

Hospitality without borders

‘Hospitality without borders’: what does this image bring to mind? It may not be a reflection of where the Church is always at, but we are certainly wanting to learn how to do this. It was the theme of the Yorkshire Baptist Association (YBA) Annual Gathering in Morley on Saturday 21st June. Throughout the day we heard inspiring stories of people who have both experienced ‘hospitality without borders’, and those who have offered it. This is hospitality which doesn’t just offer a nice piece of cake or a digestive, but hospitality which, through Christ, brings reconciliation and healing. The event began with an amazing example of this from the experience of a young man from the Democratic Republic of Congo who, despite personal loss and tragedy, has found the strength to forgive the perpetrators and through the love of Harehills Baptist Church, Leeds, has experienced the rebuilding work of Jesus in his life. So far as the multi-cultural aspect of Yorkshire Baptist life was concerned, it was a real privilege to welcome into the YBA the Berean Baptist Temple, Sheffield, led by Pastor Yaw Adu-Gyanfi from Ghana. The assistance offered by Rev Nigel Manges and his congregation at Cemetery Road Baptist Church, Sheffield, to both Pastor Yaw Adu-Gyanfi and the newly developed and flourishing Karen Church which shares their building, was a further authentic demonstration of hospitality.

The new president of the YBA who was inducted on Saturday, Rev Graeme Dodds, also shared his remarkable story of ‘hospitality without borders’. As a younger man he had spent some time in prison, and through a Christian couple he got to know, and lived with on his release from prison, became a Christian, his life was transformed and he is now Minister of Harehills as well as president of the YBA. Other examples we heard throughout the day were from an estate in Bradford where many families are struggling to cope due to the stresses and strains of everyday life. The local Church, Buttershaw Baptist, asked the community what would be helpful for them, and people agreed that a Family Support Centre was wanted. Those from that estate suddenly felt they had friends to chat to and support when they needed it. We also heard about the transatlantic slave trade apology, that the BUGB has recently offered. Reference was also made to the ‘Huddersfield Declaration’ which emanated from the work of ecumenical group of Church leaders from across Yorkshire who came together at New North Road Baptist Church, Huddersfield. There they covenanted to make a whole-hearted commitment of support to the issues faced by asylum seekers and refugees. During the day, we were reminded again that Jesus himself is amongst the poor, needy, lonely and desperate: whatever we do for any of these people, we do for Him, (Matt 25). The YBA regional ministers Graham Brownlee and Ernie Whalley were delighted with the way that those present really engaged with the content. Ernie Whalley was particularly encouraged by the richness and diversity of the day, saying: “The day was a foretaste of the great Kingdom party – right from the offer of grapes on the steps as we arrived to the resounding sound of our final song: *In Christ Alone*.”

There was lively worship, including some stunning African drumming and dancing led by Pastor Nicolas Kabwe from South Parade Baptist Church, Leeds. It was a wonderful and very challenging day, with related activities and fun for the kids too. We hope and pray that next year there will be many more testimonies and stories of people- wherever they are in life- experiencing ‘hospitality without borders’.