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News:

Benefit cap 'damaging', says Churches
The Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) has spoken out against the Benefit cap, which 'overwhelmingly targets families with children'

The Benefit cap is the limit on the total amount of benefits a family can receive, currently set at £26,000 per year.

New Benefit cap statistics have revealed that 19 out of 20 families whose benefits were cut have children, and that over a quarter of a million children have been affected by the cap since it was introduced in April 2013.

Additionally, the majority of families affected were accepted as not being able to work due to illness, disability or caring responsibilities.

Despite this JPIT said that the Government claims that the Benefit cap is designed to get people into work, while also acknowledging that most families affected have illness or caring responsibilities that prevent them from working.

'It is clear that the Benefit Cap overwhelmingly targets children,' said JPIT Policy Adviser Paul Morrison.

'It cannot be morally acceptable to leave children without enough to live on in order to pressurise their parents into work. This is doubly true if those parents have no prospect of moving into work because they are sick or caring for family members.'

He continued, 'Over 2,000 single parents with babies under a year of age had their Housing Benefit cut because of the cap each month. Does the Government seriously expect that cutting Housing Benefit will make it easier for them to find work?'

From the Monday 7 November the Benefit cap will be reduced to £23,000 in London and £20,000 for the rest of the UK. This will increase the number of families affected and spread the impact of the cap more widely throughout the UK.

Paul said the lower Benefit cap could be "disastrous" for tens of thousands more children throughout the country.

'We know, from our experience on the ground and the Government's own research, [3] that the Benefit Cap drives people into rent arrears, debt and hunger.'

In November 2015 a coalition of Churches published the report "Enough" supporting the principle families should have enough to live on. The report argued that benefits should be set at a level that meets a family's basic needs and should not be eroded by the Benefit cap or the two-child rule introduced by the Welfare Reform Act 2016.

A YouGov survey commissioned by the Churches revealed that 61 per cent of UK adults believe that welfare benefits should be set at a level that allows families with children to cover their basic costs.

The Joint Public Issues Team combines the expertise of the Baptist Union, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church in the area of public issues, representing more than 800,000 people in the UK.

Helwys service live on Radio 4

A service marking the work of Baptist pioneer Thomas Helwys was broadcast live on Radio 4's Sunday Service programme

The service came from the The Well, Retford Baptist Church: Helwys was a Nottinghamshire man who died in Newgate Gaol at an unknown date 400 years ago.

The religious freedom campaigner Baroness Elizabeth Berridge was one of the leaders of the service, alongside church's minister John Brewster.

'The witness of Thomas Helwys brings together the two themes of our worship today,' said John, 'remembering the saints that have gone before us; and bringing before God our responsibility to defend freedom of religion or belief in the world today.'

In explaining why she had set up the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Religious Liberty, Baroness Berridge said an estimated 76 per cent of the world's population live in countries where they face high-level hostility due to their religious affiliations.

'But the situation is not without hope,' she continued, 'in some circumstances people of faith are cooperating across religious boundaries.'

Tony Peck, General Secretary of the European Baptist Federation, was the preacher, explaining that Helwys possessed of a powerful vision 'way in advance of its time'.

His plea for religious freedom for all, including other faiths, was about 'as far away as it could possibly be from the reality of early 17th century England.' It threatened the status quo, and landed him in prison. His concern was rooted in his own Christian experience, for freedom is at the heart of the biblical witness and Christian message.

The modern world sees religious freedom under threat 'in new and terrifying ways,' continued Tony. He cited the martyr of Rami Ayyad, the Baptist Christian murdered in Gaza in 2007.

But there are also good stories to tell. In the turmoil of the events in Tahrir Square in Cairo in 2011, Muslims and Christians were protecting each other and each other's property. And he spoke of a Lebanese friend who is a key Christian voice in the Middle East.

'He urges us not to see Christians as a beleaguered minority but as part of a 'silent majority' of people of all faiths who desire to live together in peace; and who together will speak out against a "reckless minority" who would promote violent fanaticism or a view that paints entire religions in the hues of violence and terror.'

He summed up by saying that from our own experience of freedom in Christ 'we can with confidence defend today the freedom to believe, to witness, and to worship whenever and wherever in the world it is threatened.

'In this way the bold and courageous words of the Apostle Paul and the Baptist Thomas Helwys continue to inspire us both to prayer and to action.'

The service also featured recorded messages from Benedict Rogers of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, who highlighted the case of Alexander Aan, an Indonesian atheist jailed for his beliefs, and Baroness Brinton, who drew attention to the persecution of Shia Muslims in Pakistan.

Andy Flanagan sung 'Seven Storeys', written after a visit to Egypt with the Baptist word and spirit network Fresh Streams, where he was told of a young woman thrown to her death by her husband after she changed her religion.

Adrian Gray, a member of Retford Baptist Church and historical adviser and director of Pilgrims & Prophets, which organises Christian heritage tours in Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire, helped make the initial contact Baroness Berridge.

He said, "From this small area of England, the early Baptists produced the ideas that led to the American Constitution and the UN Declaration of Human Rights article 18. 'It is now more important than ever that we celebrate the role of Baptist Christians in paving the way for religious freedom for all beliefs - and none.'

Adrian is also the author of *From Here we changed the World*, which tells the story of how a few people from the area have influenced hundreds of millions of others across the globe.

A full script from the programme can be accessed on the BBC until the end of November.

X Factor star in Barking church concert

Kerrie Anne Philips, who reached the semi-finals in the 2015 series, was a performer at the latest concert at Barking Baptist Church

The Baptist church's youth group was staging its fourth such concert, originally birthed in the wake of the London street riots in 2011 to demonstrate a more positive side of youth culture.

Kerrie explained that she had started singing in her local church at the age of five, and that the support of her church and family had encouraged her to pursue a career in music. She admitted to having felt a sense of relief at not making the finals of the popular TV talent show, but explained she believed that her future life and career were secure in the hands of God.

She also shared she was currently working with several producers on her debut album which would include soul, R & B and gospel tracks. In case anyone supposed that she had travelled to Barking in a chauffeur driven limousine, she explained that she had come via the London underground!

Kerrie was not the only talent show participant to appear on stage at the Baptist church concert, which took place on Saturday evening (29 October).

The programme also included performances from the dancer Becca, who had appeared on Britain's Got Talent, and the Project G Dance Group who had been semi-finalists on the programme Got to Dance back in 2012.

Contemporary dance played a major role in the Saturday evening entertainment with notable performances from a young man called David, who combined dance with poetry, and "acro-dancer" Teckisha who amazed the audience with her physical dexterity.

Music was provided by the Dellaway Steel Band (above) and members of the Genesis Church, a congregation of Romanian Christians meeting in Barking, who had also assisted with the lighting and sound for the evening's event.

The young people of the church contributed a poetic drama, written and directed by their leader, Yemi Aderibige (24). Entitled Where is God?, the short play demonstrated the relevance of the Christian faith even in times of great hardship and suffering.

The spoken word also played an important part in the proceedings with young preacher Ada explaining the role of the Kingdom of God in the teachings of Jesus.

Author and motivational speaker Emeka Egbuonu spoke on the themes Hope, Responsibility and Purpose, encouraging his youthful audience to set their sights high and not to accept second best. In keeping with the concert's roots, Emeka issued a forthright appeal for an end to gun and knife crime and help for young people in finding their purpose in life.

The evening continued with the presentation of awards to the young performers who had taken part in the evening. Yemi Aderibigbe received special commendation for her role in organising and staging the evening. The audience slowly dispersed as the Dellaway Steel Band performed more of their music.

'Everyone at the concert felt that it had gone well and had been a worthwhile venture,' said Graham Hedges. 'This kind of event does not appeal to everyone, but I think it is true to say that the whole church was supportive of this event by the youth group, and were pleased that it had attracted a good audience.'

Build a wall

A Baptist minister's reflection on Donald Trump's Presidential victory

"Build a wall," he said, "let's keep the problem out, let's make ourselves safe by barricading ourselves in...."

"Build a wall" he said, "build the foundations on fear; the other, the different they are not welcome here..."

"Build a wall," he said, "and trust in me, I'll stand up for you and fight with hatred and lies...."

"Build a wall, " he said, "then I'll make it great. Look at me... just look, aren't I great, yes I am...."

"Build a wall," he said, "keep the women in their place; get your own way, it's the same as my way, don't you see....."

"Build a wall," he said, "send that black man back home. He's a liar and a cheat. I'm RIGHT, look at me...."

"Build a wall," he said, "send that woman to jail. She's a liar and corrupt. I'm right, look at me...."

"Build a wall," he said, "and keep the guns, ready loaded. We'll be safe, don't you worry, look at me...."

"Build a wall," he said, "let's barricade ourselves in, I'm your saviour, I'll protect you, look at me, look at ME...."

"Build a wall," he said.

So they did.

Lord have mercy.

Today we woke up to the news that Donald Trump, who ran in one of the most divisive and, frankly, ridiculous presidential races in the US, has been voted in as the next President. I'm gutted. I really am. I don't know what will unfold in the days to come, but Trump's record in his campaigning on how he spoke about 'the other' - Mexicans, Muslims, women.... and others has been awful.

I'm not sure how to respond at the moment except to pray... for the future, for America and for the impact on the world.

*"God is our refuge and strength
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
though its waters roar and foam
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.
There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;
God will help it when the morning dawns.
The nations are in uproar, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.
The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge" Psalm 46:1-7*

The Revd Claire Nicholls is minister at Christ Church, Ramsbottom. This reflection first appeared on her blog Claire'n'Fish and is republished with permission.

Baptisms

Battle Baptist Church, Sussex: Kieran Dudgeon, Ryan Hearne, Rebecca Cowley, David Weeks, Samantha James, Robert Weeks, Abbey McNeill

Earls Colne Baptist Church, Colchester: Ruth Brooks
London Road Baptist Church, Lowestoft: Eleanor Cornwell and Nathan Thompson
Socketts Heath Baptist Church, Grays: Onome Fe-cados and Margaret Quilter
South Woodham Evangelical Church, South Woodham Ferrers: Chanelle Leher,
Deirdre (Dee) Taylor, Jill Downton, Georgina Morlham, Esther Nguyen
Streatham Baptist Church, London: Sheraz Johnson-Gill
Thatcham Baptist Church, Berkshire: Eddie Brown, David Del Hierro, Charlene Hurd,
Adrian Smith, Lucy Taylor, Eddie Kendall-Ball
Waltham Cross Baptist Church: 5
Wealdstone Baptist Church, Harrow: Dalis Campbell, Omari Gordon

Death

CHALLINOR, Clifford Henry: 1933-2016

After several years of mixed health issues, Clifford Challinor was called to the nearer presence of his Lord on 29th September 2016. He lived a very full life as a principal China buyer for Della Porta's, Shrewsbury before running his own shop in Pontesbury. He was well known and respected by all in the village and in fact, everywhere.

He was a Deacon, Life Deacon, Treasurer and Secretary, at different times, at Pontesbury Baptist Church, Shrewsbury, President of the West Midlands Baptist Association, Secretary and President of the Baptist Men's Movement. He was a well-respected Lay Preacher who spoke in different denominations and across the country.

He was a strong family man, having two sons with his first wife Glenys who passed on in 1994. He married Ann in 1997 and adopted a new family as his own.

He was regarded by many as a true Christian Gentleman. He devoted his life to his Lord and His work here on earth. He was always ready to talk to anyone and explain his beliefs and was responsible for leading men and women to a belief in his Lord. Cliff will be sadly missed by many but all realise that now out of pain, claiming his reward to be with his Saviour and Lord.

Ordination

Malvern Baptist Church recently held an ordination service for its new minister David Clarke

Dave is married to Sue and they have three grown-up children. Dave was previously pastor of Strood Gospel Mission Church in Kent, and before that led a new church plant in Hackney.

He studied Theology at Spurgeon's College in London where he specialised in Church Planting and Evangelism. Prior to that Dave was a member of Newark Baptist Church where he served as a young adult's group leader and also as Director of Newark Youth for Christ.

Dave and Sue moved up to Malvern at the end of September and have spent October getting to know Malvern better and meeting church and community leaders in the town.