



28 October, 2015

News:

New life springs up in Sheffield

Exciting things are happening in the Yorkshire city following the plant of a Baptist church

Around 200 people attended the official launch of [The Well](#) last month, and both dechurched and unchurched people are beginning to make commitments to Jesus there.

The ambiguity of its name and a modern redesign even led one person to inquire whether it was a new bar.

'I loved that,' says Baptist minister Nick Allan, who together with wife Marjorie is leading The Well.

'The name stands for living water, and drinking from a spiritual well. It is a place where people will hopefully be refilled. Whether they realise it or not, everyone is spiritually thirsty.'

Background

Nick and Marjorie had been leaders at St Thomas' Philadelphia Church for several years when their posts were made redundant due to financial restrictions in February.

Sensing their time in Sheffield had not yet run its course the couple rested on the Lord for their next steps. Alongside them were their missional community, a group of people who had journeyed together through life's ups and downs.

'When we knew we were going, this community said "We're coming with you",' Nick says. 'We were like a family. We had this community ready to go.'

Around this time Nick happened to be reading the Sheffield Star, and noticed that Horizon (formerly Endcliffe) Methodist Church had sadly closed, and that its building in busy Ecclesall Road was now empty. The road is one of the heartbeats of the city, with a bustling mix of students, businesses and homes. ('A brilliant place to share the gospel

from,' says Nick).

After a mutual discernment process which included the Yorkshire Baptist Association (YBA), the Methodist Circuit and the couple themselves, Nick and Marjorie were invited to plant a new church into the Horizon church building.

'We were super excited when we got that telephone call,' says Marjorie 'and we're very aware of the wonderful missionary heritage.

'We find it interesting that the congregation that had been here for 111 years, serving faithfully, came to an end in April of this year, the month that we stepped out of our context and became available to begin something new.'

After several months adapting the building (the front has been transformed into a contemporary café, which leads into a more traditional church sanctuary with pews) and simply praying in it, the new church was launched last month with a party open to the neighbourhood.

Missionaries loving a people and a place

Nick says they feel less like ministers planting a church, more "missionaries loving a people and a place". Their heart is to reach the unchurched, including the 60,000 young adults and students who live in Sheffield. The website has a very modern feel, and [the language used is deliberately accessible](#).

'We've tried to present what a community of faith is to people who aren't yet Christians.' Nick says.

But while he talks about an attractional model and the importance of welcome, he says there is no compromise on the message of Jesus.

'All we do is preach the gospel, give people the opportunity to turn to Jesus. And people are responding. There is excitement among the existing congregation. There is a great power in the gospel.'

A 'Baptist journey'

Nick says the formation of The Well has been a very Baptist journey.

'It's been going on a journey with my extended family. We've also had wonderful support from the YBA. We've been discerning together, deriving confidence from each other that the Lord is in this.

'That's how Baptist churches often began. I really appreciate my Baptist heritage. I've been learning more about it through the process.'

It's just the beginning

And while so much has happened already, it's a process that's still very much at the beginning, notes Graham Ensor, the Regional Minister Team Leader of the Yorkshire Baptist Association.

'It's been a real privilege to journey with Nick and Marjorie and the core team at The Well, seeing God open one door after another and pave the way for a new church plant on the Ecclesall Road in Sheffield. On occasions the journey has been challenging – but God's grace has always proved more than sufficient for the challenges.

'If truth be known they are only at the beginning of a journey not the end of it – so they need our prayer now more than ever, for as we all know, 'unless the Lord builds a house, the builders labour in vain...'

'So, let's be excited by all that has happened to date, but let's trust and pray for much more that is to come.'

To find out more about The Well and how it came about [click here to read an interview](#) with Nick and Majorie, and Graham Ensor, the Regional Minister Team Leader of the Yorkshire Baptist Association.

Visit The Well: <http://www.wellsheffield.com>

Seventy-two – four Associations discovering their way in the Mission of God

How four Associations are embracing a new opportunity to collaborate

Remember 2012? London hosted the Olympic Games, and Baptists in England and Wales engaged in all kinds of conversations, online and face to face, about their shared future.

The conversations would result in Associations taking on new responsibilities. One of the ideas to emerge was Association Partnerships, for it made sense for them to work together.

Four Associations in the South and West were quick to embrace this new opportunity to collaborate - and [Seventy-two](#) is one result.

'*Seventy-two* has grown out of the relationships between the Regional Team Leaders of four of our Baptist Associations: Southern Counties, South Wales, South West and the West of England,' says Nigel Coles of WEBA (pictured).

'For some years we've been away on retreat together, along with Roy Searle, and *Seventy-two* is merely an articulation of some of the heart and vision which has emerged through walking and praying together.

'Core to our concern, as Regional Association Team Leaders, is our awareness of the heartfelt cry, expressed through the Futures Process, of people wishing to identify more with a 'movement' than an institution, across our Baptist Union.'

Nigel identifies a need – to face the reality of decline among our churches; and a purpose – to preach the gospel and to live the kingdom and encourage all our churches to own this.

Seventy-two will be an umbrella term for various partnership initiatives that are designed to act as a catalyst for missional movement across the region, through our Union's networks.

It will be one expression of being Baptists Together in England and Wales.

Three major initiatives are currently planned:

- *Seventy-two* will be a partner at [Spring Harvest](#), Minehead Week 3, in 2016, where an exhibition area, seminar input and receptions for the *Seventy-two* network are being planned.
- The Partnership will facilitate the 'South West Hub' for the new [Forge England course](#) in partnership with [For Mission](#) (formerly Springdale College).
- [A *Seventy-two* website](#) is in production, which will function as a guest blogging site and an information point for these initiatives.

Why 'Seventy-Two'?

The title, 'Seventy-two', is taken from Jesus' sending out of the seventy-two in Luke 10. The new partnership's primary values all there in Luke 10:1-12:

Collaboration: if Jesus chose not to do it all himself, why do we?

Innovation: it's Jesus mission, not ours, but we are sent in his name.

Exploration: we're not sure of all the details, but 'go' we must.

Incarnation: 'don't move around looking for the best cook in town' (7).

There's already a monthly *Seventy-two* newsletter, which anyone can subscribe to at www.seventy-two.network. Alternatively, contact Nigel Coles directly at nigel.coles@seventy-two.network for more information

The heart of the ecumenical journey

[Churches Together in England \(CTE\)](#) gathers people of different traditions to find new ways of working and worshipping together. Baptist minister Claire Nicholls draws encouragement and challenges after attending its recent forum

"Forty three denominations gather together to listen."

I was encouraged right at the beginning of [the CTE Forum](#) when the commitment was to listen to many voices and not just one – recognising that listening, speaking and good relationships are at the heart of the ecumenical journey where “unity is achieved whilst walking”.

Hearing from new voices, including young adults

The three main voices we heard – Orthodox, Pentecostal and Young Adults – were important voices that had not been a big part of the ecumenical conversation before, and there was an opportunity for all to contribute in small groups and discussion time.

I was encouraged particularly by the voices of the Young Adults for whom denominational identity was important, but who challenged the forum to think outside the box, beyond structures, to building relationships that were genuine and were able to tackle the difficult issues together.

The issue of mental health came up and a number of times we talked about the weight of the burden that young people in particular carry as they try to create identity in a society where identity matters, but is difficult to define.

I talked with a group about the issues that church faces and they were challenged by the idea of being involved in conversations about gender roles and sexuality, and the fact that these were some of the issues that mattered to young people.

There was a lot of concern about ageing congregations, and there were people who were looking for ways in which the trend could be reversed.

I hope, that as a result of the forum, these conversations will continue and the Young Adults contribution will not become a token gesture – that young adults will be invited to help steer the conversations that are happening ecumenically.

The need to talk about the difficult areas of ecumenism

I struggled a bit at times with the forum, because it seemed that the majority of people who were there were only interested in the exciting bits of ecumenism (understandable) but didn't really want to talk about how difficult it is sometimes – particularly when you are dealing with church structures in a local context.

I felt that there needed to be some space for some honesty about our frustrations beyond our own denominations. However, when I spoke about how difficult my journey had been at times there was an element of surprise and a move to fix me, when all I wanted to do was express myself! It seemed that ecumenism had moved beyond those conversations because they'd been had before, but as someone new to the movement. I found that unhelpful.

Also I believe if we are still finding it frustrating locally, the conversation needs to be revisited and there needs to be space for lament as well as celebration. Honesty builds trust and trust builds good relationships.

Revisiting good and bad stories – and a challenge for Baptists

In his closing address the General Secretary spoke about how “ecumenism is iterative not linear”. I took this to mean that as relationships are being built and trust is growing, that we need to keep revisiting the things that hold us back, that make things difficult and that are historically hard work, so that the stuff that was bypassed can be dealt with or bypassed again if it is not the right time!

I also took it to mean that we need to revisit the good stories – how our history has got us to where we are today – look at how relationships have been built, share stories beyond forum and learn from the passion of those in the ecumenical movement who are able to hold it up as something good and transformational.

A couple of different people talked about how Baptists have something unique to offer to the ecumenical journey – how we act as a bit of a bridge between old and new – churches that are able to work independently and interdependently within a loose structure that enables freedom for movement built on trust.

That's something I've recognised as important on a local level as we've worked as an LEP within and beyond Methodist circuit structures. I wonder how, as Baptists, we go about sharing our story to enable us to do that more effectively within the wider ecumenical movement?

The Revd Claire Nicholls is minister of Christ Church, Ramsbottom, a Baptist/Methodist Local Ecumenical Partnership

Central African Republic: sexual violence survivors' voices

BMS World Mission sponsored research into gender based violence during the Central African Republic conflict has led to the release of a powerful report with the potential to help survivors and inspire leaders to take action

“With the death of my father, my husband and my baby, I will never forget what happened to me. I wonder why I must continue to live.”

These are the heart-breaking words from just one woman who contributed to BMS-supported research on sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) in the Central African Republic (CAR).

The study, carried out in April and May 2015, was the first into sexual violence in CAR since the crisis began, and uncovered some of the challenges faced by survivors and what leaders need to do in order to stop these horrific acts of violence.

Perhaps, more importantly, it gave a voice to women whose story might otherwise remain untold.

“To date, no one else has mapped the testimonies of these brave women who have been horribly degraded as a result of the war in the Central African Republic,” says Steve Sanderson, BMS Manager for Mission.

“The report challenges the international community to play their part in helping CAR’s GBV survivors rebuild their lives.”

Christian anti-Balaka militias and Muslim Seleka rebels were both responsible for atrocities during the recent conflict, according to the BBC.

Thousands of Christians and Muslims were killed and hundreds of thousands more displaced. While there has been a ceasefire, the conflict continues today. The prevalence of sexual violence has been exacerbated due to its use in the conflict as a weapon of war.

[BMS and Tearfund worked together](#) on the research into the extent of GBV and the impact it had on those who survived it.

[BMS supported the research](#) as part of the [Dignity initiative](#), which aims to put an end to GBV.

It is also part of the pledge BMS has made as a founder member of [We Will Speak Out](#), a global coalition committed to seeking faith based approaches come to the fore in tackling gender based violence.

Research into a subject as sensitive as this cannot be imposed from outside. It must take into account local needs and customs.

So, The BMS and Tearfund study was undertaken in collaboration with local partners in CAR, consulting with heads of neighbourhoods, mayors, and religious leaders from different faith groups.

A team of 12 Christian and Muslim female researchers were trained and put in contact with religious authorities to help them meet with survivors.

Research was conducted in the capital Bangui and in the district of Begoua, and careful thought was put into conducting research sensitively, through discussion and support groups, providing counseling and ensuring anonymity.

The report highlights brutal survivor stories of SGBV, most too traumatising to relate here.

Women from both Christian and Muslim backgrounds discussed the stigma of sexual violence, what would help them recover from their ordeal and what role faith communities could play in supporting them.

Though these women have experienced horrible brutality, they manage to share their hopes for healing and visions for a better future. "It is difficult to talk about these experiences because it is shameful and dehumanises you as a human being," says one woman from Begoua. "We need lots of prayers." The report demonstrates that, to move forward with their lives, the women will need financial, medical, legal, psychosocial support, and an improved justice system.

Results of the report, *To Make Our Voices Heard*, were released at a workshop on 9-11 September 2015. It brought faith leaders, government ministries, UN agencies, and other local and national representatives together to discuss the response to sexual violence in the conflict. For three days the group discussed findings of the research, studied teachings on sexual violence in Muslim and Christian religions, and created action plans to respond to sexual violence in CAR.

"The release of the report in Bangui a few weeks ago attracted widespread support from key decision makers on the ground," says Steve Sanderson.

"It is anticipated that we will bring the report into the view of the British and possibly French governments with a view to it influencing policy on transitional justice, peacebuilding and protection in Central Africa."

BMS believes the voices of these brave women should ring loud and clear.

We hope the release of this report will inspire a call to action by faith, government, and

international leaders alike, to make every effort to end sexual violence in Central African Republic and around the world.

Please pray for healing and justice for the women in CAR who have been victims of GBV. Also pray for wisdom for government officials and faith leaders as they carry out action plans and put an end to sexual violence in CAR.

For more information download the [To Make Our Voices Heard](#) report. Please be aware that some of the accounts in this report describe sexual violence in graphic detail and may be distressing to some readers.

Christian Aid launches new way to link to overseas projects

Charity's Church Crowdfunding website offers UK churches a direct link to lifesaving projects run by Baptists in Myanmar

Christian Aid's [Crowdfunding website](#) is set to transform how UK churches partner with communities overseas.

Launched last week, Crowdfunding offers churches the choice between [a community health project run by Baptists in Myanmar](#) and [an initiative which empowers women in Afghanistan](#).

Churches have the chance to decide exactly where their money is going.

Christian Aid partner the Karen Baptist Convention (KBC) is working with some of the most vulnerable communities in Eastern Myanmar.

Disproportionately affected by years of civil war in Myanmar, many people from the Karen ethnic group were forced to leave their homes, fleeing to remote areas where they struggle to make ends meet.

Beginning as a missionary society, KBC has since expanded its mission to deliver lifesaving healthcare and education to these marginalised rural communities.

In Myanmar, where 1 in 260 women die in childbirth and 40 million people are at risk of contracting malaria, KBC is providing urgently needed health services.

By training community volunteers to provide essential healthcare, KBC is saving lives – and by raising awareness of health and hygiene, the project is transforming communities for years to come.

Gracy Shermon, 26, was recently trained as a Traditional Birth Attendant by KBC. Gracy

is a volunteer and is passionate about combatting malaria and supporting mothers-to-be in her community.

She's seen the difference that the project has made: 'My family and me, pregnant women, mothers and the community have all benefitted', she says.

A Christian, Gracy attends church and religion is deeply important to her work, particularly during difficult times: 'my faith helps me deal with the challenges', she says.

In Myanmar, where 1 in 260 women die in childbirth and 40 million people are at risk of contracting malaria, Karen Baptist Convention is providing urgently needed health services.

Dan Doherty, a Baptist church planter Portishead, is excited by the prospect of a direct link between churches in the UK and Myanmar.

'It's amazing to be linked directly to Baptist churches doing such great work in rural Myanmar. KBC have a vision of God's love for the world's poor, saving lives and bringing essential healthcare to vulnerable families.

'Baptists in the UK have an amazing opportunity to support KBC's mission. By pledging to fundraise over the next few months, we can bring hope to poor communities. I'm especially excited to get regular updates from the project and to have an authentic link to the people we're supporting.'

Anna Couper, Church Fundraising Manager at Christian Aid, said: 'We're thrilled to launch Church Crowdfunding. Serving the poor is an integral part of the mission of many churches, and this close link to our partners and projects could be just what they're looking for.

'We're excited to fund these amazing projects, and Church Crowdfunding has real potential to build partnerships between churches and communities around the world.'

Christian Aid is asking Baptist churches to prayerfully consider pledging to support this project. With many more communities in Eastern Myanmar without the vital healthcare they deserve, Baptist churches in Myanmar need support to save more lives.

For more information about each project visit the Crowdfunding website at www.christianaid.org.uk/crowdfunding

Baptisms:

Cirencester Baptist Church, Gloucestershire: Camilla Metcalf + 3
Cherry Hinton Baptist Church, Cambridge: Scott Byrne, Poppy Roberts, Vicky Fulcher
Clarence Park Baptist Church, Weston-super-Mare: Katie Christian
Dagnall Street Baptist Church, St Albans: Richard Beadle
Long Eaton Baptist Church, Nottingham: Pat Prescott
Underhill Baptist Church, Barnet: Ajoke Onibuje, Subu Onibuje
Whepstead Baptist Church, Suffolk, Ivy Durrant

Know anyone preparing for baptism? [Check out our new range of cards](#)

Events/resources:**Adoption Sunday**

This year's Adoption Sunday takes place on 1 November. Adoption Sunday is an opportunity each year for the Church to share the good news of our adoption into God's family and to respond to the needs of children and young people in the UK care system.

<http://www.homeforgood.org.uk/get-involved/adoption-sunday>

A heart for politics?

Christians in Politics is organising a weekend, from the 6-8 November, for people wanting to explore how their faith can impact the public square. Day tickets available.

www.christiansinpolitics.org.uk

Safe to Belong

The new version of Safe To Belong, our Baptist Union's safeguarding policy for adults at risk, has just been published

http://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/450987/Safe_to_Belong.aspx

Get in the Picture

Registrations have now opened for Get in the Picture 2015, an opportunity to re-experience the Christmas story in a creative and fun way.

<http://www.getinthepicture.org.uk/>

Pension roadshows

Pension and finance roadshows are taking place across Associations between now and January.

Visit http://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/449747/Pension_Finance_Roadshows.aspx

Notice:

Four Oaks Baptist Church is purchasing new chairs and will have the old ones available for disposal. There are about 150 chairs, 30 of which may have some staining on the seats or back but the rest are in very good condition. They are of solid wooden, upholstered construction, interlocking with a shelf at the back and

a hole for the communion cup. They should be available in about two month's time and would need to be collected from **Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands**. We are looking for a donation, so in the event of two or more people being interested we would ask that you be upfront in the donation you would wish to give. Please contact 0121 308 1096 [David Pearson] if you are interested. Thank you.

For more visit www.baptisttimes.co.uk