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FEATURES

6 What may grow from the compost of Covid?

By Emma Nash

16 Attending to your own self-care

By Tim Fergusson

Stories from the ground: reflecting the reality, and looking ahead

18 I cry out to God and ask: 'When will this end?'

by Kit Torres

20 "Our pastoral response is one of listening"

by David Southall

21 'We have to provide hope'

by Ali Cherry and Barbara Griffiths

23 "Reconnect with the world at your own pace"

by Sandra Boden

24 'Let your help come from knowing people's needs'

by Vania John-Baptiste

26 'We are not alone'

by Sheena Dykes and Dawn Hazell

27 Enabling life in all its fullness

West Lane Baptist Church

29 Becoming a bereavement friendly church

by Judith Brashaw



9

Hope in a time of crisis

A reflection on Elijah
by Charmaine Mhlanga



13

...As you love yourself

A cautionary tale
by Matt Nott



34

Attentive to Rhythms of Grace Geoff Colmer introduces the 2021-2022 presidential theme



37

Prayers of lament

The pattern of biblical lament has much to offer
by Gale Richards

30 'The big thing is to get people to sense there is hope'

by Colin Richards

31 University challenges

by Joni Roberts and Josh Edah

39 Supporting children and young people through Covid

by Rae Morfin

REGULARS

5 General Secretary

Lynn Green on 'Pain and Hope'

25 Resources

33 Events

42 Prayers for our time

A selection of prayers from Nick Fawcett

44 News

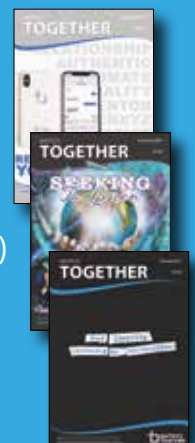
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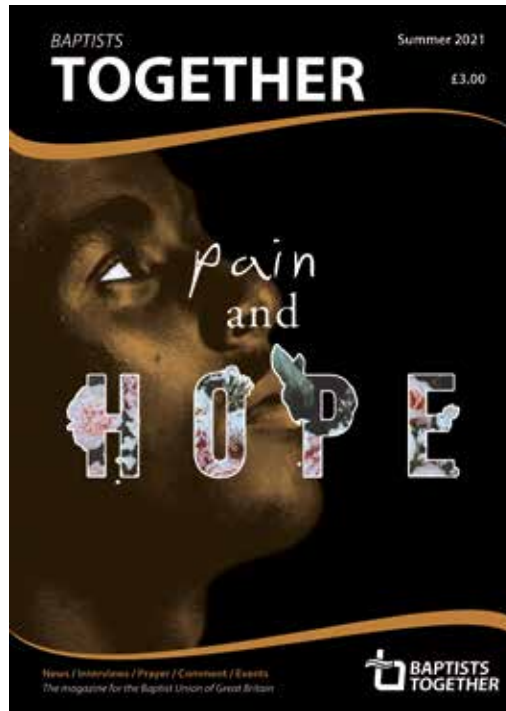
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PAIN AND HOPE

I am wondering how the pandemic has been for you so far? It is almost unbelievable that we have been caught up in all this for over a year now. Looking back, I can see that it has been different for me at different stages. Sometimes I have felt overwhelmed and down in the dumps and at other times I have really embraced the blessings of this peculiar season. In this edition of our magazine we are aiming to explore some of the different responses we have experienced.

At the same time, as we begin to entertain the possibility of what it might look like to move forward, the stories and resources here can encourage and inspire you as you look to the future in faith. With the Old Testament prophet Elijah as our guide, we are able to engage with the highs and lows of life and leadership over recent months. In different ways, the stories, reflections and resources that follow unpack for us what it means to be sustained by the power of Jesus Christ as we have faced all sorts of challenges, uncertainties and also moments of blessing. What has been important, I believe, is not that we have been amazing (although many of you have!) but that you have been an authentic disciple, faithfully



following Jesus as best you can day by day.

So I am going to suggest that you grab a cuppa, if you haven't already done so! Find a comfy chair in a quiet spot and grab your journal, or a notebook, and sit down to read this edition. But not simply to read it - how about being intentional about using this as an opportunity to listen to God and reflect on your own experience. Being attentive

to the Lord as you read, what is it that resonates with you? What might God be wanting to show you? What new thing might the Lord be bringing about in your life? As you read, become aware of what it is that you need from God; whether that is rest or healing or energy or focus for your growing sense of creative imagination. Why don't you try jotting down your thoughts, feelings, hopes and longings as you go?

As you reflect you might also want to prayerfully ponder what resonates with those you lead or with those in your wider communities. Use this as an invitation to become attentive to how it has been for them too. What do they need? What is God showing you? Where is God at work? As you reflect more widely you may experience a growing sense of God's unfolding call for the communities you serve.

Hopefully the prayers at the end of this magazine will enable you to share honestly with God and deepen your faith in Jesus, the One who was, who is with us and who will come again in glory.

Be blessed,

LYNN GREEN

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What May Grow From The Compost of Covid?

by Emma Nash

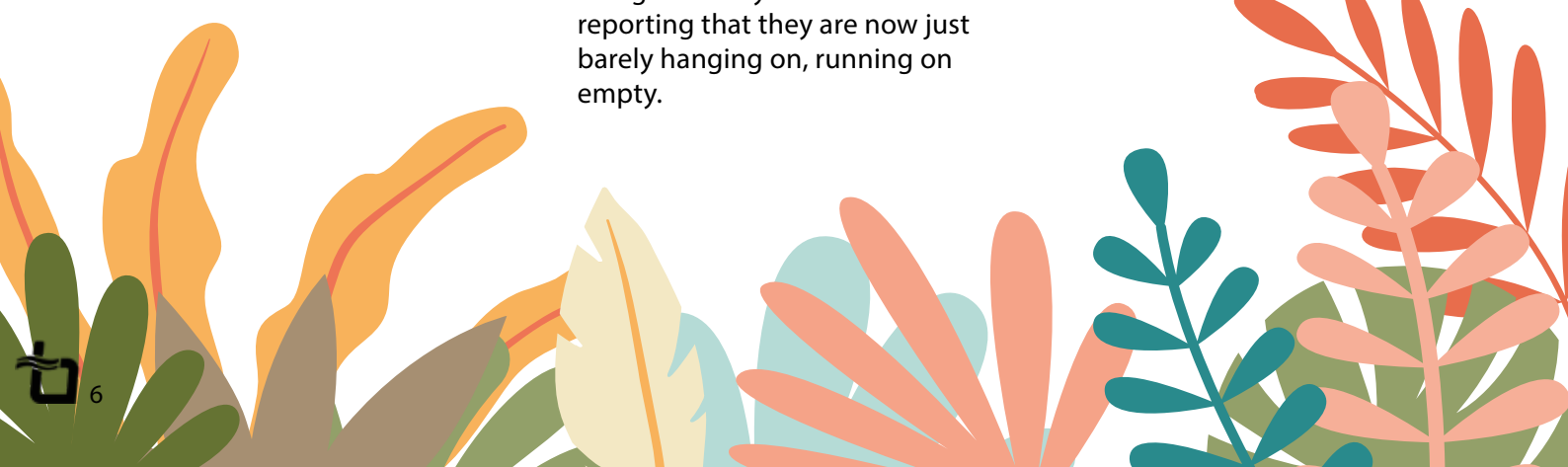
Much has been lost over the past year. Physical and social contact; income; education; family harmony; good mental health. Most devastating of all, much loved people who have died. We have not all lost the same things, but we have all experienced loss.

Ministers and other church leaders have had a huge upsurge in pastoral need at the same time as sweeping restrictions which have made it very difficult for them to meet that need. They have been forced to learn new skills and to operate using new media. Their church members have had the option of sampling other churches' worship. They may have jumped ship, preferring the preacher down the road or on the other side of the world. There have been times when government guidelines have changed so frequently that keeping up with and interpreting

them has been a considerable challenge. Furthermore, some ministers have found that there are fewer church members who are willing or able to share the load. People who are clinically vulnerable may not have felt it wise to help run the food bank. People whose mental and emotional health has suffered badly, or who are juggling work and home schooling, may not have had the capacity they once had to offer time to the church. And, of course, many ministers are also themselves clinically vulnerable, or home schooling, or suffering mentally and emotionally from the all-pervasive culture of fear. Most Baptist churches will only have, at most, one paid member of staff – probably a minister, who has had to adapt very quickly, in a very stressful situation, probably with less help than they have been used to having, while carrying other people's stress and grief. Many ministers are reporting that they are now just barely hanging on, running on empty.

Loss of income and job security have also been experienced by ministers and other paid church workers. Many are nervous about their church's long-term financial sustainability. While some church members do continue to give via standing order, many churches rely on Sunday in-person collections, which have not been possible for months at a time. Income from groups that use their buildings during the week has also slowed or dried up completely. No one knows what church attendance figures will look like once the pandemic has passed. There are likely to be challenging times ahead for many churches.

In the face of loss, many people, including church leaders, have found themselves able to adapt, to experiment, and to acquire new skills. Churches which would never have considered using YouTube or Facebook Live



as part of their ministry at the start of 2020 discovered very quickly, once their buildings had to close, a digital town square in which they were able to share Jesus with people who wouldn't normally enter their buildings anyway. It has been widely reported that Google searches for 'prayer' increased sharply at the start of the pandemic.ⁱ Many churches reported unexpectedly high viewing figures for their online services, representing significant increases in attendance at Sunday worship and midweek prayer gatherings (although anecdotal evidence suggests that in some cases these high viewing figures have not been sustained). The missional energy and creativity have not been confined to the digital realm. I know of churches whose buildings have never been closed, because they host a food bank. Other churches and individuals have painted messages of hope on windows, delivered goody bags to help families with home schooling, and carried out community fundraising to help people most affected by Covid-19. The difficulties of social distancing have generated creative energy which has resulted in adaptations of lasting value.

Academic, author and new monastic, Elaine Heath, has spoken of 'the compost of Covid time.'ⁱⁱ I love this image. Really disgusting things go into a compost heap: rotting food, even manure. And yet the big disgusting mess is gradually transformed into something life-giving which allows new things to grow. For me, this is an image of resurrection. It affirms all that

has been traumatic, in all sorts of ways, for all kinds of people, while recognising the creative possibilities that are so evidently there.

While acknowledging all that has been difficult and painful for many in the closing of church buildings, the fact is that church the way it was back in February 2020 already wasn't working for most people. For many decades now, the UK church has been experiencing decline. Around 90 per cent of the UK are not practising Christians.ⁱⁱⁱ

Many churches were already looking to the future with fear, wondering how they would survive with so few members who were getting on in years and wouldn't be around forever to do the jobs or pay the bills.

I believe this time offers the church huge potential for growth – and I mean that in the broadest sense. The ten percent have been propelled out of a way of being church that, while not perfect, was comfortable for us, into an uncomfortable, creative liminal space.

And in this space of great uncertainty, where everything is up for grabs, the Spirit is doing new things. The power with which God raised Christ from death is at work, bringing new life to the church, for the benefit of the 90 percent who do not know God. The new things the Spirit is growing will look a little different in each place. For some churches, it may be a curiosity to experiment with evangelism in digital space. For others, a desire to show God's love by building upon the fresh waves of community spirit that some areas

have experienced – as has been the case in my own commuter town. Busy churches may find a desire for sabbath is growing from the exhaustion of trying to maintain their programmes. And many churches will notice their compassion for people experiencing poverty growing as they see the need grow all around them.

Let us look for and encourage the growth only God can bring in the garden of resurrection. At a time when church leaders are experiencing exhaustion, and when churches have less volunteer time and less money, we will not have the energy to do all the things we used to do, as well as to take on new things. Let us have the courage gently to set aside programmes and practices which have served their purpose. Let us lovingly allow some things to die, in order that the new things may have space to grow. As churches, let us ask ourselves: what one new thing is God prompting us to do?



Emma Nash is a Baptist minister seconded to The Methodist Church's Evangelism and Growth Team.

ⁱ<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/climate-and-people/pandemic-prompts-surge-interest-prayer-google-data-show/>

ⁱⁱ Comments made by Elaine during a webinar on Digital Church Planting in Autumn 2020

ⁱⁱⁱ Stuart Murray, *A Vast Minority: Church and Mission in a Plural Culture* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2015)



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Hope in a time of crisis

A reflection on Elijah

*My days are dark,
Overwhelmed by the
thoughts of my mind.
I sink into the shell of
my despair,
Not knowing how to
resurface back into the
LIGHT.*

*Righteous Father,
your Word gives me
LIGHT.*

*As you reach out to me
in the darkness of my
despair,
Help the eyes of my
heart to be opened
to the truth of your
LIGHT.*

In the middle of a sleepless and restless night, I woke up and wrote the words above in italics. The trials and hardships, which are part of the journey of faith, were evident in my life, and the reality of fear and despair had dawned upon me. The plethora of threat messages on the impact of Covid-19 were beginning to take their toll. I needed to hold on to the truth that God is divinely and consistently faithful to see us through, in spite of humanity's unfaithfulness. I was reminded of this expression: 'Every trial consists in a temptation to lose faith; and every temptation consists in a trial of faith'.

These feelings of despair are not uncommon. It is estimated that 1 in 4 people will experience a

mental health problem of some kind each year in England; and 1 in 6 people report experiencing a common mental health problem (like anxiety and depression) in any given week. These figures, quoted on the Mind website, were sourced before 2020. Since then people have faced challenging and troubling dark days as a result of Covid-19, and the pandemic continues to negatively affect the lives of people, young and old. We are in a wilderness experience where our souls have been downcast and experienced despair, our hearts have been disturbed, and our minds depressed. In the depths of our despair we have found it difficult to articulate the words to describe how we are feeling. We continue to have days when clouds are thick and

the challenge seems so impossible that we cannot see the light at the end of the tunnel.

This all-consuming despair is not uncommon to God, and we certainly see it in the Bible. Elijah is but one example of someone who experienced helplessness, yet he continued to be sustained and used by God. Is there anything we can learn from his story?

After confronting the evil King Ahab, we see in 1 Kings 19 that Elijah is now running for his life, frightened by the threats of Ahab's wife Jezebel. These spoken words of threat affected and interrupted his ability to focus on God. We read in Isaiah 26:3 **'You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you'**. In losing focus on God, Elijah lost his peace. The significant distress he experienced impacted his ability to do anything for himself, even the ability to take basic self-care, and he just wanted to die.

Yet, as the story continues, we see God providing for his physical needs, speaking to him, and giving him direction. Elijah losing the ability to trust in God's protection did not mean that God stopped protecting him. One aspect of the Elijah story was that he heard God in a whisper. How are we making space to hear God today?

When we read the account of his depression, we see that Elijah responded in a very human way. Can we learn something about ourselves that enables us to see the humanity in others when faced with our own faith failures? Believers in Christ need to proactively endeavour to gain awareness, knowledge and understanding on how to recognise - in others and ourselves - signs of trauma, anxiety, distress; that 'it is ok not to be ok'; and to respond graciously and compassionately.

Like Elijah, we will face problems, trials and difficult situations, all of which test our faith. When our faith is tested, is it our tendency to lose our focus on God, or to lean into him? The pandemic, its threats and impact on life as we are experiencing it, has been one of those trials in our time. It has tested our faith, our sense of strength, our sense of security. Covid-19 has brought loss and people are grieving and angry. It is very easy for that anger

to manifest itself as bitterness and resentment, and result in blaming and complaining. Yet a wrong focus will affect our capacity to function, to love, to extend grace and show patience towards others and ourselves. How can we retain our focus on God in a time of trial?

We have a resource Elijah wasn't aware of. In the midst of the storms of life, we need to be reminded of the promises of Jesus. Jesus said **"I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid"** (John 14:27 NLT). We can put our hope and trust in the righteous Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for protection



and provision. Remember, Jesus understands all that we go through, the threats, the betrayals, the lies said about us, the unkind criticism, the oppression, including the despair and distresses. We can put our trust in God who will never let his loved ones perish. The Lord never asks us to bear more than we are able to handle; moreover, he gives us the strength we need through each trial. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Under pressure from this pandemic, our faith in God has been forced out into the open and into action, showing its true colours. We are not to panic, God is in control, God is sovereign. We are to trust God and not be afraid, for God is our strength.



God desires his people to come to the knowledge of truth and understanding of his eternal faithfulness. People need to realise the majestic power of God, the power that spoke the world into being, and the power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead - this is the same power that has been given to those who believe in him. However, the challenge is: do we really believe that what God says in his word he will do? God says that he heals the sick = do we believe he can do it? God says he will heal the brokenhearted - do we believe he will do it? Oh, that God would help us not to fear or doubt the truth of his word.

As I faced my own sleepless nights, I began to grasp how the amazing presence of God's peace

is evident in the wilderness of an unknown end. The following words from a book by David Adam, *Fire of the North: The Life of Saint Cuthbert*ⁱ, have resonated with me and helped me.

FOOD IN THE WILDERNESS

*When our way is weary
And the going tough,
When life is dreary
And things get rough,
When spirits weaken
And the day turns dark,
When sorrows deepen
And the pain finds its mark,
Strengthen us, keep us true,
Save us, Lord, as you can do.
Lord, when troubles oppress,
Feed us in the wilderness.*

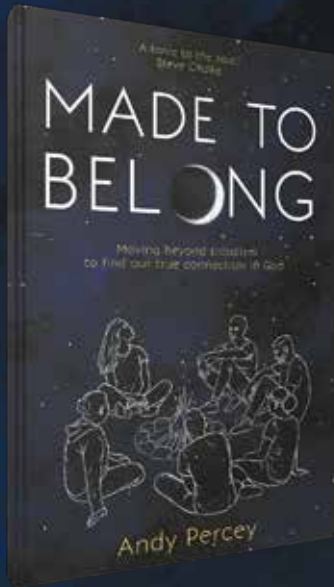
We have a God whose provision and protection will always be with us whatever wilderness we find ourselves in. May God's grace be sufficient for you today and always, to enable you to stand firm and put your hope in him.



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‘...As you love yourself...’

A cautionary tale by Matt Nott

Looking back, I can now easily see the signs that I was heading towards a breakdown. Thankfully God redeems, and breakdowns can often (if we are willing to go through the painful process of transformation) lead to breakthroughs.

2020 began with extra vigour as I sought to prepare the church for my upcoming sabbatical. I worked harder and longer to get the church shipshape so I could focus on a much-needed review of my spiritual rhythms and practices. In truth, I'd been running on empty for a long time.

Then the pandemic hit: fuelled by adrenaline, uncertainty and the belief that this could truly be a 'kairos' moment, I led as best I could and decided to postpone my sabbatical. I couldn't abandon ship at such a time as this.

Yet something was wrong deep within me: a creeping bitterness; a growing resentment, leaving me questioning whether all this was worth it. Was I really up to the job? Two personal body blows hit across the summer and I was ready to hand in my notice.

Thankfully, my leaders noticed and offered me compassionate leave. Initially offended, I was about to reject their offer... but deep down I knew they were right. I needed to rest and to find God in the midst of it all.

‘I'm learning that in taking care of my own needs (emotional, mental, spiritual, physical and social wellbeing) I'm more able to truly love God and love others.’

'...As you love yourself...'

With my emails and phone screened by my beloved wife, and a scarily empty diary, I prioritised sleep, sorted out our overgrown garden, had an adventure climbing Snowdon alone, met trusted spiritual advisers and started counselling. **I'd recommend counselling to all of us ministers.** Several months on, I'm a work in progress but I'm learning the importance of loving myself.

Have you noticed how easy it is to gloss over those four words of the greatest commandment... as you love yourself? We devote ourselves to loving God and loving others, but if we don't learn to love ourselves then what we have to offer God and others is limited, at best. Put another way, if we don't prioritise sustaining our own wellbeing we all too easily find ourselves, like the older brother in the prodigal son's story (Luke 15), feeling like we are 'slaving' - instead of owning our identity as beloved children of the most-high God.

This rich parable has much to teach us. I realised I'd stopped responding out of love, instead viewing myself as a 'slave' to church and to others. When I find myself 'slaving' my heart becomes hardened, my barriers to God and others go up, and self-preservation kicks in.

"I am with you... you matter to me". He asks me and you to love ourselves as he loves us. Out of this love we can choose to love God and choose to love others.

I'm learning that in taking care of my own needs (emotional, mental, spiritual, physical and social wellbeing) I'm more able to truly love God and love others. By instilling boundaries and healthy rhythms, I'm more able to sustain myself for the triathlon of ministry - my heart is softer and my identity is stronger.

So what are the changes I've actually made? I offer them as a starting place to explore how you can demonstrate loving yourself:

- 1.** Communication boundaries - turning off phone/emails/social media accounts on evenings and days off. Sounds simple, yet I know so many people struggle to do this. It's made even harder when most of our church 'workforce' are volunteers who give their time outside of office hours. Trust me, they too will benefit if you moderate when you reply. To remain contactable by family and close friends, I bought a personal mobile. My church phone gets turned off when I'm not on duty.
- 2.** Daily time with God - often called a quiet time. I've had a mixed experience of this daily rhythm. If it becomes legalistic, this time with God quickly feels like another work appointment. If I view it as a chance to encounter God's love for me in prayer, word and worship then I find real joy in it. I try and mix this up, as sitting at my office desk is just too tempting a place to let my mind switch into what the day ahead holds. I enjoy running and

this often allows me to connect with God away from others and the to-do list.

- 3.** Margin in my diary. How many of us do back-to-back meetings? Probably most of us. I've learnt that having time to plan and process is essential. Coming out of a tough pastoral meeting then launching straight into a Sunday planning meeting doesn't do us (nor those we are meeting with) any favours.
- 4.** Work only two sessions a day. There is nothing new here, yet it's so easy to be 'ministering' from the moment our eyes open to the moment they close again at night. This is no way to sustain your wellbeing and ultimately leads to something having to give. If you're like me, we give up that which is good for our wellbeing.
- 5.** Take time for yourself. It turns out, taking a Sabbath is good for your wellbeing! (Who knew?). A complete pause... to celebrate that God is good, that he is in control, and we are free to 'be' rather than 'do'. To prioritise feasting, having fun, resting, taking a breath, and getting perspective. I now spend each Friday morning in silence and solitude; it's a work in progress as I live in a busy house (and I like to talk) but this new rhythm prepares me for my sabbath day on Saturday.

A cautionary tale

6. Regular retreat days. Once a month I take Friday to go away (obviously not in lockdown, but I look forward to the day when I can travel). In the meantime, I get a takeaway coffee and walk, or pick up one of the pile of books I kept meaning to read, or sit and meditate on one of the truths about who God is and how he feels about me. A day with Dad.

7. Working to my strengths. There are things that I'm not great at when it comes to 'running' a church, but I'm coming to accept this is OK. This is why teams exist. I need to prioritise what I'm good at. For me this is pastoral care and discipleship - it might be different for you. I need to make sure I'm not stuck in sub-committees, chairing every meeting, preaching every sermon so that I can give my best to that which I was created to be and do.

There are many others who speak into this more deeply. I have much to learn so I simply offer this cautionary tale with the prayer that it will help you to 'love yourself'. God sees you and says, "I am with you... you matter to me". He asks me and you to love ourselves as he loves us. Out of this love we can choose to love God and choose to love others.



Matt Nott

is the minister of
King's Community
Church, Oldbury

'Have you noticed how easy it is to gloss over those four words of the greatest commandment... as you love yourself?'

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CMD

Attending to your own self-care

Why self-care (and mutual care) is a key part of the Continuing Ministerial Development Framework. By Tim Fergusson

If you are a minister – whether a church pastor, chaplain, pioneer, evangelist, or children’s, youth or families’ worker – how are you doing? One year on from the upending of your established pattern of ministry, how’s it going?

It has become common place to play down any difficulties we have endured or weariness we carry, because we feel there are others more worthy of sympathy. Probably few ministers wish to focus on their own trials when so many frontline workers continue to risk their own health, day in, day out.

But counting up the cost of change and loss shouldn’t be a competitive activity. Yes, of course most of us can identify easily those who have fared worse during the pandemic. Nevertheless, we still have to face the reality of our own circumstances. Recent conversations with ministers have made it clear that the picture is extremely mixed. Some have even thrived through this last year, but the majority report at least a sense of weariness. It is not hard to see why. Various, ministers have had to navigate the following:

An increased pastoral burden without the use of that most basic tool – pastoral visiting. A constantly changing landscape of guidance and requirements. Worries about the wisdom and even the legality of different types of gathering. Conflict with those who feel decisions have been too cautious or too cavalier. A compromised ability to offer care leading up to and following so many deaths. Concern over children, young people and the elderly in the absence of their usual support activities. The requirement to learn new skills in a short time. Anxiety about church finances and the sustainability of paid ministry. Pressure to reimagine the church beyond the pandemic, even as the pandemic itself rages on. The absence of the joy of festivals celebrated together or the chance to relax away on holiday... the list might continue. And all this is compounded for some ministers by their own personal experience of illness, clinical vulnerability (what a cold phrase!), bereavement, or the inequality that the pandemic has laid bare, such as for people of colour.

Half-way between the start of the pandemic and today, we launched the Continuing Ministerial Development (CMD) framework. There was a little unease among some ministers that at the very moment they really started to feel the strain of the pandemic, an additional burden was being placed upon them. However, I cannot emphasise enough one short sentence on the opening page of the CMD handbook. Rightly understood, ‘**CMD is an act of self-care and of mutual care**’. While CMD expects us to grow in learning and skills and to review our ministry from time to time, it also asks us to pay attention to our own well-being, and that of each other.

And right now, clearly, it is this second of the five CMD habits – attentiveness – that must be to the fore. As I asked at the beginning, how are you doing? By which I mean, how are *you* doing? Not, how is your church or chaplaincy or mission project, but how are *you*?

If we are concerned for our self-care, we will be attentive to our rest; to our exercise; to our diet; our quiet; our time off; to our pace.

We may have sacrificed care for ourselves through much of the last year, and this is understandable. But if we are to help our congregations and communities recover well, our own recovery must be included in our priorities.

In our CMD webinar on 17 Marchⁱ, Simon Barrington from Forge Leadership talked of seven priorities for this season of recovery. We should, he said:

1. Acknowledge our own fragility.

We recognise we are far from immune from the deprivations of the pandemic. There should be no shame in admitting that we ourselves may need help.

2. Lean into our own support networks.

This is not the moment for heroic solo endurance. Instead we ask for trusted friends, peers, mentors or regional teams to listen to us and support us.

3. Continue to examine the rhythms of life that refresh us.

As restrictions are lifted, our pattern of ministry will change (yet again!) and we should ensure our pattern of refreshment and rest also develops. The demands upon us will remain high for some time to come, so also should our diligence in seeking rhythms that sustain us.

4. Lean into the 'sacrament of the present moment'.

We remember that God's grace is sufficient for *this* day. Even if we have one eye on future plans for our ministry setting, we pay attention to God's presence here with us in this moment.

5. Push into a new emotional language.

We have all had an encounter with mortality and witnessed global grief. We should make space for lament at all that has been lost and to express our disappointment over all that was planned that could not happen.

6. Accept ongoing uncertainty.

We have shared an experience of losing control of our immediate environment and diary. Unfortunately, certainty probably isn't returning any time soon. So we will have to get used to managing the tension between various polarities – such as the progress of our communities and their well-being, or the provision of online and offline gatherings.

7. Keep focussed on purpose and vision.

Knowing the big picture we are each called to can help ground us in times of transition when we are not sure what the detail of the next few months looks like.

Please watch the webinar if you want to delve more deeply into these ideas. And as the second point makes explicit, much of this is wisely done in conjunction with others. I said above that CMD is an act not only of self-care, but of mutual care. We walk with each other, with good grace and with kindness, as we continue to grapple with the changed nature of our ministry.

Sometimes however, we may benefit from more specialist help than can be provided by peers and mentors. CMCS, the Churches Ministerial Counselling Service, provides professional and subsidised counselling for ministers, ministers' spouses and adult members of their households who wish to access it. You may

access it directly through their websiteⁱⁱ. Your use of the service is never made known to anyone in either the regional associations or among Baptist Union staff. A little over 100 Baptist ministers or their family members began counselling through CMCS in 2020, an increase of 10 per cent over the previous year. Do take advantage of this service if you think it may help you. Asking for support when it is required is simply another example of the self-care we must all pay special attention to in this season. Here are some comments from those who have received counselling through CMCS:

"In ministry it is really important to get help at an early stage – it can be a lonely calling and the pandemic has heightened this."

"I needed 'help' – hard to admit – but at no time [during counselling] did I feel less than valued and supported."

"Sessions via Zoom were helpful as it was not possible to continue face-to-face sessions."

"It was all set up quickly and efficiently but with genuine care... It has made a huge difference at a time I really needed it."

"It was easy to access and fast to get counselling with someone who had some understanding of church life."

"Talking therapies at an affordable cost are vital when no-one else seems able to understand."

"I felt confident in the confidentiality of the service."

Tim Fergusson is Baptists Together Ministerial Development Adviser.



For more on Continuing Ministerial Development, visit baptist.org.uk/cmd

ⁱ <https://youtu.be/KRytCdEzG04>

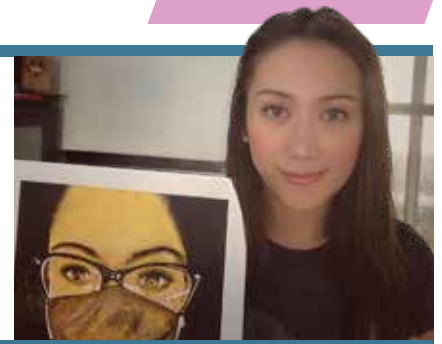
ⁱⁱ www.cmincs.net/welcome.htm



STORIES FROM THE GROUND : HEALTHCARE

'I cry out to God and ask: "When will this end?"'

Working in a hospital during a pandemic has been overwhelming at times, writes NHS nurse and Baptist church member Kit Torres. But we try to hold on to God's promises for us.



'For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favour lasts a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.' Psalms 30:5

This is one of the promises that I hold on to every time I start my shift as a senior qualified nurse. 'Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.'

Due to the crisis our nation and the NHS is experiencing at this time, it is inevitable that we will experience tremendous pressure and increased workload. Before the pandemic I worked in an Elective Orthopaedic Unit where I had to be very systematic and focused with all my patient care. A patient came in for their operation and, depending on the extent of their surgery, they could be discharged from the hospital the following day or few days later.

The nurse-to-patient ratio was in an acceptable range. It was such a fulfilling job, knowing I could give the best of nursing care to my patients who were recuperating from their operations. It was a very straightforward and uncomplicated job - until the pandemic hit.

In the early days you could instantly feel the subtle chaos and panic which staff were trying to put out of sight. We were trying our very best to remain focused

in spite of the upcoming and unavoidable ordeal.

Gradually, we began to be dispatched somewhere else to help out with other wards which were understaffed. You could feel the constant fear of being sent to the unknown, away from your comfort zone.

Then the most dreaded news was announced. Our ward was going to shut completely until further notice. We were to be moved to a more acute emergency hospital to cover the Trauma Orthopaedic Unit.

Here we are overwhelmed with the immense workload. We are constantly understaffed. The nurse-to-patient ratio is beyond belief. It's a 12-hour non-stop shift, which is mentally and physically exhausting. The staff morale is extremely low.

The fear of contracting the virus slowly diverts to the fear of coming to work knowing that you will face another challenging and difficult shift.

I cry out to God and ask: "When will this end? How much longer should I endure? Should I just look for another job?"

The Lord knows our heartaches and fears. Our hopes and dreams. He is the one who knows the greater picture and he knows what's best for us. We may have a barrage of questions in mind but, as it says in Isaiah 55:8-9,

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Whenever I think of the hardships, I also think about the reasons I should be thankful and grateful.

As it says in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, *'In everything, give thanks.'*

I am extremely thankful, for while others are struggling to find a new job or to feed their families, I've kept my job - and not just a job nor a profession but a calling. I feel honoured to be called to a profession as humbling as nursing.

I know that it will not always be easy to remember the blessings we receive for our work in nursing. We will often get discouraged, sometimes because of lack of praise and appreciation, sometimes because of our own personal stressors, sometimes just because we are worn out, but I truly praise God for he keeps my life under control. I am constantly reminded of his promises. He didn't promise to wipe away my troubles but he promised that he will be with me every step of the way.

'Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.'

Deuteronomy 31:6

I am also upheld by the support and prayers of my congregation. We understand each other's difficulties and pressures, as many of us work in a hospital setting. Our church, the Filipino International Church, with the leadership of our Pastor Virgilio Pansacala, has been tirelessly providing encouragement and strengthens our faith through daily Bible study, prayer meetings, and online Sunday services.

"God didn't promise to wipe away my troubles - but he promised that he will be with me every step of the way."

I am grateful that I belong to a church that constantly feeds our spiritual thirst.

We may be facing difficulties which are overwhelming right now, but try to hold on to God's promises for us; 'we may weep for the night, but joy comes in the morning'. Let us look forward for that 'joy' in God's perfect time and, as we wait, let us rejoice for we are assured of God's love for us - a love that endures forever.

Kit Torres has worked as a nurse for the Northumbria NHS Trust for 17 years. She is a member of the Filipino International Church



'Our pastoral response is one of listening'

A reflection by hospital chaplain David Southall



I was in full PPE on a Covid ward at 1 in the morning. It was busy. At staff nurse Victoria's request I had come to see a lady who was soon to die and to 'hold her hand'. Her daughters were already there and the lady was pleased to see me as she was an avid reader of my weekly newspaper column. She told me very coherently about her life and what gave it meaning. She knew she was going to die soon and asked for some prayers which I gladly did. I was there about an hour, and amidst the tears and laughter, I can describe it as a sacred space.

When I left, I remarked to Victoria about how chatty she was. "I know," she said. "That's the thing about Covid. I'm used to nursing end-of-life patients who slowly slip into unconsciousness and peacefully pass away. With Covid, patients seem to be well one minute and then just die... quickly... like that!" I could see tears in her eyes and asked how she coped. "I've just cried while you were in the room; and there will be more tears. I'm bearing up!"

That story is just one instance of the pressure on staff, patients and relatives as they treat people, one year on, with 100,000 plus deaths and rising. I could give you many more. And the stressors on staff go on and on. Staff who have to wear full PPE for 12 hour shifts. Staff who

have been redeployed to areas out of their comfort zone. Staff who are working extra hours to cover sickness. And this does not apply just to the clinical areas; all staff have had a mental and emotional battering from this pandemic. All of this does not factor in their personal lives. Those who have had Covid and are recovering from 'long Covid'; or who have lost loved ones; or whose families have succumbed to financial and relationship pressure due to the wider effects on society.

Of course, our Trust, along with others in the country, has put staff wellbeing as one of our top priorities; and chaplaincy has been at the heart of it. So, as Chaplains, we have an open door policy for staff to just drop in and talk about issues they are facing. We aim to create a safe space without any pressure to talk or any agenda. Chaplains have also been instrumental in setting up a mindfulness service for staff by which they can learn some skills which will help them with resilience and mental health. We are the focal point for local foodbank referrals for staff. Yes, staff are having hard financial times too and are using the foodbanks to supplement their needs. And we have been involved in other wellbeing provision, like a credit card with mental health crisis numbers printed on it for staff who are struggling.

We are not out of the woods yet but there are glimmers of hope with the vaccination campaign and a hope, in the words of R S Thomas that: "It will not always be like this." But that also brings the added stress, to already exhausted staff, that we will soon have to restore to service as usual. For many this will be a bridge too far and I predict that we will see staff leaving the NHS for other careers. And I also think there will be

a large mental health fallout among staff, long after the lockdowns and pandemics are gone. At the moment nurses are doing what nurses do (I speak from previous experience as a nurse in the NHS myself): they are just getting on with the job. But you can't run on empty for as long as this without incurring mental health problems.

But in all of this there is still hope and light. My personal view is that it is a huge privilege to have served as hospital chaplain for 12 years in Worcestershire and to have been a listening ear to staff whom I count as my friends. I am very grateful to my friends at Fernhill Heath Baptist Church for their prayers and support during this time, along with other local churches who let us know that they are praying for us a team. And Covid has led to some innovative practices and new ways of doing things across the Trust; things like virtual meetings and new ways of meeting patients' and relatives' needs.

But make no mistake. A senior nurse, who has seen everything, told me the other day that she has worked in the NHS for 40 years and has never known a time as hard as this. I think our pastoral response to those in our congregations who have worked in the NHS in these extraordinary times, is one of listening. Listen to the stories; hear the pain and anguish caused; provide a safe space for silence or speaking. This seems to me, in the long term, the path to healing.

David Southall is Chaplaincy Team Leader and Equalities Engagement Lead for Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust

‘We have to provide hope’

Parish nurses walk alongside those who are struggling in the communities they serve. How has the pandemic impacted their ministry, and what needs do they perceive as we move forward? *Baptists Together Magazine* spoke to Ali Cherry and Barbara Griffiths, two parish nurses in Baptist churches



“Parish nursing is all about learning what a community needs and providing for that”, Ali Cherry says. Ali was appointed by Aldeburgh Baptist Church as its parish nurse in 2012. A picturesque small seaside town on the Suffolk coast, with a sizeable elderly population, Aldeburgh has very different needs to an urban setting. Over the years Ali has focused on the isolation she’s encountered among residents by bringing people together in different ways.

One of the first things she started up was a Holiday at Home, after discovering how daunting many residents feel about venturing out in the summer months when the town receives lots of visitors. The Holiday at Home featured three days of entertainment, lunch, afternoon tea and a thought for the day. “It has been a really good way of bringing everyone together,” says Ali. 2020 was the first year they weren’t able to do it ‘and it was much missed’.

Other activities have involved taking on an Age UK support/ activity group for people with dementia and their carers; and setting up a Friends on Friday group using the local library, a group open to all who want to get out, meet people and chat “and a really lovely group to invite people to.”

Much of her role has been as an advocate: helping people who are nervous or unsure about speaking to doctors and social workers.

Some of the residents served by Ali have no relatives, or relatives living in different parts of the country.

Ali says “the great thing about parish nursing is that you can offer people more time in a way that pressured NHS workers might struggle to. Sit with them, hold their hands, spend time so they feel able to open up.”

The way she works has naturally been affected during the pandemic, with the restrictions preventing Ali from carrying out her usual home visits as well as hosting the clubs. Instead she has spent one of her two days contacting people by phone; the other day doing in-person visiting that complied with the restrictions, such as doorstep chats, socially distanced walks for those who don’t feel confident going out on their own, and delivering supplies.

“I’ve just been trying to think of things that are useful,” she explains, adding that many of the people she sees are over 80 and not on the internet. “One thing I’ve tried to do is a newsletter with news, crossword and quizzes - and that’s been well received.”

She says many have struggled with isolation, missing the lunch clubs and other informal chats. Unfortunately many who have dementia have gone ‘really downhill’ without their daily routines.

“I’m one of the few people they see. One gentleman goes out shopping once a week, and that’s the only contact he has.

“You don’t really know the impact of this contact, especially for people with dementia.”

“But then I’ll get a message, like last week a lady said: “I feel so much better that you’ve come. Thank you so much for coming every week. I was feeling really down before that.”

“Looking ahead, it’s going to be difficult to encourage some people out again. There has been so much fear”, Ali says.

“We could help by encouraging people to keep fit by going out and keep their mental health up by meeting people.”

“We maybe need to adapt what we do – meet in smaller groups for example, just to start getting people out and socialising.”

“And being available to those who need to talk about the effects the last year has had on them – being able to provide time.”

Barbara Griffiths has worked as the parish nurse at Christchurch Baptist Church, Welwyn Garden City for nine years. She describes herself as ‘a resource for the congregation and for all the groups which run in the church’. Unlike some parish nurses who are working on their own, Barbara works closely with the pastoral care team. People are referred to her by the minister, pastoral care team or another church member, always with consent. Others come to a drop-in.

There’s a breadth to the role. One day Barbara could be supporting someone who has had a baby; another day someone needing end of life care. Like Ali, part of her role is being an advocate, going with people to appointments. Other needs are often around mental health. Though she is not mental health trained she is able to listen and to signpost to appropriate services.

“It’s a mix of helping people in times of crisis and others in an ongoing way,” she explains.

In the early days of the pandemic, Barbara used her experience and knowledge from nursing and of infection control to help the church make sense of the guidance and understand what it could and couldn’t do. Beyond that, the needs and nature of the job haven’t changed – “just how I go about it”.

“It’s being prepared to think differently and all about finding a way that works for each individual client. Writing, texting, emailing, WhatsApping, Zooming, Facebook messages when we would normally run a group. Praying in the street with people, and over the phone; being aware of people who want to be prayed for.

“There has still been lots of signposting, and helping people access the medical services they needed – people were reluctant to use them for fear of catching the virus.

“In some ways it’s all different – but in other ways it’s the same. With nursing, you prepare a bed – and then adapt according to the patient’s needs.”

Looking ahead, Barbara says churches are uniquely placed to be there for the community.

“We need to recognise that we don’t always need to have an answer, but we can be good listeners – we can just sit and be there. We need to allow people to grieve for what they’ve lost – people who have lost loved ones in the pandemic; the things they’ve missed.”

She points out there are many people on waiting lists who will be suffering with long term conditions, and adds that health inequalities have been exacerbated.

She adds: “Moving forward we have to provide hope. Parish nursing talks about *whole person healthcare* – caring for the person’s whole well-being, incorporating body, mind and spirit. That’s going to be part of the way forward – maybe parish nurses can be a role model.”

For more on Parish Nursing, visit parishnursing.org.uk

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‘Reconnect with the world at your own pace’

Interview with Sandra Boden, counsellor at the Oak Tree Counselling Service



The Oak Tree Counselling Service (OTCS) was established in 2002, by Andy Nott and Sandra Boden, with the aim of offering affordable counselling for adults. The service, inspired by the pastoral counselling ministry of former pastor John Bedford, is an independent charity connected to King’s Community Church in Oldbury. It operates in accordance with the Association of Christian Counsellors guidelines and the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy Ethical Framework for The Counselling Profession.

Over the years trained volunteer counsellors (including Sandy Nott, wife of Andy Nott) have worked with a steady stream of clients. These have consisted of a combination of referrals, recommendations and people who have independently accessed the service. Sandra has been a senior psychotherapist/counsellor and supervisor from the start.

“We established ourselves fairly quickly,” explains Sandra. “At that time there weren’t many places that offered affordable counselling.

“We provide support for people with a wide range of difficulties including stress, anger, bereavement, abuse, amongst other spiritual/psychological issues. We work with couples, families and groups as well as individuals. The aim is to make counselling available to anyone, but we do ask all our clients for a

financial contribution – no matter how small – as this encourages personal investment in the counselling process”.

One way the service differs from others is that it offers open-ended counselling. Other services generally offer between 6 and 20 sessions. For some people, this may suffice; for others, particularly those with more complex difficulties, an open-ended contract is required.

Counselling often makes a difference. “I find it humbling when clients trust me enough to share details of their lives and experiences that they have never spoken about. To witness their transformation as they let go of outdated beliefs which have been self-limiting is rewarding. Some difficulties may not be resolved but encouraging clients to use coping strategies can enable them to live in a healthier way. Generally, the people who work with us finish with a renewed sense of understanding, hope and purpose”.

Sandra says that over the last year there has been a concentration of cases regarding bereavement. Social restrictions have made coping with the loss of a loved one even more difficult. Stress, depression and loneliness are recurring issues; as is anxiety, and fear of catching the virus.

“Living with the Covid-19 pandemic is disorientating,” Sandra explains. “For some it has intensified pre-existing issues as

well as bringing fresh challenges in its own right.”

She is expecting an increase in calls as the restrictions of the pandemic lift. “Kay Baker (OTCS counsellor) and I agree that there may be an increase in people wanting counselling as they adjust to life without loved ones; or the loss of jobs and the purpose and self-esteem that went with them; or changes in relationships that have occurred over the past year.”

With the end of lockdown in mind Sandra advises people to take things slowly – and be mindful that life will not go back to how it was.

“I would suggest reconnecting with the world at your own pace. Do what you feel comfortable with in terms of joining social groups, engaging with activities and connecting with friends and loved ones; and do it in your own time.

“Remember the world is forever changed, it won’t be how it was. Feel your way back into it. You don’t need to impose the way you do this on anyone or have others’ ideas imposed on you.”



'Let your help come from knowing people's needs'

Vania John-Baptiste is the minister of Underhill Baptist Church in north London, and a trained counsellor specialising in bereavement counselling.



As we move towards a post-Covid world, she shares these thoughts on offering a pastoral response to those in our congregations and communities

Make space to listen

As we emerge from the pandemic, in order to better help and support people, we need to begin by knowing what their needs are – this can be done through something as simple as listening.

When I joined Underhill Baptist Church in July, one of the first things I did was to meet with our leadership team and ask them questions regarding how the lockdown, the restrictions and social distancing had impacted their life. I found that I was better able to help others by listening to them and finding out where they're at – it's important to let one's help come from knowing people's needs.

One of the things I am considering setting up at Underhill, is a support group for the church and the local community in order to provide space for people to come and talk about how the pandemic has affected them - a place to come and talk and share experiences and help each other by listening and sharing.

As we think about sharing the gospel with people and responding

to people's pastoral needs in these challenging times, we need to consider a place where we can be still. Be a real presence. Be someone to talk to and who is willing and able to listen. More importantly we need to listen to discern God's voice in all this. How does he want us to respond?

Know the needs are different

There will be a variety of issues around loss and bereavement: loss of loved ones, income, homes, loss of one's way of life/social structure. Any one of these will bring its own challenges and trauma. It means different things for different people. Everyone has coped differently and has their different stories. Being a presence, bringing a good listening ear, and standing alongside people is a good start to the journey of helping them to process their emotions.

Some of the challenges of Covid-19 have caused some people's coping mechanisms to break down, so it may be a case of encouraging them to go back to basics: self-care (eating and sleeping well); keeping in contact with family and friends. Sometimes we may need to be a signpost to appropriate organisations, or some of the useful resources online.

Know your limitations

In offering a listening ear, we also need to know our limitations – and this is particularly pertinent for ministers: we can't do it all! We may have to consider coming alongside local organisations that are already offering and providing help and support. Which online resources are you aware of? For example, Cruse Bereavement Care, who provide free care and bereavement counselling to people suffering from grief; St Joseph's Hospice, who provide

counselling advice; CARIS Islington Bereavement Service, and Mental Health organisations such as MIND and CAMHS, who provide support for young people facing emotional and mental health challenges.

Covid and bereavement

The impact of Coronavirus on bereavement and grief has significantly intensified the grieving process. For instance, not being able to visit your loved one who is dying in hospital and saying goodbye as you would have expected, as well as restrictions placed on funerals. It has been difficult for people to make sense of how the person has died, so in this instance grief may be delayed, as people have not been able to process their emotions.

We also need to think about the different cultural and ritualistic traditions where people usually gather to celebrate and honour the life of the deceased – which Covid-19 has prevented people from doing.

Create ways of saying goodbye

There are definitely ways of helping someone explore saying goodbye to a loved one who has died during the restrictions posed by the pandemic, as well as ways of remembering the person who has died. All this involves discussion beforehand. If those who are grieving find it difficult to express their feelings in spoken words, perhaps they can be encouraged to write a letter to their loved one. Or invite them to draw a picture asking 'What does saying goodbye look like to you?' Don't take it for granted that we know. Other ways to explore saying goodbye could be replicating journeys they used to go on with that person such as a walk, or a visit to a café.

Resources

A small selection of Christian charities and organisations that help churches support the mental and emotional wellbeing of their people and communities.

Renew Wellbeing

Renew Wellbeing

Renew Wellbeing helps churches open spaces of welcome and inclusion in partnership with mental health teams to improve mental and emotional wellbeing.

Renew spaces are simple café style spaces run by local churches where hobbies and activities are shared or co-produced. Each café space is attached to a quiet room or prayer space where inner habits of wellbeing are shared. Each church partners with a mental health professional from the local council to ensure good inclusive practices for safe spaces where it's OK not to be OK can be sustained.

The manual for setting up a centre is included in the book *Slow Down, Show Up and Pray* available from all booksellers.

Visit renewwellbeing.org.uk

mind & soul foundation

Mind and Soul Foundation

Mind and Soul Foundation is a charity that seeks:

- To educate: sharing the best of Christian theology and scientific advances.
- To equip: Helping people meet with God and recover from emotional distress.
- To encourage: Engaging with the local church and mental health services.

Visit mindandsoulfoundation.org

You can also find the Mind and Soul Foundation on social media - @mindandsouluk on most platforms.



Kintsugi Hope

Kintsugi Hope exists to see a world where mental and emotional health is supported and understood, with safe and supportive spaces for people to grow and flourish. It achieves this through Wellbeing Groups run by local churches and Christian charities, a 12 week programme designed to look at themes of emotional and mental health with peer facilitated support.

Visit kintsugihope.com



TalkThrough

TalkThrough offers a combination of resources that aim to equip youth workers, parents, churches and schools to provide effective pastoral care that supports good mental health and wellbeing in young people at a time when we have a mental health crisis in the UK.

Visit talkthrough.org.uk/

For more, visit the Faith, wellbeing and mental health section of our website: baptist.org.uk/wellbeing



“WE ARE NOT ALONE”

Sheena Dykes and Dawn Hazell highlight a resource to help people to understand and share experiences of grief in the midst of Covid-19



Are people in your church struggling and looking for resources to help them through the pain of this pandemic?

Many of us have lost jobs, financial security, health and community connections, as well

as the opportunity to gather in worship and to celebrate milestones like graduations, weddings, births, and anniversaries. In addition, we are reminded daily of the lives lost to the virus. These losses raise larger questions for us as Christians. How do we understand and process grief as people of faith? How can we support vulnerable and grieving members of our community while practising

physical distancing? Where can we find hope and joy in this season?

Faith, Grief, and Covid-19: A Conversation is a resource created by Sanctuary Mental Health Ministries to help people to understand and share experiences of grief in the midst of Covid-19.

As a church we recognised many people were asking the above questions and this resource gave an opportunity to draw people together to share their experiences in a supportive environment. Over four sessions, participants gathered virtually to watch a short series of films featuring insights from a panel of experts, and were then invited to engage in discussion, reflection and prayer.

Being able to identify the discomfort that the pandemic has caused us as a form of grief, and realising we were not alone in experiencing it, were both hugely helpful. The film presenters

talked about the different types of grief with honesty, insight and empathy. We were able to understand that we were experiencing layers of loss, and that the ‘standard’ models of the bereavement process could not necessarily be applied in the present situation. We learned that lament is important, and that it is OK to call out and tell God how we are feeling. Although society encourages us to suppress emotions, they can be the gateway to God and we often learn and grow most in the difficult times. Some found the last session particularly helpful as it covered how to respond to others who are grieving – knowing how best to support them and what to say – while not feeling the need to provide all the answers.

We ran the course twice and the feedback was positive. The sessions were informative and thought-provoking and had a good balance of film, discussion, prayer and reflections. There was much to learn with the key takeaway being that we were not alone and that in the middle of our anxious times, our faith in God gives us a shared hope.

Sheena Dykes and Dawn Hazell are members of Union Baptist Church in High Wycombe who co-led the *Faith, Grief, and Covid-19: A Conversation* course.

Visit sanctuarymentalhealth.org to access the course



Enabling life in all its fullness

West Lane Baptist Church has a small congregation – but plays an integral part in the life of the Yorkshire village in which it is based



When men’s mental health support group ‘It’s Worth Talking About’ had to find a new venue for its Haworth branch following the closure of a local pub, help was at hand in the form of West Lane Baptist Church (WLBC). Although members were not meeting there for services, the church building remained open because it housed a foodbank. Blessed with a redeveloped building, the church was well equipped to offer Covid secure premises for the group - and had even secured lottery funding to provide a rent holiday.

What’s more, minister Chris Upton was acutely aware of the need for such a support group.

Chris has been West Lane’s minister for 20 years and says he has tried to act as a chaplain to the Yorkshire village in that time. A couple of years ago, along with a local Anglican vicar, he set up ‘Healthy Haworth’, a loose coalition of people who are thinking about how to make Haworth (and its surrounding areas) a healthier place. ‘Healthier’ in this context means general wellbeing and sense of ease, peace and flourishing, rather than a strictly medical lack of disease. ‘Healthy Haworth’ sees a mixture of health care professionals, alternative therapy providers, church leaders and Parish Councillors gathering every eight weeks to talk and see if there are ways they can help each other.

Chris knew from these discussions that there was a need for a mental health peer support group.

“There is nothing in the village – you have to travel a long way to access one.

“So the men’s group ‘It’s Worth Talking About’ began at the pub; but when the pub closed, the group needed a new, neutral venue.

“I was put in touch with the group’s leader on Facebook, and we were only too happy to lend them the church. It’s exactly the kind of local initiative which contributes to people’s wellbeing that we have supported for many years here. It’s not something we’re leading, but we’re helping it to happen.”

Chris explained that the church’s actions are underpinned by its theology: it takes seriously the Christian gospel’s call to be ‘salt and light’ in the world. It wants to break down the wall between who is in and who is out, and enable people to live life in all its fullness.

Redeveloping its old building has been key. It was originally built for around 450 people. By the 1990s, when the congregation numbered around 40 people, the church leadership at the time took the decision to sell much of its land and plough the funds back into modernising the main building,

including installing a mezzanine floor.

Chris arrived as a student minister in 2000.

He was told by deacon Derek Fuller: “We’ve done what we can with the building – now we need help with the spiritual bits.”

“The idea was, we’ve got this building, how do we make it work?”

With further improvements over the years, the building is both useable and useful throughout the week. In pre-Covid times it was in use every day: it had become integral to the social life of the village, and from the church’s point of view was playing a part in enabling ‘life in all its fullness’ for all people.

Pre-pandemic it was used by many different groups such as:

- Weightwatchers and Slimming World - aiming to encourage healthy eating.
- An over-55s exercise class along with Health Walks - encouraging taking care of the body.



- The Bronte Society, the Gilbert and Sullivan Society and Haworth Cinema - stimulating the intellect and appreciation of the arts.
- The Parish Council, the Women's Institute, Drop-in lunches and other public meetings - helping local community engagement and building social capital.
- The Guides, Weeny Boppers and Sunday school - ensuring that children and young people know they are valued.
- Sunday worship - aiming to explore the spiritual side of life and providing a framework for how religion is integral to how we live this life and not simplistically concerned about the next.

“That all of these things happen at WLBC is no accident but a clear outworking of a commitment to serve the whole person and not just be interested in ‘saving souls,’” says Chris.

During the pandemic it continued to be used, as a foodbank, and the venue for the afore-mentioned mental health group. (Support groups such as this were still able to meet during lockdown).

The foodbank has been running throughout the pandemic. When the restrictions are eased, Chris sees it being a place where it can act as more than just a signpost; but a place where people can be heard and be advocated for. “And as with the other groups, there is no shortage of people wanting to help”, he says.

“Many people who would not come on a Sunday are involved, people who have great sympathy for Christ's heart for justice. I've been overwhelmed by people in the village wanting to channel that, people who delight in coming to a local place so they can help local people.”

He adds: “We may still have the same numbers in our congregation as we had when I arrived 20 years ago, but the church is there and is clearly a healthy aspect of society.

It's back to the idea that we don't need anything new, no shiny theology – it's about being salt and light, and just simply going about loving people and being there for them.”

Chris Upton is minister of West Lane Baptist Church. He is also trained in pastoral supervision and is a member of APSE (Association of Pastoral Supervision and Education). Contact him if you are a minister considering pastoral supervision as part of your ongoing CMD: chris@altruists.org

Every year we do a 'Holiday at Home' for the local community where, with good imagination and plenty of buy-in from local pubs and restaurants who donate food and drink, we travel in our imagination to another country.

In 2020 we were meant to be going to Belgium and this painting was done in the style of the surrealist artist René Magritte. We think that it is an almost prophetic piece of work and speaks volumes about re-imagining our church buildings as stages on which the drama of the gospel is played out in our local communities.



Painting: West Lane Baptist Church - Ian Palmer

Becoming a bereavement friendly church

Judith Brashaw is Bereavement Team Co-ordinator, Oundle Baptist Church



Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Romans 12:15

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress.

James 1:27

At Oundle Baptist Church since 2018 we have been exploring how to become a Bereavement Friendly Church, indeed a bereavement friendly town if we can. We want to reach out, with the love of Jesus, to all those who face bereavement in our local community.

We know how to provide a great funeral, but have much to learn about helping one another prepare for the death of those we love, or even for our own death. Once the funeral is over life does not return to normal for those who are grieving, and we wanted to equip ourselves to be better able to walk alongside people as they navigate the months and years ahead. The pandemic has

resulted in so many more deaths and added layers of complication and difficulty for families at their most painful time.

Over this last year in our town and in our wider networks we have seen people face the death of loved ones, while unable to be at the bedside or graveside to say their farewells. In deep mourning families are not allowed to gather, friends cannot offer hugs, neighbours or colleagues may not share a cheering cuppa or a squeeze of the hand. A lasagne left on a doorstep, or pastoral support by phone or Zoom, is scant comfort and many have been struggling and isolated in their grief. Friends who want to support and show care often feel uncertain how to help.

We were partly prepared, and there is so much more to learn, but it's helpful that many training and support opportunities are now running online.

Why do we do it? We are called to love.

We want to welcome and care for people without judgement or conditions. For some people this is a faith journey. The trauma of bereavement can challenge or awaken faith. We are in a unique place to speak God's love through the care that we offer, to create a connection as we journey with people. The training, books and resources all help equip us with good practice and excellent tools to minister the love of Jesus.

It is our hope that we can continue to develop our bereavement ministry, to help make our church, our community and our town a place where people who have been bereaved feel safe, cared for, listened to and loved – where we can develop a vocabulary allowing discussion about death and bereavement.

Read in more depth about the journey that the team at Oundle has been on, and access the resources they found helpful, at: baptist.org.uk/oundle



Class of 2019 Certificate in Bereavement Ministry, Cliff College

‘The big thing is to get people to sense there is hope’

Colin Richards, Christians Against Poverty Debt Centre manager at Kirkintilloch Baptist Church, East Dunbartonshire, shares his experiences of the pandemic so far – and outlines what may be ahead



The beginning of the pandemic saw a slowdown in terms of clients accessing the services of debt charities. However, this has begun to really change throughout 2021 - and there is a sense that the worst is to come.

“There were several reasons why people weren’t contacting Christians Against Poverty (CAP) to seek debt help in the early part of the pandemic”, explained Colin.

The furlough scheme kicked in and there were payment holidays. Organisations that collected debt had to re-arrange their work. People weren’t chased. They were at home and maybe spending less – not buying lunch or a coffee at work. There was a readjustment of people’s finances. Colin says this wasn’t simply CAP’s experience, but seen across the national charities involved in debt counselling, such as Citizens Advice and StepChange.

Following the most recent lockdown however, more and more people have begun to access the services. It’s people

in a range of circumstances, and includes those who haven’t previously needed to access debt help: the self-employed and freelancers who haven’t had the Government support, and have steadily worked through their reserves; people who have eaten into their overdraft, and used credit cards simply to get by; others who in the past have rarely connected with state support and are having to learn to live with greatly reduced incomes.

Despite this increase, “There’s a degree of holding our breath,” Colin says. “One of the signs of a tsunami is that the tide goes out a long way – but behind it is the big wave. We are still seeing the tide go out... And in our experience, it’s always the most vulnerable who are the worst affected.”

The way CAP works is very relational. Its debt counsellors visit people in their homes, while its Job Clubs would normally take place in a group face-to-face setting where relationships can be nurtured. (Kirkintilloch Baptist Church also runs a CAP Job Club). Everything migrated online during the lockdowns, and while it enabled the work to continue, it has brought its challenges, not least highlighting how big an issue digital exclusion is.

Colin also cautions that significant mental health issues often accompany debt problems. CAP’s own studies show that before

working with them, one third of people have considered suicide as a route out of debt; and 14 per cent have attempted suicide. Often people don’t realise what options are available to them, which can lead to despair.

Colin says CAP has a longstanding and strong relationship with Government, banks and utility companies to ensure there is support for people to get back on their feet, and wants to see this continue in these difficult circumstances. “People have to be given the chance to catch up.”

So if you are in debt, or know someone struggling with debt, do seek the support of debt charities which can help explore options.

“Above all, they offer something intangible but crucial”, Colin says. “The big thing is to get people to sense there is hope.”

For more on CAP and the services (CAP Debt Help, CAP Job Clubs, CAP Life Skills) visit capuk.org

University challenges

University students have had a hugely disrupted year. Joni Roberts and Josh Edah give an insight into their experiences in the pandemic.



“I’ve seen lots of loneliness”

Joni Roberts is in her second year of a French and Philosophy degree at King’s College in London. Her university career started off with the normal freedoms – lots of freshers’ events, packed lecture halls, meeting for coffee, clubs, playing sports, and in-person church.

As the virus spread, her course moved online, and Joni returned home to Stratford-upon-Avon (where she attends the Barn in Bidford) a couple of days before the announcement of the first national lockdown. She remained there until September, when she returned to London for her second year and moved into a house with four friends. There was some in-person teaching in the early autumn, but that was soon curtailed with rising numbers of infections.

Life has subsequently become ‘very stripped back’.

“Though a lot of effort has been put into online, it’s quite isolating,” she says. “You’re stuck in a house. Four classes in a day, then the work on top of that, means 10 hours online at your desk. There’s no change in scenery, unlike before. It’s much harder to engage in classes online. People are exhausted, they don’t necessarily have the same drive as last year.

“You can go out for walks and get groceries, but you can’t socialise with anyone outside your bubble. I’ve not been able to see friends from courses. There’s no social life, which is a big part of the university experience. There’s no sport either.

“So it’s been really difficult. Life is completely different, and I’ve seen lots of loneliness.”

A couple of things have been key in helping her navigate this period. Her household has learned to support each other: making an effort to have dinner together every night; watching movies in people’s rooms and playing card games. “If we are all feeling isolated, we’ve done something together. It’s changed the mood and given us a chance to switch off. It’s been a learning curve, learning to live together. But we’ve formed a community and we are really close, in a way we probably wouldn’t have been had we had the usual distractions.”

Joni has also been part of an online community with her church, King’s Cross Church. “I joined a hub. We’ve been meeting once a week over Zoom. We’ll do a short Bible study, talk about highs and lows, pray for each other and play games. There are 11 or 12 of us. I’ve only met a couple of people in person. It’s seemed intimate and genuine, and it’s been such a lifeline.”

She adds: “There have been lots of moments of growth – when circumstances you are in are painful, often positive things will grow.

“It’s showed me the power of meaningful human contact, and deepened the relationships I have.

‘A survey of 4,193 students conducted for the National Union of Students found that 52% said their mental health was worse than it was before the pandemic’



“Difficult to meet new people – but learning self discipline and patience”

Josh Edah is in his first year, studying Maths and Computer Science at the University of Essex. There have been many reasons why it’s been a challenging time. For instance, his entire course has been online, and will be for the remainder of the academic year. Josh adds that personal support is naturally more limited too – it’s difficult to ask a lecturer all the questions you’d like to when you’re in a Zoom meeting with dozens of other students.

“Obviously you understand why it has to be online, but it doesn’t feel like value for money at £9,000 a year,” he says. “Hopefully when lockdown is lifted there can be more one-on-one support.”

Another challenge is the lack of human contact.

“I’ve not really had the experience of meeting new people. I’ve met some, which is great - I have flatmates, and in my block I have friends on all the three floors. I’ve met some people in the other accommodation. But I feel like I could have met more without the pandemic. It has been a struggle to find new friends, and that’s been one of the biggest things.

“I’ve also not had a chance to get a feel for the whole place. So if the pandemic wasn’t a thing, the experience would be better.”

All this has taken its toll, Josh admits. Keeping in touch with friends via social media and video technology has helped, as has listening to a lot of worship music. Josh, whose church back home in London is Mitcham Baptist, also joined the Christian Union and

attends its Thursday services each week. “It’s been good to be in a community like this,” he says.

Did he think about deferring this year?

“No, I thought there was no point in missing a year. My goal is three years at Essex, and then hopefully a Masters at Oxford or Cambridge. I then want to take that knowledge and use it for the betterment of society. With Computer Sciences you can go into almost anything. So I wanted to get started, and it’s been a case of getting on with it.”

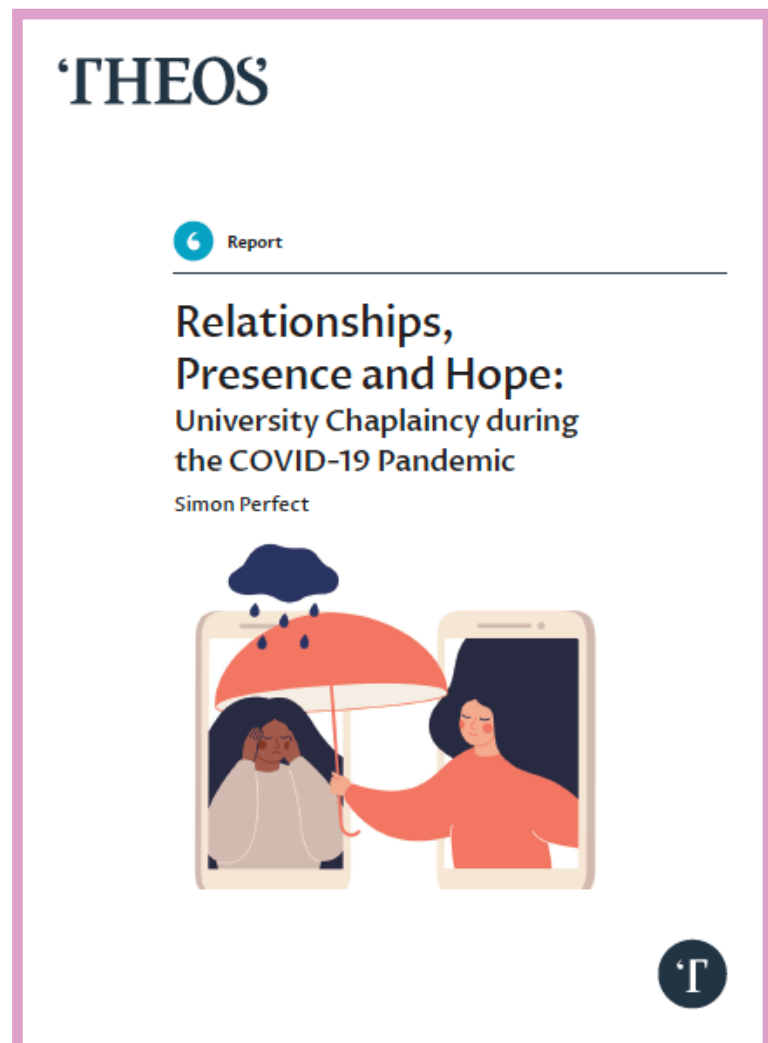
“I’ve learnt a lot of self discipline,” he continues. “The transition from secondary school to university is a big one. You have to learn to

manage your time effectively. “You need a lot of patience, and I know this is affecting everyone in different ways. Once restrictions lift we’ll feel a lot better.”

Further reading

As a result of research conducted by Theos, *Relationships, Presence and Hope* explores the unique contributions of chaplains during this time, the challenges they have faced, and what lessons can be learned by chaplains and employers.

For more, bit.ly/theoschaplaincy



EVENTS

Christian Aid Week

10-16 May
caweek.org

Baptist Assembly

13-16 May
Baptist Assembly will be online, with keynote speaker Shane Claiborne, and a live service on Sunday morning
Baptistassembly.org.uk

Thy Kingdom Come

13 – 23 May
Global wave of prayer inviting Christians around the world to pray for more people to know Jesus
thykingdomcome.global

Pentecost

23 May

The Big Lunch

5-6 June
The Big Lunch is about millions of people getting together to share food, have fun and get to know each other better
thebiglunch.com/

Refugee Week

14-20 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
refugeeweek.org.uk/

Father's Day

20 June

Sea Sunday

11 July
Churches around the world come together to remember seafarers and pray for them, their families and those who support them.
missiontoseafarers.org/sea-sunday

Keswick Convention

17-23 July;
24-30 July;
31 July – 6 August
keswickministries.org/

Baptist World Congress

7-10 July (virtual gathering)
baptistworld.org/congress

New Wine

Elements 1 24-28 July;
Elements 2 29 July – 2 August
Sixty-One 5-8 August
The East of England Showground, Peterborough
new-wine.org/

Greenbelt

27-30 August
Boughton House, Northamptonshire
greenbelt.org.uk

Education Sunday

12 September
cte.org.uk

Peacemaking Sunday

19 September
jointpublicissues.org.uk/issues/peacemaking





Attentive to Rhythms of Grace

Incoming President Geoff Colmer introduces the presidential theme for 2021-2022

At the start of 2015, one of my hopes was to see a kingfisher. I'd never seen one before and I even considered contacting the Buckinghamshire Bird Society to ask where I might go to catch a sighting. On 2 January that year, my wife Cazz and I were walking in the parkland very near to where we live, when along the brook I saw a bird hurtling towards us. As it passed us, I turned and the light caught its fluorescent blue and orange colouring: it was a kingfisher! I was reminded of the poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'As kingfishers catch fire...' and this was exactly my experience.

This was a gift, a moment of grace. Even more than this, it has changed the way I walk in the parkland because now, I'm always watching for the kingfisher. I don't see it frequently and when I do, invariably it takes me by surprise and comes again as a gift, a moment of grace. But the kingfisher is never far away from my attention.

Giving our entire attention to what God is doing right now, being attentive to rhythms of grace, requires an orientation, a disposition, an attitude.

When settling upon a theme for the presidency of the Baptist Union, 'Attentive to rhythms of grace' resonated for me. It is captured by the experience of the kingfisher and how I now walk in the parkland. But more deeply, it expresses what I've longed for in life and ministry. Subsequently, it has taken on further significance in two ways, one global and the other personal.

The world has changed because of Coronavirus. At the time of writing (early February) we are in another lockdown, a situation unimaginable a year ago. And when, eventually, we emerge from Covid-19, life will be far from what we think of as 'normal'

for some time to come, even with mass vaccination.

And my world has changed. Last July, following acute back pain, I was diagnosed with spinal myeloma, a blood cancer. My condition is highly treatable, though ultimately incurable, and currently I live with the effects.

So, what does being 'attentive to rhythms of grace' mean for Baptists Together, and what does it mean for me, at this particular time? Eugene Peterson in *The Message* translates Matthew 6:34 as 'Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now.'

God's nature is to give his entire attention to us – it is how God expresses his love, seeking encounter with us. We see this throughout the biblical story and it becomes our personal story. God's desire is that we respond by giving our attention to God, by responding with love to this encounter. This response isn't just a one-off, but a way of being, whereby we live with our attention upon God.

While this sounds all very lovely, the reality is different. It is all too easy not to be attentive. We live in an age characterised by anxiety, distractions, noise, busyness and driven-ness where many things clamour for our attention. Little of this has gone away with the limitations of Coronavirus, although we can add to it a deep weary-ness. And, let's not kid ourselves, what is true of our society at large can be equally true of church.

Giving our entire attention to what God is doing right now, being attentive to rhythms of grace, requires an orientation, a disposition, an attitude. But for this to happen, we also require habits or practices which, rather than becoming a to-do list, become who we are. These habits or practices are based on an expectation that God is to be found in the very ordinary as well as extraordinary parts of life.

One tradition speaks of ‘finding God in all things’ and this can be our experience. As the apostle Paul (quoting a contemporary poet) puts it, ‘[in him we live and move and have our being.](#)’ Acts 17:28.

Some of these practices are more obvious and already part of our living as Christians. Being part of a church is an obvious place where, in all the ups and downs of our life together, we can give our attention to what God is doing right now.

... an expectation that God is to be found in the very ordinary as well as extraordinary parts of life

Becoming still and keeping silence, taking some moments to stop - look - and listen, what is often called contemplation, is intentionally becoming attentive to rhythms of grace. As are different ways of meditating upon Scripture known as Lectio Divina, imaginative contemplation, or Examen, ways of reading and praying that I’ll come back to during the year.

The psalmist declares, ‘[The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it.](#)’ Ps 24:1. Creation is the arena in which we are invited to be attentive to the rhythms of grace, as my story of the kingfisher shows. But the gifts of creation, creativity, that God gives to humanity, and which express themselves in the arts for example, provide windows onto God. For me, music often draws me into a heightened awareness of God in the here and now.

Connection with people, relationship and friendship, something which has become so vital and yet restricted with Coronavirus, can be a powerful way that we experience rhythms of grace in the face of the other.

Celtic spirituality speaks of ‘thin places’, places where encounter with God can seem just that bit easier, and more accessible. I can think of a small, out-of-the-way church in bustling Assisi, Italy, which is just such a place for me. But strangely, some of life’s painful experiences, such as illness and grief, can be a means of God coming very close, something I’ve experienced especially over this last year.

Being ‘attentive to rhythms of grace’ is vital in our mission. I’m drawn to Rowan Williams’ remark that whenever he meets someone he asks, ‘What is God already doing in this person’s life? And how can I help?’ Our engagement with mission must always be one where we join in with what God is already doing and this requires giving our entire attention to God.

There are many dimensions to explore in a life of being ‘attentive to rhythms of grace’, but for now I conclude with gratitude. Gratefully on the day that is past can open our eyes to those moments of grace, both drawing us further into God and, at the same time, sharpening our discernment of God’s presence and action in our daily lives.

As I look with excitement to the year ahead, I invite you to join with me in this daily prayer:

*Gracious Lord,
by your Spirit,
turn my whole being to you
that I might live this day
‘attentive to rhythms of grace’
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

Geoff Colmer is Regional Minister Team Leader of the Central Baptist Association. He will be inducted in May as Baptist Union President 2021-2022.





Prayers of Lament

Although uncomfortable, the pattern of biblical lament has much to offer at this time. By Gale Richards

At the end of March 2020, the UK had entered lockdown for the first time in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and I was preparing to preach in an online Good Friday service with a local Baptist church. I felt led to preach on the theme of lament, as I wondered how well many of us would cope mentally, living with all the restrictions, loss and uncertainty we faced.

It seemed to me the psalms of lament show us how we can and must share with God, even our rawest of feelings. A practice that has the potential to aid both our spiritual and mental wellbeing. That led me to preach on a psalm of lament on Good Friday, in the hope that God would use me to offer something to the gathered congregation about the need to make space to lament, individually and corporately.

I sensed the need for lament as part of our 'walking together, and watching over one

another' as church members, but additionally to model something to the wider community, about the character of God not being distant, but present with us, in our suffering. This was a message that I felt so many in our wider community desperately needed to hear. It also resonated with the initiative I was involved in with local Baptist ministers displaying 'Try Praying' banners on our church buildings, inviting those who 'don't do church', to give prayer a try.

So, on Good Friday 2020, I preached on Psalm 22, referencing how Jesus is recorded as quoting from it in Matthew 27:46 '*...My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*' (NRSV). These were words I encouraged people to hear, as a reminder that we are allowed to feel sad and cry out in our pain and suffering. There were sad things happening around us, and to us. We needed to cry out because we were hurting.

In following the pattern of biblical lament - we were to begin with a complaint addressed to God, as we reflected on and contrasted current bad times with better times; cry out for relief; and state our trust in God delivering that relief. We are able to make that last statement because we know the character of the God we serve is kind, loving, faithful and just. We are to refuse to carry the burden of repressing our pain and instead use Jesus as our model. He knew there would ultimately be a good outcome from his suffering, but that did not stop him crying out in the midst of it. We cry out as Jesus did on the cross, because it hurts!

There were positive responses to that sermon and some admissions that lamenting was not something that some had necessarily ever been taught to do, or felt comfortable doing. I had little time to reflect on how prayers of lament had become a natural part of my spirituality, before the events surrounding the killing of George Floyd in the USA, unfolded on 25 May, and gave me my answer.



Those events reminded me that I was raised by a Jamaican-born mother who passed on to me a tradition of lamenting, that stretches back generations to the enslaved African people my family descends from. I had not necessarily attached the label 'prayers of lament' to what I had grown up hearing my mum and her peers offer to God, but that is what they were. When they experienced injustice, especially racial injustice, they complained to God, as they reflected on better past times, cried out for relief, and ended with a statement confirming their trust in God to deliver that relief. Sometimes they were accompanied by words from African spiritual songs or contemporary songs, for each generation shapes the tradition for their

time and their context. I would suggest 'Hear my Cry O Lord' based on Psalm 61 has been an important accompanying song to prayers of lament, for a number of Black British people of my generation. The words within it - *When my heart is overwhelmed lead me to the rock that is higher than I* - being of particular significance.

In the aftermath of George Floyd's death, I reached out to an African-American Baptist minister back in the USA, who had spent several months worshipping with us, as she completed her PhD. I wanted her to know that we would be standing in solidarity in prayer with her and others in the USA, in the pursuit of global racial justice. She responded by sending me a poem she had come across on the theme of 'Black people are tired of trying to convince you that our Black lives matter too.' It included some of the names of the many Black lives lost, as the struggle for global racial justice continues.

I used that poem as inspiration for one of our Sunday morning services in June 2020. A service in which we explored the theme of what it means to be 'A place where all are welcome' in relation to the Good Samaritan parable. A service that also included space for two members of the congregation to share contrasting perspectives on the global Black Lives Matter protests taking place. It ended with me leading prayers inspired by the refrain in the poem 'Black people are tired,' to allow us to corporately lament, as we reflected on the global need and gospel imperative for racial justice.

As I look back on the events of 2020, I am certain prayers of lament helped sustain me.



Gale Richards, minister,
Zion Baptist Church,
Cambridge





Supporting children and young people through Covid

By Rae Morfin of Transforming Lives for Good (TLG), who has been leading the Emotional Rollercoaster training across our Associations

I think we may all have said at least once in our lives: “Well that was some rollercoaster!” when referring to an event or set of circumstances that have taken us through an array of strong emotions. There’s something about the highs and lows, the fast and slows that we can all relate to as we journey through life.

I have had the joy of spending time with so many Baptist Union leaders, children, youth and family leaders, workers and volunteers on our virtual training tour of the UK, to share with you *The Emotional Rollercoaster* resource. At TLG we are all about enabling local churches to help struggling children. This partnership is a great example of how, together, we can make a difference for those who need to know the love of God and the strength of fellowship for such a time as this. It’s a resource that offers therapeutic

responses, approaches and activities to explore emotional health, it is especially relevant for supporting children who have been impacted by lockdown and Covid-19.

In our chats at the end of each training event, we’ve been hearing about children, young people and families in your communities who are feeling stretched and at the end of their own resources. It is probably of no surprise that a recent ‘large-scale study, undertaken by the NHS in July 2020, found that clinically significant mental health conditions amongst children had risen by 50 per cent compared to three years earlier. A staggering 1 in 6 children now have a probable mental health condition.’ (*The state of children’s mental health services 2020/21* by the UK Children’s Commissioner¹)

At TLG we are constantly thinking about how to

resource and equip the church to step in, to be there for those children and teens who are struggling in our society.

After time spent listening to God, when the pandemic hit last year, I felt drawn to ‘be still’ and listen to his words in the Psalms, and in particular to Psalm 23. I drew such strength from knowing we are connected to the one true eternal God, the Good Shepherd who can lead us all through any ‘rollercoaster’ of the season we may face. As he leads us in this way, may we bring him to others in this way too.

The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want...

It’s a matter of trust isn’t it? If we know he’s guiding, that he can see the end from the beginning, we can put our hand in his and let him lead us, each moment, each day.

¹ <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/report/mental-health-services-2020-21/>

He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake...

Our God can only be true to himself and he is love, provider, way maker, powerful and faithful. We get a sense of this when we enjoy his creation, where all our senses are engaged in awe and wonder. Where we can be excited or calmed, energised or find rest and be restored.

Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for YOU (God) are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me...

When we walk through the toughest ask of our lives, our God doesn't pull back,

he draws near, constantly loving, being there, giving us his truth, which can often bring the right perspective for the trials we face. It's here that our trust in him is realised and his promises are our fortress.

How does he do it?

Through his people loving, enabled by his Spirit. It's when we pray, bring verses to speak his heart, show hospitality, show generosity, creativity in care, by just 'being there'. It's the fruit of the Spirit developing in us, pouring out to each other.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows...

He knows when times are hard, when we feel cornered, when there

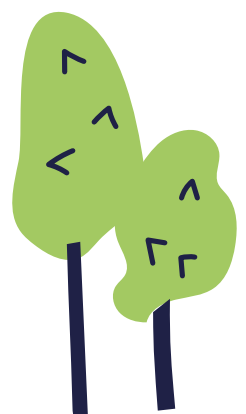
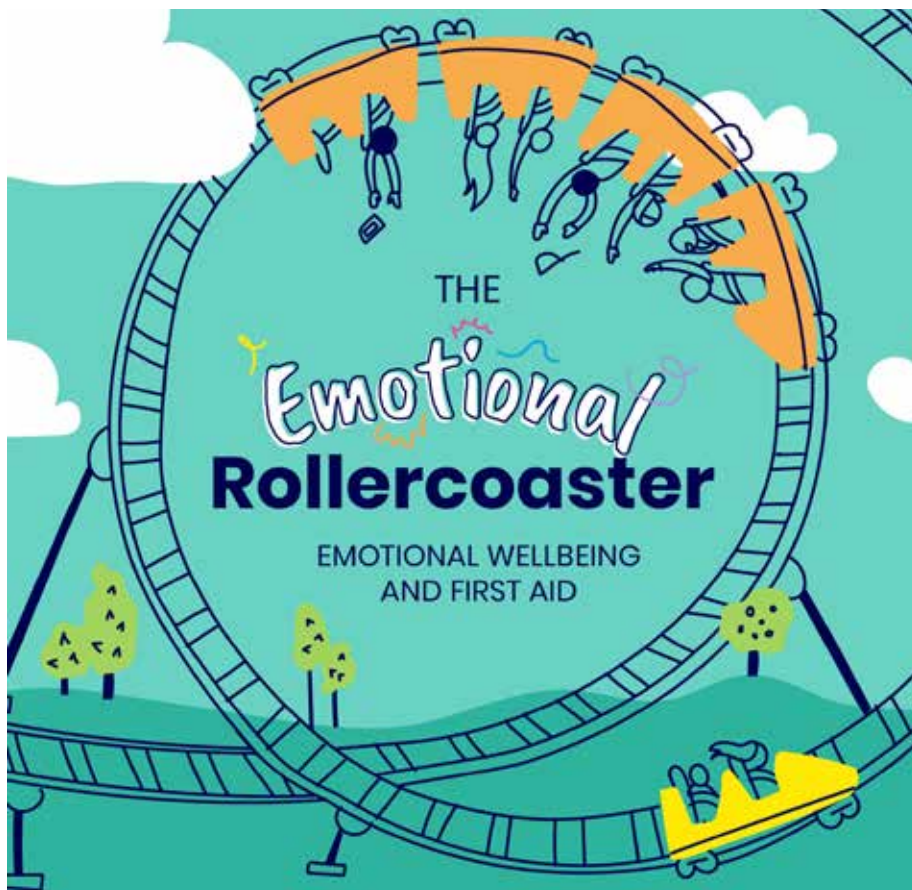
doesn't seem to be a way out. I don't think it's a coincidence that many food banks, holiday meal clubs and community food pack deliveries involve a myriad of churches. It is God's heart to provide for those in need.

I've heard a lot of accounts of gratitude and joy when those who never expected to be in such need, find friendship, generosity and faith on their doorstep from a Christian who carries God's love in word and practical deed.

Surely goodness and mercy (or in some translations – love) shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

We have an eternal hope – an assurance that we can hold on to, that we can point others to. He is the Good Shepherd who knows what we need, who sends his sentinels of goodness and mercy to faithfully follow us. He is our home.

The Emotional Rollercoaster resource was written to demonstrate the heart of God along with known behavioural and neurological understanding.



Here's a little breakdown of our training content:

● **Being leader ready**

What is emotional health and what does it look like to be emotionally healthy? It is important that we understand the need to care for our own emotional health in order to better support others for longer. Before we start exploring how to help others, let's take some time for self-reflection; to acknowledge what stress looks like for us personally and learn new strategies to turn that stress-dial down.

● **How does emotional distress affect us?**

Here we explore the impact of emotional distress on the body and the long-term effect adverse childhood experiences can have on a person's life. We address how emotional distress can affect a person's learning ability, their brain, behaviour, and social/emotional well-being.

● **How to bring support**

Finally, we take a look at how we can support those who are struggling. Bringing our 'three step' approach to equip you for those tricky situations, and taking a look at how to deliver the *Emotional Rollercoaster* resource. It's important to remember that we aren't the professionals and don't need to try to 'fix things,' but we can be well prepared to come alongside those that need our help.

It's time to talk about emotions with our children and teens. To let them know that they are God made. That the spectrum of emotions felt and demonstrated are like the signal-box for how we're doing in body, soul and spirit. That we can do this by following God's commands to 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind, and to love your neighbour as yourself'. Matthew 22:36-40

Let's learn together, showing them how to

govern and navigate the emotional signals we can all feel. For we have heard from thousands of church volunteers, via our TLG programmes, about the power of 'just showing up' and being there for children, teens and families.

My prayer is that this resource will be a practical tool for you to use in supporting children and teens to navigate their God-given emotions. So that when you journey with those who are struggling, they will feel supported, loved and connected in to a God who cares.

May many be drawn to their Good Shepherd by his loving kindness and tender mercies shown through you. Amen.

Rae Morfin is Head of Therapeutic Support at TLG

As founder of TLG's Early Intervention programme, Rae now has strategic oversight in therapeutic approaches and delivery at TLG.

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Prayers for our time

Faith in God's help and support

In our fear, Lord,
be our confidence.
In our weakness
be our strength.
In our panic
be our calm.
In our sickness
be our healing.
In our confusion
be our anchor.
In our insecurity
be our rock.
In our darkness
be our light.
In our grief
be our solace.
In our despair
be our hope.
In our storm
be our sunshine.
In our night
be our day.

Amen.

For those who face threats to their health as an ever-present reality

This crisis has brought us up short, Lord
overturning our way of life,
shattering our security
leaving us feeling
vulnerable, scared, alone –
fearful for our welfare
fearful of the future.
Help us to remember that for many in our world,
this is not the exception but the norm
thousands having grown used to
living with the constant threat of
disease –
Malaria
Ebola
Zika virus
Cholera
Dengue fever
to name but some.
Help us, through what we are
wrestling with now
to understand and empathise
with what too many wrestle with
repeatedly
to realise how fortunate we have
been
and to resolve to help build a
fairer more caring world for all.

Amen.

Trust in God's transforming love

In our darkness, Lord,
be our light.
In our despondency
be our hope.
In our dread
be our assurance.
In our isolation
be our companion.
In our need
be our provider.
In our confusion
be our lodestar.
In our brokenness
be our healing.
In our sorrow
be our joy.
Reach out to us, Lord, in this time
of need
and be our all.

Amen.



Lord of all

Lord of all
the delight of those who glimpse you
the joy of those who love you
the peace of those who serve you
the contentment of those who serve you
the strength of those who seek you
the guide of those who hear you
the hope of those who trust you
the light of those who know you
the treasure of those who follow you.
Draw closer to me
that I may draw closer to you.

Amen.

Seeking God's peace

Breathe your peace within me,
Lord
peace such as only you can give.
When I fret about tomorrow,
when I worry about my loved ones
when I question whether I can cope
when my stomach feels knotted
and panic rises within me
help me to hear your still small voice
rebuking the wind and waves
stilling the storm
calming the roiling waves
and in place of turmoil bring tranquillity
in place of chaos, quietness
in place of a troubled, anxious spirit
rest for my soul.

Amen.

For victims of Covid-19 and for signs of hope

A prayer the countless victims of Coronavirus – in some sense, essentially all of us – and for the possibility that an end to the pandemic and its associated crisis may perhaps be in sight in the months ahead.

God of mercy
hear our prayer for all those whose lives during this past year have been overturned by Covid-19;
those who have suffered and those who still struggle with the after-effects of the illness;
those who have lost loved ones as a result;

those in our hospitals and health centres exhausted by the demands made upon them;
those in our nursing and residential homes who have been so vulnerable yet who have felt so isolated;

those who have developed vaccines and treatments or who continue to work upon them
and those whose job it is to organise and roll out the vaccination programme;
those in governments and positions in leadership seeking to take right decisions for the present and the future;

those whose livelihoods have been undermined even destroyed by the economic impact of lockdowns and the like;
those facing years of unemployment and an uncertain future as a result of the pandemic's impact.

Our country
our society
our world
is broken – hurting
but hoping;
fearful of the future
yet praying for a miracle.

Hear our prayer
and, in your love
pick us up
and put us together again.

Amen.

Baptist minister Nick Fawcett is a devotional and reflective writer. He has posted regular prayers on his website relating to the Coronavirus pandemic, and in 2020 published a free ebook *For such a time as this - Prayers in response to the Coronavirus pandemic*.

This is a small collection of his prayers, and includes material from his forthcoming book *God of Here, There and Everywhere: 100 Prayers for Personal Devotion Inspired by the Celtic Tradition*. Access his writing here: nickfawcett.uk



New book on grief by Baptist minister

As the pandemic recedes and people talk about returning to normal life, how do you navigate your way through grief when your life will never be the same again?

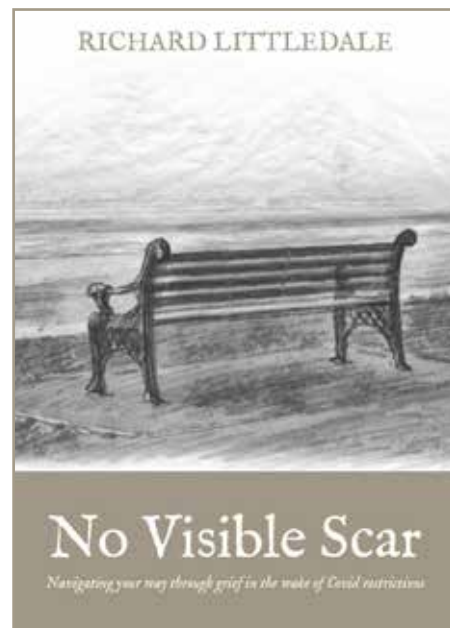
A new book by a Baptist minister seeks to help you understand your feelings and find hope in this strange land called grief.

No Visible Scar: Navigating Your Way through Grief in the Wake of Covid Restrictions is written by Richard Littledale, minister of Newbury Baptist Church in Berkshire.

This book is specifically for those who have lost a loved one during pandemic restrictions. On top of the disorientating feelings of loss and grief, you may also be feeling the pain of not having been able to say a final goodbye, or not having been able to have the funeral you would have wished. The restrictions imposed by the lockdown have added extra levels of grief that perhaps others do not see.

Quantity packs enable this resource to be used by churches, funeral directors, grief charities, or counselling services to help those who are grieving.

Richard is also the author of *Postcards from the Land of Grief* (2019), written following the death of his wife Fiona.



Perceptions of church improving

A new poll has found perceptions of the role of the Church are improving following efforts to support and care for their communities throughout the pandemic.

The survey found that those who do not identify as Christian were more likely, since the Covid pandemic, to agree with the statement that the UK Church is making a positive difference in the world - 25 per cent today compared with 19 per cent three years ago.

The survey was commissioned in partnership by YourNeighbour and international Christian children's charity World Vision.

More than one in three (36 per cent) of the total UK population agree that Christian churches are making a positive difference in the world.

The study, which surveyed 2,170 respondents, also found that 42 per cent of UK adults agree that local

Christian churches are making a positive difference in their community with 24 per cent disagreeing.

When asked what community needs Christian churches could provide for, events for the elderly and homeless services were selected most often, with both chosen by 1 in 4 UK adults (24 per cent), closely followed by shelter for the homeless (22 per cent) and food/clothes/toy collection and distribution (20 per cent).

Book launch explores how Baptists do theology together

The official launch of a book charting the denominational reforms of the 1990s drew an audience of 80 participants to reflect on a key period of Baptist life and ask important questions about how Baptists do theology today. *Renewing a Modern Denomination: A*

Study of Baptist Institutional Life in the 1990s is written by the Revd Dr Andy Goodliff.

Andy identifies two streams of thought at work at the heart of the movement for renewal of the British Baptist Union.

He charts the work of theologians such as Professor Paul Fiddes and Dr Brian Haymes arguing the case for a renewal of covenantal relationships as the basis of Union life in local churches, associations and the Union itself; and the thoughts of the Revd Dr Nigel Wright, the Revd Douglas McBain and

others pressing for a more missional construct for Baptist life together.

Commenting on the launch, Dr Christine Joynes, Director of the Centre for Baptist Studies said: "This was a valuable opportunity not only to reflect on a key period of Baptist institutional developments in the 1990s, but also to ask important questions about how Baptists do theology together today.

"Andy's book is a significant achievement and provides many important insights for understanding how Baptist identity has been shaped."

Divestment resolution overwhelmingly passed at Council

Baptist Union Council members overwhelmingly passed a divestment resolution at their latest gathering (23-24 March).

This update to the Baptist Union Ethical Investment Policy reflects a commitment to respond to the continuing environmental and climate crisis by abstaining from investment of funds in all fossil fuel extraction, refining and distribution. The Baptist Union had previously already divested from Coal and Tar Sands in March 2019.

The proposal had been brought to Council by the Revd Dr Dave Gregory, Convenor of the Baptist Union's Environmental Network, and was co-authored by John Levick, the Baptist Union's Treasurer, as a practical commitment towards climate justice ahead of the COP26 United Nations climate conference in Glasgow in November.

In presenting the resolution Dr Gregory

explained that taking this step at this moment "enables us to walk more firmly with our partners in the gospel in light of the climate crisis which affects the whole 'community of creation', both human and others, across the world today and threatens the order of creation into the future".

Lucy Tiller, intern for the Joint Public Issues Team, spoke movingly to the resolution, emphasising that climate justice was an issue on which many young people agreed. "Today I'm asking you to use your financial resources and your moral leadership to stand alongside young people and groups already affected by climate chaos."

Following the presentations many council members spoke passionately in support of divestment. Several highlighted how churches in their Associations had asked them to support the motion. A number of Baptist churches have already divested, including Devonport Baptist Church

in Plymouth and High Street Baptist Church in Tring.

The resolution was passed with a 98.5 per cent majority. The updated wording to the Baptist Union investment policy now reads: 'We will therefore avoid investment in companies with significant trading in: the extraction, production and refining of oil, gas, tar sand and coal'.

The gathering was the second time Council had taken place on Zoom. Two sessions were devoted to pioneering, one of our four key areas of work as Baptists Together. A Pioneer Manifesto was presented, which offered 'a hopeful vision for the shared life of our Baptist family, with some observations about the challenges that are currently hindering us in fulfilling that vision'. A resolution affirming the place and gift of pioneers and pioneering, and committing to taking further practical steps to put that affirmation into practice across our movement, was overwhelmingly passed.

For the full Council report, visit baptist.org.uk/councilmarch21

Is the 'missing generation' still missing?



The Evangelical Alliance (EA) has published a new resource that focuses on young adults in our churches. Entitled *Changing church - is the 'missing generation' still missing?*, the resource is designed 'to help us reflect on this as a church', says the EA.

It pulls together in-depth analysis of research in this area of ministry and extensive conversations and interviews with hundreds of church leaders, young adults, practitioners and academics. It covers issues from social media to racial injustice, harsh realities, good news stories and transformative innovations.

The resource will help us 'listen to the voices of young adults, and ask the right questions as we seek to create a thriving community for all generations and opportunities for significant numbers of 20s and 30s to come to faith', the EA continues. It comes more than ten years after the EA published *The Missing Generation* (2009) due to the dearth of 20s and 30s in many churches. This is still the case for many churches today, but there are reasons for hope, the resource underlines.

In capturing up to date research, the resource presents encouraging findings from recent months: namely that one in

two young adults have prayed regularly (online or offline) during the pandemic; and that one in two young adults have attended services (online or offline) in the same period.

Furthermore, it is 'striking and encouraging for the purposes of this resource' that engagement in both prayer and church attendance has been higher for young adults than any other age group.

This suggests that 'the coincidence of the impact of the pandemic and the increased accessibility of church services have led to these high proportions of engagement'. However, it is 'not all good news' - a significant proportion of this generation is engaging less than before.

For more visit: eauk.org/resources/what-we-offer/reports/the-missing-generation



FATHER GOD

**HELP ME,
HELP US.**

**TEACH ME,
TEACH US.**

**WALK WITH ME,
WALK WITH US.**

**BLESS ME,
BLESS US.**

**FORGIVE ME,
FORGIVE US**

AMEN

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