

BAPTISTS

Summer 2017

TOGETHER



Beacons of hope

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

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Beacons of Hope



Painting: Chris Duffett

When Lynn Green offered a call to prayer in 2015 she had a deep sense that God wanted to do a new thing, that God was calling all across Baptists Together to prayer to make space for the Spirit to speak and move. Following that *Beacons of Prayer* call, Lynn was both amazed and encouraged to see how God had been moving churches to pray and seek him.

As she and others reflected on *Beacons of Prayer* a year later, there was a sense it was developing into a call for our churches to be *Beacons of Hope*, sharing the good news of Jesus in the places he has put us.

This edition of *Together Magazine* is an exploration of that call. It features Lynn writing in more detail about what it looks like to be a *Beacon of Hope*; stories documenting how our churches are being just that; several revealing testimonies where Baptists account for the hope that's in them; and much more besides.

There are so many in our communities who are longing for hope. As Lynn writes, we are called to share and embody this hope that we have, perhaps more than ever before. May the words in this magazine help inform your own call as a witness to the love, light and life of Jesus.

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Beacons of hope

What does it mean to be *Beacons of Hope* in a world where hope is so often in short supply?

By Lynn Green

Hope is in short supply

Every weekday morning I walked through the same neighbourhood. I watched and listened; trying to see as God sees in that place. As I walked I became aware of a place where it appeared the odds were stacked against you. Where you didn't necessarily achieve your academic potential. Where getting a job that paid enough to support your family was a tall order. Where you dreaded an unexpected bill because there was hardly enough for your everyday needs. Life here wasn't lived in the perspective of a pay rise and wondering what you would spend your bonus on; there was no sense of a bigger house with a garden for the kids, or a better job or promotion or a retirement devoted largely to going on holiday. Things were probably going to get worse, not better.

As I walked I slowly began to realise how much of my life and energy was rooted in a different view of the world,

I believe that we are called to share and embody this hope that we have, more than ever before.

where I had many opportunities to have a positive influence. I had a good education, a job I loved. There was money in my purse, savings, and a family who could bail me out if I ever got into real financial difficulties. But walking here I began to glimpse another experience of life. It was a community where hope appeared to be in short supply...

It's by no means the only place where hope seems to be lacking. There is the silent desperation of loneliness, isolation and relationship breakdown that afflicts many communities that, outwardly, seem so sorted. There is the frantic tyranny of boardroom success and the relentless pursuit of always having to be seen with the right accessories. There are the politics and economics of our world, where hopes for peace, prosperity, our welfare state, relations with Europe, authentic democracy and for religious freedom... are all in short supply.

Beacons of Hope

But in the midst of all this the Bible continually points us to the hope that we have; a hope rooted in the steadfast nature of God, and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We have hope that God is true to his promises to bring us into relationship with him and to establish his Kingdom way of life here on earth, now and for eternity. This hope has a very definite future orientation. We have, '...a faith and knowledge resting on the *hope of eternal life*, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time...' (Titus 1:2). For suffering and oppressed believers around the world, hope of a future where 'all things are made new' is very powerful indeed. It gives hope to endure and motivates boldness and perseverance.

Some have questioned whether this future focus causes complacency in the present, and an acceptance of the status quo which is not in keeping with God's coming Kingdom. But surely this can never truly be the case?

Our experience of God's hope, embodied in Jesus Christ, is something that cannot fail to affect the present as well. Romans 15:13 points to this, '*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*' Hope experienced is hope overflowing; how can it be otherwise? It is in the DNA of the Church and marks us out as disciples; we are bearers of hope. As the German theologian, Moltmann writes,

'From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionising and transforming the present...' (*Theology of Hope*, Introduction)

And I believe that we are called to share and embody this hope that we have, more than ever before.

As I have been thinking about what it looks like to be Beacons of Hope, I have been reflecting on a series of images - a candle, fire pit, lighthouse and beacon.



Images of Hope



Photo: Kevin Finneran | unsplash.com

Candle – Each one of us as disciples of Jesus Christ is a bearer of hope. It may not feel like this day in, day out, when our witness appears insignificant in the face of the global forces that shape the lives of our communities. Yet, like a candle that sheds light wherever it goes, we too embody and share hope through our actions, attitudes, words and prayers. We are part of God's quiet, Kingdom revolution. '...let your light shine before people, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.' Matt 5:16

Fire pit – Like many people, we love to have a fire pit! It might be after a family meal on a summer evening, or a gathering of young people and their guitars. It is a great time to relax and have fun, talk and be together, and a time to be quiet and simply stare into the firelight as the night draws in. As churches we can be *Beacons of Hope* in our communities by being places of welcome and hospitality. In a world where unconditional love and acceptance can be hard to practise and discover, we can model and invite people to become part of authentic community.



Photo: Daisy A King | iStockphoto.com

Lighthouse – We often think about a lighthouse steadfastly shining its light in a stormy night, yet the light shines when it is calm too. There is something in this image for our churches: communities which are firmly set upon the rock of the Lord and who are steadfastly present, in good times and bad. Embodying and offering grace and truth, justice, peace and joy in the place where God has called you. ‘...shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life..’
Philippians 2:16



Photo: Allen Cai | unsplash.com



Photo: lindarocks | iStockphoto.com

Beacon – The original beacons were lit from hill to hill to warn others and carry the message of impending danger. For me, this image speaks of the prophetic calling of the church. It is said that we are in a ‘post-truth’ era and it is imperative that the church does not lose its voice but continues to speak for truth even when this cuts across our culture. Just like the prophets of the Bible, our churches need to be speaking ‘truth to power’ and to challenge the status quo when it betrays the values of God’s Kingdom.

But the prophetic is more: another aspect is demonstrated in pioneering and church planting. We know that God’s heart is close to the poor and marginalised, those people and places that no one normally cares about. As we seek to join Jesus in the places where churches are not formally present, we are establishing *Beacons of Hope* in his name and making a powerful prophetic statement that these people and these communities have value, have hope and do matter.

One of the things I love about being a Baptist is our capacity for beautiful, creative, Spirit-inspired variety! And nowhere is this truer than when we are being *Beacons of Hope*. As you read this magazine I hope that you will be inspired by the many different ways individuals and churches are seeking to be *Beacons of Hope* in their communities.

Lynn Green is General Secretary of our Baptist Union



Beacons of Prayer painting by Chris Duffett - inspired by Lynn’s 2015 call to prayer

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Photo: Olton Baptist Church

Tim Fergusson (with yellow bucket) helps to baptise an asylum seeker who has found faith at Olton Baptist Church. The candidate wanted to be baptised outside, hence the slightly unusual method!

Our church's work with refugees and asylum seekers

Olton Baptist Church in Solihull has been intentionally helping asylum seekers and refugees (AS&Rs) for six years. Much of what it offers is quite simple, which leads it to believe that it may be replicable in other Baptist churches. Minister **Tim Fergusson** shares the story

Our intentional support of AS&Rs began with two church members who had a passion for welcoming the stranger. They took on a double plot with a small shed at the local allotments and invited a few AS&Rs to join them – to work the ground, grow some veg and enjoy a place of safety and friendship. Some came to drink tea and chat, others came to dig because it reminded them of working their own land. The shared activity also allowed those who had suffered trauma to enjoy company without having to talk in any depth.

As the allotment project continued, other church members started to be involved in AS&R related groups. A few began to help at a Solihull Churches Together drop-in for asylum seekers obliged to report at the UK Border Agency's Midlands centre. Another church member landed a job at a nearby AS&R support organisation. A handful of church members were trained as befrienders by Restore, the

Birmingham Churches Together AS&R support charity. This last connection has been especially important as we have sought advice from Restore on numerous occasions.

Gradually, we encountered an increasing number of AS&Rs. Some we knew for a brief season, while others developed strong friendships with people in the church.

What I have found helpful about Olton Baptist Church is the way people treated me like a human being, contrary to what I experienced in all the three detention centres

Apart from providing the bus fare to get to the allotment project, we have never guaranteed any form of financial or practical support. Instead, a number of people in the church give low-level support to those they have built a relationship with, such as the provision of a bus pass or a phone top-up (without the ability to be in contact or to travel, relationship-building is extremely hard), or giving lifts, or helping with access to local services, or helping fill in forms. On a couple of occasions, we have written to local MPs to ask for their assistance in progressing a claim or in challenging government processes.

Many AS&Rs have contact with us only through the allotment project. But some have asked to attend church, and a sizeable handful has become part of our worshipping congregation. Two have been baptised, three are now church members. They have variously joined our worship band and our

children's team and our outreach to a residential home. Six came along to our church weekend away – perhaps the first holiday they have had in years. You can read what this has meant to one asylum seeker in the box on the right. Alongside this natural development, the church's teaching has frequently focussed on the theme of welcoming the stranger. We eventually signed up at a church meeting to a charter of support for AS&Rs, formally placing welcome of the stranger on the church's list of priorities.

In one case only so far, an asylum seeker has been accommodated by a couple in the church. The asylum seeker already had a strong friendship with the couple involved and expectations were openly discussed before this began. It proved both costly and enriching to the couple who acted as hosts for six months.

Behind this story lie many setbacks and mistakes. We have sometimes been taken for granted or not told the truth. We have realised that some church volunteers are vulnerable themselves and need guarding. We have felt powerless in the face of mental health difficulties. We have had to deal with anger within ourselves at the injustice of what we have seen and heard. We have found ourselves drawn in alarmingly to the needs of others as it becomes apparent we are the only ones offering support. We have been guilty

of leaving the integration of AS&Rs to a few overburdened volunteers. We have had to deal with suspicion and conflict among the different ethnic groups we are reaching. And of course, we have had to challenge our own prejudices, assumptions and sense of entitlement.

We have discovered that we have been enriched as we have demonstrated grace.

Finally, there is a phrase, the 'vowels of grace', that has become useful to us. Welcoming the stranger, integrating those of other cultures, and supporting the marginalised can often be hard work. We have learnt to embrace the reality that 'grace' is spelt not only with an A and an E, but also an I, O and a U. Those who exhibit grace become familiar with Awkwardness, Embarrassment, Inconvenience, Offence and Uncertainty. When we are tempted to complain or walk away, reminding each other of this group of words has helped us to count the cost but still persevere. It is worth it, for when all is said and done, we have discovered that we have been enriched as we have demonstrated grace. As the marginalised among us, the AS&Rs have caused us to sharpen our faith, learn generosity and develop an openness of spirit. Our otherwise homogeneous middle class church culture needs their participation as much as they need our welcome. ■

One story, from an African asylum seeker:

"Since being befriended, my life has completely changed. I have become a part of Olton Baptist church and found a new family – people that love me and trust me. In my personal opinion, I believe that churches have to stand together and speak into politics just to make sure people are treated fairly. What I have found helpful about OBC is the way people treated me like a human being, contrary to what I experienced in all the three detention centres I have been through since claiming asylum. I now feel confident because I have a new family who believe in me and are all helping me integrate into church life. I am saying this because many people will not realise how important little things they do can be – like saying hello, or just talking to you and treating you as a person. I would like the church to see how powerful their ministry of welcome is to those who have known only hostility since they arrived in Britain."

Olton has produced guidelines on befriending refugees and asylum seekers. Visit baptist.org.uk/olton to read this story online and find a link to the guidelines



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Releasing hope in community



Photo: Yeldall Manor

One way our churches are beacons of hope in their communities is through their partnerships with local organisations – something that has been powerfully demonstrated by a group of Baptist churches and a drug and alcohol recovery centre in Berkshire

Yeldall Manor is a residential rehabilitation centre set in 38 acres of countryside near Reading, and for nearly 40 years has been helping men to overcome serious drug or alcohol addictions and return to society. More than 80 per cent of those who completed its programme in the last two years are continuing to live drug/alcohol-free lives at least six months later.

A key element in its residents' progress is the support from a range of local churches, including **Woodley, Wycliffe, Wokingham** and **Finchampstead Baptist churches**.

"When Yeldall was set up 40 years ago," said Treflyn Lloyd Roberts, CEO and a member of **Woodley Baptist Church**, "Yeldall had support from local churches.

"This continues, and it's vital. We couldn't do what we do without it."

The approach

Yeldall offers a staged approach to those on its programme, helping residents understand and begin to deal with the problems which lie behind their addiction, as well as developing the character qualities upon which long-term abstinence can be built. It views addiction as a disorder of the whole person; recovery is not just abstinence but one that involves learning how to work, develop personal relationships and enjoy positive leisure activities.

Yeldall is a Christian organisation, believing that the best means of achieving true freedom is through a relationship with Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. However, it's also clear that it will never impose its viewpoint upon anyone, 'recognising freedom of choice in faith, as in other areas'. It accepts people of all faiths and none. All Yeldall's staff and regular volunteers are Christian.



Sharing a meal in the Yeldall Manor dining room

Photo: Yeldall Manor

Photo: © Lynda Bowyer Photography

How do churches support Yeldall?

Church support comes in many forms. There's the financial, whether that's to the general fund or directly to a bursary scheme, which enables Yeldall to offer places to those who cannot access local authority funding and are unable to afford it.

Then there's the relational. Volunteers seek to offer friendship, support and prayer for the residents. There are monthly prayer meetings, attended by staff, residents and supporters, along with quarterly celebration services and an annual Open Day (a summer fete largely staffed by volunteers). Seeing people give up their time to support and pray with them is a real encouragement to the residents, some of whom haven't experienced that sort of care before, especially from people they don't know.

The volunteers include Roger Howard, a retired businessman and member of *Finchampstead Baptist Church*. During spring and summer Roger works on the allotment alongside the residents. "Physical work is part of the



treatment," he explains. "And when they work they tend to talk. Having a sympathetic Christian working with them encourages them. A recognition of their past is part of the recovery process."

After he retired, and after many years as a trustee of another Christian rehabilitation organisation, Roger was asked to join the trustees at Yeldall.

As with all the volunteers, his involvement stems from, and impacts, his faith. "We view addiction as a disorder of the whole person. Therefore we treat the whole person. We have a high proportion of staff and volunteers to people: the guys get a lot of attention. So we need volunteers. The volunteers have different levels of involvement, but all are committed to the guys' recovery. It's their faith in action." →



Yeldall Manor is all about recovery for life – men finding freedom from addiction so that they can go on to live life to the full.

Over the years, hundreds of men have experienced this transformation at Yeldall Manor, finding healing, wholeness and hope for the future whilst completing our programmes.

Today, these men are enjoying life drug and alcohol-free, a life free from guilt and shame, a life full of good relationships, a life of productive and fulfilling work, a life they can feel proud of.



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Dan counselling one of the residents

Photo: © Lynda Bowyer Photography



Being part of a supportive community

The rehabilitation involves attending church services, in part to encourage a resident to become part of a supportive community. Yeldall wants all who complete its programme to have five key elements in place when they leave: improved health (physical, mental, spiritual), accommodation, a vocation (something to get up for), recovery networks and social networks. The latter is an area where churches can play a key role, providing a space, friends, accountability and security.

Having a range of churches connected to Yeldall means there is greater choice for its residents, and thereby a greater chance of linking up with one and benefitting from that community support.

One-to-one discipling

A more recent development has been one-to-one discipling. **Wycliffe Baptist Church** in Reading has had a long association with Yeldall. Five of its members work there, and it is one of the churches that welcomes Yeldall residents to its services. Last year it held a service where several made a commitment to Christ.

Pastor Lee Kohler spoke to Yeldall about the possibility of discipling one of them. He and Andy, who has suffered from cocaine addiction, have subsequently met each week, going through a discipleship course *Growing in Christ*, a practical Bible study series to help new Christians to become established in their faith. He has encouraged Andy to develop practices like quiet times, and be part of a home group.

“We’ve seen how much Andy has grown,” says Lee. “He had anger management issues. He was quite aggressive. That’s changed – he’s much more in control. There are ups and downs, but lots of good things in place.”

They’ve continued to meet (“We just talk life,” says Lee), and Andy is now at the stage where he is encouraging others. Lee has invited other church members to offer one-to-one discipleship, which several are doing. “I don’t think of it in terms of social work, but more in spiritual terms,” says Lee. “It has a huge impact on the Yeldall guys, and on our church members.”

It all means that Yeldall is an organisation that combines addiction professionals with the practical, financial and prayerful support of a compassionate Christian community. It’s an approach that has resulted in the transformation of damaged lives.

“I often use the analogy of helping my daughters learn to ride a bike,” says CEO Treflyn. “You don’t just take off the stabilisers and let them go: you run alongside for as long as they need it.

“To have so many people work alongside and build and model healthy relationships is a vital part of what we do.”



Photo: © Lynda Bowyer Photography

Hope MK

A city-wide mission led by young people seeing God's love shared in Milton Keynes



Photo: Hope MK

"We wanted to challenge our young people in the city where they live," explains Baptist youth minister Ricky Rew. "We'd seen their faith grow at summer camps and conferences, followed by a reluctance to put it in action back home.

"How could we go about changing that?"

Hope MK was one response to that dilemma. Set up by Ricky, of **Spurgeon Baptist Church**, alongside two youth workers, Hope MK sees young people lead a variety of projects that seek to bless Milton Keynes during the October half term. The vision is 'to see the love of God shared with the people of our city, and many people having an encounter with the God who knows them and loves them - with young people leading the way!' The projects cover a range of social action and community building activities. A partnership of churches, organisations and Christians from across Milton Keynes helps bring it all together.

Each day begins with a time of gathering for worship, talks and workshops. The activities take place in the afternoons, before all gather again for dinner and reflection on the day. The final evening sees a celebration event to which the young people can invite their friends.

Both its range and the numbers involved have grown since Hope MK first took place in 2013. Then 100 youngsters aged between 11 and 17 took part, but that had grown to 153 last year. Alongside 70 adult volunteers, they represented 34 churches across Milton Keynes. They led 14 projects,

sharing hope by tidying neglected community spaces, litter picking, running family fun sessions, giving away freebies, praying for people and more. Fourteen Christian organisations and six local partner organisations were involved too.

"It was an amazing four days," says Ricky, "where God did some great things."

The results can be seen in a variety of ways. There is the individual impact each project has – some took place in deprived parts of the community where community spaces have long been neglected. There's been a deepening in the relationships between the churches involved. "That's been a real change," Ricky says. "We've discovered we're actually pretty normal and we have much more in common than we realise. And we've seen the fruit of this in other inter-church areas."

But the biggest effect is on the young people themselves. Around a quarter are committed Christians who have a strong faith and want to live it out. Around half have a basic faith,

perhaps living their parents' faith and not particularly developed. The final quarter have no faith at all, maybe simply some connection with a church youth group or with the young people.

"For some, they say it's the first time they see God at work," Ricky says. "We see a great transformation in them as individuals. God stirs their hearts." Last year 15 became Christians, and 120 more responded by coming forward and kneeling to display their desire to go deeper with God."

Ricky continues, "Giving up their school holiday to run a variety of community building and social action projects, they demonstrate that young people are not lazy, apathetic and good for nothing.

"Please pray for the young people who were involved, and for the ongoing impact of the projects - that hope would continue to be spread across the city."

For more information visit:
www.hopemk.com
 or contact hello@hopemk.com



Photo: Hope MK

IN THE PRESENCE OF A PADRE

A military chaplain's role is to be a light in a dark place, and there are few darker places than a warzone. But God is at work here, writes **Cole Maynard**



Photo: Ministry of Defence

One of the abiding memories I have of flying into Camp Bastion at night is that of light in a dark place. Situated in the middle of a massive desert, in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, was a substantial camp on an arid sandy plateau, a former seabed. At night as you flew across vast tracts of darkness suddenly you saw a glimmer in the distance, as the camp loomed into view, and the cold intractable surface of sand and grit gave way to concrete runways, tents, lights, and the thrum of generators... life!

The role of the military chaplain is just like this – a light in a dark place – and there are few darker places than that of a warzone. The chaplain is to provide a safe harbour, a place of welcome and familiarity. A non-judgemental haven where the service person can open up, share deep feelings or problems, and find both acceptance and support. As a serving army chaplain in my 20th year I can truly say it is such a privilege to represent both Christ and my denomination in this way. Wearing the uniform of the soldier – but not carrying his weapons – we have a unique role being the only unarmed officer in the ranks, and the only one who can offer the confidence of the confessional – an unusual role perhaps for a free-church minister! Yet, living with the soldiers and sharing their experiences gives you both a unique insight and shared comradeship with your uniformed flock.

During my last tour of Afghanistan I worked in the headquarters as the Joint Force Senior Chaplain in Camp Bastion and flew around theatre (the area where the military events are occurring) to visit my team in various parts of the country. I mixed with very senior officers and very junior soldiers, all who titled me Padre, and so we shared a moment, a conversation, a prayer or a concern. Sunday mornings saw me leading a formal liturgical act of worship for the headquarters staff, with 1 Star officers and below, the former preferring a more structured approach being Anglo-Catholic. In the evenings two or three soldiers would lead the worship with music downloaded from YouTube leaving me to top and tail the service and preach. With modern songs, lively praise and soldiers giving testimony every week sharing with their peers what God was doing in their lives, it carried a very different flavour to the earlier offering. The congregation averaged 40-50 most Sundays, which is not bad for a service starting at 8.30 in the evening! Music in the desert.

God was at work and I truly thank him for the testimonies we heard. Personal accounts of how God was using a dark desert full of conflict and pain to bring young men and women closer to him. One such person was a young Intelligence Corporal with whom I was put into contact due to the difficulties of his job. Following regular meetings

over several months our pastoral sessions became a discipleship class and I had the privilege of baptising him by immersion in a specially constructed pool in the desert. As I climbed out of the water and stood dripping beside him to pray, the sun was setting and we were bathed in a glorious warm light. It was the only time in those six months that I actually felt cool, but my heart was on fire!

As my fingers dance over the keyboard I am about to fly out to South Sudan with a smallish detachment of British soldiers to work with the United Nations in two refugee camps in that land. As ever my mind and my heart are torn by both the excitement at the pastoral opportunities and the pain of separation that such long deployment brings. South Sudan is a country that needs our prayers and our compassion. So I follow the bugle call to pastures new, knowing that our Saviour is one who leads from the front and does not drive us from the back.

It is my prayer that with the presence of a padre, his light might shine in the darkness and be a beacon of hope.

Cole Maynard has been a Baptist army chaplain for 20 years. He is currently on a deployment in South Sudan



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The Blackley Centre hosted an inter faith conference in February

BUILDING HOPE

Baptist ministers **Jo and Andy Williams** are combining their expertise in a new centre for peace building and inter faith relations in the north

Conflict and disagreement are an unfortunate reality in many people's lives. Mediators have reported that family breakdown is on the rise¹. At a Civil Mediation Council conference in February, nearly four in five senior level delegates reported they had been aware of or experienced workplace conflict over the previous year². What's more, conflict is something that church communities find difficult, despite peace-making and reconciliation being key ideas in the teaching of Jesus. 'Churches do not 'do conflict' very well', according to Bridge Builders, a national, Christian mediation charity. 'When there is disagreement and tension among Christians in the church, they can find themselves struggling.'

With hate crime also increasing³, two Baptist ministers are seeking to bring hope to these issues with the creation of a new centre for peace building and inter faith relations.

Jo Williams is an experienced mediator, working as a mediator and trainer for churches, colleges, communities and families. She is a member of the College of Mediators.

Husband Andy has been involved in developing inter faith relations for many years. While minister at **Sion Baptist Church** in Burnley, he was a founding member of the inter faith project *Building Bridges in Burnley* in 2002. He is the moderator of the Baptist Inter Faith Working Group.

The couple moved to **Blackley Baptist Church** in Yorkshire last year, part of their call involving the development of the church's Blackley Centre. It has operated as a retreat and hospitality centre since 1994, but with the previous minister retiring, the church was looking for new ideas about how to develop it.



The Blackley Centre

1 bit.ly/resolvex

2 bit.ly/cmcfcb

3 bit.ly/hatespike

The Williams' vision is to create 'a centre for peace building and inter faith relations in the North'. Their proposed strapline is: 'Building understanding, relationships and peace through dialogue'. This suggested vision seeks to recognise the good work already being done in mediation and inter faith relations, while offering ways in which these two aspects of work/ministry can be further resourced and developed to better address the great need that exists. They are seeking to provide a centre that is a 'conductive, welcoming and safe meeting place, for people seeking to transform conflict and make peace and for people of all faiths to develop understanding and friendship'.

The church has supported this vision, as has the **Yorkshire Baptist Association** which has supplied a grant for a scoping project to explore how the centre might work. The scoping project will be ready to report by the middle of May.

It's early days, but possibilities involve providing one-to-one coaching for clergy (and other faith leaders) whose faith communities are in, or in danger of being in, or recovering from, conflict (internally or with one another). Networking with local and northern inter faith organisations opens the potential to provide faith literacy training, develop inter faith events and address the needs of secondary schools in learning about and encountering people of different faiths.

"For a long time Jo and I have had the dream of putting together our specialisms," says Andy, "to explore how the two might inform and enrich one another in theory and practice."



Jo and Andy Williams

For more information and resources, to help you relate well to people of other faiths, see: www.baptist.org.uk/interfaith



A deacons' meeting at the church

"Conflict is a reality in people's lives, in church communities and more widely. Part of our faith is bringing people into relationship, which comes from the God who brings us into relationship with him."

"From the inter faith point of view, it's about breaking down barriers, growing understanding, seeing people discover what they have in common and how they relate to each other. There is actually a lot of commonality among faith communities."

"There has been an increase in hate crime, and people view religion as a source of that conflict. Showing there is more that unites us, that people can be brought together and that religions have resources for making peace and overcoming problems, will help to address this emerging and growing need."



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Baptist church planting in Europe and North Africa



Yousef amongst the congregation in Egypt

Baptist church planters are being beacons of hope across Europe and North Africa, operating through a partnership with much British support, writes **Daniel Trusiewicz**.

The **European Baptist Federation** identifies planters for its Mission Partnership (MP) programme, with the Baptist Union of Great Britain, BMS World Mission and the Baptist Insurance Company among the programme's contributors. Here are two examples of how the MP church planters are making a difference.

Yousef - Light Disperses Darkness in Egypt

The local mission workers in Egypt minister sacrificially, often among the poorest and illiterate people. Their mission is twofold: to share the message of the gospel, and carry out social work, bringing bright rays of light to a dark reality.

The multi-ethnic and socially diverse population of Egypt numbers nearly 80 million. About 90 per cent are Muslim and only 10 per cent are Christians, with Coptic and Orthodox being the largest groups. The evangelical believers are

the 'minority of the minority' in Egypt, because they comprise only about 10 per cent of the Christian population.

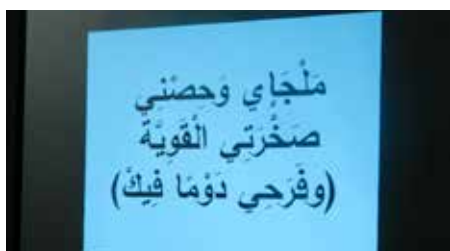
The Baptist Convention in Egypt is now led by pastor Mounir Malaty from Cairo. The Convention comprises 19 local churches and many groups that are considered church plants. The small Convention actively seeks opportunities to plant new congregations. Yousef began the ministry more than two years ago with a goal of serving 100 families from the neighbourhood. The first evangelistic meetings were held in the private home of a believer and the mission team soon surpassed



Yousef and his family

its original goal. "In 2016, we held our meetings on Fridays and Sundays. Additionally we continue the children's ministry for about 30 kids and organise a Bible study for adults," Yousef shares. "Our goal now is to serve 200 families. We also plan to develop a discipleship group in order to grow more leaders."

The mission team is also running a free learning centre for about 70 children, served by seven teachers. "Some orphans and children of people who can't afford other schooling attend," Yousef explains. "This centre started in October 2015 as the response to illiteracy, which is a serious problem in Egypt."



Alex – Influencing young people in Ukraine

Ukraine is populated by about 46 million who are predominantly nominal Orthodox. There is a good influx of Baptists (about 125,000) who are actively involved in thriving mission work, leading numerous exciting social and evangelistic projects all over the country. The greatest need, though, is in the western part of country, where Baptists are scarce.

About two and a half years ago Alex and his wife Oksana moved to Ternopil (western Ukraine), sent by the mother church of Rivne. They started by opening a social network webpage and immediately had about 500 friends. They use it to share some biblical texts, conduct social surveys and get to know new people. Alex also organises a floor ball (hockey) for about 30 teenagers.



Alex (above, centre) and the team organise activities for children



Some of the church family in Ternopil



Doing this provides opportunities to build friendly relationships with the local youth in the hope that the gospel will make its way into their hearts. The church planters also try to make friends with the parents of the young people, as some of them demonstrate a very positive attitude.

“There are three students on our team,” says Alex. “They live in a nearby dormitory and attend the morning prayers. They study the Bible in their rooms and organise meetings for other students. They also distribute Christian literature.”

The team organises different activities for children on occasions. Their most recent family day welcomed about 300 participants, all having lots of fun and asking about a next time...

The mission group organises three meetings a week. On Mondays there

is the team meeting where they share reports from recent activities and make plans. Each team member is encouraged to lead a group during the week and must have a disciple who will be able to organise his own group in future. On Wednesdays there is an evangelistic Bible study and team members invite newcomers. On Sundays there are open meetings with a worship time, Bible readings, prayers and fellowship over a cup of tea. The mission team works with poor people too, giving away food parcels.

“Our immediate plan is to start a family club and we have found a building where young people could gather,” says Alex. “It is really exciting to see how the teenagers grow in faith and become involved in ministry.”

Daniel Trusiewicz is the EBF Mission Partnerships co-ordinator



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How do you know what your church's role is?



57 West share in a community meal after Saturday church

57 West began life very differently to what it is now. Pastor Dan Pratt reports on how it found its ministry

The first morning of January 2014 was cold and bleak. I sat opposite Louise, the last remaining person of a small group of 20-somethings who had joined the church planting team over a year before. For the last 15 months we had attempted, in a spectacularly unsuccessful fashion, to start a church among university and college students, who are plentiful in the Essex coastal town of Southend-on-Sea. The team had grown tired, discouraged and numbers dwindled. Louise and I had agreed to start 2014 with a day of prayer and fasting. If we were honest, this was a last ditch-attempt to start a church. We were out of energy, ideas and faith was low.

During the last year we had tried every kind of missional activity we could think of. Student evenings, talent shows, go-karting, pub, club and street work. Lots of good conversations, but no sustained relationship nor community emerging. Apart from 57 West's premises, a renovated barber's shop that now looked like a coffee shop, we had very little to show for our efforts.

After what seemed an eternity of praying (which was in fact only two hours), there was a 'tap, tap, tap' on the window. Four rough sleepers were looking through the glass. All cold and damp. I tried to hide the annoyance from my face while thinking 'you're

disrupting our prayer time!' Louise more graciously invited them inside. "We're praying. You're welcome to come in if you want to join us praying," I stated, determined that 'my' prayer day wouldn't be blindsided. Relieved to find a dry and warmish place, Pete, Mick, Amanda and Fred¹ wearily took off their damp jackets as Louise made coffee. We had met many rough sleepers walking the streets during the last year and before. During that time friendships emerged. It wasn't therefore a surprise that our rough sleeper friends had passed by and sought an opportunity to escape the cold.

¹ Name changed





Celebrating the second birthday of 57 West

As we prayed together I was surprised to discover our friend's faith and their raw and honest prayers: "God, I've had a shit year," Pete prayed sincerely, "please give me a better year." Suddenly, Mick stood up and threw on his jacket. "Just give me five minutes," he said, disappearing. Several minutes later he reappeared with eight of his friends. All rough sleepers. All looking cold, glum, and with nowhere to go. They entered in varying degrees of sobriety.

My prayer day was disappearing into chaos and I was annoyed. With fourteen of us, we gave praying a go once again, and to my surprise it was working. Heart-wrenchingly honest prayers. My selfishness and self-preoccupation were being exposed, as I silently repented. My expectations and faith were combusting, as neatly defined boxes of what should happen during a prayer day were blown away. Our new friends were teaching me to have faith in the midst of suffering; to be vulnerable in brokenness, and; to persevere through trials.

For the next 12 hours, prayers and spontaneous discussions about life and faith were interspersed by copious amounts of coffee and chatting. We decided to conclude the day by sharing communion together. My theology once again entered crisis. Who should take communion? Are all these people Christians? What about Jack over there who is drunk? I was assessing and judging each person. As my loss of control increased, walls in my heart were put up. Who was in and who was out? Are they worthy enough?

Again I was convicted. What about my selfishness and sin? Was I worthy enough? God's love filled my heart. It was his grace that enabled any of us to take communion. God was big enough to preserve the sanctity of communion, my theology was not. As we read from the Bible passage, "this is my body broken for you", I looked around the room. Pete, Mick, Amanda, Fred and our new friends. This was Christ's body. Indeed our brokenness was united through Christ's broken body, our addictions and fragility were brought under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We were God's children. We were loved by him. Christ's body was broken for us. The one communion cup was passed by dirty hands. Jesus came to save those who need a doctor. Us. His body was broken for each of us in that room, so that we could live. In our brokenness and death we were invited into the new life of Christ's resurrection. God's grace and mercy are a great equaliser! We are Christ's body. This was Christ's church! 1st January 2014, a new church had been planted by God's Spirit in Southend-on-Sea.



Damian's baptism in 2016

Sometimes I am slow to catch on with what God is doing. Sometimes God answers prayers before we've even prayed them. Sometimes the answers to our prayers aren't those we expect, or even want! All church planting gimmicks were blown away as tumbleweed. It was all dross. It was not my ability or anointing that planted that church. It was God's Spirit. God had worked in spite of my selfishness and control issues! I was privileged to be there and to join what God was doing.

Our new friends, Louise and I continued to meet. We tried to figure out together what it means to be church. A weekly, gathered church service emerged. It was raw, honest and very chaotic. I struggled to keep up with what God was doing. A meal emerged following church, inviting the poor, the homeless and vulnerable into community. Our small premises went from being empty to being suddenly packed. During the week we opened as a community café, offering a safe space, hot food and drinks as well as an invitation to be community together.



In January 2017, we celebrated our third anniversary of being church together. I am still learning to follow what God is doing and try not to get in the way. God has continued to grow the ministry. In 2015 we had 4000 visits to our community, increasing to 6000 in 2016. 57 West has celebrated five baptisms, several commitments of faith and a myriad of ways that God's grace is evident. Violence, death and poverty impact us. Our brokenness is where God's Spirit has breathed life, hope and healing. We cling to God's hope and grace in the storms. Together we are the body of Christ in central Southend.

Dan Pratt is the pastor of 57 West in Southend



Photos: 57 West



Baptist church brings light to its community in Uganda



A safe source of light is transforming village life in Uganda, thanks to BMS World Mission

When one simple action raises money, helps people's lungs, gives children a better chance at an education *and* introduces people to Jesus as Lord, it's probably worth doing. That's what one Ugandan Christian thinks about a solar panel project that he has helped to bring to a rural mountain village.

The solar powered light that has transformed the life of *Kayanji Baptist Church*, which is nestled in western Uganda's Rwenzori Mountains, was installed three years ago, through a project funded by BMS. Since the solar power was given to the church, its membership has more than doubled – from 30 to 80 people.



Isaiah Thembo

"The Bible says, 'let there be light,'" says Isaiah Thembo, a local BMS worker and the man who helped to install solar powered lighting in Kayanji Baptist Church. "Through the project, people are coming to see that God is love. Because the church is connecting the community to God."

Kayanji village used to be plunged into darkness when the sun went down, but now Kayanji Baptist Church is sharing the light.

It opens its doors every evening for people to come and use the light to read and to study – the whole village is welcome. The pastor also uses the light to run a Bible study every morning that more and more members of the community are attending. In addition, the solar power is used for people to charge their mobile phones, at a small cost. The money raised through phone-charging maintains

the church and is used to help struggling people in the community, such as widows and orphans.

Only seven per cent of the whole of Kasese District, of which Kayanji village is a part, have mains electricity. For the vast majority of the district, the only source of light is by burning kerosene lanterns or candles which is expensive and dangerous. Kerosene produces a dim light and toxic smoke, which irritates the eyes and skin and is a major cause of both respiratory diseases and harmful CO₂ emissions.

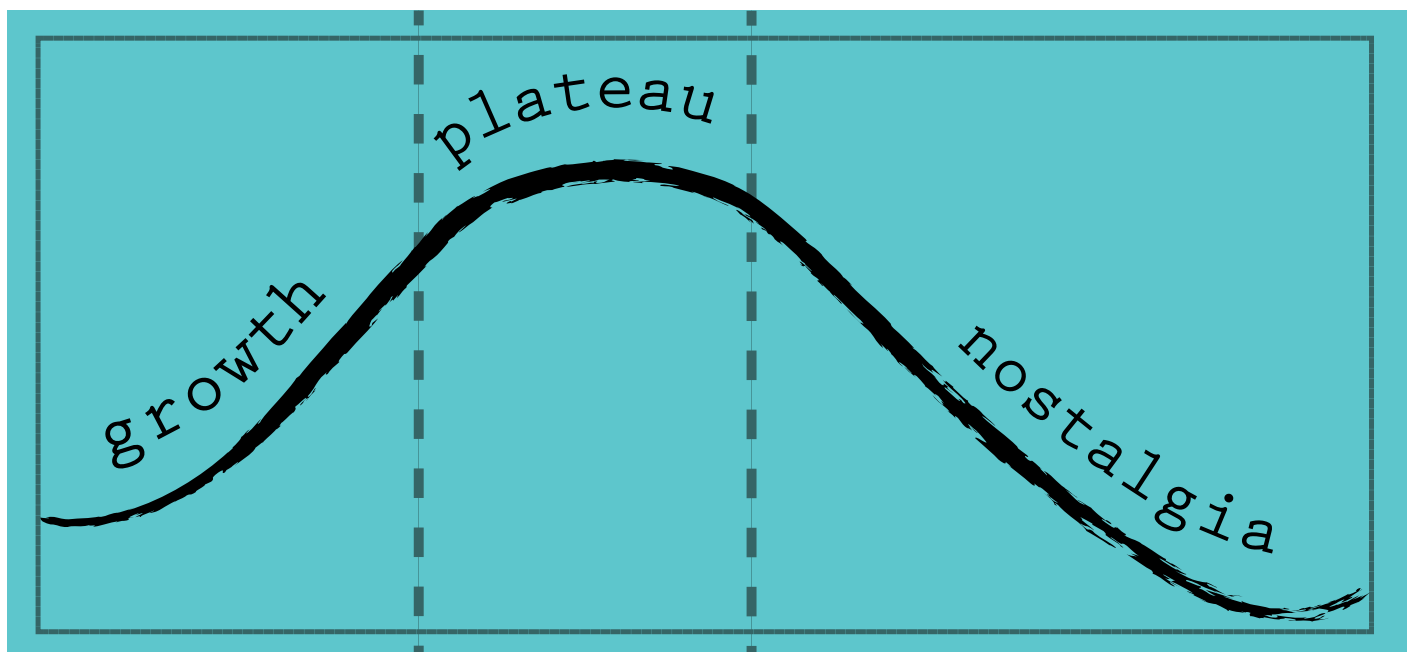
In a country that is in darkness for nearly 12 hours a day, a safe source of light can completely change people's quality of life.

"My kids come here for [school] preparation every evening," says father-of-ten Kambala Limengo. Kambala is a member of Kayanji Baptist Church and is excited about the change the solar project has had, both for his family and for the wider community. "Our children used to learn from home using candles," he says. "But this solar light is bright, and it doesn't give out smoke – it doesn't use firewood or kerosene to burn, it is just using the sun."



Kambala Limengo

Kayanji is one of eight rural villages that have had their churches and their evenings transformed thanks to this BMS World Mission solar project. The lights are helping children thrive at school, they are providing income for practical outreach into the community and, perhaps most exciting of all, they are providing a way to introduce people to the Light of the World.



Hope for a church on the edge of its ability

In the West of England, a number of Baptist churches are discovering that the very edge of ability is a good place to rediscover our hope in Christ. By **Nigel Coles** and **Ruth Whiter**

One exercise we often try with church leadership teams is to ask them to place themselves on an imaginary bell curve which represents the life of their fellowship. Placing yourself at the beginning of the downward curve can be scary, as down naturally leads to death.

As followers of Jesus, however, we are used to the idea that we need to 'die to self'. We all have our own stories of struggling to accept God's ways, preferring our own ways, avoiding dying to ourselves at all costs, but then discovering that 'all costs' is his way to life and fruitfulness.

For a church to 'die to self' is perhaps an even harder struggle, because we each bring our individual reluctance and make it bigger than the sum of our parts! But perhaps this is our choice, as a church facing the downward curve: to choose to die to ourselves, or to accept the death that will be imposed on us sooner or later:

Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. John 12:24

Across the **West of England Baptist Association** (WEBA) at the present time we are helping an increasing number of churches who are recognising that trajectory, consciously dying to their 'way of doing things', and seeing new life springing up – and God still calling them to be part of the next chapter.

Sadly, some churches only accept a radical re-directing of their vision when they no longer have the energy themselves to engage in the opportunities of resurrection. In WEBA we have found that establishing a Steering Group

to accompany the remaining leadership team through this journey of transformation can be helpful, but this is rarely a straightforward process.

St George Baptist Church was once a vibrant community of God's people in a busy area of East Bristol. Following a peak in the 1960s, the congregation slowly dwindled until 2007, when the remaining members agreed to look at things differently.

Ten years later, a worshipping congregation of more than 30 will soon have the building open seven days a week, providing a coffee shop and community hub. It's all looking great – but this is actually the *third* attempt at 're-planting' this church. We could have given up more than once, and some might call us naïve, some persistent, or some even belligerent, but we believe that the church is a subset of mission, not the other way round, and if the mission field for which this church was built is still there, then the church needs to work persistently to respond to it. →



Photo: Emily Coles

Stonehouse Baptist Church in Gloucestershire was a small church for a long time. Most people were quite happy. It was a friendly church of prayerful, faithful people. Nevertheless, the average age kept creeping up, and with it any ability to connect with the surrounding community diminished, so that a moment arrived when the church could have decided to close.

Instead, nearby **Minchinhampton Baptist Church** offered to lend a few people, including a pastoral leader. Through simple engagement with friends, neighbours, and community groups, the church began to grow.

In 2013 Anne Dunn joined the church as Minister in Training, and by the time she'd finished her Ministerial Formation at **Bristol Baptist College**, the membership had increased from 14 to 70. Since then, the church has outgrown its original building and moved into a local secondary school.

It's important that there's at least one remaining person in the group who will foster an atmosphere of encouragement. At Stonehouse, Joy Ramsbottom was one of the few remaining members who believed God could bring new life.



Photo: Aaron Beale

Stories like these - simple, complicated, and everything in between - are being repeated across the West of England as different churches on the edge of their ability stop focusing on who will turn the lights out when everyone's gone, and learn to die to their own selfish constraints, their perception of their own identity as church. It's not that we don't believe in dying. Rather, it's that we believe there is something more beyond.

So is there hope for a church on the edge of its ability?

Well, relying on our own ability never got us very far, so the edge of ability may be a good place to remain.

Nigel Coles is Regional Minister Team Leader at the **West of England Baptist Association**



Ruth Whiter is WEBA Communications Co-Ordinator

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The time has come

Sometimes it is right that a ministry ends: approached with a Kingdom-based perspective this is not a sign of failure, more a recognition of the seasons (and that maybe God is doing a new thing)



When **Kingswood Baptist Church**, Watford stepped out in faith and called Jane Robson to be its minister, few envisaged her role would be to help the church close five years later. Jane was the church's first minister in four years, and as a minister-in-training this was her first pastorate.

"My arrival was going to be THE moment!" she said. "Things went well initially, but then plateaued."

The church was in something of a straightjacket - "the well recognised combination of trying to support a part-time minister and fund the upkeep of the building, while also having the resources for meaningful mission to the community." Whatever it had tried in the previous two decades had kept coming back to "a declining, aged congregation with limited finances, little energy, and meagre skills for mission."

Weeks and months of prayer, preaching, formal and informal discussions culminated in a discernment of the Spirit at a special meeting in early 2015: a decision to close was made. Jane understood her call was to help the church close well.

It's a process about which she has done much reflection, both before and after (she has written a paper called *The Time has Come: Closing a Church Well in the Baptist Denomination*.)

A number of factors helped to shape the church's perspective. They understood that everything is for a season (Ecclesiastes 3: 1-11). "At a funeral we're quick to acknowledge that no-one lives forever (on earth);"

Jane wrote in a piece for the **Central Baptist Association** newsletter, 'so what gave us the right to expect that our church should go on forever?'

They were not operating autonomously, but were part of a wider movement: the act of closing could release both people and resources, locally and nationally. "We trusted that the willingness to die would allow God to use seeds which would never have otherwise been produced," said Jane.

Above all, it's not about failure, but God doing a new thing with his unchanging message. The church is not the building, but the people of God, a people called to be on the move.

"This work of bringing in the kingdom was and is God's work; it is his mission and while the message of the gospel does not change, the way in which it is presented will," she said.

"It will be painful. It will be hard. It will be sad. It will provoke comments of "What a shame" from the community who've frustratingly failed to be supportive in the past. But obedience to God, whose own son was obedient '...to death – even death on a cross...' is sometimes painful and hard and sad.



The final service at Kingswood Baptist Church

"And God? God will do a new thing with our endings. Look what he did with the 'ending' that was the death of Jesus Christ!"

Jane's essay *The Time Has Come: Closing a Church Well in the Baptist Denomination* is available here: www.baptist.org.uk/kingswood

“What’s the reason for the hope that you have?”



Illustration: www.freepik.com

As a Christian, why do you have hope? A selection of responses from around our Union

‘Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.’

1 Peter 3:15

Hope in the darkness of cancer

Hope. A great word to lift spirits and bring positivity and optimism. A great name for a church actually, like the one I lead in Plymouth....

Or I should say that I **did** lead until my cancer diagnosis back in May 2016. I very much hope to return to Hope one day soon (please God!). But for now, I feel mugged, exhausted, often feeling sick or nauseous from the chemotherapy treatment.

So what do you do when the life and ministry you were enjoying so much is completely snatched away from you?

It has led me to re-examine who I am. What I have. What God has done for me in Christ, but also what he has entrusted to me... this glorious gospel of Jesus that, as a teenager transformed my life, and has shaped it these last 42 years.

In this darkness I find myself in, this horrible place of suffering, I have gone back to the basic questions of my Christian life and faith. What has God called me to do? My answer has been: to seek to glorify God in my life, and proclaim the gospel so that others may come to know him.



Cancer hasn’t changed that. Just because I cannot ‘minister’ as I did 10 months ago, does not mean God has de-commissioned me! I’m still a man of God with a mission to fulfill, seeking to bring hope to a waiting world, where so much seems hope-less at this time.

I wondered how I can continue to bring hope, and where to bring it, if I’m not ministering **inside** and through the local church. The answer has been: **outside!**

Through writing and releasing songs that God has suddenly given me, I have gained a new platform for this life-changing gospel of hope. Not planned, never imagined by me, but God has opened up innumerable opportunities from my hospital bed, on local radio, in local press, Christian radio stations, even the Radio 2 Sunday breakfast show in March.

Working with a talented singer and musician has meant the creation, so far, of two ‘beacon’ songs. The first, *True Identity* released back in January, sets out a declaration of who I am in Christ, what God has done, and the difference it’s made in my life.

The second song, *All down to you* (released mid-March) came to me in a

head / heart-rush of about 20 minutes. It’s about how God is meeting me, and pulling me through, this very dark and tough place. The tunnel I’m in now. The final line of the chorus sets out the hope, the declaration of what I have discovered: *‘In the storm and the earthquake, you’re my solid ground’.*

For myself and for my family, I really do NOT want to be where I am today. The pain, heartache and anguish is often overwhelming. But, despite it all, God is using me to be a beacon. Maybe it shines brighter in the tunnel I’m in, than it would out of a church. When all is well and happy in life, perhaps people would pass by the message I share, thinking ‘it’s all right for you in your contented world’. Now I’m declaring that God brings hope where I am now, here in the darkness.

I know that God loves me, he is faithful, and has not given up on me.

I have that hope for now, and also the hope of a cancer-free eternity with him. How wonderful that is to know!

Andrew Gardiner is minister of *Hope Baptist Church*, Plymouth.



Follow his ministry Rising Hope on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/Risinghopeplymouth>

or visit risinghope.co.uk

I have a really good reason for hope – I need it. I need hope in the same way I cling to the fruits of God’s spirit which only blossom in times of trial.

I used to think hope meant believing things would be better tomorrow, that God would step in and make it alright. But I abandoned that kind of hope about a decade ago.

More recently, I’ve noticed that God is more interested in making me more like him, than improving my circumstances. Because, as Helen Keller said, “The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched - they must be felt with the heart.”



The hope I live with now is not dependent on an improved tomorrow or even being able to recognise God’s faithfulness. It flows from knowing that in the darkest places the light shines brightest. That today, when I’m tired and all that I see makes no sense at all, the unseen is bigger than I can comprehend.

Rachel Wright is a nurse, writer, wife and mum of three boys. Her eldest son was born with complex disabilities. *The Skies I’m Under* is her memoir of living with faith and an unexpected life.

She blogs at *Born at the Right Time* and worships with her family at *Belle Vue Baptist Church* in Southend-on-sea.

I have hope because
At my lowest Christ met me.
At my loneliest Christ comforted me.
At my most hurt and angry Christ was patient with me.
At my most un-loveable, Christ loved me as I was and has helped me to love again.

In all those moments, my darkest of nights he has been there and never failed.

So I have hope, because even when someone’s world, or even the whole world looks bleak... Christ is there. Somehow and somewhere hope is there.

(via Facebook)

The hope... of rebellion

Hope. Four letters and so much promise. Throughout my life I have hoped for many things, I’ve hoped it wouldn’t rain, I’ve hoped my kids will be happy, I’ve hoped the pain I felt would go away. Sometimes they’ve been big hopes, other times menial, petty hopes. But I use the same four letter word to describe them all.

But what of the hope I have in my faith? You know what? I’m not sure I’ve ever thought about it. I’m not sure why my faith gives me hope. I should know, surely? I’m supposed to know, right? I always hear about a hope in Jesus, a hope of heaven, a hope in salvation... hope, hope, hope. Hope means a desire for something to happen. But so much of what I’m meant to have hope for has happened. It happened on a tree on Calvary. There, I was saved, there heaven was made open for me and there I met Jesus. It happened, I can’t hope for things past, I can’t hope for things I already have.

So perhaps something in me drives me to have hope? What part of me gives me hope? What has been

burnt on my heart so deep that it sets a fire twinkling behind my eyes?

Rebellion! That’s it! That’s what gives me hope. I was born with rebellious fire. I want to see a world changed. I want to see barriers destroyed, I want to see injustice brought to heel, I want the prisoner to be freed, and I want the broken to be made whole. That’s what I found on Calvary hill, I found a man who died as a rebel. A man who was killed because he was a potential danger to the established order of things. He proclaimed a way that went to the extremes of love. A man whose main tenet appears to have been to simply love one another. Regardless of colour, creed, sexuality, religious belief or musical tastes. How radical!?

But in reality, it was in the act of his death that caused the greatest rebellion ever. Death itself lost its sting that day. Creation was changed forever. And what did we do? We made rules to rebel by. We tamed the wide-eyed rebel. We watered down a radical doctrine of

love to ‘rebellion light’. Did Jesus die for that?



NO, because that rebellious fire still burns strong in every one of us. Let us rise up for the kingdom. Stand for the oppressed. Voice the voiceless. Be the resistance of love. Be people of an almighty and just God. Be the radical, rebellious people that Jesus modelled for us.

That’s the reason for the hope I have. We have a rebellion to be getting on with. We have a kingdom of love and justice to bring about. We have heaven itself to create. With Jesus as our guide, how can we fail?

“We have hope. Rebellions are built on hope.” Jyn Erso, *Star Wars: Rogue One*

Adam Couchman lives in the South of England with his wife and two children, with another on the way. He is a keen reader, occasional public speaker, seeker of wisdom and member of *Wokingham Baptist Church*.

Imitated hope

As human beings our desires are stimulated and determined by the desires of others. Advertisers know this well, using gleaming, attractive and desirable projections of people to promote their product, creating within us an unconscious desire for what is being advertised; we want what they want because they look wonderful.

Our desires are a result of imitation, for as human beings we are by nature a people of imitation, learning from the day we are born (and before) through the act of imitation. Apple has not sold 1 billion iPhones worldwide because it is necessarily the best phone, but because desire is learnt through imitation, and so the mass desire creates desire in others, and you end up with queues in various cities around the world when the new iPhone is released. Desire happens from an early age. Take for instance when a toddler plays with a toy, and how quickly another toddler will desire that same toy, not because of the toy, but because of the desire of the other toddler. Of course all this is happening unconsciously, and yet, because of our innate desire to imitate others (and neuroscientists have discovered 'mirror neurons' in our brains), our lives are formed through imitation and the desires of others.



Now what does any of this have to do with hope?

In 1 Peter 3:15 we are being encouraged to resist the desires of others, and to be shaped in our lives according to the Lordship of Jesus.

'Do not fear their fear...'

There is positive imitation (or mimesis as René Girard called it) and negative imitation (mimetic rivalry), and our desires can often be determined by mimetic rivalry, desires born out of fear; fear that we are missing out, fear that we will (never) be like 'them', fear that our lives will not be as they should be. Fear is a great motivator, (cf Exodus 33:1-6) but is always detrimental to a life lived in relationship with the Trinitarian life; perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18).

The urge then according to the Scriptures above is for our desires not to be shaped by the desires of others, but for our lives to be shaped by the Lordship and desire of Jesus. We are called to imitate Christ, (Matthew 16:24) the 'True Human' as Walter Wink described.

Hope then is not our desires. Hope is not wishful thinking.

The hope that is within is a hope that comes from God, not from ourselves.

Our desires are determined according to those whom we imitate, whereas truthful hope springs forth from the life and love of God, a gift given by the Spirit, an imitation of the life of Jesus. It is a hope that is not determined by the whims and wishes of our culture, our mood or our circumstances, but a hope that flows from God, the One who is not bound by necessity or the desires of others, whose promises of hope emerge from the place of Christ's supremacy, from 'all things' being held together 'in him'. This is a truthful hope that emerges from the crucified God who 'was pleased to reconcile to himself all things', (Colossians 1:15-20) and is therefore a hope beyond us and our abilities and dreams and desires. A hope given as a gift to us, within us and without us.

This is a hope that is given to us in gentleness by the God of unconditionality, and so we speak of it and share it with the same spirit, and yet with confidence, a confidence that recognises the supremacy and lordship of Jesus Christ, hearts and lives determined, we pray, by the desire of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Joe Haward is minister of the *This Hope*, a pioneering Baptist church in Newton Abbot.

He blogs at redpillrev.com, and his first book *The Ghost of Perfection* is being published by Wipf and Stock later this year.

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Commentary 1 Peter 3: 15-16

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

(New International Version)

Peter is writing to a group of diaspora Christians who face oppression, persecution and quite possibly violence and martyrdom at the hands of the Roman empire, codenamed 'Babylon' at the end of the epistle. Quite naturally, such pressure births fear within the human heart, and in this part of the epistle Peter addresses the problem of fear, and its counterpart - hope. The verses under study read as a midrash (an ancient commentary) of Isaiah 8:12-13, where Peter explains that the Christians do need not to fear what others fear, or dread what others dread. Instead, their acknowledgement of Christ as Lord of their hearts and lives will 'hallow' Christ amongst the nations, declaring him to be holy, in parallel fulfilment to the first petition of the Lord's prayer. Peter makes it clear in the first chapter of the epistle that this lordship of Christ, particularly as manifest in his resurrection, is the solid foundation of the hope which is to replace fear in the Christian heart.

So, under persecution, the Christians are to acknowledge Christ as Lord, and this will change the set of their hearts from fear to hope. And they are to be 'ready' to give 'an answer' for this hope that they have at any time. The 'readiness' here has strong eschatological overtones, and is used in the gospels to express the disciples' responsibility to be ready for the coming of the Son of Man. And the 'answer' is used of a formal defence in court against specific charges. It is the root of the word 'apologetics'.

Like Paul in Philippians 1, Peter is likely to be using the courtroom language metaphorically for any situation where a Christian feels under accusation.

Despite occasional claims to the contrary, Christians in the UK are not a persecuted minority, and for this we can be thankful. But there is definitely a sense in which, like the recipients of Peter's letter, we are 'on trial' every day as we live for Christ in a society whose governing structures do not acknowledge the lordship of Christ. We have seen in recent months that fear in human hearts can have widespread political consequences. Peter reminds us that we are called to live lives which overflow out of hope, not fear. This hope is grounded historically in the resurrection of Jesus. It looks to the coming to the kingdom of the Prince of Peace as its future fulfilment, so we are to be ready. And it finds its daily encouragement in the constant experience of the sustaining love of God perceived by those who strive to honour Christ the Lord as holy in their hearts. Peter encourages us to be ready to share these reasons for the hope which we have.

Rosa Hunt is the minister of *Salem Baptist Chapel* in Tonteg, near Pontypridd, South Wales and has a particular interest in Biblical Hermeneutics.



The main commentary she used when preparing this article was Michaels, J Ramsey: *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*. Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002 (*Word Biblical Commentary* 49)



Photo: Christa Brunt | iStockphoto.com



The hope I have is in the love of God expressed on the cross through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He paid my debt of sin in full and has given me life eternal (Romans 6:23).

Eric Aidoo is the minister of *City Road Baptist Church* in Bristol

I have cause, experientially, to believe that there is a God and that he's Jesus-shaped. This isn't a protector against crap happening nor a belief that only 'Jesus-followers' can live an authentic life.

It does though give me hope that it's worth taking risks to have a go at being who I think I am as a human being and to encourage others to do the same.

(via Facebook)

So many thoughts and possible answers.

One reason I have hope is that Jesus knows what it is to feel forsaken.

In the midst of depression knowing he understands that feeling brings me hope. Life follows death, light breaks through the darkness.

(via Facebook)

My hope is to meet Jesus.
End of.





Brexit

– our responses

Photo: egal | iStockphoto.com

The referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union was bitter and divisive, and its aftermath invites many questions for Christians, whatever side of the debate we are on.

How do we minister in places where there is such apparent polarisation? How can we stay friends with people we may disagree with? Are there deeper issues to grapple with?

In short, what's your response to Brexit?

'Robustly pursue deep, confessional, vulnerable relationships'



Kezia Robinson is a Home Mission Enabler with the Yorkshire Baptist Association. She lives in Wakefield, where 66.4 per cent of people voted Leave.

It felt a little bit like a 'where were you when Kennedy was shot' moment. I woke at 5am at my Dad's place. I'd been decorating there so decided to stay over. I wasn't confident about the Brexit vote. I picked up my phone and saw the breaking news - we were leaving Europe. I felt like I'd just been winded. Like real grief was bubbling inside.

Looking back that response seems a little melodramatic. Firstly, I have friends who voted to leave Europe, folk in the church who felt it better to go than to stay. They are not deranged, racist or intellectually challenged, but have considered and credible thoughts on the issue. Secondly, given the horrendous way the debate was conducted none of us really got to consider any really good argument around the issue.

Thirdly, looking around the world, it hasn't happened in isolation. One meme I saw shortly after the vote said:

BRITAIN: Brexit is the stupidest, most self-destructive act a country could undertake.
USA: Hold my drink.

America is trying to close its borders. France is gearing up for an election where the far right is gaining traction, a picture mirrored in other European countries. It's not simply around our leaving or staying in Europe: Brexit is instead a marker of people and nations drawing lines of division in language and thought. Instead of these separate lines of thought feeding into each other, we are in a time where difference is threat and we respond with fear and hostility.

In this context how do we minister, how do we 'be church'; how do we follow Jesus Christ?

I think that in my Christian lifetime never has it felt so important that we seek a vision of the church as a body of Christ. Never has it felt so important that we don't claim the word 'fellowship' as synonymous with church attendance, but to robustly pursue deep, confessional, vulnerable relationships. What would it look like to be able to be honest in our church communities about

what we think? What if we can speak our fears even if they are unpalatable to others? Could we say out loud...

I don't want to worship with other cultures
 I don't want to give money to church when they don't cater for me
 I agree we should shut our borders
 I don't want gay people in my church
 I want to accept same sex marriage
 I am lonely and have no friends in church
 Everyone else seems happier than me on Facebook
 I'm don't feel relevant anymore
 I love pornography.

This list of things goes on, but the content is secondary. What is vital is that we find a way in our communities to talk with honesty and vulnerability to each other, whatever the unspeakable is. This bucks the trend of fight and fear in a society that is steering us to draw lines, and instead opens us up to a fully human possibility, like God in the Trinity perpetually existing in eternal relationship: we are created in this image and invited to become fully human in deep relationship with one another.

When we can speak things which feel hard, they lose their power over us and we get to wonder, to imagine what they might mean for us. We open ourselves up for change and movement. More significantly, seeking to listen deeply to others opens us to the voice of God and the movement of the Holy Spirit.

This will not just happen, it is a work for us. We are unlikely to achieve it in a seven point programme. We must simply invest ourselves in one another for good or bad, and walk with each other. Not in order to accept everything that we say, but to hear each other and wonder together with God. My most beautiful friendships are with those who have seen the very worst of me and still choose my company. God shows us this in his grace to us, and we are invited to live it with him.

Do we accept each other in our differences? If I speak to you, do you want to change me or hear me? Can we, as a people, really strive to look for the created image of God in the other?

After Brexit, more than at any other time, it may be significant for us to claim this possibility and live it with energy and unapologetic joy. Let us eat together, drink together, meet God together, dance together. Let's be bold in speaking and standing against the tyranny of shame and fear, and invite God in with all his truth and light.

I really think there is life to be had in this, life in all its fullness.

'It isn't enough to 'agree to disagree', we have to rediscover the art of active disagreement'



Ian Tutton is the minister of *Hampstead Garden Suburb Free Church*, situated in a pro-Remain constituency in London. His article 'Brexit is the solution' was the second most viewed piece in *The Baptist Times* in 2016.

Nearly one year on from the referendum, Brexit meanders on towards 2019 and the formal end of the UK's membership of the EU. A country divided, really? The vast majority of folk have already moved on. There is a danger that we exaggerate the truth to fit the narrative.

Whether we like it or not, I sense that Brexit is not the 'deal-breaker' some imagined it to be. Even among those for whom it was that big an issue, no one has gone to war over the outcome, metaphorically speaking; even the war of words is no more than a minor skirmish. My worry is that this is merely symptomatic of our political life as a whole. With the policy differences between successive governments being barely discernible, we are fast becoming indifferent to anything that provokes discussion and debate, leave alone disagreement. And the church stands condemned for its complicity...

'Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.'
 (Matthew 10: 34)...

The desperate urge to be on good terms with everyone regardless is neutering the very soul of our humanity. It is a gross misreading of the gospel to suggest that superficial reconciliation between ourselves is its goal. Justice may demand we move away from retribution and towards restoration, but nowhere can it demand reconciliation. Theologically 'reconciliation' is achievable only between God and each one of us - it is not possible between human beings: what we share is the mutual understanding that each of us is reconciled to God:

'All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.' (2 Corinthians 5: 18-20).

The so-called division in society exposed by Brexit is trivial in comparison with the divisions that flow out from a society whose members, estranged from God, find themselves estranged from each other. Rather than using pious platitudes to paper over the cracks, the Church should be exposing the rottenness that bedevils our so-called life together. It is the unholy trinity of racism, misogyny, and homophobia which is the root cause of all that divides us from within ourselves.



It is this that should be confronted - with a sword, 'the sword of the Spirit - the Word of God' (Ephesians 6: 17b).

It used to be said that foreign policy was governed by the maxim, 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend' - a cynicism that demanded compromise. As Christians we risk falling into the same trap, making common cause with those we perceive as having identified a common enemy. It isn't enough even to 'agree to disagree', we have to rediscover the art of active disagreement. Such a course is our only hope.

'As Baptists we need to defend freedom of choice'



Andy Fitchet is minister of Whitchurch Baptist Church in Hampshire. His constituency narrowly voted Leave.

Anyone who knows me will know that I was fiercely for remaining within the EU. I helped coordinate, with two others, the entire 'IN' campaign in my constituency and spent my Saturdays leading up the referendum campaigning on our local High Street. My congregation were also acutely aware of my position (I would often wear an 'IN' badge, even when preaching). When I became the minister of Whitchurch Baptist, the church knew I was something of a political animal - I had been a local councillor for three years at that point. It would be fair to say, at that time anyway, most of the congregation voted in a starkly different way to me.

The 23rd June will now always be for me a bittersweet day, sweet because it is my wedding anniversary, bitter because as I watched the votes come in and the realisation that we had lost, it felt as if I was mourning the loss of a loved one who I had fought so hard to keep alive, but then someone came in and switched the life support off and there was nothing I could do about it. The pain and sorrow I felt that morning was surprising, even for me.

My congregation however were great! Those who voted remain and those who voted leave. I received a flood of messages from people on both sides seeing if I was OK. They all knew my passion, they all sensed my pain and grace flowed toward me.

I still think it is a foolish decision to leave, I still hope somehow we don't, but I know we will. How do I minister and love people who have altered my future, and my family's, when they won't be around to see the effects? By remembering this - they did what they thought was best. None of the people in my church I have spoken to who voted to leave did it lightly, but after serious thought. It is easy to brand all leavers racists and bigots but the reality is much more complicated. I may fundamentally disagree with their choice, as I do most election days, but it is after all their choice. It wasn't my choice to leave, it was theirs and that's OK.

One of our Baptist convictions is freedom of religion, the freedom to worship God, or any god, without hindrance. This goes right back to the early days of our movement with Thomas Helwys and his letter to the King. I want to extend that to say as Baptists we need to defend freedom of choice. To debate well and disagree well. Our politics is broken because we have forgotten how to disagree well by still loving people even though we may be poles apart. We as Baptists need to stand with one another, love one another and look for Christ in one another, even when we disagree politically or theologically - and show the world around us that you can think different things and yet still give the other your coat and go the extra mile with them.

'A need for multi-ethnic churches in a Post Brexit Britain'



Israel Olofinjana is minister of Woolwich Central Baptist Church, London

If Brexit is dividing people into 'us and them', migrants and British citizens, elite and uneducated, racist and accepting of others, how should the church respond and handle these differences? We have to comprehend God's vision of every tribe, nation and language as articulated in Scriptures. The vision of a multicultural, multi-ethnic church is essential to the Gospel; a Gospel imperative that started with creation itself and runs through the biblical narratives.

The creation story is a witness to the fact that God loves and intentionally created diversity in all its beauty. The promise to Abraham that all nations will be blessed through him reveals that God's plan in salvation history was to draw to himself people from every nation (Genesis 12: 1-3). Paul expounded on this theme both in the letter to the Galatians and Ephesians. In Galatians he confirmed the acceptance of Gentiles (non-Jews) into God's family by affirming that God's promise to Abraham was not only meant for the Jews but also for the Gentiles.

God demonstrated time and time again that his Gospel brings an end to whatever divides us. The Scriptures demonstrate that God, the creator of diversity, embraces cultural diversity in a way that does not remove our differences and brings us together at the same time.

As God's ambassadors with the ministry of reconciliation, we should intentionally build multicultural, multi-ethnic churches as one of the spaces where this diversity can be lived out in togetherness. Multicultural, multi-ethnic churches are signs of God's kingdom on earth.

Israel co-founded the Centre for Missionaries from the Majority World. It is hosting a conference *Every Tribe, Nation and Language: Growing Multi-ethnic Churches in Britain* on Saturday 10 June 10:00-16:00.

'Our lives are transformed by new relationships. There is always hope'



Emilian Cirtina is the pastor of *Lancaster Baptist Church*, a multicultural church in an area that voted Leave.

"I was surprised Lancaster voted for Brexit," he says. "The two universities sustain the town's economy and 80 per cent of students are from overseas. But the town voted overwhelmingly for Brexit.

"I don't think they actually voted against immigrants per se. It was more about a political system. They were worried about their jobs and housing, and they seemed to project the blame onto foreigners."

The Sunday service after the vote, Emilian invited all those from different nations to stand with him at the front. There were 28 people from different countries. There was 'alarm' in his congregation. "It was very important to make the church a place of welcome, regardless of race or background. Being Romanian I was able to understand – I was going through the same

things. Rather than being defensive, I've tried hard to hold on to Kingdom values. People have seen the way I've responded.

"I remember saying that today that our daily bread comes from the Word of God, not the *Daily Mail*. To gently reassure the church – we stand on Christ. We are called to value the gift of hospitality and show a different way."

He believes God had been preparing this before Brexit. Five years ago the church set up a community of faith (The Ridge Christian Centre) in a deprived, multicultural area of Lancaster.

"We're trying to live by kingdom values, that life in this community is different. We are called to love our neighbours, full stop, especially as Baptists. We're trying to address needs, both spiritual and socially. It's hard and has its challenges, but we rejoice.

"The community is in shock, but it's a nice shock! People are turning their life around. Our hope is the church of God, the community of God following his word, tolerating and accepting each other. We are trying to build the community of hope. Stand up for the voice of the stranger."

Brexit Conversations

Talking about things we disagree over can be difficult. The Joint Public Issues Team has created a tool to help churches hold constructive conversations about the sort of society we wish to live in and wish to leave to future generations.

Visit: www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/conversationwelcome

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AS IN HEAVEN

the theme of the President of our Baptist Union of Great Britain 2017-18 Dianne Tidball



A woman said to her friend "I am trying to learn the Lord's Prayer." To which her friend replied "Don't you know it already?" "I can recite it but I am trying to learn to live it. I have got as far as 'your will be done', but to honestly pray 'Lord your will in everything' is difficult. My problem is that I am so self-willed and hard hearted. But I keep praying that I will be more able to agree to 'God's good, perfect and pleasing will' (Romans 12:2)."

Words are easy but living out those words is a huge challenge. We may pray the Lord's Prayer and the words slip off the tongue and yet in using those words we are asking God to change us; to line us up with his perfect will; to make us better than we are and the community we are part of more heavenly.

The theme for the Presidency of Baptists Together 2017-18 is that phrase from the Lord's Prayer 'as in heaven'. May your Kingdom come, your will be done amongst us as Baptists, in our communities, our lives 'as in heaven'. We ache for better in our own lives and responses, more love, more grace, more of God's presence and in essence that is the focus of 'as in heaven' - seeking more of God, not just for ourselves but even more so in our communities; seeking to participate more fully in God's Kingdom.

What are we praying when we say 'as in heaven'?

We are praying:

- » **For God's presence to be pre-eminent in all things.** Heaven is the reign of God and so in our communities we seek God's gracious, holy, loving rule in all we are and all we do.
- » **For God's truth to be the foundation of our beliefs and understanding.** Heaven is the place where the living Word of God's work is complete. Where because of loving sacrifice, mercy and grace there is forgiveness and healing.
- » **For God's character to pervade all things.** God is good, mercy, love, holy, compassionate, slow to anger, patient, kind, generous - these are the qualities we are seeking when we pray 'as in heaven'.

Why do we need to pray urgently 'as in heaven'?

You don't need me to make you aware of the brokenness of the world of which we are a part. For many life is hell not heaven. For refugees, trafficked people, lonely, indebted, addicted, fearful and sad life is hell. Things have always been so, it is true - Jesus looked over Jerusalem and wept as he saw how the people were lost and defeated Luke 19:41. However, God's will is for something different, for more of heaven on earth.

One writer spoke of the role of disciples of Jesus as 'punching holes in the darkness'. Of course it is not we who punch the holes but as we are channels of God's reign and will so his Spirit brings light into dark places and brings heaven where hell seems to prevail.

Further biblical reflection - as in heaven

We pray 'may your Kingdom come - as in heaven' knowing that what we are seeking is multifaceted and profound. We can keep learning new truths about God's Kingdom from the varying authors whose writing make up God's revealed story in the Bible. Maybe over the months there will be an opportunity to unpack insights more widely but at this point I want to point you to wisdom about 'as in heaven' from the Psalms.

The Psalms speak frequently of God reigning - 47:8; 146:10 - his sovereignty being over the nations and the Lord being supreme forever. As the Creator and Author of Creation God's power is ultimate. This could appear oppressive if it were in flawed human hands but as God's reign and power are detailed we read of liberating and positive features of God's supremacy and Kingdom. Psalm 85 speaks of heaven including forgiveness, unfailing love, peace and God's

flawless goodness. And in verse 10 is the phrase 'love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other'. As we pray for God's Kingdom 'as in heaven' so we pray for our lives together to be pervaded by that love which is as strong as death which many waters cannot quench, Song of Songs 8:6-7. We seek to be a people ruled by God's faithfulness and for our compassion and kindness to be, that which pervades heaven. The image of peace kissing goodness reminds us that as we seek the reign of God so the full, whole life, shalom, peace of God will be ours.

Psalm 89 deepens our understanding of God's reign. God's love stands firm forever (verse 2), unlike human empires, which rise and fall; God's loving reign is eternal. The Psalmist goes on to say (verse 14) 'Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you.' As we seek God's Kingdom so we are pursuing all that has integrity, honour, kindness and is fair. The Kingdom offers to all who respond to God, security in his love; confidence in his justice and truth and comfort in his covenant promises.

And finally

Heaven is beyond our comprehension. It is the throne of God and a place of overwhelming beauty, holiness and awe. While heaven is beyond our full comprehension we are content with the Apostle Paul 'to see through a glass darkly' 1 Cor 13:12. What we glimpse of heaven and God's Kingdom increases our desire for more of God and his presence. What we do know about heaven is that before anything else God's Kingdom arouses and incites worship. God's Kingdom will come more clearly as we focus deeply and profoundly on the presence of God and offer to him our praise and adoration.

Heaven is also centred on Christ and his death and resurrection. As we pursue 'as in heaven' our pursuit must tell the story of the Cross and include the narrative of God's love seen in sacrifice and humility. And as we worship and tell God's story we will be driven by God's love to the heart of God for compassion, sacrifice, generosity, holiness, love, healing and faithfulness.

It was C S Lewis who said "Joy is the serious business of heaven." As we pray for more heaven in our lives the outcome will be joy and life. And as Lewis also said "If you seek heaven you will get earth thrown in; if you seek earth you will get neither."

So maybe the theme God has given for the Presidency 'as in heaven' will result in us having greater joy by giving ourselves to God's presence and purposes. As we share an ache to see light shining in the dark places of our lives and communities and as together we desire God's reign ever more evident amongst us, then in that participation in a common vision we will see God's Kingdom come and his will being done amongst us as Baptists 'as in heaven'.

BAPTISTS TOGETHER

AS IN HEAVEN

MAY YOUR KINGDOM COME ON EARTH

Dianne Tidball
Baptist Union President 2017-18

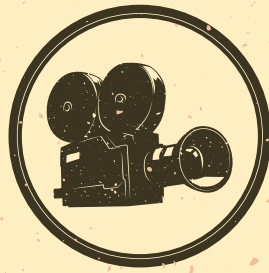
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Dianne Tidball was Regional Minister Team Leader of the **East Midlands Baptist Association** until her retirement in 2016. She is President of our Baptist Union of Great Britain 2017-18

FILMS ...



THAT INSPIRE
HOPE

A mix of the old and new



The classic hope movie? A banker (Tim Robbins) is jailed for life for the murder of his wife and lover, despite his claims of innocence. The film details how he copes with his often brutal and unfair new life in the gloomy confines of the Shawshank prison. He strikes up a friendship with another inmate Red (Morgan

Freeman). Robbins explains that hope is what gets him through. "Remember Red, hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies." It's fair to say the initially sceptical Freeman is won over by the end. *Shawshank* is now considered one of the defining films of the 1990s.



What the world be like if you had never existed? That's the central question in Frank Capra's enduring classic. George Bailey (James Stewart) wants to travel the world, but circumstances tie him to his home town, where he takes over his father's building and loan business. His treatment of the locals as human

beings contrasts sharply with that of ruthless businessman Mr Potter. Indeed, Bailey's business prevents Potter from taking over the town. But when a mishap sees him on the brink of financial collapse and entertaining suicide, an angel helps him reassess his life. Sentimental, yes, but a movie that makes you think about life in general, and how each person makes a difference.



A story about disability, race and class that somehow manages to be funny, cringey and touching in a rather breathless 112 minutes. After he becomes a quadriplegic from a paragliding accident, an aristocrat (Philippe) hires a young man from a neglected suburb (Driss) to be his caregiver. Driss has no interest

in the job – he is there to get a signature to show he was interviewed and rejected in order to keep receiving his welfare benefits. But Philippe gives him a month's trial, and despite Driss's lack of experience and unconventional methods, the pair form an improbable friendship which transforms the other. Based on a true story, *Untouchable* became the highest-grossing non-Anglophone film of all time, ahead of the likes of *Life is Beautiful*, *Crouching Tiger*, *Hidden Dragon* and *Amélie*.



Another remarkable true story. A young Indian boy (Saroo) from an Indian village unwittingly falls asleep aboard a train and travels thousands of miles across the country. Far from home and unable to speak the language, Saroo is swallowed up in the vastness of the city. He ends up in an orphanage, where he is adopted

by an Australian couple. We meet him 20 years later as an athletic Australian. But something is missing – he realises he can't rest until he's found home. The homecoming is bittersweet. It's a big and a broken world, *Lion* reminds us: but just sometimes, by some miracle, a small piece of it gets put back together again.

FREE FILM RESOURCES

Damaris has a series of film discussion guides, official film resource packs and details about setting up a film club. Visit damarismedia.com

Ethos Media provides educational and outreach resources for schools, churches and other community groups. It carries a film blog: <https://ethosmedia.org>

What's your favourite film about hope – and why?

Events



Baptist Assembly

13 May
Harrogate

Join us with a group from your church at the 2017 Baptist Assembly
www.baptistassembly.co.uk



Christian Aid Week

14 - 20 May

www.caweek.org



Thy Kingdom Come

25 May – 4 June
A global prayer movement, inviting Christians around the world to pray, between Ascension and Pentecost, for more people to come to know Jesus Christ

www.thykingdomcome.global



Big Church Day Out

27 – 28 May, West Sussex
2-3 June, Cheshire
Contemporary Christian music festival in two venues for the first time

<http://bigchurchdayout.com>



The Big Lunch

17-18 June
The one day get together for neighbours
www.thebiglunch.com



Father's Day

19 June



Refugee Week

19-25 June
A UK-wide programme of arts, cultural and educational events that celebrate the contribution of refugees to the UK, and encourages a better understanding between communities

<http://refugeeweek.org.uk>



Sea Sunday

9 July
Churches around the world come together to remember seafarers and pray for them, their families and those who support them.

www.sailors-society.org/ seasunday



Keswick Convention

15-21 July; 22-28 July; 29 July-4 August
With a theme of *Captivated: Hearing God's Word.*

keswickministries.org



Naturally Supernatural

22 – 27 July
Stafford
New event from the organisers of Soul Survivor aimed at anyone who wants to move in ministry and the power of the Holy Spirit

naturallysupernatural.co.uk



New Wine

22-28 July, 30-5 August
Royal Bath and West Showground, Somerset
United 2017: Uniting thousands to worship one

www.new-wine.org



Soul Survivor

28 July - 1 August, Stafford
5 – 9 August, Kinross
19 – 23 and 25 – 29 August, Peterborough

Five-day events for young people

<http://soulsurvivor.com>



Greenbelt

25-28 August
Boughton House, Northamptonshire

www.greenbelt.org.uk



Education Sunday

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

www.cte.org.uk



Sixth Annual Sam Sharpe Lecture

7 October
Perry Rise Baptist Church, London

Lecture being delivered by Karl Johnson - General Secretary of the Jamaica Baptist Union

www.baptist.org.uk/ samsharpe

Resources



Lest We Forget

A new series of study reflections for small groups to provide further reflection and interpretation on our Union's *Apology* for slavery and its practical outworking.

www.baptist.org.uk/lest



Moving Stories

Nine new studies blending the biblical, historical and contemporary aspects of migration, from people whose lives have been impacted by people movement.

www.baptist.org.uk/ movingstories



Pentecost People

A resource for UK Baptists to allow them to discover, explore and embrace diverse, culturally conscious, and creative worship.

www.baptist.org.uk/ pentecostpeople



Thy Kingdom Come

Prayers and ideas to help you pray as an individual, with your family and as a church.

www.thykingdomcome.global/prayerresources



A place to call home?

Six Bible studies on issues around housing and homelessness from the Joint Public Issues Team.

www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/aplacetocallhome



Conversation Welcome

A new resource from the Joint Public Issues Team, exploring the future of the UK after the EU Referendum.

www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/conversationwelcome



Germinate Enterprise

A new programme to enable rural churches to help their community flourish. Now accepted as a Cinnamon Network recognised project.

www.germinate.net/enterprise



Becoming Pentecost People

Andy Robertson explains how a new resource aims to help churches to embrace the different cultures within them, and to experience multicultural worship and prayer.

I stood at the back of the room, one of only three white people in a group of 100 – the rest were all Sri Lankan women. The worship was in full flow – committed singing, passionate if not perfect playing, and adoration for God like I've never seen before. Every song was in Tamil. I loved being there, but couldn't quite connect. Then, a song in English – no less commitment in the room, but I was now a part of this. It was all truly wonderful.

This was 2012, in a Sri Lankan fellowship in Nicosia, Cyprus. As a worship leader in a West London church that is ethnically and culturally diverse, I was only too aware of the challenge of inclusivity in worship, prayer and indeed church life as a whole. To be a church that reflected the community we served, but also took corporate worship beyond the narrow expression it had become was a passion and a mission of our pastor, and had become one for me too. I realised at that moment, standing with those Sri Lankan women, what it must be like to be excluded in worship because of a cultural or ethnic difference. It may seem surprising, but American, Australian and British worship music isn't always relevant to your average second generation British Indian from Southall who has an affinity with tablas, sitar and Bhangra fusion. There is a depth of creativity and beauty from a variety of cultures around the world that we never plumb – which is why *Pentecost People* was born.

In late 2015, a few people with a vested interest in 'multi-cultural worship' met at a college in Oxford to begin a process that would lead to the development of a resource for UK Baptists that would allow them to discover, explore and embrace diverse, culturally conscious, and creative worship. The group represented churches, academic institutions and the Baptist family, and brought together a fascinating and rich collection of experience and expertise. We soon discovered that there are a handful of churches around the country who are exploring worship that intentionally express the cultures and ethnicities represented in the congregation and community. We heard of experiences of exclusion based on skin colour, we talked of how we had been challenged by worship in other countries, and the challenges of promoting a diverse approach to worship in mono-cultural communities.

We taught each other some of the songs and expressions we had learnt and were using in our home churches – making friendship crosses from beads, performing prostration exercises that are borne from Hindu culture and listening to different forms of music used in global worship. It was an exciting time. We felt that God was priming us to deliver a significant challenge to the church. It was at this point that the name of the project – *Pentecost People* – was born.





Pentecost People – The global church expressed locally through the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit

In 2017 the *Pentecost People* resource will be launched by our Union. This new resource aims to help churches to embrace the different cultures within them, to learn hospitality in a new way and to experience multicultural worship and prayer. It is made up of four video-based study sessions filmed in British Baptist churches, and additional resources to help small groups and churches to explore these areas.

To get you thinking about this incredible and exciting subject, here's a way for you to engage church in an expression of worship drawn from the Hindu culture

This is a prostration exercise. It recognises the importance of posture and physicality in our worship - two aspects which are often discarded in western forms of corporate worship.

Time: 5-10 minutes

You will need:

- » Space for people to lie in a prostrate position (if there are physical challenges for people in achieving this, the exercise is entirely adaptable)
- » A reader
- » Ideally you will also have access to a drone sound produced by an Indian instrument called the Tampura. You can download the iTampura app onto your smart phone. The drone is continuous throughout the exercise, and represents the continued presence of God.

The exercise begins with a reading of scripture, and an explanation of the drone sound.

Romans 12

Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship.

'Extend the full length of your body onto the floor.... Do not rush - take time through the stages, allow time for meditation and reflection.'

Leader

"I offer you my..."

FOREHEAD... representing my thoughts and meditations; let the focus of these things be you Lord.

EYES... the windows of my soul; let them be filled with your light as they look out into the world.

TONGUE and LIPS... expressing worship in words and tune; calling on you through your name... let my lips always express thanks and reverence

CHEST... the seat of life; let my life be rooted in God; he is the source from which I live

HANDS... as I spread my palms flat onto the floor... I am expressing the offering of my actions, my deeds, my work to you God, for your pleasure and for your use.

KNEES... as I rise up onto my knees... I express my reverence to you and my dependence on you. I ask YOU, my rich King, to be there to meet all of my needs.

FEET... as I rise and stand, I express my pilgrimage, I acknowledge that I am on a journey with you and for you, and I reflect that you are the goal and the destination...

Amen

For prayer

- 1 Pray for an increased understanding and participation across the Baptist family of worship that is inclusive, creative and affirming of all cultures and ethnicities
- 2 Pray for the launch of *Pentecost People* – pray that it will be an effective and widely utilised tool within the Baptist family
- 3 Pray that as we diversify our approaches to worship and prayer, we would see a new richness in our worship, we would see our communities impacted and experience growth in the Kingdom of God

Andy Robertson is the Worship Facilitator at *Greenford Baptist Church* in West London



Pentecost People

will be launched at the Baptist Assembly in May
www.baptist.org.uk/pentecostpeople



A street called Hope

In my native Liverpool is a street called Hope, which over the years has managed to live up to its name. It connects the Roman Catholic and Anglican Cathedrals. It would be easy to see these famous landmarks as symbols of division and disunity but, like Hope Street, they have become the opposite.

On Pentecost Sunday, the street comes alive with dancers, musicians and theatre artists, while Christian believers walk along it, as part of a unique service of worship that begins in one cathedral and finishes at the other. Half way down is a statue dedicated to the memory of Bishop David Sheppard, Archbishop Derek Warlock and their fellow Christian leaders who worked so hard to heal the religious divisions in our city, bringing people together to overcome the very real social issues that its communities were facing. On the opposite pavement is a statue of the famous Merseyside Baptist preacher and social reformer Hugh Stowell-Brown who, a couple of generations before, was not less committed to bringing hope to our city. This is more than just a street called Hope – it is indeed a beacon of hope.

Hope is believing in something better, and through that, being inspired to strive for something better. As already said, it is far more than vague optimism. Yet I wonder if we always recognise that, and whether that kind of hope can also do us a dis-service. Someone once said that the first task of leadership is to name reality, and the reality for many of us is that we are not the churches that we used to be, and projecting things forward 'as they are', the horizon is not positive.

Hope can be a way of avoiding such realities – we simply keep going, hope for the best, put a brave face on things and even find spiritual narratives to justify such an attitude. But I do not believe that this is the kind of hope God calls us to.

The architects of Liverpool's renaissance (which cannot be entirely credited to the Church) didn't just carry on regardless, hoping for the best. They caught that vision of something better, and dared to take steps forward towards it, often in the face of cynicism, intransigence and downright opposition. They addressed things that they recognised as wrong; things that flew in the face of the values of God's kingdom. They fixed their eyes on better, and it was then that hope began to shine.

If we are to truly become beacons of hope, it will take more than vague optimism or an attitude of 'keep calm and carry on'. It may well require us to release our grasp on the worthy visions and enterprises of days now gone, embrace afresh the eternal hope that is ours in Christ and seek God's leading in becoming the people he is calling us to be for today and the future.

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



Baptist founder at heart of charity identity

Spurgeons children's charity is putting Christ, and its founder Charles Spurgeon, at the heart of its identity and mission as it undergoes a rebrand as part of its 150th anniversary.



As a tribute to Spurgeon's legacy, the 'S' from his signature has been incorporated into the new logo to illustrate an embrace between parent and child and the cared for and the carer.

Its new strapline; 'Hope for every child'; springs from Spurgeon's values of hope, compassion and inclusivity and is inspired by his teachings: "Faith goes up the stairs that love has built and looks out the windows which hope has opened."

Spurgeon, a Baptist minister, founded the charity as a compassionate and distinctively Christian response to the plight of orphaned and vulnerable children in London. In the last year, it delivered over 80 services, reaching over 37,000 children and 64,000 parents or carers.

The charity wants to build on its partnership work with churches involved in community outreach.

To see how your church can get involved visit: www.spurgeons.org

Reaching the millennial generation

A new network that aims to resource millennials within Baptist churches and those with a passion for reaching them is beginning to come together.

The millennial generation loosely refers to those aged between 18 and 35, a generation that's under-represented not just in Baptist churches, but across denominations.



To discover common themes about how Baptist churches can engage this group, 10 millennials from a variety of backgrounds across Baptists Together met in January.

Initial steps include the creation of a new Facebook group – Baptists Together Millennials – and there will be a session at this year's Baptist Assembly.

Daniel Hatfield, the Assistant Minister for Community and Discipleship at **Rayleigh Baptist Church** in Essex, organised the agenda and facilitated the discussions.

He said, "My hope is that Baptists who have a passion to reach that culture realise they are not alone. There is a significant and growing movement within the Baptist Union, who want to support and empower the mission to reach and disciple that generation.

"And this movement is open to anyone with a passion for this generation. We want to hear from you, and know that this is not a closed thing. We want to connect you into networks as they develop."

www.baptist.org.uk/millennial

Why just grow your church when you can MULTIPLY it?

A new project to help Baptist churches explore a multi-congregational future is being launched.

A multi-congregational church is a church with a single constitution but two or more distinct congregations.

The Multiply Project seeks to grow multi-congregational churches by planting new congregations 'from within' churches that already exist.

It differs from the traditional 'mother-daughter' church planting approach, where the church plant looks extremely similar to the original, and the explicit intention is to 'cut the umbilical cord' once the congregation is able to operate independently.

In a multi-congregational approach, whilst it is possible that the new congregation may one day become autonomous of the planting church, that is neither the intention nor the expectation.

Additionally, a multi-congregational approach anticipates that each new congregation will look quite different to the others as it emerges organically in response to the context in which it is planted.

"The Multiply Project's main focus is to help churches start new expressions of church in addition their established Sunday morning congregation", explained organiser Simon Goddard.

"The vision of Multiply is to see teams of individuals engage in incarnational mission and for their churches to become webs of distinct yet interconnected congregations," he added "each expressing themselves in ways that are appropriate to their own unique context."

Multiply will be using a learning community model for churches wanting to explore becoming multi-congregational, as well as for those who have already begun the journey.

There will be a combination of online and face-to-face events and resources, alongside access to relevant training.

Simon said, "The hope is to learn from one another and to share together in the challenges and the successes along the way.

"Maybe you were involved in starting a Messy Church a few years ago, and although initially pleased with how many people came, you're wondering what the next step needs to be.

"Maybe you're part of a Sunday morning congregation which caters well to a particular demographic but is not willing to change to become more attractive to other groups of people that you want to reach within the local community.

"Or maybe you want to start a fresh expression.



Case study

One example of the Multiply vision becoming reality is seen at the **Beacon Church** in Stafford.

Over the last four years five new congregations have been planted, including a 'pub church' and a lunch time gathering for office workers on a technology park.

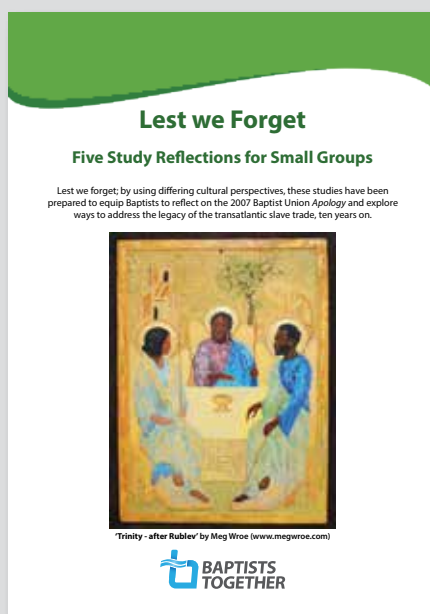
Beacon describes itself as 'one church, serving four communities, across eight main meetings'.



"If any of these apply, then perhaps Multiply is for you."

To register your interest please go to www.baptist.org.uk/multiply and you'll be sent more information about how you and your church can get involved.

The Apology, 10 years on



Baptists are being invited to reflect on our Union's *Apology* for slavery and its practical outworking as it nears its 10th anniversary.

A new series of study reflections have been created for small groups to provide further reflection and interpretation on *The Apology* itself and *The Journey* that has followed.

In November 2007 Baptist Union Council made a resolution that acknowledged our share in and benefit from our nation's participation in the transatlantic slave trade. Out of the resolution came a commitment to develop ways of promoting racial justice across our Union.

The strategic priorities subsequently recommended to Council – such as building multicultural congregations and developing the leadership skills of black and minority ethnic youth – became known as *The Journey*.

The new resource is called **Lest We Forget**, and offers reflections and Bible study notes.

In the resource foreword, General Secretary Lynn Green invites Baptists to use the resource and 'challenge the practical outworking of *The Apology* across Baptists Together'.

Lest We Forget is free, and can be downloaded here:

www.baptist.org.uk/lest



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