

Prominent US Baptist Woman Pastor to speak at 2011 Baptist Assembly

Written by Administrator

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A prominent US Baptist who has received significant hostility for being a woman pastor is to speak at the 2011 Baptist Assembly in Blackpool, organisers have announced.

The Revd Julie Pennington-Russell who will give the main address on the Sunday evening of the Assembly, was the first woman to serve as senior pastor of a Southern Baptist congregation in Texas. She has faced criticism and sanctions from Southern Baptists who believe that she should not be a minister because she is a woman. At Julie Pennington-Russell's second pastorate, Calvary Baptist Church in Waco, Texas, Baptists from other churches in the area critical of her appointment picketed outside the church at her first Sunday there. "I was walking through the picket line with my son Taylor, who was seven at the time, and all of a sudden he squeezed my hand and pulled me down and said, 'Mom, who is Jezebel, and why are they calling you that?'" Mrs Pennington-Russell said.

In 2007 Mrs Pennington-Russell moved to her current church, First Baptist Church in Decatur, Georgia, a church with a membership of over 2,200 which has been part of both the socially conservative Southern Baptist Convention and the more moderate Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. When news of her possible appointment became public, the President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Albert Mohler, wrote in a blog, 'A look at Julie Pennington-Russell's education, experience, and related qualifications would appear to qualify her for a major pulpit . . . except for the fact that she is a woman.' In November 2009 the Georgia Baptist Convention (a state affiliate of the Southern Baptist Convention) ended its 148-year-old relationship with First Baptist Church because of Mrs Pennington-Russell's appointment.

The Revd David Kerrigan, BMS World Mission General Director, who recently met with Julie Pennington-Russell at the Baptist World Congress in Hawaii, believes Baptists will benefit from seeing her at the Baptist Assembly next May. "I have followed Julie's ministry for some years and been impressed by the strength and grace she has shown in the face of virulent opposition. She is a gifted pastor and teacher and I am delighted she has been able to accept our invitation."

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Other speakers announced for next year's Baptist Assembly are well-known speaker and pastor, Jeff Lucas, 2011/12 BUGB President Pat Took, and BUGB Racial Justice Advisor Wale Hudson-Roberts. The worship will be led by Baptist Union of Scotland Mission Advisor, Andy Scarliffe.

BUGB General Secretary, Jonathan Edwards, is looking forward to the 2011 Baptist Assembly and feels that the Assembly, the joint gathering of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and BMS World Mission, is highly valued by Baptists. "Wherever I go in the country I meet people who want to tell me how much Assembly means to them. I met Dean a little while ago. Dean is a 33-year-old financial consultant from Derbyshire and he and his wife Jodie came to Assembly for the first time this year. He commented, "I came away with a sense of refreshment and renewed energy that I was able to take back with me." That's what Assembly is all about. Through worshipping, listening and discussing together the Lord is able to refresh and renew us. In 2011 we want to take a fresh look at what it means to be a Kingdom people. It will be a challenging few days – but I'm looking forward to it."

The Baptist Assembly takes place from 29 April to 2 May at the Norbreck Castle Hotel in Blackpool. For more information and to register visit www.baptistassembly.org.uk