



27 January, 2016

News:

Landmark judgment for Calais refugees with UK-based relatives

Campaigners are celebrating a British court judgment that could yet see many stuck in Calais being allowed to enter the UK

On Wednesday (20 Jan) a British court ordered that three Syrian teenagers and one adult in Calais should be immediately brought to Britain to join their relatives.

Judicial review overturns Home Office ruling

The judicial review ruled that the three unaccompanied children and dependent adult should, under European rules, be allowed to live with their loved ones who are already in Britain while their asylum claims are examined.

The Home Office had previously refused to consider their asylum applications under the 'Dublin regulation', that would only allow an asylum seeker in Calais to join family in Britain if they had already applied for asylum in France and there was an official request from Paris for them to join relatives.

However, lawyers successfully argued that the current system wasn't working, and the court has accepted that evidence of a written claim to asylum in France was sufficient to prove the children had initially sought safety there.

The case was brought to court by Citizens UK, Islington Law Centre and Bhatt Murphy Solicitors.

George Gabriel, Citizens UK said: 'We are delighted with the judgment and look forward to being able to see these families, who have been so cruelly separated by war; reunited and safe.'

'This judgment highlights that there are safe, legal routes to reconnect families using the Dublin III regulations, and we hope will allow other families to be reunited.'

Ground-breaking ruling

Baptist minister and Urban Expression co-founder Juliet Kilpin has worked closely with Citizens UK in recent months, and has visited Calais on numerous occasions.

She described the ruling as “ground-breaking”.

‘I have done very little other than encourage these volunteers, speak out against the injustice and cheer on those who have dared to believe that they could save some lives by getting the British Home Office to implement their own rules,’ Juliet said.

‘It has been an immense privilege to adventure with those who have not only been seeking justice but who have organised for justice. In this way many small acts have multiplied into a ground-breaking ruling that will undoubtedly change these boys’ lives, but may also enable other vulnerable children to be reunited with their families.’

Juliet contacted Citizens in early September after Baptists started responding to the escalating refugee crisis with the offer of beds for accommodation. Citizens were encouraged by this engagement and invited Baptists to sit on their newly formed National Refugee Welcome and Resettlement Board.

During further visits to Calais she met members of the Syrian community, some of whom had also met members of Citizens UK. Together they worked to collect information about the many unaccompanied children stranded in the intolerable conditions in Calais and liaise with a team of legal experts to build the case.

Juliet was also among the 100 or so people who welcomed the four on their arrival at St Pancras on Thursday night.

Also welcoming the ruling was General Secretary the Revd Lynn Green. ‘We recognise that the current situation is a complex and difficult one, and there will be a range of responses even across our Baptist movement,’ she said.

‘However it flies in the face of our Gospel values that while politicians struggle to find an answer to what has become a growing crisis, children and vulnerable adults should be left unaccompanied and separated from those who can support and care for them. This is a simple act of humanity that is the very least our nation can do.’

Following the ruling, campaigners have challenged the UK and French authorities to ensure no more children are driven into the hands of people smugglers or are so desperate they take terrible risks to reach the safety of the UK. Citizens UK believe there are at least 250 unaccompanied minors living in the camp.

George cited the example of 15 year old Masud from Afghanistan, who suffocated in the back of a lorry last week trying to reach his sister in the UK.

'We know this is just the start of work to ensure the most vulnerable are protected and are pleased with this positive outcome,' he said. 'It will help us to continue to fight for justice for those who are in most need through no fault of their own.'

Juliet also highlighted the importance of being organised to achieve justice - which might yet mean the difference for other teenagers and children in Calais.

'Perhaps this is a lesson we can all take, that getting organised and working collaboratively and practically can achieve justice. As Martin Luther King Jr said, 'Those who love peace must learn to organise as effectively as those who love war'.

'In my delight I also despair for young Mamud (not his real name), a 15-year-old Iraqi boy I drank chai with this week. His parents were both killed in Iraq and he and his younger brother are trying to get to their closest relative, their grandad who lives in the UK.

'As the camp freezes under sub-zero temperatures each night and people struggle to find firewood to keep warm; as the French police continue to tear gas the camp most nights and as traffickers continue to offer life-threatening journeys to the UK, I fear for his safety.

'Will the UK follow its own legislation and give this child safe passage to be reunited with his granddad and claim asylum from here?

'Perhaps if we get organised, they will.'

George called for volunteer lawyers, translators and coordinators to help bring to the UK more refugee children and vulnerable adults with connections to nuclear family members living in Britain. Volunteers can register at the Safe Passage website.

A guide to this year's Baptist Assembly

Baptists are being invited to gather for this year's Baptist Assembly at the King's Centre in Oxford on 14 May. Wondering what to expect? Here's a brief guide:

Want to exchange ideas and be inspired by fellow Baptists? How about sharpening your thinking on one of the biggest issues of our time? Or hearing how your support can transform one million lives for the better?

These are some of the aims of the Baptist Assembly 2016, taking place at the King's Centre in Oxford on 14 May.

Each year Baptists are invited to worship God and seek his will together at the annual Assembly. This year's event will feature an "ideas exchange": a number of soapboxes where people can meet to share ideas on particular topics related to our

work as Baptists Together and BMS World Mission. Find out more, and the topics up for discussion, here.

The main morning session is entitled Inspiring One Another. 'Baptists Together exists to grow healthy churches in relationship for God's mission,' explains General Secretary Lynn Green. 'Together we will reflect on our vision and values as Baptists Together, responding to what God is doing and saying amongst us.'

In the afternoon BMS will highlight how it plans to achieve its faith target of one million lives transformed between 2016-2020.

The day will also feature a session devoted to the refugee situation in our country and around the world. Other elements include the welcoming of new President Rupert Lazar, a full programme for our children and young people, and the recognition of those who have recently been accredited as ministers and mission personnel.

The Baptist Assembly takes place on 14 May. Ticket prices remain the same as last year, and includes lunch (£29.95 for adults, £10 for children school Year Seven and above; Year Six and under are free). Follow this link to book your place.

The launch of Eco Church

John Weaver reports on the launch of a new eco award for churches

On Sunday 24 January I was privileged to present an Eco-congregation award to Central Baptist Church Norwich. This may well have been one of the last such awards to be made as on Tuesday evening (26 January) Eco Church was launched at St Paul's Cathedral.

Eco Church has been developed by A Rocha UK together with Tearfund and Christian Aid, with the support of the Church of England and the Methodist Church. The Baptist Union and the United Reformed Church have also been enthusiastic supporters of Eco-congregation.

Representing the John Ray Initiative and the Baptist Union I was part of a packed audience in the crypt of St Paul's with representatives of churches and various environmental organisations, who heard addresses from Ruth Valerio (Churches and Theology director of A Rocha UK), Martin Pett (who spoke about the development of an Eco-congregation at Trinity Church Lewes) and Rowan Williams (the former Archbishop of Canterbury) who gave the keynote address, with prayers led by representatives from Tearfund and Christian Aid.

Nigel Hopper, the churches and resources manager of A Rocha UK, explained that Eco Church had been two years in the making, replacing Eco-congregation, the award scheme for churches which has been running for 15 years. During that time, more than 300 Eco-Congregation Awards have been made to churches from all denominations. The scheme has played a significant part in helping many churches, like Central Baptist Church Norwich to a fuller biblical understanding of the importance of caring for God's earth, and in inspiring them to take practical action to this end, as part of our Christian discipleship in the mission of Christ in and for the world.

Eco Church offers a unique, free of charge, online survey for churches to gauge their contribution to environmental care. The survey covers buildings and land, worship and teaching, the lifestyles of the congregation, and their concern for the local and global environment. Online resources are offered to address the issues raised by the survey. Points gained by the church's approach to environmental issues add up to bronze, silver and gold awards. The first award of an Eco Church, a bronze award, was presented to St Paul's at the launch event.

Although the scheme is freely available, donations to A Rocha UK are most welcome.

'Not too big for churches to tackle'

Rowan Williams encouraged those who might think that global environmental issues are too big for churches to tackle in observing that there has been a 'tectonic shift' in the minds of Christians. Progress is being made through individual churches and through Christian organisations in the developing world.

He stressed that civic society still expects the church to provide a moral consensus, trusted to do the right thing, and as such the church is an 'effective community lever.' But this must be more than talk, we must show what can be done by acting and so shift the moral consensus with regard to the care of the environment.

He challenged all Christians to see this as a justice issue: for the world's poor and disadvantaged; and for the generations who come after us. He pointed out that our words 'economy' and 'ecology' both have their root in the Greek word for household. Stewardship is a covenantal concern in caring for God's world and being ecologically responsible is a justice issue.

God is faithful in his covenant with creation, God keeps his promises. The church is here to express, embody and communicate God's faithfulness and God's promises. Scripture always points us back to the God who saw creation as good, who promised 'never again' to destroy creation, and who is the ultimate land owner - the Old Testament celebration of Jubilee (Leviticus 25) reminds us that the Earth is the Lord's.

There are two kinds of hope: proximate and ultimate. Proximate hope is temporal, it is uncertain, incomplete, open to failure and looks to something beyond the present. Ultimate hope is God's Kingdom come, guaranteed, complete, beyond imagination, continuity and discontinuity. Such hope is a fact of the future.

We know we live in a time of unprecedented environmental need and our call is to continue to take action, as part of our worship of a creating, sustaining and saving God. The good news is that many churches like Norwich Central Baptist Church are now waking up to this call.

May this continue and become a focus of our discipleship and mission.

Rowan Williams quoted Martin Luther who said: 'If I knew the world would end tomorrow, I would plant a tree.'

For more on Eco Church visit: <http://ecochurch.arochoa.org.uk/>

The Revd Dr John Weaver is the Chair of the John Ray Initiative: connecting environment, science and Christianity

He was President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain 2008-9.

Major commemoration of Thomas Helwys

2016 marks 400 years since the death of the founder of the Baptist denomination, aged just 40

Around 400 years ago, the founder of the Baptist denomination in England – Thomas Helwys – died in Newgate gaol. The Well, the Baptist church closest to his birthplace in north Nottinghamshire, is organising a major event on 12 March to mark this occasion, and also to promote awareness of what Helwys and Baptists have done in the cause of religious tolerance.

Thomas Helwys is of global significance because:

Helwys was the first Englishman to explicitly state that people of any religion – Christian, Jew or Muslim – should be free to exercise their faith without government interference; the importance of this view has increased greatly in recent times

He founded the English-speaking Baptist denomination – the largest single Christian group in the USA and with nearly 50 million Baptists worldwide

In an age dominated by strict Calvinists, he preached that God's love was available for any person who wanted it

Who was Thomas Helwys?

Helwys was from a North Nottinghamshire family and was probably born at Askham, near Retford. The family held lands there, at Saundby and in Lincolnshire. His uncle Gervase was governor of the Tower of London but was executed after an important prisoner was poisoned. Thomas's father moved the family to Broxtowe Hall where he also brought up his own family; he became a friend of the puritan and separatist, John Smyth, and helped finance the escape of the Pilgrim Separatists to the Netherlands in 1608.

There, Smyth and Helwys became Baptists, but Helwys felt called by God to return to England to start an illegal Baptist church – the first congregation of the Baptist denomination. He also wrote the first book in English to argue that all people should have freedom of religion, for which he was imprisoned by King James and was never released. The message of freedom was taken up by other Baptists, such as John Murton of Gainsborough, and taken to America by Roger Williams who was married to Mary Bernard, daughter of a friend of Helwys, who had been vicar of Worksop.

How are we marking 400 years since his death?

There will be two keynote speakers, a short film about Thomas Helwys, some music, and a chance to talk with representatives of groups campaigning for religious liberty today. A buffet lunch will be followed by an optional tour of local churches relevant to the Helwys story (cost £10 each).

This event is being held at The Well, also known as Retford Baptist Church. This is the nearest Baptist church to Helwys's most likely place of birth and has been part of his denomination since at least 1691, when Baptist churches became legal. We are very grateful to the Well for their hospitality.

The commemoration event will include two keynote speakers:

BARONESS ELIZABETH BERRIDGE: Baroness Berridge is the Co-Chair of the All Party Group on International Freedom of Religion and Belief. Since 2012, Elizabeth has become a key voice in the deepening worldwide discussion on freedom of religion and belief as defined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Elizabeth will explain the importance of Helwys in the World today.

THE REVD TONY PECK: Tony is General Secretary of the European Baptist Federation (EBF) and also an ordained Baptist minister. He has spoken widely on religious freedom and wrote a well-received report on the history of religious freedom in central Europe. In his work for the EBF he has travelled widely in Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East visiting the 57 member bodies of the EBF. His main academic research interest is in the concept of religious freedom, especially as pioneered by the English Baptists in the 17th century, as well as its contemporary role in the modern concept of human rights.

Tony will introduce us to the life of Helwys.

All those interested are invited to Retford Baptist Church at 10.30 on 12 March, followed by a lunch and the opportunity to go on an afternoon coach tour of places connected with Helwys.

If you would like to attend, it would help the organisers if you confirmed by email to Sandra.withington@bassetlaw.gov.uk.

One hundred years of conscience

A significant moment in 'peace history' was marked by a service at Heaton Baptist Church in Newcastle-upon-Tyne on Sunday evening

The service marks the centenary of the passing of the Military Service Act, which introduced conscription to Britain to make up for the falling number of men volunteering to fight in World War 1. Many people refused to be conscripted on grounds of religion and/or political conscience, and faced hostility, imprisonment, torture and even the threat of execution for their stand. The act therefore heralded the birth of the conscientious objection movement in the UK.

Called 100 Years of Conscience, the service will honour the memory of these men, and the women who worked alongside them by playing leading roles in the search for a peaceful solution to the conflict.

It has been organised by Northumbria and Newcastle Universities Martin Luther King Peace Committee, which seeks to honour the legacy of Baptist minister the Revd Dr Martin Luther King Jr's visit to Newcastle in 1967. Heaton Baptist Church has a history of supporting Conscientious Objectors and of involvement in early nonviolent political action which inspired the later work of Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

'Designed to be open and accessible to all, regardless of religious or political conviction, this informal and participatory service will tell their stories through historical sketches and personal narratives, music, and visual representations,' said the event organisers.

'It will draw on research from the city's two universities, plus the activities and projects of local community groups. The service will also showcase items from the recent 'Voices and Choices' exhibition, which marks the individual choices made during World War 1. Time will be set aside for quiet personal reflection, or group discussion over refreshments about the choices faced 100 years ago and today.'

Nick Megoran is a co-convenor of the Northumbria and Newcastle Universities Martin Luther King Peace Committee and member at Heaton Baptist Church. He

said, 'We are used to marking 'war history' every November and at the significant centenaries of big battles. Join a range of people at Heaton Baptist Church, Newcastle, this Sunday night to mark a significant moment in 'peace history' - the birth in the UK of the conscientious objection movement with the introduction of conscription exactly 100 years ago.'

Baptisms:

Amphill Baptist Church, Bedfordshire: Beth Vickers

Calvary Baptist Church, Cardiff: Katherine Evans

Delves Baptist Community Church, Walsall: Amy Taylor,

Leanne Archer and Amara Ezekude

Godalming Baptist Church, Surrey: Anthony Weedon, Mark Richards

Green Fields Baptist Church, Crawley West Sussex: Jo Staunton

Gunton Baptist Church, Suffolk: Lesley Thompson and Darren Black

Know anyone preparing for baptism? [Check out our range of cards](#)

Send your baptism notifications and stories to phobson@baptist.org.uk

Baptism stories

The Revd Bill Miles writes: 'At 78 I was called last year to be Interim Pastor here at the **Green Fields Baptist Church in Crawley, West Sussex.**

'Jo's baptism was the first for my ministry here and the first in about five years, so we are praising God - a sign of hope for the future!'

Deaths

WHITFIELD Margaret (wife of the Revd Raymond Whitfield) died suddenly on 13 January 2016. A memorial

celebration of her life will be held at 1.30pm on 2 February at West Bridgford Baptist Church NG2 7NF.

LAWRENCE Susan Ivy, born 8 July 1922, passed away at Northwick Park Hospital, Harrow, aged 93.

Susan became a Christian through the ministry of the Baptist Mission Society in India where her parents were missionaries. She trained as a nurse and served in a number of countries sharing her skills and her love of Jesus. Her last years were served in her local Baptist church at South Harrow where she was instrumental in bringing a number of people to Christ and to His church.

Her funeral service will be held on Wednesday 17 February 2016 at South Harrow Baptist Church, all are welcome.

Jobs

Various opportunities to serve in Union life (trustee and committee member roles)

Children's and Youth Worker, Newport Pagnell Baptist Church

Pastor/Minister, Muff Field Chapel

Regional Minister - South West Baptist Association

Regional Team Leader - East Midlands Baptist Association

Team Leader - London Baptist Association Regional Team

For more information on all these positions, visit

<http://www.baptist.org.uk/jobs>

Events/resources:

Baptist Assembly 2016

Bookings for this year's Assembly, taking place on 14 May in Oxford, are now open

<http://www.baptist.org.uk/Group/Group.aspx?ID=247895>

Speak Arabic, Amharic or other key languages? Safe Passage is helping people who have a legal right to be

reunited with their families in the UK to claim asylum - and needs more interpreters

Visit: <http://safepassage.org.uk/>

Harrow Baptist Church has 150 copies of the old hymnbook ***Praise for Today*** it no longer needs, which are free for anyone who would like them. If you would like them contact Lin Artus on linartus@hotmail.com

The Baptist Historical Society is seeking a Honorary Treasurer, who will be a charity trustee. The role is significant but not too onerous in time. There are three committee meetings per year in central London (travel expenses remunerated) and presentation of the Annual Accounts at the BHS AGM.

If you are interested to learn more, please contact Mr Mark Sage on 01323 733840 or richardmarksage@aol.com for more information.