



14 November, 2018

News:

Baptist Union Council: November 2018

Discerning key shared priorities for our next season and exploring a sustainable funding model to enable our vision for mission were among the main discussion points at the latest Baptist Union Council.

The gathering also saw a review of Association Partnerships, a presentation by the Children, Youth and Families Round Table, and an interim report on the ongoing National Settlement Team/Settlement review. A deep sense of openness to God and the urgency of His mission characterised our time together, particularly in the Facebook live prayer event.

Council took place at the Hayes Conference Centre in Swanwick on Tuesday and Wednesday (6-7 November). It began in scripture and worship. Beth Powney, team leader of the Eastern Baptist Association (EBA), read the Parable of the Persistent Widow, from Luke 18, twice. Worship was led by Mark Hirst (SEBA) and Molly Boot (SCBA).

In response Lynn Green, our General Secretary, reminded everyone that the Lord is looking for a people who will say, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." She shared how Jonathan Oloyede, the convenor of the National Day of Prayer, had given her a prophetic word in 2017 about the Baptist family. 'In prayer, I saw the Baptist Family in the vanguard of an upsurge of faith and expressions of the Gospel of the Kingdom. It was remarkable and I believe that your denomination has the grace to help move the church forward in the Nation.' Lynn reflected, by God's grace, He is at work in and through us not because we are somehow amazing, but it will be through our openness to Him and our willingness to welcome him and make space for Him.

Council Nov18 treeCouncil members were also introduced to a collaborative art installation organised by Gemma Dunning, minister of Leytonstone Baptist Church in London. Gemma described it as 'an artistic exploration on the gender pay gap', created during a period where we are celebrating so many anniversaries relating to women in ministry.

The installation featured 150 individually designed leaves arranged around a cloth tree. Each leaf represented a Baptist Together minister in the denomination, and had been designed by somebody other than that minister. Alongside Gemma had conducted a survey on ministerial pay in our denomination. Although the survey was small (71 responses), it had nevertheless revealed a gender pay gap. 'Are we representative of Isaiah 61, do we represent the splendour in this passage?' she said. 'It suggests this is something we need to look at.'

Gemma encouraged each council member to take home a leaf and place it in a prominent place at home, as a representation of our wider family and a reminder to pray for one another.

Kindertransport anniversary: it's our turn, campaigners urge government

In 1938 the UK launched what became known as the Kindertransport scheme, an organised rescue effort that saw 10,000 predominantly Jewish children given refuge from Nazi persecution.

Exactly 80 years later a group of campaigners, including Baptist ministers emboldened by the response of their local council, will ask the Government to protect today's unaccompanied refugee children – and they request your prayers.

Minister Steve Tinning explains more

On 15 November 1938, leaders of the British Jewish community and members of the Quaker movement visited prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. They asked him to show compassion towards the growing number of Jewish children across Europe whose lives were being threatened by the Nazis, urging him to open doors of safe passage for these unaccompanied children to come to the UK.

Very quickly the government agreed.

Less than three weeks after that initial meeting the first group of child refugees arrived in the UK – the first of what would amount to around 10,000 lives saved because of an operation that became known as the Kindertransport.

Eighty years on, the refugee crisis which hit the headlines three years ago continues. In the autumn of 2015 six British national newspapers published the photo of three year old Aylan Kurdi's body on their front pages. Since then the lives of more than 9000 people have been extinguished while fleeing war and persecution across the Mediterranean.

The UNHCR say that we are now witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record - across the world there are currently 25.4 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18.

Tragically this desperate plight is rarely the focus of our press.

However, many are working hard to ensure the legacy of the Kindertransport is not forgotten. On 15 November 2018 campaigners ask today's government to show a similar commitment of compassion to that made 80 years ago to the day. It's the climax of Safe Passage's 'Our Turn' campaign, which encourages people to ask their local councils to pledge places for these vulnerable children into their communities, should the government agree to fully fund a scheme which opens a safe and legal route to sanctuary.

Here in Southend I've been involved with the Revd Juliet Kilpin (Peaceful Borders) and others in making this request of our local council.

At first it wasn't easy. The council was reluctant to make any firm commitment and it soon appeared as though the door might have been closed.

However, when the town's faith leaders, including a local Imam, a Rabbi, the Archdeacon and all 16 Baptist ministers in the borough organised together and wrote an open letter imploring the council to pledge a welcome to just 30 vulnerable refugee children over ten years, it opened up new avenues of dialogue with them.

At the council meeting the following week a Syrian teenage refugee girl, who has lived with her family in a flat owned by Leigh Road Baptist Church for the last two years, asked the council if they would make the pledge called for by the local faith leaders – and the council enthusiastically agreed.

It was an emotional day. Forty-six faith leaders (including 16 Baptist ministers) and a 15 year old refugee girl had changed a council's mind on refugee support.

But the task is only half complete – we still need the national government to make their commitment.

On Thursday, 15 November, Juliet and I will take that pledge and add it to many others (more than 700 pledged places in all) as we meet with more than 1000 people and commemorate the Kindertransport anniversary at Friends House in London.

Present will be numerous Kindertransport survivors and their families – including the inspirational refugee advocate Lord Alf Dubs (rescued by the Kindertransport in 1939), the Archbishop of Canterbury, refugee campaigners from all over the country, and representatives from the government. I'm delighted to say that Lynn Green, our Baptist Union's general secretary, will also be there.

Please pray that the voices of the voiceless will be represented and heard, and that the 'Our Turn' campaign might persuade the government to open safe and legal routes of sanctuary for 10,000 vulnerable child refugees.

The organisation Safe Passage has been the driving force behind this campaign. It has highlighted the fact that if every council in the country offered to take just three children a year over a ten year period we would be able to match the efforts of the Kindertransport operation.

If you would like more information on how to get involved in this and similar campaigns please contact campaigns@safepassage.org.uk

Steve Tinning is a minister at Leigh Road Baptist Church

Regional minister inductions at the LBA

A new season in the life of the London Baptist Association has begun with the induction of four regional ministers

Around 300 people gathered at the Salvation Army Regent Hall in Oxford Street to welcome Winston Bygrave, Carol Bostridge, Hany Abdelmasih and Lee Johnson to their new roles (pictured from left to right, alongside Team Leader Phil Barnard, centre).

Lynn Green, General Secretary of our Baptist Union, led the act of induction, and friends and colleagues gathered to pray for the new team. Lynn also preached, taking 1 Peter 5 as her text, and particularly highlighted the need to stand firm.

Hany has been pastor of Alliston Alliance Church in Ontario, Canada since 2012, having previously ministered in London at Hammersmith Christian Fellowship and East Hill Baptist Church. He will oversee the Western, Thames Valley and Central Districts when he takes up his new role in January.

Carol was the long-standing minister of Crofton Park Baptist Church (2000-2014), and has more recently worked across churches, coordinating foodbanks, street pastors and other projects. She will oversee the South East and South East Thames districts.

Winston taught in secondary schools for more than 20 years, before becoming the minister of West Hendon Baptist Church in 2011. He will oversee the North Western district.

Lee has been a church minister for 21 years, most recently as pastor of Stoke Newington Baptist Church. He is also a director of the London Baptist Property Board. He oversees three districts in his new role: Northern, North Eastern and Eastern. He said, 'As I take up my role as a Regional Minister I am looking forward to supporting the churches, ministers and association in our mission of growing healthy churches across London.'

The LBA represents a family of more than 300 churches, and is the largest association in our union.

Regional minister team leader Phil Barnard said, 'These appointments represent the opening of an exciting new chapter of ministry for the LBA and I am looking forward to what Lee, Carol, Winston and Hany will contribute to Baptist life across London and the UK.

'As we reconnect with our churches, we want to be an Association for the 21st century, equipping and enabling churches to be missional communities across our capital city.'

Festschrift honour for John Colwell

Baptist theologian John Colwell is presented with a set of essays that engage with his work and seek to build upon it

The award of the Festschrift took place at Spurgeon's College last Wednesday (31 October), where John was both student and then a tutor. Baptist minister Andy Goodliff, who edited the volume alongside father Paul, explained how it came about.

'John Colwell writes that reading Stanley Hauerwas radically changed his life. For me reading John Colwell radically changed my life. I remember in 2003 picking up *Living the Christian Story* off my father's bookshelf. I read it in two days. The dry approach that had been my experience of Christian ethics was transformed through John's call to indwell the gospel story. My understanding of discipleship has followed this path ever since. I know that for any of his students whom he taught have had the same experience that I had in reading.

'So it was in 2017 that my father Paul Goodliff and I conspired with friends and colleagues and with the help of John's wife Rosie to produce a book in his honour and surprise him with it.

'On 31 October, a day that some remember for Martin Luther, a group of Baptists gathered at Spurgeon's College, John's former home as a ministerial and post-graduate student and then 15 years as a tutor, to surprise him with *Rhythms of Faithfulness*. We had arranged for John to come and give a talk as part of a day of

theologically reflecting on the Order for Baptist Ministry, which he helped found in 2009. John knew something was up when the group who had gathered numbered among them unexpected guests, especially his former student and friend, Steve Holmes.

'It was a special moment to present John with this set of essays that engage with his own work and seek to build upon it.'

Rhythms of Faithfulness Andy said the book comes in two halves. The first reflects on the various moments in morning prayer that are contained in the Daily Offices of the Order for Baptist Ministry. It explore what it means to come into God's presence, to celebrate God's presence, to acknowledge our humanity, to listen to the Word, bring our concerns and to go to love and serve.

The second half takes a different feast or season from the Christian year — following John's work in *The Rhythm of Doctrine* — and depending on the author exploring it theologically, biblically and historically.

'The aim of the book is to first rightly honour John,' Andy continued. 'Baptists theologians of real ability are few and far to come by and John has been and is one of our theological voices that we would do well to listen to.'

'The second aim is to offer Baptists and other Christians an encouragement to take the Christian tradition, the Christian year as a gift we have not always treasured, and to give new attention to it would aid our call to the rhythms of faithfulness that is following Jesus.'

Sally Nelson, a former student of John's and now the Dean of Baptist Formation at St Hild's College, was among the contributors to *Rhythms of Faithfulness*. She spoke of John's influence on his students.

'It was lovely to return to Spurgeon's after a gap of about 10 years - and on such a beautiful sunny day. The people who gathered on 31 October have long since scattered in the pursuit of their respective ministries, and would rarely be in one place at one time - except to honour a colleague like John!

'When I started at Spurgeon's (incidentally, on the same day John started teaching there), women still formed a vanishingly small proportion of the college-based ministerial students. Most of us had experienced a bruising journey through selection, and deeply appreciated the fact that John was unfailingly supportive of our ministries. I particularly remember a chapel sermon he preached, exploring theological questions around a hypothetical female 'Christa'.

'However, even more important was John's ability to communicate excitement about theology. His enthusiasm for theological exploration, and his commitment to its importance for ministerial formation, will have influenced scores of Baptist ministers who went through Spurgeon's during his 15 years there. Teachers are

often 'invisible' influencers of others, and maybe rarely see the outcome of their work.

'I hope that this Festschrift will be a blessing to John and show him something of the result of his ministry, which has snowballed out to so many others through the students he has helped to form.

'I am also grateful to Andy and Paul Goodliff for all their creativity in organising a project that was thankful, positive and affirming: what a great day, celebrating Christian service.'

Responding to the day, John said, 'Not much leaves me speechless but this came close: it was wholly a surprise and most humbling.

'I am so grateful to be surrounded by friends, both in their presence and in their contributions to the volume.'