



29 January, 2015

News:

Disappointment at child refugee vote

Charities and campaigners have reacted with dismay after MPs voted not to take in unaccompanied children stranded in Europe

On Monday night the Government narrowly defeated a cross-party amendment to the immigration bill that would have seen the UK accept 3,000 child refugees. The amendment was tabled by Lord Alf Dubs, who was rescued by Kindertransport, the government-backed programme that accepted child refugees from Germany ahead of the Second World War.

The Government had recently announced that that it would take in an extra 3,000 child refugees over the next four years who are currently based in camps in the Middle East and North Africa. The major argument it put forward against taking in unaccompanied children in Europe was the possibility of a 'pull factor', that such a policy would encourage more.

MPs voted against the amendment by 294 votes to 276.

The Christian fostering and adoption charity Home for Good said it was 'very disappointed' about the result.

'This crisis has not gone away and there are still many children in need of loving homes,' it stated. 'Last year over 3000 children arrived unaccompanied into the UK and claimed asylum, some fleeing war, others violence and hardship. These children desperately need homes and people to care for them.'

Kirsty McNeill, Director of Advocacy and Campaigns at Save the Children, said: 'Today's narrow vote by MPs not to offer sanctuary to 3,000 lone refugee children who are already in Europe is deeply disappointing.'

Baptist minister Juliet Kilpin, who has been regularly visiting the refugee camp often called 'the jungle' in Calais since August 2015, live-tweeted the debate. Just before the vote was announced she wrote: 'Waiting for our finest moment or our worst.'

Following the result she wrote how 3000 children equates to just five children per

constituency, adding 'Contemplating options if my government honestly thinks it's best thing to not give refuge to 3000 child refugees.'

In a blog entitled "Shame", Baptist regional minister Nick Lear noted that a mere ten votes would have changed the outcome – and how many MPs only came into the House of Commons Chamber for the vote, not the 'impassioned, moving and (on the whole) well-informed debate' that preceded it.

'If just 10 of the MPs who voted against the amendment had changed their mind and voted in favour of it the amendment would have carried and 3000 children would now have a hope and a future,' Nick wrote. 'I was deeply saddened and ashamed that our country had turned its back on these children.'

Of the pull factor theory, Nick wrote, '...that's just daft. If my child ran and fell over, hurting their leg, I would not leave them there saying, "If I help you now it will encourage you to run again and I'll only have to help you some more if you fall over again."

'Where's the compassion?'

What next?

A revised amendment was debated and passed in the House of Lords on Tuesday. The alternative doesn't refer to a specific number of refugees, stating that numbers "shall be determined by the government in consultation with local authorities." The amended Amendment will now come back to the Commons.

There are two petitions relating to this amendment:

<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/128833>

<https://www.change.org/p/government-save-lone-child-refugees-in-europe>

Dianne Tidball receives Presidency nomination

The Regional Team Leader of the East Midlands Baptist Association (EMBA) has been appointed Vice-President of our Union

Dianne, a former teacher who has served as EMBA team leader for eight years, was one of three nominations for the President for the year 2017-18. The others were Roger Sutton, who heads the Gather network, and the joint candidacy of the youth and children specialists Jacky Storey and Bob Morris.

Voting closed at the end of March, and Dianne will now be welcomed at the Baptist Assembly on May 14. She will become President at the 2017 Assembly. At this year's event our current President Jenni Entrican will be succeeded by Rupert Lazar.

Responding to the news, Dianne described herself as 'delighted, honoured and privileged' to be elected as the next President.

'My prayer is that I might, in some small way, inspire, encourage and support our Baptist movement in celebrating all that God has done through Christ, speaking out the Good News of Jesus and sharing God's love in practical, creative and compassionate ways.'

After 20 years in teaching, Dianne has served as a minister in two Baptist Churches, Ruislip and North Bushey. For the past eight years she has served as Regional Team Leader in the East Midlands (she will be stepping down later this year) and served on a number of national committees.

She is married to Derek with one son Richard who is married to Jenny. She has written a number of books published by IVP and Christian Focus, has been a speaker at various conferences and travelled widely teaching the Bible and inspiring others in discipleship.

In her candidacy profile she wrote:

'As I reflect on God's extravagant love, his unending grace and the gift of his Son I am conscious of how thankful we can be and the privilege that is ours in knowing Jesus Christ as Saviour. I am routinely energised by the power of the Gospel, the importance of discipleship and the need for leadership.'

'I believe in the local church. There is nothing so engaging and attractive as a group of people sharing together the love of Christ. As Christians worship, care for each other, and look to serve their community with kindness and compassion, and share Good News they are an inspiration and a catalyst for transformation.'

'My hope and prayer is that God's Baptist people might be renewed by the Holy Spirit with a fresh joy in knowing Christ and his Gospel and overflow with the presence of God that many more might share 'life in all its fullness'. So, if called to be President of the Baptist Union, then my theme would be along the lines of 'Contagious Good News; enthusiastic discipleship; skilled leadership'. Knowing that when we encounter God for ourselves and are filled with joy in his presence that is contagious and offers hope to all.'

I have a strong commitment to growing healthy churches where the Scriptures are routinely taught and followed; where the Holy Spirit is given opportunity to lead and when discipleship is focussed and lovingly sacrificial. A significant part of being a healthy church is having effective leaders (of all styles and cultures) who lead with

wisdom, intention and grace.

“Be strong and very courageous for the Lord your God is with you.” Joshua 1:9.

The Baptist Assembly – an update

This year’s Baptist Assembly is now full! We are delighted that all available tickets have been taken, and look forward to welcoming delegates to the King’s Centre in Oxford on 14 May.

With this year's venue capacity having been reached, we are now evaluating our future plans for the Assembly. Next year at the Harrogate International Centre we will have a large capacity as we try to plan for an Assembly that is large enough for all who want to come, while at the same time ensuring that we get the best value in terms of not over-specifying venue size.

The notes below are the story of recent Assembly developments, outlining how the event has evolved and indicating how everyone with an interest can have a say in Assembly's future.

History

For many years Assembly was a series of services and business meetings mainly assembling in London. From the 1990s, in partnership with BMS World Mission, it developed something of the character of a Christian conference, with a residential experience enriching fellowship and a comprehensive menu of fringe meetings, special interest groups and exhibitions, alongside the formal business of the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) and BMS.

Futures and and other factors

The last Assembly in this format took place in 2013 - a time when the recommendations of the BUGB Futures process began to be implemented.

In the run up to 2013 Assembly had been suffering from falling numbers, financial losses, and a need to rethink content, which led to the decision by BUGB and BMS to experiment with a series of one-day assemblies for the years 2015-17.

A one-day event

The search for suitable venues began for the experimental period. Our best advice suggested one-day events would be unlikely to attract more than 1,000 delegates.

So, in order to ensure financial viability, the Kingsgate Centre in Peterborough was secured for 2015, and the King's Centre in Oxford for the following year. Venues in Manchester, Sheffield and Leeds were under consideration for 2017.

The first of the new experimental one-day Assemblies duly took place on 16 May, 2015 in Peterborough. For the first time in many years every single ticket for the Baptist Assembly was taken. Surveys of delegates suggested that many were first time delegates, attracted by the location, intergenerational format and shortened length. This success contributed to the choosing of a larger venue, in Harrogate, for 2017.

With us needing to book Assembly two venues in advance, we held to the choice of the King's Centre in Oxford for 2016, with that location also meeting the aim of bringing the Assembly to parts of the country that hadn't previously hosted it.

With a capacity audience for the second year running, we have acknowledged the need for a larger capacity, with Harrogate meeting that need in 2017.

Feedback, and the future of the Baptist Assembly

During this experimental period the aim was to enable each Assembly to be different in character, shaped by the facilities available. In response to many requests, the 2016 event features a key session dedicated to our response to the refugee crisis. There was also much discussion after Peterborough about the changing way ministers transferring to the accredited list were recognised, and this feedback has been incorporated into the planning of the 2016 event.

This, though, remains a period of experimentation, and the story of the Baptist Assembly is an on-going one. As planned, we will review progress immediately after the 2016 event, as a venue for 2018 need to be secured quickly. We plan to consult widely on that review.

Further details on how to contribute to this review will be made known by both BUGB and BMS in the coming months.

The importance of the Baptist Assembly in our shared life together

While reflecting on its format, we must continue to remember why we have a Baptist Assembly. Former Baptist Union President Chris Ellis was invited to explain this for the Spring 2016 edition of *Baptists Together* magazine. He wrote:

The Baptist Assembly is a time where we gather to worship God and to seek his will for our life and witness together. We network with old friends and encounter new people we don't know but who join with us in making up this particular expression of the Body of Christ, Baptists Together. We organise meetings to inform and stimulate, we hold debates to sharpen our understanding, and we share meals and swap stories together. Above all we worship together – as praise and confession, intercession and scripture, shape and direct our shared life and witness.

But in all this we need to hold on to our vision of how assembly helps us – to be open to God, to encourage one another in discipleship and mission, and to gather intentionally to celebrate and pray for the coming Kingdom of God.

Thank you for your interest in the Baptist Assembly. For all who are booked to come we look forward to welcoming you to Oxford next month. For those disappointed to be missing this year's event, we hope that next year will provide even greater participation.

Never too late to find love

Both widowed and in their 80s, Ray and Joy did not expect to be married again. Minister Alison Griffiths shares their story

Ray 84 and Joy 83 have known each other for years as Joy's first husband was good friends with Ray. After Joy's husband died and she moved back to Lydney, Gloucestershire Ray got in touch to see how she was settling into her new home.

As his wife had also died in recent years, he knew only too well what it is like to lose a dearly loved spouse and how painful it can be to pick up the threads of a new life. Gradually a new friendship developed and eventually they realised it was love - something that surprised both of them as neither had expected to find this kind of love at their age.

They were married on Saturday 23 April, two years from the date when they first realised they wanted to be together. It was a small wedding with just a few friends and the church family present and it was a particularly joyful day. With Methodists, Salvation Army soldiers, Free Church as well as Baptists celebrating, it was also a truly ecumenical affair.

The ability to continue to take risks - loving is a risky business at any age - is a characteristic of both Joy and Ray and their openness and courage to follow where God leads continues to be a witness and inspiration to all of us. The church members are relieved Ray and Joy have chosen to settle in Lydney and so will remain regular worshippers at Lydney Baptist.

It is probably the last marriage that will take place in the traditional worship sanctuary of Lydney Baptist Church as it is about to undergo a major redevelopment, completely transforming the church area, so it will also be remembered as an historic event in the life of the church.

Joy has several major health issues that need to be resolved in the coming few months so your prayers for her restoration to better health would be particularly appreciated as they begin their married life together.

Welcome to the Essex County Council Baptist Church

Minister Graeme Ross explains how the words "Baptist Church" were added to the bus stop in front of his church's building

Look at this picture and read the sign on the bus shelter for yourself. You could assume that Essex county council are into church planting, but there is really something else going on.

It all began several months ago when I was chatting to our local county Councillor, Dave Harris. At the time, the bus stop outside of the church said Cherry Tree Garage on it (because Cherry Tree Garage used to be near the church before it closed a few years ago). I asked Dave how we could go about requesting that the bus stop name could be changed to 'Baptist Church' because we are very much open.

Dave said he would ask on our behalf and within a very short period of time he had arranged it. Surprisingly though, what turned up was a bus shelter rather than just a new name on the stop.

I love the way that the sign reads 'Essex County Council Baptist Church' and it makes me smile whenever I see it. That a bus shelter says 'Baptist Church on it' is a wonderful reminder that the church is the people, rather than any building or shelter.

Most of all, I love the way that this shelter blesses people, especially when it is raining! At Orchard Baptist Church, we want to be a blessing to the community that we are a part of. The shelter feels like a good representation of who we are, even though it is not something that we have put there or paid for.

Someone suggested that I should complain because the shelter makes it harder for people to see the church if they are driving past. I can see what they mean but then I can see (because I happen to be there a lot) how the shelter blesses people.

- *Is it more important that people get a good view of our building or that people are blessed?*
- *Which is your church community more obsessed with, how you look or how you bless people?*

The bus shelter also reminds me of what Jesus said about the Kingdom of God.

“It is like a tiny mustard seed that a man planted in a garden; it grows and becomes a tree, and the birds make nests in its branches.” (Luke 13.19)

The shelter appeared, not because of our hard work or effort and in the same way, God is growing his kingdom as more people recognise him as their Lord and Saviour.

The shelter offers sanctuary to people and so does the Kingdom of God. If we are citizens of the Kingdom, we need to consider how we are offering blessing, sanctuary and support to the people around us.

So, is our church community more obsessed with how we look or how we bless people?

The Revd Graeme Ross is minister of Orchard Baptist Church in Essex. This story originally appeared on his blog [Honest About My Faith](#), and is republished with permission

Helwys message 'still relevant today'

An event marking 400 years of Baptist founder and pioneer of religious freedom - Adrian Gray reports

A large crowd gathered recently at Retford Baptist Church (The Well) to mark 400 years since the death of Nottinghamshire man Thomas Helwys, who died in Newgate Gaol at an unknown date.

This event was organised by local Christian Heritage workers with Bassetlaw Christian Heritage and the support of Bassetlaw District Council. It was a great day!

The event was held in Retford as Thomas Helwys and his family came from this area of England. Indeed one of the Helwys family a generation earlier had been the pluralist vicar of several local parishes.

The commemoration was opened by Jo White of Bassetlaw Council and then by Richard Warren, assistant pastor at The Well.

Tony Peck, General Secretary of the European Baptist Federation, combined spiritual insight and historical commentary in describing the historical importance of Thomas

Helwys. We then watched a film of his thoughts from prison.

Baroness Elizabeth Berridge, campaigner for religious freedom, explained why Helwys's message is as relevant today as in the 1600s. Baroness Berridge represented the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Religious Liberty.

Finally staff from Open Doors and Release International, charities with a focus on religious persecution were interviewed about their work.

One mature member of those attending described it as 'the best event ever'....so we are happy!

In the afternoon guests were taken on a tour of places associated with Helwys and his family, and it was sunny!

Tied in with this event, a new book on the Christian Heritage of North Notts and West Lincs was published: *From Here We Changed the World* by Adrian Gray (pictured) is available from bookshops and online stores.

Adrian Gray is Historical adviser and director of Pilgrims & Prophets, and a member of Retford Baptist Church

Nepal earthquakes: one year on

It is a year since the first 2015 earthquake hit Nepal. What is life like in the country now and what difference has your generous giving made?

“Everything has been devastated by the earthquake and everything is unsettled.”

When the first earthquake shook Nepal on 25 April 2015, everything changed for Bir Bhada Dimdung and his family. Not only was his home destroyed but his neighbours' houses were too. Almost all of the houses in the Sankhu area of Lalitpur District where he lives were either destroyed or badly damaged.

Bir Bhada (below) and his family are still living in a temporary house 12 months on. But thanks to the generous giving of BMS World Mission supporters, when it is possible for him to, he will be able to not only build his own house but help build others too. He has now received stonemason training to enable him to build homes to withstand future earthquakes.

“Before the training I had no idea about what sort of house was earthquake-resistant and I would have just used stones,” Bir Bhada says. “Now I have ideas for earthquake-resistant houses.”

The skills he has learned mean that he can be paid more for the work he does,

increasing the opportunities for him and his family.

“My hope for the future is to build a better shelter for my family and to provide higher education for my son,” he says. “My son gives me a new hope.”

Sita Maya Ghising (below) lives in the same district and her home was destroyed too. Thanks to BMS, she has received training in livestock management, dairy production and growing vegetables. The training is giving her ideas of a new, more hopeful future.

“I want to have a strong family and be a role model so that change can be seen in me,” Sita Maya says. “I am not so well educated, so I want to establish a big farm and get registered. I started with milk after the earthquake and want to grow my farm and dairy produce business.”

Bir Bhada and Sita Maya are just two of the people whose lives have been transformed by the £540,000 you gave to the BMS Nepal earthquake appeal. In the first few weeks after the disaster, over £50,000 provided:

- food relief
- blankets
- tarpaulins
- medical supplies
- a vehicle for distributing relief and helping with long-term recovery efforts
- training for those responding to the earthquake

The majority of the money raised is going towards the second phase of rehabilitation, which should take about three years. During that time we will be contributing to the transformation of over 54,000 people by supporting education and health programmes, enabling livelihood training like that given to Bir Bhada and Sita Maya, and providing materials and support for the construction of hundreds of new earthquake-resistant homes for those currently living in temporary shelters or severely damaged homes. With your help, we are also helping to train people to prepare better for future earthquakes.

BMS mission worker Jerry Clewett, who initially directed the disaster response for one of our partners in Nepal, says that the response from BMS in the first few days and weeks following the earthquakes was vital in enabling them to be able to help 12,000 people in seven severely affected communities.

“The pledges of money from BMS and other partners were absolutely crucial,” he says.

“All of the support has had a fantastic impact, both in a tangible way by enabling work to be done, and in an encouraging way – knowing that people care outside Nepal.”

Since the first earthquake 12 months ago, there have been over 400 aftershocks. BMS mission worker Ruth Clewett says they have grown used to them but they still put them on edge.

“Paradoxically, part of you is a bit blasé,” she says. “When there is an aftershock, you shrug it off. At the same time we’re a bit hyper – if someone knocks into the back of your chair, you jump.”

With recent earthquakes in Ecuador, Japan and Afghanistan, some believe there might be another earthquake in Nepal soon. “There is a lot of superstition and fear here,” says BMS worker Debbie Drew.

Fellow mission worker Jenny Saunders has heard similar superstitions. “Some are predicting a big earthquake on the anniversary and some will be sleeping outside just in case,” Jenny says.

Despite the fear, many good things have come out of the response to the earthquakes. A community spirit to look out for each other has grown, with many taking helping the needy into their own hands.

“I can see signs of hope,” says Jerry Clewett. “There is a lot of goodwill from people, particularly from the more wealthy people in Kathmandu and especially the younger people. I think there is a growing civil awareness and willingness to support others who are less well-off in the villages. Providing that positivity continues, there will be a lot of hope for the future.”

It will take years for Nepal to fully recover from last year’s earthquakes, and BMS is committed to helping in that process through recovery work, our mission worker presence and prayer. Please continue to pray for Nepal and especially for good leadership there.

“Pray that God will raise up people who will be truly concerned about the needs of the poorest and worst-hit people,” suggests BMS worker Andy Saunders. “Pray that God will raise up leaders in all areas of society, who have a real heart for the country.”

The work we are doing to help earthquake survivors would not have been possible without your generous support. Thank you.

This article first appeared on the website of [BMS World Mission](#) and is used with permission.

Baptisms:

Beverley Baptist Church, Hull: Fiona Rosario

Carleton Rode Baptist Church, Norfolk: Matt Court, Tim Sale and Lei Zhao Gennaris

Dover Baptist Church, Kent: Glenn Morley and Decerie Quijano

Ebenezer Baptist Church, Abertillery: Zoe Powell, Steve Green, Patrick Jones and Tara Phillips

Haddenham Baptist Church, Haddenham, Ely: Carol Isaacson

High Street Baptist Church, Tring: Reuben Nelson-Cofie

Morton New Day Baptist Church, Lincolnshire: Stephen Smith, Dave Doe

Stalham Baptist Church, Norwich: David Child

West Cliff Baptist Church, Bournemouth: Kevin & Trish Lait

Baptism stories:

At Haddenham Baptist Church in Ely senior citizen Carol Isaacson was baptised, with 60 people attending. her baptism. Church secretary Paul Shepherd writes, 'It was our our first Baptism this year. Carol was well supported by her family and friends. Rev. Jim Mullin led the service and about 40 people enjoyed a sumptuous 'bring and share' lunch afterwards.'

Very pleased to let you know that David Child was baptised on Easter Sunday, writes Geoff Reynolds of Stalham Baptist Church (Norwich). He shared an inspiring and amusing testimony with us and had many members of his family and friends present.

Jobs:

National Safeguarding Support Worker, Baptist Union of Great Britain

Pathways Manager + Church Administrator, Pathways Centre, Hinckley Baptist Church

Political Adviser and Team Coordinator, Joint Public Issues Team

Regional Ministers, South Wales Baptist Association

Events/notices:

Flames of Prayer

Lynn Green is encouraging all our Baptist churches to join together in creating a Beacon of Prayer – sharing the ways in which God is at work in and through our churches and communities. She would like church leaders to download and print a flame template (if possible on yellow or orange paper), and then write down where you see God at work in and through your church/community. Bring it with you to this year's Baptist Assembly in Oxford on 14 May, or send it to the Assembly office by 29 April. [Full details are on the Baptists Together website.](#)

Hope in Higher Education forum, 4 May

Releasing the potential of the Free Churches to work with universities, students and communities. Keynote speaker Professor Les Ebdon

Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church

A booking form together with further information is available on www.freechurches.org.uk or email education@freechurches.org.uk

For enquiries, please phone 0203 6518

For more visit www.baptisttimes.co.uk