

Stari's faith legacy

SHE was a beautiful young woman who wrote bravely about her final months living with terminal cancer.

Now the Baptist church she was part of is looking to reproduce Stari Gunaratne's blog into a book to develop an internship course to equip others in their faith.

Stari, born in Leicester of Sri Lankan parents, died aged 26 on 18 December.

She had been a medical student at Leeds University and had made a full recovery from Hodgkin's Lymphoma, diagnosed in 2010. However a routine check up at the beginning of 2012 revealed that she had now developed acute myeloid leukaemia, triggered by the earlier chemotherapy she had received.

Her blog entitled 'Finding the Anchor in the Storm' charted her progress through intense pain, the rigour of a bone marrow transplant, and the final realisation that she only had weeks to live.

'Rather than it becoming a depressing litany of hopelessness, true to Stari's character it bubbles with life as her strong Christian faith shines through,' said the Revd Brian Nicholls, minister



of South Parade Baptist Church in Leeds, the church where Stari was baptised five years ago.

One of the things the church was able to discuss with her was the production of a book based on the blog, Brian added.

The proceeds will be put to developing 'a thoroughgoing intern scheme that will help equip people to be effective Christian leaders in the world.'

Brian explained that as Stari grew more confident in her faith, she had focused on equipping others.

'For years she had seen herself as a loser – in her own words, 'an ugly duckling, a fat under-achiever.

'The irony is that in many ways this beautiful, young woman was a winner – a genuine swan: someone who achieved far more than most of us will ever manage however long we are on

this earth.

'Alongside her wide range of abilities as a sportswoman, musician, comedienne, children's worker, and counsellor, she began to focus her attention on equipping others to grow in leadership. One of her sayings was that 'you can't piggy back on someone else's faith' – you need to know it for yourself.'

The church has already set aside some housing and is drawing up the details of the scheme.

It will involve work alongside the existing ministry team of South Parade, a teaching component linking into one of the Christian leadership training schemes available in the North of England, personal mentoring, and support as interns explore the longer term implications of God's call on their lives.

Stari's blog can be found at <http://iwontbewanting.blogspot.co.uk>.

Gifts towards the planned internship course in her memory can be sent to South Parade Baptist Church', Kirkstall Lane, Headingley, Leeds LS6 3LF.

DWP spin on sickness benefit feeds 'unpleasant narrative'

THE latest news release from the Department of Work and Pensions is an example of the Government using statistics to fit an 'unpleasant narrative' that stigmatises the most vulnerable in society as scroungers.

That's according to Paul Morrison Policy Advisor of the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) of the Methodist Church, Baptists Together and the United Reformed Church.

The DWP press release on Monday stated that almost one million people who applied for sickness benefit have instead been found fit for work.

But in a blog post the following day Mr Morrison said he read the release 'rolling my eyes'.

Mr Morrison, the author of last year's JPIT Truth and Lies Report, which had a section unmasking the myth that thousands of benefit claimants are 'on the fiddle', described the one million figure in this latest release as 'ill-explained'.

The figure applied to Work Capability Assessments (WCA) test results between 2008 and 2013, not people (who can take



the test several times), and doesn't include the number of decisions overturned on appeal.

Mr Morrison added that a wide range of organisations have argued that the WCA, introduced in 2008, is unfair. 'Every analysis has shown that the Assessment finds substantial numbers people "fit-for-work" when they simply are not,' he said.

The result was that in adding test results together from at least three different versions of the test from 4½ years the DWP has added 'apples and pears, and as far as the press is concerned got scroungers – 1 million of them,' wrote Mr Morrison.

'The unpleasant narrative is fed; nastier and straight forwardly untrue stories will flow from these

statistics,' he added.

Revealing that he had received emails from people who have gone through the Assessment process, including people who are disabled and feel the benefits system is against them, he said he couldn't stay silent.

'I didn't want to want to write this blog going over territory explored in some detail in the Truth and Lies campaign.

'But I decided to write it because of the emails I received after the press coverage.

'They felt that their communities – even their churches – are judging them badly because of beliefs encouraged by stories like this.

'Disabled people deserve better than this and Christians and Churches should stand alongside them and demand that they receive it.'

Mr Morrison quoted DWP estimates that the level of Incapacity Benefit fraud is less than 0.3 per cent – the lowest of any means tested benefit. To read the blog visit <http://bit.ly/LoxLYX>

GB Ministries moves to Derbyshire

GB MINISTRIES, the Girls' Brigade and Arise Ministries in community together, has relocated to a new base in Derbyshire.

The mission movement has moved from Baptist House in Didcot, Oxfordshire, to Cliff College, Derbyshire and re-opened on 20 January after an extended closure period over Christmas for the move and induction of new team members.

GB Ministries Director

Ruth Gilson said, 'To be based within Cliff's missional learning community provides new opportunities for us both to develop further in relevant mission for this new context - and we're expectant of what God is going to do through this new relationship.'

The move provides GB Ministries with access to on-site facilities for activities and gatherings, plus being part of a mission and learning community

strengthens new opportunities to further develop in relevant and contemporary mission.

The move came as Girls' Brigade (GB) rounded up its 2013 celebrations for 120 years in local church mission. In 2013, GB came into contact with around 40,000 children, young people and adults as part of its week by week work and hundreds of special events celebrating the special anniversary year.

Easter explored through art in the city

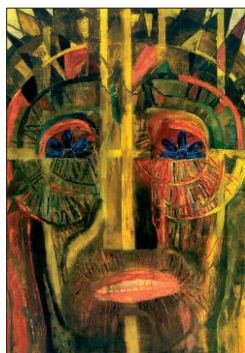
Artworks and meditations exploring how Easter relates to the realities of the every day will form a slice of Manchester city centre life this Lent

The PassionArt Trail features more than 60 pieces of art by 20 artists from Manchester and beyond across six major venues from 5 March to 21 April. The series of reflections written around some of the artworks will aim to help people understand and engage meaningfully with the work.

The trail has been curated by artist Lesley Sutton, wife of Baptist minister the Revd Roger Sutton, who has partnered with the venues to share the Easter story. With 25 years of working with church and community groups, she believes the artworks will encourage the public to make connections to their own lives.

'The Easter passion story reflects on the universal themes of transformation, grief and loss, love and kindness and our longing for hope,' she said.

'The artworks and the written meditations that accompany them will encourage the public to make meaningful connections with their own lives



Ecce Homo by Norman Adams - one of the 14 stations of the cross at St Mary's Church in the PassionArt Trail

'The PassionArt Trail creates opportunity for sanctuary in the midst of the busyness of modern life.'

Art works range from the figurative oil paintings of Woman of the Year 2008 artist Ghislaine Howard; a sound work based on the rhythm of the heartbeat of artist Jane Poulton's mother in the last weeks of her life; the abstract Stations of the Cross by Norman Adams and a series of photographs entitled 'Last Meal on Death Row: Texas' by Brit artist Mat Collishaw drawing links to the Last Supper of Christ, and many more traditional and contemporary works.

The program also includes an academic 'Art and The Spiritual View Conference' from 27-29 March at The Nazarene Theological College in Didsbury,

Visit <http://www.passionarttrail.co.uk/> for more

- themes as betrayal, forgiveness, compassion, bereavement, and the fear of death are part of the universal human experience.'

The trail takes in a range of impressive venues, including non-gallery sites such as the John Rylands Library, the National Football Museum, Manchester Cathedral and St Ann's Church.

Lesley hopes it will help to give viewers space to reflect on their own lives.

'In the Christian tradition Lent is a season of quiet meditation, self-denial and pilgrimage. People from all cultures and faiths seek the path of solitude and simplicity in their search for meaning.

opportunities. What is the Crucible Course and how can it help?

<http://bit.ly/1a1v0I2>

> 'Tax evasion is a violation of the citizenship that belongs to God' - Christian Aid publishes resources on tax dodging

<http://bit.ly/1a1upWQ>

> As the UK discusses taking in

Syrian refugees, on Holocaust Memorial Day we remembered the 10,000 Kinder children given refuge in the UK from Nazi Europe

<http://bit.ly/1jJhFYf>

> Dávid Gál of Hungarian Baptist Aid reports on a Baptist church service at the heart of the conflict in South Sudan

<http://bit.ly/1fc9myv>

Faith and festivals

CHURCHES across the country are being invited to training days to help organise community festivals or other events to engage with their communities.

The training and information days in February and March are called 'Equip your Church to be at the Heart of Community'. They are being offered by Fusion Youth and Community in conjunction with partners Crossing London and HOPE 2014.

Many churches across the UK already have experience of reaching out into their communities - during the 2012 London Olympics over 600,000 people attended community festivals and events hosted by churches.

And this year there are more opportunities, with events such as the World Cup, Commonwealth Games and important dates in the church and the national calendar like the Big Lunch in June, according to Marty Woods, Europe Director for Fusion Youth and Community.

'This year - 2014 - offers UK churches so many ways to engage with their communities,' said Marty. 'These highly practical days will help churches to identify opportunities, make their choices, and be ready for action.'

'We hope many hundreds of people from churches across the nation will get prepared and equipped for a year of festivals, fun and outreach!'

Register online at eventbrite.co.uk. Search for 'Heart of Community' and select your venue.

Birthday celebrations for Naomi

NAOMI Sterling, who has been a member at Newbridge Baptist Church in Bordesley Green, Birmingham since 1962, celebrated her 100th birthday in style recently.

She turned 100 on 15 December and a grand party to celebrate this milestone

was held at Newbridge Baptist a week later. Naomi was joined by her three children and niece

(far right) who came all the way from the US for the occasion.

Naomi still lives alone (against the will of her children) and is able to do most things for herself. Until a few months ago, she was still a regular usher welcoming all who entered the church doors.

She is a beloved member of her church and community. May God continue to bless her.



Real Easter egg

THE Real Easter Egg campaign has launched for another year and this time there are three eggs in the range.

Out of the 80 million Easter Eggs sold in the UK every year, the Real Easter Egg is the only one which tells the Easter story, gives money to charity and is Fairtrade.

It launched in 2010, and to date more than 450,000 eggs have been sold.

Read more at www.realesteregg.co.uk

Home for Good

HOME for Good, a national campaign which aims to make fostering and adoption a normal part of church life, shared its message with 25,000 people at conferences and festivals in 2013, it has revealed.

In addition 500 people attended gatherings to explore equipping churches, more than 100 'champions' signed up to be part of the campaign, and 200 churches took part in the first ever national Adoption Sunday.

Visit <http://bit.ly/LofdYN>

JOBS

Part-Time Director of Baptist and Anabaptist Studies, The International Baptist Theological Study Centre (IBTS Centre), Amsterdam

For more details visit: <http://bit.ly/1fdj459>

BAPTISMS

Bishop's Stortford Baptist Church, Herts: Rosanna Massie 1
Colne Avenue Baptist Church, Southampton: Michelle Wheatley 1
Hope Baptist Church, Plymouth: Matt Laws, Alice McMurdo 2
Wealdstone Baptist Church, London: Natalie Gordon 1

Send notifications of baptisms, ministerial changes, deaths and testimonies to phobson@baptist.org.uk

From the www. baptisttimes.co.uk

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