



News – 27 June 2018

Churches urge end to hostile environment policies

A group of major churches is launching a campaign to challenge the government's approach to illegal immigration, which they say is leading to destitution, discrimination and distrust

The Baptist Union, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church have joined forces to call on the government to review entirely the web of policies that have created the hostile environment. In a new report for church members, *Destitution, Discrimination and Distrust: the web of the hostile environment*, they set out how aspects of the policies run counter to Christian teaching.

The campaign follows recent revelations about how British citizens such as members of the 'Windrush generation' have lost their homes, jobs and access to NHS treatment because of the policies. But the report argues that the web of the hostile environment reaches much further.

Speaking on behalf of the denominations the Church Leaders, the Revd Lynn Green, General Secretary of the Baptist Union, the Revd Richard Frazer, convenor of the Church and Society Committee of the Church of Scotland, the Revd Loraine N Mellor, President of the Methodist Conference, and the Revd Kevin Watson and Alan Yates, Moderators of the United Reformed Church, said:

'As a group of Church denominations, the injustices of the hostile environment alarm us. The impact of the hostile environment has gone well beyond immigrants who are in the country illegally. It is of deep concern that people who do not look or sound 'British' are now facing increased levels of discrimination in finding homes and employment.

'We believe it is inhumane to use the threat of destitution as a policy tool to encourage people to leave the country and we call for an immediate end to indefinite detention.

'This is not about who we do or do not allow into the UK, but about how we relate to one another inside our borders. Due process, justice and the proper implementation of immigration policies should not require us to live in suspicion of our neighbour. The hostile environment spins a web of distrust and encourages suspicion. As Christians we believe that God calls us to offer welcome to the stranger and care for the vulnerable, whoever they are.'

'Many of our churches support those who have suffered hardship as a result of the hostile environment. Our churches include some of the very people who are at risk of destitution and discrimination. Our Christian faith moves us to pray and work for a society where people are truly hospitable to one another.'

'We are therefore calling for a review of immigration policy and practice to examine the damaging effects that the hostile environment is having on the whole of society.'

'A far more enduring way to remember her'

A Baptist minister whose wife died from cancer last year is creating a fund in her name that will support oncology nurses

Richard Littledale and his family have launched the Fiona Fund to provide grants to nurses who have demonstrated a personal commitment to education and developing their skills.

Richard, minister of Newbury Baptist Church, explained that Fiona spent all her working life as an information manager, the final ten years working as Faculty Liaison Librarian for the St George's Medical School. During her time there she trained hundreds of health professionals to access relevant, peer-reviewed and reliable information.

Despite her failing health during seven years of cancer care, she devoted herself to encouraging them in continuing professional development - seeking to go further and learn more in pursuit of excellence.

The fund will continue this legacy. Each year the Fiona Littledale Award is to be given to an Oncology nurse who has demonstrated their personal commitment to developing their skills and understanding of the field. The award, presented at the annual Patient Experience Network (PEN) awards, will enable them to undertake further training during the year of the award at no cost to themselves.

In a blog post, Richard explained that Fiona had been recently described as someone 'who dedicated her life to empowering others to be the best that they could be'.

'This was never more true than when working as a healthcare librarian at St George's University Library,' he wrote. 'In her last years, when hospital visits became both more frequent and more intrusive, it would give her the most tremendous lift to encounter some of 'her' students, who had passed through her hands whilst studying for their profession.

'Training and knowledge were as much weapons against cancer as hypodermics and scalpels, so far as Fiona was concerned.'

He added that Fiona loved the sea, and on their many visits they would often pass benches placed there in memory of a loved one. However, she had strong views on these benches, Richard wrote.

'Don't have a bench with my name', she said 'I don't want people sitting on me'. True to that spirit, the Fiona Fund has found a far more enduring way to remember her.'

Each year the recipient will write a blog post on their training experience, and will be offered the opportunity to host the Fiona Fund Twitter account.

'We hope these wonderful oncology nurses will find a bench once in a while for a well-earned sit down, but we also hope the Fiona Fund will help them on their way,' Richard continued.

'I always referred to Fiona as my 'bravest and best'. Hopefully, this Fund will enable others to do their best in a way which would have made her proud.'

Reaching out with hope for all

New Hope Baptist Church in Coseley launches The Hope Project, an ambitious well-being initiative for the community

'The message is very simple...,' says Paul Westwood to an audience packed with church members, local police, teachers and other community stakeholders. 'Hope for all.'

Paul leads New Hope Baptist Church in Coseley in the West Midlands, and much hard work, planning and funding led the church to gather these representatives for the launch of its initiative The Hope Project last Wednesday evening (13 June).

The Hope Project is a programme designed to positively impact the well-being of vulnerable people of all ages in the community. There are three distinctive parts:

- Living Life to the Full – a life skills course to support people with anxiety and low mood which can often lead to depression
- Music Moves – a once weekly, 12 week music based course aimed at 11-17 year olds who may be introverted, unsociable or anxious
- Beauty for Ashes – a programme designed to meet the needs of survivors of domestic violence

In introducing the project, Paul explained that the motivation is to 'play a small part in bringing some hope back to the community'.

'The world doesn't seem to be a good place at times,' he said. 'We describe ourselves as a Christian country, yet the church and community seem so far apart.'

'We decided we would be best served if we got out into our community.'

However, although motivated by faith, there was no agenda of 'back-door evangelism', Paul told the audience. The church was simply following Jesus' example and instruction of taking care of the needy and downtrodden.

'We want to help and encourage,' Paul said. 'These are programmes for the anxious and depressed, that build up youngsters who are maybe on the wrong road, that encourage people to become who they are meant to be.'

'We seek to engage with everyone, and there is no agenda other than to reach out with hope.'

The Hope Project has been supported financially by the Heart of England Baptist Association, whose team leader Adrian Argile attended the launch. Thanking the role HEBA played in getting the project up and running, Paul said, 'When I first spoke to Adrian he caught the vision straight away, so I want to thank all that HEBA have done. Their funding helped us get started.'

Adrian said he was 'thrilled' that the Hope Project has come into being, and noted the trust the community has placed in the church.

'The church are seeking to offer support to a range of people through three projects, while at the same time maintaining their Christian distinctive,' he said.

'They have the trust of many community bodies and it will be exciting to see how things develop into the future. As an Association, we are pleased to support New Hope Baptist Church in their ministry.'

'Ministering in Rugby has been very special'

Rugby Baptist Church prepares to say farewell to Michael Bochenski, who has served as its minister for nine years

During his time in Rugby the church has seen dozens of new members join and a multi-cultural congregation grow - with new people joining the church including West Indian, African and Chinese worshippers.

'It has been a joy to welcome so many new people into membership here and to see others joining us as adherents – regular worshippers – during my time here,' said Dr Bochenski, a former President of our Baptist Union. 'It has been especially great to link up with Christians from all over the world and to learn so much from them too.'

During his time in Rugby Dr Bochenski has also spearheaded interchurch community action and involvement in a number of ways. For nine years he led the town's homeless charity Hope 4 Rugby, and for seven its interchurch network Rugby Revive. Among the new projects he helped to launch and develop in the borough have been: the Winter Night Shelter, the new Hope Centre on Newbold Road, the Rugby Foodbank, the Rugby Street Pastors, and the Gift of Years project (supporting local care and residential homes). He also encouraged the town's many churches to get involved in a wide range of community outreach programmes including the Rugby World 'Fanzone', Hope Rugby and a Love Rugby mission.

'I have been a minister for some 40 years in many different places,' said Dr Bochenski, 'but ministering here in Rugby has been very special. A number of us have worked very hard at building co-operation between churches and their leaders and the local communities we serve. The outcome of this has been a range of ministries and community projects focussing especially on the needs of some of Rugby's neediest and most vulnerable citizens. For me that is always near the heart of authentic Christianity.'

Michael's farewell takes place over the weekend of 14-15 July.

On Saturday 14 July in Rugby Baptist Church, Dr Bochenski and his wife Jane will look back at over 40 years of Christian ministry in the presence of family and friends. The preacher will be the Revd Jonathan Edwards, the former General Secretary of the Baptist Union. Dr Bochenski's final service as minister of Rugby Baptist Church will be on Sunday 15 July at 10.30.

Looking back at Michael Bochenski's time in Rugby, church secretary Emma Tiller said, 'Michael has been at the heart of our church life for nearly ten years. He's made a huge difference to the town as well as the church, and we'll miss him very much.'

'Mixing piety and pleasure with aplomb'

The former offices of the Baptist Union of Great Britain have been transformed into a boutique hotel in Central London

L'oscar in Southampton Row, Holborn, opened for bookings last week (13 June) with many of its period features intact and its rooms and corridors lavishly restored.

L'oscar is based in the former Baptist Church House, a Grade II-listed building which was built between 1901 and 1903 and housed the offices of our Union until the move to Didcot in 1989. The building was originally sold to London Underground in order to make a new entrance to Holborn Tube Station for Crossrail, the scheme to build two new railway lines across London. However, Crossrail in that incarnation did not come about and the building lay unoccupied for many years.

That changed when, looking for a hotel property, French architect and designer Jacques Garcia and the present owner discovered the abandoned building while walking around London.

'I fell in love with the 19th-century architecture straight away,' Jacques told Conde Nast Traveller. 'And within minutes I knew how it would look, how to make this marvellous base sublime.'

Original architect Arthur Keen mixed 'Wrenaissance' style with arts and crafts influences, partnering some of the best artists and craftsmen of the time to create much of the exterior and interior design of ornately plastered ceilings, carved fireplaces, oak panelling, and finely worked plaques. Many Baptists took 'considerable pride' in the centre, with its panelled oak Council Chamber and other fine features, historian Ian Randall told The Baptist Times when news of the building's sale emerged in 2012.

Work on the refurbishment subsequently began approximately six years ago, and the new owners worked closely with English Heritage and Camden Council to ensure a sensitive restoration.

It means much of those striking original features remain, which speak not just of the building's architecture but also its Baptist past. A bust of John Bunyan continues to cast its eye over Southampton Row from the corner of the building; the committee room, now an intimate events space, contains a fireplace with an original terracotta carving of a scene from Bunyan's *The Pilgrims Progress*.

A mezzanine floor has been incorporated into the striking former Council Chamber, the 1903 octagonal chapel with glass dome, and this now houses the hotel's restaurant The Baptist Grill, and the Baptist Bar below.

The library is the hotel's largest events space, and retains its oak panelled shelves, once filled with literature of the Baptist church. There are 39 rooms in total.

The name pays tribute to both the Irish writer Oscar Wilde (one of the mottos of L'oscar is a Wilde quote: 'Every saint has a past, and every sinner has a future') and to the glamour of the American Oscar awards ceremony. Hotelier Duncan Shakeshaft says: 'A hotel 'is essentially a theatre, with staff and guests playing their parts. It is a performance of the utmost quality, with every detail considered for the enjoyment of the guest and to enhance the harmony of the whole.'

The irony of the transformation of 'the turn-of-the-century Baptist Church Headquarters into a boutique hotel dripping in opulent finishes' was highlighted in the Robb Report's review of the new hotel.... which concluded:

'Instead of masking its ecclesiastical roots, the property's developers, led by famed architect and interior designer Jacques Garcia and hotelier Duncan Shakeshaft, have exploited them to an ultra-stylish end—mixing piety and pleasure with aplomb.'