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News:

Reaching the millennial generation

A new network that aims to resource millennials within Baptist churches and beyond is beginning to come together

The millennial generation loosely refers to those aged between 18 and 35, a generation that's under-represented not just in Baptist churches, but across denominations.

To discover common themes about how Baptist churches can engage this group, 10 millennials from a variety of backgrounds across Baptists Together met recently for 24 hours at the International Mission Centre (IMC) in Birmingham.

Key features of millennial culture

Daniel Hatfield, the Assistant Minister for Community and Discipleship at Rayleigh Baptist Church in Essex, organised the agenda and facilitated the discussions.

He explained that it was encouraging simply to gather and share experiences with others millennials.

'People of the millennial generation intuitively understand many of the same things, but perhaps won't be able to articulate them on their own. When you get a group of people together talking about what they value, the same kind of stuff comes up, and this was at different levels of leadership, from different parts of the country.

'It encourages you – you're not alone.'

He added that four key features of millennial culture had emerged from the discussions. Millennials want authenticity and depth. 'People are not satisfied with friendly,' said Daniel. 'They want friends.'

There is a passion for moving beyond the church walls, putting words into practice. They want to share Jesus with those who do not know him.

They also want experience, not just theory, and value the arts in speaking the prophetic.

This can be summed up in the acronym EPIC: Experiential; Participatory; Image Rich, Community Hungry.

Another theme emerged: the value of genuine conversation; the capacity to disagree but remain friends because of the value of the relationship. 'There were theological differences, among the group, but we were able to talk about them,' said Daniel.

The structure of the day

The time together at IMC began with worship, followed by testimonies, where each person shared their story in response to the following questions:

What about your experience of church has helped keep you part of it? What barriers has your faith encountered that you've had to overcome to stay in a church? What do you long to see in your church that, as a millennial, would make you excited to be a part of it?

Reflections were shared on each other's stories, before a session sharing ideas and stories about how churches (of any denomination) are effectively empowering millennials in their churches.

There was a discussion about whether there is there anything distinctive from Baptist theology that supports how God is trying to reach this demographic in the UK?

The final two hour session focused on a network: what can be done to reach and empower church leaders and millennials in churches to engage with Jesus in a way that is relevant to millennials within and beyond local church communities? Is there some kind of network/gathering/online presence that would help facilitate this?

Outcomes

Initial steps include the creation of a new Facebook group – Baptists Together Millennials – and it is hoped more networking will emerge, said Daniel.

'My hope is that Baptists who have a passion to reach that culture realise they are not alone. There is a significant and growing movement within the Baptist Union, who want to support and empower the mission to reach and disciple that generation.

‘And this movement is open to anyone with a passion for this generation. We want to hear from you, and know that this is not a closed thing. We want to connect you into networks as they develop.’

The Revd Carl Smethurst, a regional minister in the South West Baptist Association, was one of the facilitators. He was encouraged by the gathering, saying there was a deep desire among amongst 18-35s to create communities to which those in their generation can belong and explore faith, sometimes using well established methods, sometimes in creative new ways.

In addition there was a genuine commitment to Baptist principles and a desire to re-interpret what they look like for their generation.

‘The beginning of a new network of millennials started here,’ he said.

‘This felt like a generation of leaders that God has blessed us with coming together for the first time - at least the first time in a long time. They have a passion and desire for the Kingdom of God and a willingness to follow where he leads.

‘I think that it will develop in to a group that will be an essential part of helping to discern how God is leading us in the future and who have the creativity and energy to engage with a generation that is hugely under-represented in our churches at present.’

Hope rises from cancer despair

In turmoil following a cancer diagnosis, a Baptist minister experienced a sudden burst of creativity resulting in a series of songs about God and faith

The Revd Andrew Gardiner, minister at Hope Baptist Church in Plymouth, was diagnosed with bowel cancer in May. The cancer had spread to his liver by August.

As he underwent aggressive treatment, deeply frustrated and in turmoil at being “snatched” from his place in local church ministry, he discovered God was enabling him to do something new: write a succession of songs, poems and even a book.

‘To my astonishment, it started in the middle of the night in a hospital ward,’ Andrew said.

‘Three songs came. I haven't done anything like this for decades – no time!’

In total Andrew has now written 20 songs, as well as a number of poems. He is also 11 chapters into a book, called *The Tunnel*, for which he is looking for a publisher.

He's called his new ministry *Rising Hope*: ‘a ministry of light, emerging from a dark place,’ he explained.

'Rising Hope is me seeking to minister to others when I have been taken out of local church ministry due to cancer treatment. I have been dragged against my will into a dark place – "the tunnel". It's a place of darkness, fears, loss and confusion.

'But in this place I have discovered God does some things which are surprising and new.

'I still have a calling to proclaim Christ and spread the gospel, so I have to find alternative ways of doing that.

'Rising Hope is a new vehicle....until I can get back in the old one that I love.'

There is a website and a Facebook page. The first song was released on iTunes last Wednesday. Called True Identity, it looks at who we are in Christ. A friend who fronts a band has recorded it, while his daughter appears in the video that accompanies it. (It can be viewed here on Youtube.)

'I have had to ask myself some big questions about who I am when I'm not ministering anymore,' Andrew said.

'I have had to learn afresh about who I am when I'm NOT doing (ministry), but being.

'I hope that hundreds of others will get the message about who we are In Christ, what he has done to make this possible, and how that changes how we see ourselves, our lives, our present priorities and future dreams.

'I am desperate to see people released into being who they really are, coming fully into our inheritance.'

He is now about to embark on a third course of chemotherapy, after the first two failed to shrink the tumours.

'I still don't feel ill from the cancer - I hardly have over the 8 1/2 months to be honest. But the treatment has made me very ill, off and on.

'I did have pain in my liver and colon, but after an evening of prayer with friends who came to our house it disappeared the next day....that was November, and its not returned!

'I am emotionally very up and down, and have physical (unexplained) abdominal pain, all day, every day.

'But I carry 2 Corinthians 4: 8-12 in my soul.'

New theological college in Yorkshire

St Hild College will train Anglican ordinands, Baptist ministers in training and independent students

The new college launched in January and has been created by the merger of the Yorkshire Ministry Course (YMC) and St Barnabas Theological Centre.

It will operate with teaching centres in Mirfield, Sheffield and York. Across these three sites, St Hild College trains over 100 students including ordinands from York, Leeds, Sheffield, Leicester, Derby, Manchester and Southwell and Nottingham dioceses. It trains Baptists in association with Northern Baptist College - the Revd Dr Sally Nelson is the college's Baptist tutor, in addition to other Baptist lecturers such as the Revd Dr Keith Jones and the Revd Dr Chris Ellis. The college also has a range of independent students on its undergraduate and postgraduate pathways.

Mark Powley, previously Principal of the YMC and before that Director of St Barnabas Theological Centre, is the new Principal of St Hild College. He leads a team of 11 staff plus a wide associate faculty team including tutors from a range of theological traditions. He said the new college will expand contextual training in the North, thereby keeping ministers in the region.

'We've seen significant growth in contextual training in recent years - it is something we believe can retain people in the north and train them to read their context better. The approach we have taken is to build on new models that have emerged in contextual training, but to do so in close partnership with the institutions that already exist.

'The extent of that cooperation is really quite striking - we are bringing together diverse partners, from the brothers of the Community of the Resurrection to the resource churches committed to church planting.'

Alongside the Yorkshire dioceses and Yorkshire Baptist Association, the St Hild College governing body includes representatives of three larger resource churches - St George's Leeds, St Thomas Crookes and The Belfrey York - as well as the Community of the Resurrection, at whose Mirfield home the new college's residential weekends take place.

The Service of Commissioning for St Hild College took place at Dewsbury Minster on Saturday (14 January), led by Rt Revd Peter Burrows, Bishop of Doncaster, Rt Revd James Bell, Bishop of Ripon, and the Revd Graham Ensor, Team Leader of the Yorkshire Baptist Association (pictured second left with St Hild College staff and the Bishops).

Graham praised the cooperative spirit of the launch process, commenting, 'This new college is an example of gospel partnership, where everybody is committed to a

higher goal than that of their own organisation, namely the equipping of women and men of God for missional ministry to regospel the North of England.'

Bishop Peter, Chair of Trustees for the new college, added, 'I feel that St Hild College will be a powerhouse for theological education, and one that holds the confidence of the church.'

On choosing a name, Mark said: 'Obviously, naming a new college is a complicated business, but we realised we had a great candidate in St Hild. It is now 1,360 years since she established her monastery in Whitby.

'Bede writes of her wisdom, diligence and integrity at a crucial time of evangelisation. She seems an ideal symbol for 21st century mission and the creative forms of training it requires.'

Concern for detained Burmese pastors

Two Burmese Baptist pastors whose detention by the Burmese Army prompted an international outcry face up to five years in prison

Nawng Latt and Gam Seng, ethnic Kachin Christians, went missing after being called to military base on December 24.

The detention was linked to their assisting journalists investigating an unlawful military airstrike on a Catholic Church - resulted in an international outcry. A statement from the international NGO Human Rights Watch (HRW) called for their release. Amnesty International and Fortify Rights also issued statements, while British MPs spoke in Parliament to ask the Burmese government to investigate the disappearance of the pastors.

On 19 January the military then released a statement confirming they were holding the two men.

According to The Irrawaddy, the pastors were handed to police by the military on 22 January, where they have now been visited by members of the Kachin Baptist Convention.

HRW updated its report on Wednesday to state the pastors had now been charged under the Unlawful Associations Act.

It said the Burmese government has long used the Unlawful Associations Act to restrict freedom of association and detain peaceful activists. The law carries a sentence of up to five years in prison.

'The arrest of the two Kachin Baptist leaders appears to be retaliation for their help in exposing wartime abuses,' said Matthew Smith, chief executive officer of Fortify

Rights. 'The military came clean about their detention only after local and international outcry, but they're are still at grave risk.'

Fighting between the Burmese military and the Kachin Independence Army in northern Burma has displaced more than 23,000 people during the past several weeks, HRW reported.

Baptisms

Albany Park Baptist Church, Bexley: Christine Everitt

Bethesda Baptist Church, Haverfordwest: Joe Jones

Bishop's Stortford Baptist Church, Herts: Vanessa Fox, Peter Hamilton Gray

Butt Lane Baptist Church, Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire: Sian Hough, Brendan Hanley

Nansen Road Baptist Church, Ipswich: Daniella Lynch

Witnesham Baptist Church, Ipswich: Maggie Gallant