



11 May 2016

News:

'Speed up child refugee process'

Campaigners are encouraging people to continue pressing MPs on welcoming unaccompanied refugee children stranded in Europe to the UK

On Monday MPs voted to agree to the revised "Dubs Amendment" to the Immigration Bill. The amendment, named after Labour peer Lord Alfred Dubs, initially called on the UK to welcome 3,000 children but was narrowly rejected in the House of Commons on 25 April. The revised amendment removes the commitment to take 3000 children, instead putting the decision on numbers in the hands of the government and local authorities.

After it became clear the Government was likely to lose the next Commons vote on the revised Dubs Amendment, Prime Minister David Cameron announced on 5 May that the UK would take in more unaccompanied Syrian refugee children from Europe, without committing to a specific figure.

The independent community organising group Citizens UK, which helped to form the National Refugee Welcome and Resettlement Board last year, is encouraging people to thank MPs for the success of the Dubs Amendment, but ask them to ensure that the most at risk children are relocated to Britain in time to start school this September.

A statement on its website read:

It was amazing to see, finally, the government agree to back the Dubs amendment last week.

We have all worked so hard to try and protect refugee children in Europe it was an incredible breakthrough to hear the Prime Minister commit to speeding up family reunion for refugee children and agree to consulting with local authorities and then creating a new route for the most vulnerable children in Europe to be relocated here whether they have family or not.

It's important to celebrate victories like this, and to thank the government for doing the right thing. Yet we mustn't forget how urgent the situation is. 10,000 children have gone missing, 95,000 need help, and 157 will spend tonight in the freezing mud of Calais even though they have families just the other side of the channel.

Will you join us in writing to your MP to thank them for the success of the Dubs amendment, and to ask them to ensure that all the children in Calais with valid family reunion claims and the first 300 of those identified as most at risk are relocated to Britain in time to start school this September?

Write to your MP here: <http://write.refugees-welcome.org.uk/mp/write>

Reaching out to refugees and asylum seekers in Teesside

Welcoming the stranger has taken on a fresh and urgent meaning for Stockton Baptist Tabernacle. In a little over a year, members of the Teesside church have responded to the needs of hundreds of refugees and asylum seekers from 34 different nations.

With more than 100 baptisms it has seen many come to a meaningful relationship with Christ, and as its ministry grows the church is increasingly connecting with others who are working with refugees and asylum seekers

Beginnings and developments

The developments began in 2014 when Stockton began seeing lots of asylum seekers on its Alpha Course. "Part of the attraction to Alpha was the meal and welcome they received," says church secretary Peter Chapman. "But the people running Alpha, as they got to know their guests better, were becoming overwhelmed by the major issues the asylum seekers and refugees were facing."

The church wondered if, and how, it could meet some of these needs. Two other churches in the town – Portrack Baptist Church and the Parish church were already involved in ministry to asylum seekers and provided excellent advice and guidance. After much research and prayerful consideration, it set up a weekly asylum drop-in in November 2014 - a place that above all offers welcome. "We didn't intend to offer a service, we began by simply offering friendship, food and drink," explains Peter. "There was no defined objective other than friendship."

There is table tennis, pool, clothes people can buy very cheaply, alongside coffee, tea and food. (Those who are destitute can also pick up food parcels there). In order to encourage more women – many come from a culture where men and women don't mix – it offers quieter things for them and their children, such as crafts. Two members began offering English language classes and we now have a variety of weekly classes catering for about 80 people at different stages of learning. Part of

the friendship has been helping with issues that arise in people's asylum claims, talking about costs, driving to solicitors or to hearings, which could be in Tyneside, or further afield in Liverpool or London. A couple of members have a role in the technical side of someone's asylum case.

Throughout 2015 interest in the drop-in, the general friendship and assistance offered, and the Christian faith underpinning it all, snowballed: in the last 15 months the church has baptised around 100 people.

"The nature and character of our church is changing," Peter says. "On any Sunday there are between 50-70 from an international background. Part of the service is translated into Farsi. "It has been extraordinary".

Why so many have sought baptism

In terms of the baptisms it's a story of people coming from an Islamic culture that does not generally welcome questions, Peter explains.

Iranians are the dominant group, making up about two-fifths of the asylum seekers in the town. Many arrive disillusioned with Islam and the vengeance they have experienced. They hear about a God who loves them; they discover at an Alpha Course they can discuss this openly, and the practical experiences of friendship they receive, are quite simply an expression to them of God's love. It's a contrast to their repressive experience of Islam.

"Many have come to a wonderful and genuine faith in Christ," Peter says, and want that to be known in a public way, not least as a witness to their Islamic friends and family.

The response of members

Naturally there has been a corresponding impact on established members.

"One of the real joys when we said we wanted to offer friendship has been the response of the congregation," Peter adds. "We have had 40/50 people, in their 60s and 70s, for whom this is the thing they have been waiting for." Approximately 25 volunteer each week to staff the Drop-in activities and English classes, as well as the countless examples of both giving and receiving hospitality. It has been a great encouragement to hear what God has done in the lives of many of our friends.

New issues

A year on and new issues are beginning to emerge. Quite a number have been given refugee status. Many have come from a professional background, are used to a particular standard of living, but have fled from political or Christian persecution. They may have refugee status, but now have to adjust to different circumstances.

“The reality begins to dawn,” says Peter. “They realise they’re unlikely to reach the same levels in their career and standard of living. Contact with family will be difficult from now on. As they begin to face these new realities they can hit a period of depression.”

Many fall into the cracks of the system, where there is a delay between the granting of refugee status and being able to work.

A number of asylum seekers, having failed in their claim to asylum, may have grounds for submitting a Fresh Claim, having become Christians whilst being in the UK. This often results in a period when they have no accommodation or income and are destitute. We try to help in various ways.

The church is beginning to reach out to other groups who are working with asylum seekers, developing partnerships that complement each other's strengths and forming a more cohesive framework in which to work across the Tees Valley.

Some of their friends are attracted to London and other cities to look for work where they may have friends or families. However they often report that they don't find the same welcome there, and can become disillusioned. It means Peter and the church are keen to make connections with other churches, especially in the big cities, and give thought to what a genuinely welcoming church is.

“We would love to have a list of churches that offer a proper welcome, so we can point the people who leave here to them.” Peter and a colleague are members of the Tees Valley Cities of Sanctuary Group. They are also exploring the feasibility of visiting other churches with an asylum team, to tell them about their journey and share learning experiences.

The reasons people leave their countries

“People have fled for a variety of reasons” says Peter, explaining that the Syrians are fleeing war; an Albanian woman fled from an abusive husband. Some Iranians have become Christians in their own country. Many Eritreans are delightful Christians who have suffered persecution. A Pakistani young man fled because he was persecuted for his faith. He came from a Christian family, he was badly beaten up at the Christian school his father ran.

“We don’t know the basis of why everybody has come” he continues. “We feel we need to slowly build friendships so they get to a place where they are able to tell us.

Advice for churches interested in helping refugees and asylum seekers

Peter offers the following points:

1 The first thing to do is find out information about asylum issues to discover the reality, and explode the myths. The perceptions of the general public are often inaccurate, and real contact with asylum seekers will begin to dispel this.

The 2nd thing is to find a way to simply offer to be friends with people. This is best if there is somewhere that asylum seekers can receive warmth and food - a safe and welcoming place where people can talk, and share their concerns and their stories, and just get to know each other. Even if there is a big language barrier, you can always ask a name. Don’t ask inquisitive questions until you have met them several times - and only in a way that you can offer help. Be sensitive to cultural differences, and particularly the way men should greet women.

3 If churches in the area already doing work with asylum seekers and refugees, make contact with them, and do things together. Combined Christian witness both to the asylum seekers and to the town is really effective.

4 Encourage the learning of English - find out where there are language courses and how to get registered etc. Learning English is empowering, and a crucial part of coping in a strange and new location and culture.

Anybody who would like to spend time at Stockton Baptist Tabernacle to see its ministry to refugees and asylum seekers at work is welcome to do so. They are invited to spend both a Sunday and Monday there, so they can be part of a service and the weekly drop-in. Let the church know you are coming by contacting the office (01642 602223)

Team Leader appointed at the LBA

The London Baptist Association has appointed the Revd Phil Barnard as its new Regional Minister Team Leader

Phil has been Pastor of Mitcham Lane Baptist Church, Streatham, for almost ten years, and has also served as an LBA District Minister in the South West. Prior to

entering pastoral ministry he worked in retail management and, after training at London Bible College, spent six years as a minister at Hertford Baptist Church in the Central Association.

He succeeds the Revd Geoff Andrews, who left the role last year. The recruitment process was rigorous: consultations were held across the Association to help shape the thinking of the appointment, alongside input from a task group and district ministers. Four candidates were invited for the initial interview; which subsequently narrowed the selection to two. Following the second interview, the interviewing panel was unanimous in its choice of Phil.

The LBA Board of Directors endorsed this decision, and brought it to member churches at a General Meeting on 28 April. Again, support for the appointment of Phil was unanimous.

LBA Moderator John Grant said, 'We were greatly encouraged by the unanimous decision of around 150 attending the special meeting. The Board looks forward to strengthening the relationship with local churches and the pastoral and strategic leadership that Phil will bring to this role.'

Phil said, 'It is both exciting and humbling to be nominated as Team Leader. I have long felt an emerging call to regional ministry and for the LBA to recognise that call is something for which I am deeply thankful to God.'

'I am very much looking forward to serving and encouraging the churches and ministers across our great city. In our post-denominational era, I have a passion for recapturing a vision for association life and interdependence.'

'The LBA means a great deal to me and I firmly believe that by communicating better, and being clearer in vision and purpose, we can see our association go forward in strength and confidence.'

His ten years at Mitcham Lane saw the fellowship grow and a range of projects make an impact in the local community, such as the establishment of a Christians Against Poverty centre and an urban garden. His management experience proved invaluable in helping a financially struggling church move to a secure position.

Having lived in and around the capital most of his life (as a youngster he attended North Cheam Baptist Church in Surrey during the ministry of the Revd David Coffey), Phil explained that he loves the city and its vibrant diversity. He has a passion for mission and discipleship, and for the UK church to make a transformational impact in its post-Christian, multi-faith setting. He believes his skills in management, strategy, vision building and partnership work will serve him well in this calling.

Phil is married to Jenny, who works for the Diocese of London in its Youth and Children's Department overseeing a programme of youth apprenticeships. They have three children, Eleanor (12), Edward (8) and Ernest (3). In his spare time, he enjoys music, film, books and social media, and is a life-long supporter of Tottenham

Hotspur FC. He's also an experienced multi-instrumentalist and has played in many bands inside and outside of church life.

Phil's ministry at Mitcham Lane Baptist Church ends later this month. He starts with the LBA on 20 June, with an induction service on 2 July.

He added, 'I would value your prayers as I conclude my ministry at Mitcham Lane and prepare for this very different role – with all of its abundant opportunities and challenges – in the coming weeks and months ahead.'

New EU resources for churches

A series of briefing notes to help Free Churches reflect about the EU referendum have been published by the Joint Public Issues Team

Think, Pray, Vote: EU referendum resources for churches is a 27-page document to be used for personal reflection or with groups ahead of the vote on 23 June.

It has been produced by the Joint Public Issues Team of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church and the Church of Scotland to help Christians consider Britain's membership of the European Union in the light of the gospel command to love your neighbour.

The resource 'does not presume to say which way people should vote: rather, it explores the issues surrounding a range of aspects of membership of the European Union (EU), and offers different opinions and perspectives.'

It highlights seven issues: the single market; sovereignty and subsidiarity; the free movement of people; work and benefits; peace and international relations; care for the environment; and agriculture and food.

These may not all be the issues currently being covered in the media, but are 'crucial questions about how the UK relates to the EU, now and in the future'.

Each of these issues concludes with a brief reflection, a series of questions, and Scripture passages which relate to the particular section.

The resource also features personal opinions from two Christians who will be voting in different ways in the referendum, and offers background information on the EU.

'On either side of the debate there are individuals with passionately held views on the question of the UK's membership to the EU,' it states. 'Whatever our position as Christians we should work to ensure that our discussions are respectful, our

decisions are taken with good grace and that it is God's kingdom that is central rather than our own.'

The Revd Phil Jump, Regional Minister Team Leader of the North Western Baptist Association, is a Baptist member of the JPIT team.

He said:

If we are serious about living as 24/7 disciples, this touches every aspect of our lives, including how we vote. So many of the narratives around the European referendum seem to be centred on self-interest and economic gain. It is vital that Christian people not only ask Christian questions about our future in Europe, but stimulate conversations in the public square about the things that really matter.

This resource does not seek to tell anyone how to vote, but it does explore key issues and how they relate to our understanding of the Kingdom of God.

The resource was welcomed by the Revd Tony Peck, General Secretary of the European Baptist Federation, who commented that while there were some areas he would have liked to have seen covered, it was nevertheless 'excellent material'.

He said:

Many have said that this Referendum will be decided on the basis of emotional response rather than reasoned debate, and perhaps the churches can show the way here in seeking to encourage a more integrated approach. The JPIT material seeks to explore some of the major issues in a straightforward and balanced way, bringing biblical and theological considerations to bear on them.

Inevitably those who compiled this resource had to be selective. I would have like to have seen a whole section devoted to the political, social and theological aspects of the principle of 'solidarity' of countries with each other that so inspired the Christian founders of the EU, and which we now need to reflect on again as we look at life continuing within the EU or outside it. Also it might have been good to have included some reference to the excellent work with the European Institutions done by the Conference of European Churches (CEC), of which are all the JPIT participating churches are members. CEC is in regular dialogue with the European Institutions, seeking to bring a Christian voice to their deliberations and decision-making.

But let's use this excellent material to help us as Baptist churches to seek the mind of Christ together on what will be a critical and far-reaching decision for our nation!

Pentecost stroll to support flood victims in Bangladesh

Four generations of the congregation at Shipley Baptist Church, West Yorkshire, are to take part in a sponsored walk that will launch this year's Christian Aid Week in the area

Ezra Jones (6), Alex Jones (37), the Revd Dr Keith Jones (65) and Ken Jones (92) (pictured, l-r) will join walkers from other churches in being sponsored to lap Robert's Park in Saltaire as many times as they can.

It takes place between 11am and 4pm on Pentecost Sunday at the start of Christian Aid Week (15-21 May). Following the walk a Pentecost celebration will be held at the Bandstand with music from local singer-songwriter John Froud.

The funds raised will help Christian Aid support families in Bangladesh who have lost their homes to annual flooding.

Keith is the minister of Shipley Baptist Church and local Christian Aid organiser. He said, 'The people of Shipley and Saltaire are very generous and open-hearted and always support Christian Aid Week.

'Across the United Kingdom over 20,000 churches work together to raise funds. Last year in Shipley we raised over £8,000 during Christian Aid Week. We hope they will turn out to encourage and give to Christian Aid this year as we seek to help flood victims in Bangladesh.'

With the worsening condition of climate change many families have been forced to flee their homes, causing homelessness and hunger. These poor families who earn their living from agriculture are forced to adapt their farming methods to cope with their changing environment. This unpredictable weather condition is making it much harder for farmers to grow the food they need.

Bangladesh's location, geography, large rivers and monsoon climate make it incredibly vulnerable to natural disasters, including floods and cyclones. Bangladesh is home to 160 million people - four fifths of whom live on less than £1.30 a day - making it one of the most densely populated countries on earth.

As a result of the climate change, average rainfall is rising, and as extreme rain and floods get more frequent, difficult dry spells in between them are getting longer. The rising sea level is also taking its toll, making the impact of cyclones even worse as sea water reaches further inland, and means 40 per cent of Southern Bangladesh's farmland could one day be under water.

Christian Aid believes the most vulnerable do not have to be swept away by the tide of poverty and it is collaborating with GUK to provide support for families suffering with the consequences of annual floods, which destroy their home, belongings and

lives, leaving them with nothing. A Christian Aid Home Safety Package (£250) provides an earth plinth, raising a home 6-8ft above water, creating a safe place for a family to rebuild their home and safely keep livestock. The package also includes a goat, seeds and a wormery, all of which will provide a long-term income.

You can help to change the lives of climate-affected families in places like Bangladesh this Christian Aid Week by donating online at www.caweek.org calling 08080 006 006, or texting 'SAFE' to 70040 to give £5.

Double celebration at Hunslet

When Hunslet Baptist Church in Leeds held a baptismal service in early April it also marked a recovery from flooding damage sustained last December. By Gill Knowles

Hunslet Baptist Church held a baptismal service on 3 April 2016 for Jonathan Knowles (17). Jonathan has attended the church with his family all his life and gave his life to Christ at Soul Survivor last August

It was a double celebration in the newly refurbished basement community area following the flooding of the rooms on Boxing Day 2015.

This event devastated the church members when they arrived for Sunday services on 27 December to find the area had been flooded to a depth of 15cm, something unknown in the church's 179 year history.

It was even harder to take in as in 2011 the church underwent a major redevelopment and had spent approximately £350,000 on the community area alone, with the whole project costing around £700,000.

The walls have had to be replastered, carpets replaced and the entire space redecorated. The kitchen also has to be entirely replaced, which included the condemning of the 65 year old industrial gas range cooker - we lost a great friend there!

However we have just been given a £5000 grant from the Particular Baptist Fund towards a new range cooker, electric warmer and dishwasher for which we are very grateful to God and the Trustees for this generous gift. This will enable us to get back to normal catering for our groups and events.

The congregation has remained positive about the whole situation. We were fortunate to be fully insured and knew God's hand was in this.

The repair works are almost complete and we are looking forward to using the area again for our regular activities which include a toddler Group, Meeting Place for over 65s with a varied calendar of activities. We were also able to recommence our monthly Craft Club last week.

Knowing their rights and standing up for them

Seeking justice for the poor and the voiceless is a key component of the new BMS World Mission strategy to transform one million lives by 2020

“Give someone a fish, and you feed them for a day. Teach them how to fish and you feed them for a lifetime,” the old saying goes. But what if the law forbids them from fishing?

There are often many factors influencing why someone is in poverty, but one factor can be the law of the land and the sometimes unfair legal restraints which prevent the poorest from improving their situation. In other instances there is nothing wrong with the law, but it is not being enforced or the poor are not aware of their legal rights and how it could help them. The rule of law can be just as important in lifting someone out of poverty as providing food, medicine or shelter.

This is why justice is an important part of the new BMS strategy. We want to enable individuals and communities to access justice and to advocate for those without a voice. Bible verses such as Proverbs 31: 8-9 are our inspiration: “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.” Our faith-stretching target is to develop justice ministries in four countries that will impact over 120,000 people, and your support is crucial to that.

Behind the numbers

Andrew Caplen, former President of the Law Society of England and Wales, has recently seen the legal work BMS is already doing in Uganda and Mozambique. In Uganda, he heard the amazing story of Benjamin, who had been on death row since he was 16, but always claimed his innocence and that he was unfairly charged as he was only a juvenile when he was sentenced. Thanks to support from BMS partner the Uganda Christian Lawyers’ Fraternity (UCLF), he was freed from prison 15 years later.

In Mozambique, Andrew saw the challenges of a relatively young legal system trying to develop.

“Mozambique is one of the poorest countries in the world, recently independent, recently come out of a civil war, trying to instigate a fledging justice system. It is not cheap and it is not easy either,” he says.

In this context, BMS mission workers Annet Ttendo Miller, Damien Miller and Kathy Russell have helped develop a similar body to UCLF, the Association of Mozambican Christian Lawyers (AMAC), to share the Christian message among legal professionals

and to promote Christian ethics in judicial legal actions. They are starting to represent people who would not be able to afford a lawyer and are teaching poor communities about their legal rights. Andrew was impressed by the passion and vision of the AMAC team to not only help people individually, but to also seek to improve justice for all in Mozambique.

“The BMS work is just beginning there, but I think it is really exciting what they are doing,” says Andrew. He was impressed with the ideals that have motivated the BMS workers and local Christian lawyers who have helped set-up AMAC. “They really care about justice for the poor and about the [legal] system in Mozambique and what change can be made.”

Andrew was able to see the work first hand as Annet and Damien advised a local charity on legal issues relating to gender based violence (GBV) – a huge problem in Mozambique. He heard one story of a woman the charity had helped who had been thrown out by her husband when he started having children with her stepdaughter. The legal information Annet and Damien are providing the charity will not just help the staff they have trained – it will be cascaded down to 145 ‘Mother leaders’ and then to over 1,500 beneficiaries, so those affected by GBV will be far more aware of their legal rights. Andrew was impressed by the justice work Annet and Damien were initiating in Beira and Kathy Russell was doing at the AMAC office in Maputo.

“In Mozambique, the thing that really encouraged me were the workers out there: Kathy Russell, Annet and Damien Miller. They all have incredible testimonies and an incredible desire for justice,” he says.

Andrew believes “justice is absolutely fundamental” to improving lives around the world and that BMS’ involvement is vital.

“BMS brings a particular angled way of doing Christian justice mission that is extremely rewarding. The [legal] workers that BMS has got really need to be encouraged and supported because what they are doing is so important.”

Pray for us as we develop our justice ministries over the next five years to help thousands and thousands more people, not only to stand up for their rights but by doing so, potentially get out of poverty.

Baptisms

Lymm Baptist Church, Cheshire: Jude Wynne, Hannah Gerrard, Corrie Gerrard, Abi Barrell, Emilia Evans, Sophie Instone

Sion Baptist Church, Rossendale, Lancs: Joanne Thompson

Stanton Road Baptist Church, Luton: Cameron & Sarah Webber

Warley Baptist Church, Oldbury: Becky Goodwin

West Wickham & Shirley Baptist Church, Croydon: Jessica Ioannou

Baptism stories:

Minister Richard Starling writes: On Sunday 24 April 2016, we celebrated the baptism of Cameron & Sarah Webber at Stanton Road Baptist Church, Luton. Cam & Sarah were married here in October last year: it was great to have a packed church on both occasions!

On Easter Sunday Joanne Thompson was baptised at Sion Baptist Church, Newchurch Road, Higher Cloughfold, Rossendale, Lancs. by our minister the Revd Mark Faris- Robertson. Her two children, Joseph and Charlotte were dedicated on that morning too...a wonderful morning. (Ann Alden, Church Secretary)

Jobs

Associate Pastor, Southall Baptist Church

Tutor in Old Testament, Spurgeon's College

Tutor in Christian Doctrine and Ethics, Spurgeon's College

National Safeguarding Support Worker, Baptist Union of Great Britain

Regional Ministers, South Wales Baptist Association

Events/notices

Sailors' Society, a Christian maritime welfare charity, has launched a brand new service resource pack for churches wishing to celebrate Sea Sunday and give thanks for seafarers, the 'heroes of the sea'. Sea Sunday, held this year on 10 July with the theme of Noah and 'My Hero', gives churches around the world the chance to come together to remember seafarers and pray for them, their families and those who support them.

The pack includes a sermon written by John Risbridger, minister and team leader at Above Bar Church, Southampton, and chair of Keswick Ministries, and Sunday School resources by Lisa Edwards, children and families pastor at Guildford Baptist Church.

Visit www.seasundayhero.org

'(Leadership) My Journey So Far' An evening with the Revd Karl Johnson, General Secretary of the Jamaican Baptist Union, takes place on Thursday 19 May (7-9.30pm) at Rye Lane Baptist Church. Worship with Muiyiwa. Organised by Breaking Bread, a group of Black and Asian Baptist ministers who meet for prayer and fellowship.

Christian disability charity **Through the Roof** is inviting UK churches to participate in a new survey into churches' experience of their disabled members. Visit <http://www.webassoc.org.uk/through-the-roof-survey/> for more.

For more visit www.baptisttimes.co.uk