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News:

New safeguarding film for Baptist churches

A new film which aims to highlight excellence in safeguarding for Baptist churches has been released

Level 1: Excellence in Safeguarding outlines key messages for church members and visitors, and is designed to be shown in all age services and at the start of holiday clubs.

It's based on a script by Baptist minister Nick Lear and was performed by the drama group at Oadby Baptist Church in Leicester. The filming took place at the church.

The new film is all about making people aware of general safeguarding principles; that a church has good processes in place; and the importance of listening to children and others who have concerns.

The previous Safeguarding film offered by Baptists Together struck a different tone: produced by the police a decade ago when there was less awareness of safeguarding, it referenced tragic cases such as Baby P and Victoria Climbié to underline a message that safeguarding issues could happen in a church.

'We wanted a much more positive message,' explained Rachel Stone, Baptists Together People Support and Safeguarding Manager, 'and something to reflect the huge amount of safeguarding work Baptist churches have undertaken in recent years.'

'The previous film was hard hitting and couldn't be shown to children.'

'We wanted the new one to give a message that says "Here in this church safeguarding is something we take seriously. But, if you are worried about anything, come and talk to somebody."'

'We wanted something that could be shown to everyone, including children and vulnerable adults.'

Rachel said the film was appropriate for use at an age services when a message of family and caring for each other could be shared. It could be used at the outset of a holiday club or something similar. There is a short version which can be shown during an annual meeting when safeguarding policies are reviewed. The film is subtitled and available as a free download.

Rachel also commended the Oadby drama group. 'It's wonderful they had the confidence to do this. It's great that it's set in a Baptist church, and with Nick's script, it's something that is right for Baptist churches in 2018.'

Oadby premiered the film on Saturday as part of its "Pudding Party" evening to mark the onset of Lent.

The film was directed by Oadby's Leanne Mitchell, and filmed by and edited by Mike Lowe, Baptists Together Communications Enabler. Leanne said, 'It has been a great opportunity and pleasure for us at Oadby Baptist Church to work on the Safeguarding video with Mike Lowe. The young people really enjoyed the process of rehearsing, performing and recording the script for the video.'

'It was fantastic to be able to show the finished video to all of the young people at the Premiere evening. We hope that it will prove to be a very useful resource and will encourage awareness of Safeguarding across the churches in the Union.'

Prayer following helicopter tragedy

There has been an outpouring of prayer for a Baptist pastor whose two sons died in a helicopter crash in the Grand Canyon at the weekend

Stuart and Jason Hill from West Sussex were killed alongside Stuart's girlfriend Becky Dobson when the helicopter they were travelling in crashed on Saturday (10 February).

Stuart, 30, and Jason, 32, were the sons of the Revd David Hill, a former pastor of Broadwater Baptist Church in Worthing, and currently a chaplain at Worthing and St Richard's (Chichester Hospitals). The brothers were well known and loved by many in the church, which shared the following prayer image on its Facebook page. That post has subsequently been shared more than 400 times.

In a statement released via the Foreign Office, David and wife Sandra said their sons were 'inseparable brothers' and 'remarkable people' who will be 'deeply missed by so many people'.

'We always said they were so close they were like twins and we will find some support in knowing they were with each other to the last,' the statement added.

'We will thank God every day for having them in our lives.'

They said that they were praying for those injured and that their 'hearts go out to Becky's family'.

Broadwater Baptist Church will open each Tuesday between 11am and 12 noon 'for those who wish to spend some time in prayer for the Hill family and their loved ones.'

St Matthew's Church in Worthing will host a service of prayer this Friday. The South Eastern Baptist Association contacted its members on Monday to request prayer for David and Sandra, as well as current Broadwater pastor Jason Gain as he ministers to the town.

To know Jesus more... and more to know Jesus

A new movement is taking place in Skipton, and the town's Baptist church is part of it

Churches in Skipton want to challenge Christians and non-Christians in the Yorkshire town to know Jesus more in an exciting new project based around the hashtag #doyouknowHim?

Throughout February and March there will be various services, prayers and outreach events, which will include a weekly station on Saturdays in the town aimed at engaging people in conversation about Jesus. Evangelist and former Baptist Union President the Revd Chris Duffett led some training for the initiative. The churches will also be following a 10-week sermon series on Jesus.

Among the participating churches is Skipton Baptist Church. Its minister the Revd Phil Burns explained there were two aspects to the question #doyouknowHim?

'We want to challenge other Christians to know Jesus more,' he told Premier Christian Radio

'But not only that, to go out and ask people – "do they know him?'. We know there's a lot of misunderstanding about who Jesus is and the church, and we just want people to know that they are known and loved by Jesus.'

The initiative has come about following last year's Easter service planning, which developed into a 10-week sermon and small group series, followed by Skipton Baptist Church and the local Pentecostal church.

Phil said, 'We then shared the idea with the other churches alongside the thought of doing some outreach and mission work together.'

Around 70 people from different churches took part in Chris's training. A launch service took place at St Andrew's Church on Sunday (28 January - see below).

'It just feels we are tapping into something God is doing,' Phil added.

'I hope that every church in Skipton is transformed by God's Spirit, to be more pursuing after knowing Jesus, but also to have a heart to show his love out in the streets of Skipton and beyond.'

'Fighting for their survival'

Open Doors asks people to remember the persecuted Christians in North Korea ahead of the Winter Olympics

With the start of the Winter Olympics the world's attention is focused on Korea. The joint Korean women's ice hockey team and the pro-unification flag show that North Korea is attempting to present a more friendly face to the world.

But Open Doors, an international ministry serving persecuted Christians and churches worldwide, is asking people not to forget the thousands of Christians persecuted under the brutal Kim regime.

Every year Open Doors produces its World Watch List, an independently audited ranking of the 50 countries where Christians face the most extreme persecution. Every year North Korea remains the most dangerous place in the world to be a Christian.

'As many nations come together to take part in the Winter Olympics, let us not forget that every day over 300,000 Christians are denied the right to take part in the religious observance of their choice,' said Dr Matthew Rees, Advocacy Policy Officer at Open Doors.

'They are a beleaguered community who are fighting for their very survival.'

Every aspect of life in North Korea is controlled by the state, the charity explains. The belief that God is a higher authority than the nation's leader, Kim Jong-un, is seen as a threat that must be crushed. Tens of thousands of Christians are incarcerated in horrific labour camps, and thousands more keep their faith in Christ a complete secret.

'They ignore all freedoms,' said Timothy, a North Korean refugee.

'The human rights level is zero per cent. Religions are not allowed. The leader of North Korea has to be worshipped as god, and this will not change unless the regime collapses.'

Incredibly, despite this tremendous persecution, the church in North Korea is growing – Open Doors estimates that there are 300,000 courageous Christians in North Korea, who are in desperate need of encouragement.

As a way to support North Korean believers and to understand their hardship, pain and courage, Open Doors is asking people to Live like a North Korean with their Lent resource of the same name.

Many secret believers in North Korea are strengthened by the knowledge that Christians around the world are standing with them. One North Korean secret believer said, 'We don't know your names or your faces. Still you support us. Thanks to you we are holding on.'

Daily Bible readings, prayers and actions help you to experience a little of what North Korean Christians endure every day. You might end up buying your Bible or surviving a day without electricity. These actions 'cannot replicate the reality of our dear brothers and sisters', says Open Doors, but with prayerful reflection 'they can provide a window into the world of a North Korean Christian.'

Feature:

Edith Gates: A Baptist Pioneer

What do we know about the first woman to be recognised as being in pastoral charge of an English Baptist church?

A hundred years ago Blyth Spartans Ladies FC won the Munitionettes Cup at Ayresome Park in front of a crowd of 22,000.

In 1918 women workers on the London bus and tram systems went on strike for equal pay. In 1918, the Representation of the People Act enfranchised 8.5 million women over 30.

After the upheaval of the Great War, doors to change were opened that impacted every area of life, including women's calling and ministry to Baptist churches.

Edith Gates was the first woman to be recognised as being in pastoral charge of an English Baptist church: Baptist Union handbooks record her pastorate as starting in 1918, at the close of the war. Even then she was first described as the church secretary, then as the pastor – somehow she did not fit into existing categories.

Her pastorate at Little Tew and Cleveley, Oxfordshire began when she was 35. (She was born on 22 March 1883.) We know nothing about the start of that ministry or through what process the church called her to the role of minister, but having passed the First Examination of the Baptist Union and being recommended by the Oxfordshire Association, she was enrolled as a probationer in 1922 along with another woman, Maria Living-Taylor.

She then studied for her Second Examination at Havelock Hall, the Baptist Women's Training College. Little Tew and Cleveley was her only pastorate, lasting from 1918-1950.

At this time the church received a grant from the Sustentation Fund, the forerunner to Home Mission. This became a point of contention. In the early 1920s a Baptist Union committee was charged with considering the matter of women in ministry, after the first three names had already been added to the accredited list.

But they gave with one hand and took away with the other. Whilst affirming 'that it would be contrary to Baptist belief and practice to make sex a bar to any kind of Christian service' the committee and then Baptist Union Council bowed to a number of practical issues. Matters of finance, expediency and embarrassment were cited and a separate list of women ministers, with different and lesser conditions and benefits, was adopted in 1926. It could be argued that this action slowed down the recognition of women's ministry in Baptist churches by many decades.

Records from local historians report that 'after the First World War the services at the (Little Tew) Baptist chapel were conducted by the two Miss Gates, who lived in the Manse. The Revd Edith Gates became the minister in 1918, with her sister acting as organist'. Her ministry was so active that a school-room was built ... in 1925, replacing two derelict cottages adjacent to the chapel. A study of Oxfordshire Baptist chapels in 1977 recorded a conversation with a 95 year old lady remembering the 300-400 strong congregations who gathered to listen to the Revd Edith Gates on Sundays.

The chapels celebrated the 21st anniversary of Edith Gates' ministry in 1939; it was to continue for another 11 years, after which Edith retired in 1950 to live in Weston-super-Mare. She died on 19 January 1962.

Little Tew and Cleveley chapels are both closed now with the nearest Baptist church being Chipping Norton. I hope there are historians of Oxfordshire Baptist history who can shed more light on Edith Gates ministry: when she was inducted, when ordained and perhaps most interesting of all, her own reflections on ministry, church and faith. There is very little information from which to imagine her understanding of her calling, what opposition she faced or what it was like to be a pioneer into uncharted territory for women.

But for her place as the first woman in our modern denominational history whose pastorate was recognised, leading to her accreditation as a Baptist minister, she should surely be remembered and celebrated in this centenary year.