

End Hunger Fast

A CAMPAIGN calling on the Government to tackle Britain's growing hunger stepped up a gear this week.

The End Hunger Fast campaign asks the Government to take action on welfare, wages and food markets, factors it says have contributed to the rise of people going hungry and having to use foodbanks.

Fasting is a key part of the campaign, which is spearheaded by a number of Christian organisations, both to raise awareness of the issues and stand in solidarity with the thousands of people who are going hungry.

The public is invited to join a nationwide fast on 4 April, while a collection of Christian leaders, MPs, celebrities and anti-poverty activists are taking part in a 40-day fasting relay throughout Lent.

The relay began on Ash Wednesday, and those taking part include the Revd Lynn Green, General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain.

She hopes the End Hunger Fast campaign will enable the voices of the marginalised to be heard.

'Fasting is a spiritual discipline that draws us closer to

God,' she said, 'and the closer we come to God the more we share His heart for all who are poor.'

'In all the changes to the welfare system the needs of real people need to be upheld. My



prayer is that the End Hunger Fast campaign will give a voice to all those who will struggle to put food on the table today, and help lead to real and lasting change that prevents such hunger struggles in the future.'

Mrs Green will be taking part in the fasting chain on 28 March. Those involved in the first week include comedian Eddie Izzard, Helen Drewery, General Secretary of the Quakers, Rt Rev Michael Perham, the Bishop of Gloucester, Rt Rev Nick Holtam, the Bishop of Salisbury, Rt Rev Stephen Platten, the Bishop of Wakefield, and Sarah Teather MP.

Helen Drewery said, 'Quakers are angry that such hunger and inequality exists in Britain. So I'll be taking part in the fasting chain because I want to stand in solidarity with people who have no choice but to go hungry and because I think that the Government needs to take the issue of hunger more seriously.'

Stepping up the pressure on Ash Wednesday was a letter from 20 leading secular charities, which was published in national newspapers and announced "Hunger has returned to Britain".

The letter, signed by the likes of Oxfam, Just Fair and Child Poverty Action Group, followed an earlier letter from faith leaders.

In addition fresh statistics from the Trussell Trust showed their foodbanks gave out three days' emergency food over 600,000 times between April and December 2013, more than in the entire previous financial year, while a new poll shows strength of public backing. 70 per cent say the Government should act immediately to stop people going hungry in Britain while 71 per cent agree that rise of numbers needing food banks is a "national disgrace".

Barefoot Lent

A BAPTIST pastor is to go without shoes this Lent.

Andy Fitchet, who leads Whitchurch Baptist Church and the Thin Place church plant in Andover, is hoping to raise awareness of global poverty. Andy is undertaking the challenge alongside Victoria Ashdown, the curate in All Hallows, Whitchurch.

'We wanted to do something over Lent that would be fairly radical and could be very missional at the same time,' he explained.

'So after excluding the idea of feet washing, Victoria mentioned the idea of going barefoot. Interestingly this was something that God had spoken to me about a few years earlier, but I had ignored!'

'The idea is that we are giving up a very basic and daily comfort to raise awareness of global poverty, and also to cultivate the idea of 'take off your shoes, for where you stand is holy ground'.'

There is a section on the church website: www.whitchurchbc.org.uk as well as a twitter feed (@barefootlent) to chronicle the experiences.

'We will be blogging and tweeting our painful way through Lent so people can keep up to date with what is going on,' added Andy.

His first tweet suggested it could be a long period. 'Owch. The only word to describe my first outing into town!'

'Pray for Ukraine'

PRAYER continues to be urged for the crisis in Ukraine, as Christians were described as 'standing in the gaps' amid the escalating tensions with Russia.

On Tuesday the Euro-Asiatic Federation, which brings together many of the Baptist Unions who were part of the Soviet Union, including Ukraine and Russia, issued a statement calling for a peaceful negotiation to the situation.

Quoting Jeremiah 6:16, it said 'it is never possible to solve a country's internal difficulties with outside force.'

Wider prayer was urged by Sergey Rakhuba, President of Russian Ministries, a BMS World Mission partner organisation.

In an email to supporters, he said that 'my heart bleeds for people on both sides of this conflict'. He added that 'while I love the Russian people and have

committed my life and ministry to them, I cannot justify the actions of the Kremlin'.

He continued, 'I urge the global Christian community to join with church leaders and Christians from both of these brother nations to pray and fast for the end to this dangerous situation and for the leaders of these countries.'

Writing at the weekend Pavel Unguryan, a lawyer and Ukraine's Missions Department Director with the Baptists of Ukraine, described the situation as 'one step away from war'. He related how he had travelled from Kiev to Odessa, where alongside others he has been conducting peacekeeping events.

Mr Unguryan's attempts at peacemaking were indicative of many Christians in the country, said Tony Peck, the General Secretary of the European Baptist Federation, describing them as 'standing in the gaps'.

THE new edition of Baptist Voice, the Baptist audio magazine, is now available. It is the first time it has been produced by Ralph Birtwistle of Greenfield Church in Manchester.

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