



28 June, 2017

News:

**'An amazing outpouring of kindness and generosity'
A Baptist minister has spoken of the relief efforts following the fire at Grenfell Tower – including those of his own congregation**

Westbourne Park Baptist Church in West London is around a mile from Grenfell Tower.

'Members of the congregation know people who live or have lived in the tower, teach children who live there and are caring for those taken to hospital,' said its pastor Jem Sewell.

'As a result, there is a huge impact on us and a desire to help.'

In the immediate aftermath, several Westbourne members volunteered at Latymer Community Church, the church at the heart of the response. The prayer wall that has featured in many press reports is on Latymer's building.

Westbourne itself received and sorted consignments of clothes in the days following the fire (though please note, it is no longer receiving donations of items, and is passing all financial contributions to colleagues at Latymer Community Church).

The church also offered its offices as temporary accommodation if needed.

Jem has been posting updates about where to volunteer and how to give on the church's Facebook page.

On the day of the fire he wrote this:

So an update after an eventful day...

The response to the fire tragedy has been immense. Buildings set aside for sleeping those made homeless are pretty full with donations. Thank you, thank you thank you.

At the moment there seems to be enough on the ground but things may change over the coming days, watch this space.

There are some trusted 'Just Giving' pages being set up and I will post a link to these tomorrow.

Thank you to Manoj, Felicia, Wills and Lydia who I know have been volunteering and thank you to those I don't yet know about. Thanks to those who have organised collections we will get them to those in need.

Through the posts he's revealed some of the emotional impact of the tragedy and its response.

A June 15 post said this:

I make no apology for being a little tearful. I have just returned from the scene of an amazing outpouring of kindness and generosity. Remarkable things are being done in a sacrificial way on the ground. Those who have called from around the UK to see how they can help, thank you.

Another post on June 15 quoted Psalm 74:

So many of us feel helpless, we want to do something, say something, give something but don't know how.

I read the start of Psalm 74 this morning which asks strong questions of God when he appears not to act. There are times when we simply do not understand.

The Turning - first annual review

Organisers of a street mission which began in Reading and became known as The Turning have revealed that more than 7000 people in the UK have responded to the gospel in the last year

The Turning's first annual review also showed that more than 2000 evangelists have been trained for Turning events in eight areas of the UK. Each area has seen hundreds respond to an invitation to accept Christ.

The Turning originated at Baptist church The Gate (formerly Reading Community Church) at the end of May 2016. 'We thought it would be a one-week mission which could, possibly, stretch to two weeks,' explained Baptist pastor Yinka Oyekan and Turning team leader.

'Nearly a year on, this "one-week mission" has become #TheTurning. We have been to many towns and cities across the UK and even into Europe and seen many respond to the gospel!'

He added, 'The Turning is becoming a phenomena. What looked, from a distance, like a technique, on closer inspection is revealed to be a gift from heaven. A gift that miraculously empowers ordinary Christians, enabling them to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.'

The Turning sees Christians trained in evangelism before taking to the streets to speak to people using what they have learnt.

Each person prayed for is given the opportunity to respond to an invitation to accept Christ.

The report quotes an evangelist in Bristol who was initially sceptical.

'I came to The Turning extremely reluctantly! I was very wary of following a script and didn't want to associate with it in case people thought I was rude! But, out of obedience to God and my pastor I came – I thought I could come once, do my bit and never do it again... God had other plans!

'As soon as I arrived at the training, the teaching helped ease my worries and answered my many questions. Then I saw the script in action! Before I knew it, and much to my surprise, I was using the script, seeing people blessed and responding to the invitation to pray. I was actually enjoying it!

'The Turning Launch has given me the confidence to approach people and tell them about Jesus. It has reminded me that people are hungry and ready to receive the Gospel. I know to no longer hide my light but let it shine before all men.'

The annual review also highlighted how The Turning has been able to develop tools to help with follow up; tools it said it did not have in the first six months. The tools 'facilitate local churches to do follow up effectively', and will be highlighted in a separate release in August.

The review explained how 'a number of interesting challenges have emerged around the nature of the Church discipleship and churches ability to respond adequately to the those open to the gospel.' It stated that Yinka and the team have been working on how to address these and adopt best practice, which will be released in due course.

It also spoke of the importance of church unity in Turning events ('one key lesson that has been learnt is that The Turning is the most fruitful through a local church unity movement not within a parachurch context'), and how organisers believe the Turning will grow. It forecasted that by 2019, after the end of its third year, 375,000 will have responded on the streets of the UK. There have already been Turning events in Europe, and the report lists 12 areas where missions are planned for 2018.

Yinka told The Baptist Times the figures shares in the annual review are those they can verify, explaining the responses are a mixture of those who are genuine, seeking, confused, and those who are just polite. 'The truer figure is probably three to four times that have been prayed for,' he said.

'We have seen the power of unity and have been honoured to serve areas around the UK as we bring this grace to others,' Yinka added.

'We know that this is only the beginning and as this next year progresses we will see more and more Christians declare the love of God on the streets and see more and more people respond to that call.'

The review also featured a short film of Yinka in conversation with Paul Revill, Regional Minister for Mission in the Northern Baptist Association, during a Turning event in Newcastle.

Paul said, 'I've seen a huge coming together of churches, which has been wonderful to see. Personally it's been great for me to have opportunities to share faith. The more you do it, the more confidence you get. To be out there talking about the Lord has been wonderful.

'The openness of people to listen and to respond... there've been some significant encounters. People who you don't think will be interested say "Yes, I will pray a prayer."

'There's that sense that God is ahead of us and out on the streets.

'My hope is this is a movement which will spread to the whole church. We all need this – it's for everybody!'

Baptists in Wales celebrate 150 years

Baptists from all corners of Wales gathered in Carmarthen for a special day of celebration to mark 150 years since the formation of the Baptist Union of Wales (BUW)

Taking place in the University of Saint David on Saturday (17 June) the event was full to capacity with around 450 people in attendance, including more than 80 children and young people.

The BUW is a union of Associations working across the breadth of Wales among some 400 churches serving both Welsh and English speaking communities, and the event brought together Welsh and non-Welsh speakers of all ages.

The day began with bi-lingual all-age worship, followed by a number of seminar options with guest speakers John and Olive Drane, Nigel Wright, Roy Jenkins, David Kerrigan and Stephen Martin. A number of Welsh language seminars were held so that people could participate in their heart language.

A special presentation from the Bible Society and Dai Woolridge was performed, reminding delegates of their Welsh heritage as a missionary nation in years gone by, weaved together with the rich Welsh hymns sung by Cath Woolridge and Sound of Wales. Concert pianist, Aija Kim, played a wonderful reflective piece on Psalm 150 as delegates remembered the legacy of Wales to Korean Christians.

On a boiling hot day the water pistol used by Martyn Geraint, a well-known Welsh language children's presenter and Christian, helped to cool people down in the family worship time and the special birthday cake was happily shared among delegates, not to mention the free ice creams.

Speaking after the event Judith Morris, BUW General Secretary, said 'Our aim for today has been to celebrate with Baptists from across Wales and provide an opportunity for all ages to share in this significant occasion. We are delighted with the response and grateful to all those who have contributed to make this a day to remember.'

Justice in the spotlight in Yorkshire

Justice will be kept in the spotlight thanks to the YBA's new Yorkshire Justice Hub, which has met for the first time

Basically its purpose is to help make our churches more inclusive by raising awareness of matters of justice and changing culture among Yorkshire Baptists.

Institutional structures by their nature resist change and distance those who are different - be it through gender, race or disability, for example.

Four of the six task group members met at Wakefield Baptist Church – (pictured from the left), Mrs Carol Moore – a member of the YBA Executive and Cemetery Road Baptist Church, Sheffield, James Martin, also of Cemetery Road, and the Revd Craig Millward, of King's Centre, part of Network Church Sheffield, - plus YBA Regional Minister the Revd Mary Taylor. The other two members are the Revd Sue Barclay, currently completing a PHD looking at Gender and mission in Africa and the Revd Sally Nelson, Baptist tutor at St Hild College, Yorkshire.

The group aims to promote resources for building just churches, structures and processes and offer support when things go wrong, as well as networking with other regional and national hubs. Initially group members will work with a small number of

churches to encourage them to be the best they can be in welcoming and including all. Their emphasis will be on walking with individuals and churches. Biblical justice is not primarily about 'my rights' but giving justice to another and taking a risk to do this takes us on an exciting journey of transformative reflection and encounter.

Carol writes: "What does the word Justice mean to me? Issues of Justice and Poverty are mentioned in the Scriptures over 2100 times. Our guide for life. The Oxford English Dictionary definition of Justice: Just behaviour or treatment - 'a concern for justice, peace, and genuine respect for people'.

"We believe all people are made in the image of God. How then can justice for all not be at the centre of all that we are and all that we do? Be that putting out the bin for your elderly neighbour, supporting your local food bank, lobbying your local MP on issues of justice or providing meals for children in your locality during school holidays who depend on free school meals in term time."

James adds: "Justice is always a core function of God's love and one that as Baptists we are passionate about living out. The opportunity for us to continually move forward in Yorkshire by loving well in and through our church activities is vital.

"As a group we seek to highlight areas of prejudice, or lack of awareness and understanding through the work of the justice hub. We desire to remove unintentional non-Scriptural caps on people's experience and potential inside (and outside) the church by resourcing the wider family of churches."

Doctors back calls for the decriminalisation of abortion

The move was voted for by doctors' representatives at the British Medical Association (BMA) annual representative meeting on Tuesday (27 June). The BMA has previously opposed changing the current law on abortion

PregnancyThe new policy does not call for an absence of regulation and limits could still be set, but they would be subject to professional and regulatory, rather than criminal, sanctions.

BMA medical ethics committee chair John Chisholm said: 'This is clearly a sensitive and complex issue, on which doctors voiced a broad range of views during an informed and considered debate.

'Abortion is currently a crime, with exceptions, throughout the UK. Following the debate the majority of doctors were clear that abortion should be treated as a medical issue rather than a criminal one.

'What must be clear is that decriminalisation does not mean deregulation. The debate today and the BMA's new policy only relate to whether abortion should or should not be a criminal offence; the policy does not address the broader issue of

when and how abortion should be available. The BMA has established policy on these issues which remains unchanged.'

In response, the Christian Medical Fellowship released a statement expressing its 'dismay' at the move.

Speaking after the vote Dr Peter Saunders, Chief Executive of the Christian Medical Fellowship commented: 'This decision defies common sense and the BMA will dismay thousands of ordinary doctors and nurses with their unprecedented decision.

'What the BMA has chosen to do is back abortion on demand, without restriction including on length of gestation and sex. Anyone will be able to carry out an abortion anywhere by any means in any place at any gestation for any reason. Should Parliament bring forward legislation on a similar basis we would be the third country in the world after China and Canada to remove all safeguards to unborn children.

'Doctors will be dismayed by the British Medical Association decision to back abortion.'

Reflection: Creation groans - a response to the London fire

The whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for the redemption of our bodies. In this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?

But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. [Romans 8:22-27]

As Christians in the UK gather in the coming days, our worship will be overshadowed by the horrific tower-block fire that appears to have claimed so many lives in a shattered London neighbourhood. We are called to be beacons of hope in the midst of communities throughout the UK, that will be shocked, stunned and angry about the events that have unfolded.

We all know what it is to feel the sunlight on our faces on a bright summer's day, its warmth somehow lightens our spirit and gives us energy and life. Yet the same, flaming energy that comprises this ball of gasses at the centre of our solar system,

can engulf a building in minutes, destroying everything in its path in a truly terrifying and devastating way. In this simple yet deadly contrast we see the “groans of creation” - that which was made to be good turning into a distorted monster of danger and destruction.

As tears are wept; hearts break; while anger and disbelief spews out in torrents of words and actions; where spirits are crushed by immeasurable anguish, we who are part of this damaged creation add to its groaning.

And the Spirit’s response is not to tell us to pull ourselves together, compose quiet platitudes or calmly carry on. Words alone will never plumb the depths of despair, fear and anger of those who are shattered by these events. But prayers are more than words alone, and the Spirit who witnesses the deepest groanings of God’s creation captures the cries of broken hearts and offers their lament before the throne of our Creator.

Hope is never lost; for the day will come when creation’s groaning will cease and her renewal will be fulfilled. But as we wait, ours is not the task of providing explanations, imposing words or generating spiritual distractions. Rather it is to provide the space where the groans of a shattered creation can be heard, and assuring those who yet still struggle to find any words, that the anguish of their hearts is the only prayer they need to offer.

May God help us all in our task.

The Revd Phil Jump is Team Leader Regional Minister, North Western Baptist Association