helpful way we can respond to the hurricane, and the provision of cholera treatment was identified as one of the urgent needs. On Wednesday (12 October), it agreed a grant of £22,150 to help towards treatment for 1,200 cholera patients over the next six months. This treatment will be provided through a hospital on the south west tip of Haiti, serving people hit by the heart of Hurricane Matthew.

BMS has a history of helping to prevent cholera and caring for cholera patients in Haiti. Following the 2010 earthquakes, it worked with a partner in Cap-Haitien to

help reduce the cholera related mortality rate from around 13 per cent to under 0.5 per cent.

“Haiti is one of the most marginalised and fragile countries in the world,” says Steve Sanderson, Deputy Director for Mission. “BMS has historically stood by Haiti in times of disaster, not least with the earthquakes and cholera outbreaks in 2010. As we continue to stand with the people of Haiti following Hurricane Matthew, we want to ensure that we demonstrate the love of Christ through helping those directly affected and leaving communities more resilient.”

BMS wants to say a huge thank you to all the churches and individuals who have taken up offerings, prayed for and given gifts to BMS relief work – both in Haiti and in other countries around the world. Your gifts means BMS has been able to respond quickly, providing support for some of the worst-affected people in the country.

"Please pray with us, that BMS, in partnership with people on the ground, would be able to prevent the devastating wave of cholera deaths that could be a natural outcome of this disaster."

You can give towards our relief work in Haiti and other disaster-affected countries by giving to BMS disaster recovery today.

Baptisms

Bilston Baptist Church, West Midlands: Usha Talluri

Broadway Baptist Church, Derby: Marcia Thompson and John Morgan

Hertford Baptist Church, Hertford: Paula Hine

Quinton Park Baptist Church, Coventry: Alecks Kostandinov from Bulgaria, baptised by Dick Prior at his penultimate service

ShIPLEY Baptist Church, West Yorkshire: Abigail Baylis

South Woodham Evangelical Church, South Woodham Ferrers: Chanelle Leher, Deirdre (Dee) Taylor, Jill Downton, Georgina Morlham, Esther Nguyen

Union Baptist Church, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire: Amber Barnes, Michael Hazell, Marcus Horn, Becca Manktelow, Joel Morriss & Jenny Rooke

Yeovil Baptist Church, Somerset: Sarah Smalley

Baptism stories

On Sunday 25 September 2016 we had the privilege of sharing in the baptism of Sarah Smalley from **Yeovil Baptist Church**. However, instead of being baptised at church, Sarah wished for her service to be held on the beach and so a group of approximately 40 people travelled to Castle Cove beach near Weymouth and witnessed her being baptised in the sea by the Revds Barbara Carpenter and Derek Hills. As we remember Jesus being baptised in the river Jordan and how He walked along the sea shores, we continue to be blessed with the work He has installed for us and for the many rich blessings he bestows upon us all.

