



10 May 2017

News:

Connecting faith and action

A new centre to help Christians explore questions about justice and how we understand and live out our faith in today's world launches this week

The Centre for Theology and Justice is a collaborative initiative to encourage, support and make available the results of theological reflection on current issues of justice.

The Centre is a network of partner bodies and collaborators rather than a physical location, explained co-ordinator, Baptist minister the Revd Dr Simon Oxley. 'The centre will be more of a virtual centre,' he said, 'it will find its expression on its website and social media, and in events and processes which promote theological reflection on issues of justice.'

Its core partners are Christian Aid, Church Action on Poverty, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, and Luther King House, Manchester.

The need for theological reflection 'has been raised acutely by the refugee crisis', the website states, 'and there are many other pressing areas of social justice which demand our attention.'

The Centre will 'draw on the theological reflection and contextual theology already being done; linking to action and underpinned by a commitment to justice.

'We will consider what else needs to be done and how that can be achieved,' the website continues. 'We will work to resource the grassroots to engage in their own contexts.'

It will work in a number of ways, including:

- Provide a series of lectures aimed at developing the capacity of Churches to reflect theologically on issues of justice, including the annual David Goodbourn lecture.
- Build a network of speakers who can advocate on issues of justice.

- Run workshops, research days, theme weeks and conferences on issues of justice.
- Propose, sponsor and oversee research projects on specific issues.
- Contribute to various partners' specific projects when appropriate.
- Gather and share grassroots stories.
- Contribute resources to churches in the area of justice, spirituality and liturgy.
- Offer placements through partners for internships.
- Inform and enrich theologically the work of all of the partners.

The launch took place at Luther King House on Wednesday (10 May).

It was held at the inaugural lecture in memory of ecumenical educator and leader David Goodbourn. Father Augusto Zampini, an Argentine Roman Catholic priest and theological adviser to CAFOD, spoke on the topic 'Is justice enough? A radical Christian response to the current humanitarian and ecological crisis'. A full report and video will be shared by the Centre in due course.

David was the former General Secretary of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, and a former President of Luther King House.

'It was felt appropriate that the lecture and centre, because it chimed with his concerns,' said Simon. The lecture will take place annually.

Commenting on the launch of the centre, Bob Fyffe, General Secretary of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, said, 'We are faced with many challenging issues which raise questions about justice and how we understand and live out our faith in today's world.

'The Centre for Theology and Justice will enable more Christians to reflect theologically on these issues, and make a public, prophetic voice heard.'

The Centre for Theology and Justice will share resources and news of its work at www.theologyjustice.org

New event to showcase Baptist research

Theology Live! is a day event featuring Baptists engaged in theological and biblical research

Did you know that there are bunch of Baptists engaged in theological and biblical research? We believe too often much of this 'light is hidden under a bowl', to

borrow from Jesus. We would like to help put the light of this research on a stand, so it might give greater light among Baptist people.

This is the reason we have set up Theology Live! Taking the model of Catalyst Live from BMS, we are organising a day for 13 Baptists* to share something of their research.

We hope this might network some of us together, and that it might offer a window for others to learn and to be inspired. We hope it won't be a one off, and that there might be future days where others can present too.

This is a call to take our minds seriously, to be open to the renewing of our minds, to value those who have exercised their minds to think deeply about God, the Bible, the church, mission and more.

Theology Live! is taking place on Monday 11th December, 9.30-5.30pm at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, London.

* The contributors are Myra Blyth, Andy Goodliff, Paul Goodliff, Sian Hancock, Martin Hobgen, Ashley Lovett, Ruth Moriarty, Trevor Neill, Helen Paynter, Michael Peat, Edward Pillar, Pat Took and Simon Woodman

You can get your free ticket here:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/theology-live-tickets-32347634646>

'A gift to Baptists in England'

Tributes have been paid to Dr Alan Kreider, who died at his home in the US on Monday (8 May). He was 75.

Alan was the American Professor Emeritus of Church History and Mission at the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana. His main interests were mission, worship, peace, and ecclesiastical history, especially the early church and Anabaptism.

But to remember as a Mennonite is to is 'to obscure the contribution that he and (wife) Ellie have made to the wider church,' noted one tribute. The couple had a particular influence on British Baptists during their long stay in England.

Alan was Director of the London Mennonite Centre between 1974 and 1991, before moving to Manchester as an Adjunct Lecturer in Church History at the University of Manchester and as Theologian in Residence at the Northern Baptist College.

In 1995 he moved to Oxford, where he remained until 2000, as both Director of the Oxford Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture at Regent's Park College and a member of the Oxford University Theology Faculty.

British Baptist theologian the Revd Dr Sean Winter described him as 'an outstanding historian of the early church, deeply committed to the values of peacemaking and radical discipleship.'

Sean, currently Associate Professor in New Testament, Pilgrim Theological College, University of Divinity, also remembered him as a friend:

Alan arrived to take up leadership at the Centre for Christianity and Culture at Regent's Park College in Oxford just after Sean left to take up his first pastorate in Reading.

I soon became involved in the Thursday night table-group that met in Oxford weekly, and of which Alan and Ellie were indispensable members. The memories of common purpose, mutual commitment, deep listening and much, much laughter that marked the experience of that group shaped all who participated in it.

Together, Alan and Ellie preached at our wedding, in the customary Kreider fashion in which each took it in turn to speak a sentence seamlessly emerging out of what the other had just said said.

And when we were discerning important moves, first to Manchester and Northern Baptist College, where Alan and Ellie had also taught, and then to Australia, Alan was on hand to listen and to pose the important questions about vocation, and commitment, and what it meant to serve Christ through serving the church.

Professor Paul Fiddes was Principal of Regent's Park College when Alan came to Oxford. He paid this tribute:

In a life full of different kinds of ministry, Dr Alan Kreider was the first Director of the Oxford Centre for Christianity and Culture at Regent's Park College, Oxford (1995-2000). The aim of the Centre is to open up the boundaries between Christian faith and wider society, and Alan brought to this task a rich range of gifts, developed in previous ministry.

Among these were deep skills in fostering reconciliation and friendship between diverse groups of people, a fine scholarly mind (applied especially to ground-breaking work in the study of the mission of the early church), and a very gracious personality.

He not only established the Centre as a key element of the college community, but with Ellie he strengthened the community through their very presence among us and had an impact on the lives of students and staff alike. The College is hugely grateful to Alan for modelling the Anabaptist tradition of 'following Jesus', and so being a transformative force in its midst.

Stuart Murray-Williams, who co-edited the 2011 publication *Forming Christian Habits in Post-Christendom: The legacy of Alan and Eleanor Kreider*, highlighted Alan's profound impact on his own ministry:

My response to learning yesterday that Alan Kreider had died was deep sadness and a great sense of loss, but also celebration of a life well lived and gratitude for all that Alan has meant to me as a close friend and mentor over more than 30 years. Nobody has had a greater influence on my understanding and practice of Christian discipleship. We have seen less of each other since he and Eleanor returned to America in 2000, but were frequent conversation partners via Skype until a month ago.

Alan's legacy in the UK includes the widely valued ministry of the London Mennonite Centre; the Anabaptist Network of which he was a founding member; his teaching in many churches, colleges and courses; his careful scholarship and passionate writing; his generous friendship and gentle encouragement of many thousands of people; and the way he and Eleanor worked together that empowered women and men and modelled a fresh understanding of shared ministry.

Their contribution to the church in these islands (and in many other nations) has been immense. Thanks be to God!

'We've been supporting the transition from a more traditional form of gathered church to three expressions of church'

Our latest Home Mission story

- Pill Baptist Church in North Somerset is in a process of transition
- A Home Mission Grant is enabling Jon Thurlow to work with the church one day a week as 'Discipleship and Mission Team Lead', as three different 'expressions' of church take root there.

WEBA Regional Minister Alisdair Longwill asked Jon Thurlow a few questions about this:

Tell me a bit about the journey of Pill Baptist Church during the last 2 years.

For two hundred years, Pill Baptist Church has met for worship in a vintage 19th century chapel and enthusiastically engaged in the life of the village of Pill. However, in 2015, with a declining active membership, the chapel building was closed and the members made the decision to hand over the oversight of the church to a steering group, established by WEBA. Together we have been praying, reflecting and

listening to God, exploring a fresh vision for Pill Baptist Church as we look to the future.

As a steering group we've been supporting the transition from a more traditional form of gathered church to three expressions of church, meeting in a variety of community spaces across the village of Pill. This includes an already established, monthly, all-age Café style church; a more traditional Sunday morning service on the site of a retirement community; and a weekly Women's Bright Hour.

We've also developed a monthly discipleship focused 'Lyfe Group' and partnered with a neighbouring Baptist missional community in launching The Gathering, meeting together in a nearby Costa reflecting on what being a disciple means today.

As our strapline says, 'together our aim is to glorify God as we seek to live increasingly Jesus-shaped lives and engage in his mission to the world.'

Jon, what is your particular role and how does this work out in practice?

I work for Pill Baptist Church one day a week as Discipleship and Mission Team Lead. I'm partnering with the church to help develop a core group of people who are following Jesus in everyday life and looking to engage with the mission of God in community of Pill and surrounding area.

In practice that means everything from listening, facilitating meetings, networking with local church communities, carrying out a mission audit, trying to be present in Pill to get a sense of the place and the people, praying, listening to what God is saying through the scriptures, preaching/teaching, overseeing a Facebook group, helping with run a village Easter Egg hunt, putting together communications/newsletters/posters...

...Oh, and working four days a week as an NHS Clinical Specialist Physiotherapist in Pain Management, studying for a certificate in theology at Trinity College Bristol, and most importantly being a husband to Sophie and Dad to Ed and Jess. In other words, life is full!

Tell me a bit more about your Café Church event?

Café Church is a monthly all age gathering held once a month in the local community centre. It was the vision of a team of people connected to Pill Baptist Church, some five years ago, as a way engaging with people in Pill exploring the Christian faith in a more relaxed and informal setting, as well as being a church community for people from a whole range of church backgrounds.

Café Church tends to involve a time of eating, drinking and conversation around tables, a guest musician, an interview and reflection exploring an aspect of living as a follower of Jesus and some imaginative crafts, story and activities for younger people. We also meet outside of the monthly meetings in a variety of contexts, including breakfasting together, a legendary regular summer barbecue and engaging

in the community together through events like our Christmas Knitted Nativity Project, and upcoming village Easter Egg Hunt.

What are you praying that you'll be able to achieve in next 18-24 months?

My prayer is that we will continue to develop and gather together a group of people from the local community committed to become what we're calling the 'Core Group,' around which to develop a fresh expression of church that reaches out to, connects, and engages with the community of Pill. We're not really sure what that looks like yet, but we're trying to keep our eyes open to what God is already doing in the community.

What principles have you learned thus far, that others might be able to learn from? PillCakeHm... I've learnt that juggling NHS work, bivocational ministry, theological study and family life is only really possible thanks to an incredibly patient, loving wife and family, a supportive and encouraging community of people in Pill Baptist, and a reliance on the fact that those who 'wait upon God get fresh strength. They spread their wings and soar like eagles, they run and don't get tired, they walk and don't lag behind,' as the Message version puts it (Isaiah 40).

What might people be praying for you, your people and for the community of Pill?

- For Sophie, myself, Ed, and Jess, that God might continue to encourage and refresh us as we balance the various demands of life and look to the future.
- For us as a Steering Group and wider church community, wisdom and a clear vision for the future as well as how best to share Jesus with the wider majority of the community of Pill who may never enter a traditional church context.
- That God would give us the eyes to see where he is already at work in the community and show us in what ways we can join in in his mission.

From Land's End... to Canterbury

A Baptist minister is planning to walk across the south of England during his sabbatical this summer

The Revd David Mann, minister of Bethel Baptist Church in Swavesey, Cambridgeshire, will set off from Land's End in July and arrive in Canterbury around seven weeks later.

He plans to walk between 12 and 15 miles each day, and take in as many places of historical spiritual significance along the 550 mile route as possible.

As well as being an opportunity to take 'a real break from my work' and engage with the spiritual landscape of the country, he is interested in investigating Christian

hospitality at a time when many people in the world 'are forced to embark upon journeys, often of much greater distance than my own, in search of refuge'.

To that end he has contacted churches and communities along the route, and is delighted to have received offers of accommodation for the majority of nights he'll be on the road for.

The Baptist Times caught up with him as he finalised his pilgrimage plans.

Have you done a pilgrimage before?

No. this will be my first genuine pilgrimage.

Could you say a little more about how you got the idea?

The idea came out of having had to postpone my earlier plans for my sabbatical in 2016. At that time I was working around the idea of some reading and writing on the topic of 'The Theology of Play', something that has interested me for quite a long time.

After postponing my plans last year I realised that using this topic was more of a convenience than a real purposeful plan, and so I decided to step back and consider what might God really want me to do with my sabbatical.

I had watched a couple of episodes of Michael Portillo's train journey series, and the idea of possibly doing a series of train journeys to sites of spiritual significance came to my mind. I began looking in to possibilities and started to feel that perhaps there was something more significant that I could be doing.

I have been challenged for some time by the ongoing refugee situations around the world, and spent a lot of time praying about, and trying to understand what it takes to compel somebody to leave behind everything and set off on a journey across the world, in search of hope, refuge, and sanctuary.

It seemed to me that this idea of pilgrimage, and these questions somehow had something connecting them.

What's your route, and what's been the response from Christians in those areas?

I have drawn up a route which lasts seven weeks. It takes me from Land's End through Cornwall and Devon (Exeter) and then on to Winchester. From Winchester I travel down to Brighton and then meander between coast to countryside as far as Pegwell Bay (The site of S Augustine's landing in Britain), before turning towards Canterbury.

I contacted churches and communities in the area in which I will end each day, asking if they might be able to offer me shelter in their church, church hall, porch or graveyard.

Although initially the response was slow, things really picked up. The generosity and warmth of the response to my request has been fantastic, and in very many of the locations I have been offered hospitality in the homes of church members.

I plan to walk for the main part on my own, but am extending an invitation for people to join me at weekends, or perhaps other days where there may be some particular significance to that leg of the journey.

(The only dates that I still have not confirmed are:

Sunday 13 August Winchester
Sunday 20 August Seaford
Monday 28 August New Romney
Friday 1 September Minster)

Why is it important for you to investigate the nature of Christian hospitality?

Connected to this 'journey of the refugee' issue is, for me, a question of how we respond to people who turn up on our 'doorstep' in need. There has been a lot of media coverage of the refugees; their motives for travelling, whether we can trust them, and what the response of governments and agencies is. It seems to me that we need to consider our own response at a more personal level (and local church level).

We might sympathise with these unnamed individuals on our TV screens and in our papers, but what would we do if they knocked on our door (church or home) and asked for shelter?

What are your hopes for the pilgrimage?

I guess that there are two things.

Firstly there is the personal hope: That I will find some refreshing for myself as I walk through, and engage with, the spiritual landscape and history of England (the Southern part at least!) That it would be a time to heal some wounds too.

Secondly there is the hospitality thing: That there will opportunities to meet with individuals and church communities along the way, and to talk, and share and pray with them about the health of hospitality in the country and the church in the 21st century.

That these conversations will encourage those individuals and church communities to continue to reflect on the questions. And that the Christian voice and values of hospitality might rise up above the clamour of fear, division, difference, prejudice and hate.

Baptisms

Beacon Baptist Church, Kilmington, Devon: Paul Obudo, Sophie Clist
Burton Latimer Baptist Church, Burton Latimer, Northamptonshire: Andy Collier
Earls Hall Baptist Church, Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex: Rob Scott, Ross Clitherow, Charlie Stanton and Tom Stanton
Halstead Baptist Church, Essex: Steve Balaam
Hill Street Baptist Church, Derbyshire: Pauline Johnstone & Richard Butler
Limbrick Wood Baptist Church, Coventry: Martin Millson and Sofia Zimonte
Oldham Baptist Church, Lancashire: Eva Uraj and Justina Pralgauskaite
Open Door Baptist Church, Peterborough: Zuzana Grigeloeva
Ross Baptist Church, Ross-on-Wye, Herefordshire: Peter Preece
Streatham Baptist Church, London: Anita Abena-Amoako, Michael Forrest and Michael Forrest Jnr
Tabernacle Baptist Church, Penarth: Gareth Phillips
Upton Vale Baptist Church, Torquay: Warren Elliott, Leigh, Joanna Sangpay, Jonny Ryley, Tara Porter, Matt Swiss, Alfie Sams, Bex Roots, Ben Greenwell, Steve Edwards, Will Payne

Baptism stories

The Revd Neil Bennett, pastor of **Ross Baptist Church, Herefordshire**, writes, 'On Easter Sunday I had the privilege of baptizing Peter Preece, following a challenge from the baptistery x3 people responded and we will be organising their baptisms soon.'

Limbrick Wood Baptist Church, Coventry

We had two baptisms on Easter morning - Martin Millson and Sofia Zimonte, each sharing their stories before being baptized by Pastor Darren Bovis-Coulter. After a 'bring and share' lunch together the Latvian church used the open baptistery for seven more baptisms! Praise the Lord!

Open Door Baptist Church, Peterborough

On Easter Sunday Zuzana Grigeloeva was baptised at Open Door Baptist Church, Harris Street. Originally from Slovakia Zuzana gave a moving testimony about her spiritual journey. Her joy was infectious

Testimony from Andy Collier, baptised at **Burton Latimer Church, Northamptonshire:**

I was six when I was christened along with my two year old nephew. I went to church as told to by mum with little idea as to why, only having basic knowledge of the Bible. Continued to attend until, in 1992, when due to life's circumstances I turned my back on God, blaming him for all my problems and ills.

Then a few years ago I met someone whose faith was unshakable, solid, a foundation, my rock; my father in law Peter Clipson.

I opened my heart and asked God if I was worthy and if he could forgive me for doubting his existence and would he re-enter my life and reignite my faith in him.

Well, here I stand, God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in my life because I want them to be, not because of what someone else wants.

Now I am about to be baptised in the same manner as our Saviour, to be absolved of my sins. So that, when at the appointed time Jesus comes to take me home, I will enter heaven and have eternal life.

Thanks be to God