



**12 July, 2017**

**News:**

### **Global Baptists promote religious liberty concerns**

**Baptists from nearly 50 nations focused on religious liberty concerns in multiple nations during the annual gathering of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) in Bangkok, Thailand, during the first week of July.**

Through resolutions, presentations and advocacy, the historic Baptist concern for religious liberty led to attention given to Iraq, Myanmar, Russia, Thailand, the United States and elsewhere.

The BWA's general assembly passed two resolutions focused on religious liberty concerns.

Three other resolutions passed dealt with slavery and human trafficking, refugees in East Africa and the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela.

A resolution on religious freedom in Russia expressed "great concern" about "recent legislation that restricts evangelism and missionary work by minority faiths."

The resolution noted that Baptists and other Christians "have been arrested and fined during the past year due to the new laws curtailing religious liberty." However, the resolution especially noted the targeting of Jehovah's Witnesses and called on officials "to restore the religious rights of all people."

The BWA also praised "the response of the Russian Baptist Union for standing for the principle of religious freedom for everyone, even for those with whom they have deep differences, such as Jehovah's Witnesses."

Russian Baptist leaders have publicly criticised the criminalisation of Jehovah's Witnesses, even expressing these concerns to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

In another resolution, the BWA offered its disagreement with U.S. President Donald Trump's travel ban on individuals from six predominately Muslim nations, noting the executive order has "raised serious concerns about religious freedom."

The BWA argued in the resolution that no law should be used to discriminate on the basis of religion. The resolution urges the U.S. government to "to affirm its historic commitment to religious freedom for all people" and calls on Baptists in the U.S. "to stand firm for cherished Baptist principles of religious liberty."

An even more significant vote during the meeting also showed religious liberty remains a BWA priority as members of the general council elected a new general secretary - Elijah Brown - to lead the organisation starting 1 January.

Brown currently serves as executive vice president of 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative, a Christian human rights organisation based in Virginia.

He described his calling as, in part, building up "Christ-centred witnesses within the public square, especially in areas of conflict, persecution, refugee marginalisation and injustice."

John Upton, former BWA president and chair of the search committee, echoed that sentiment as he described Brown as one who "values human rights, is a champion of religious freedom."

That focus will set Brown in the tradition of former BWA General Secretary Denton Lotz.

The BWA remembers Lotz and his wife by presenting the Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award during the annual gatherings.

This year's recipient, Cynthia Maung, is a Karen refugee from Myanmar who has lived in Thailand for three decades. A medical doctor, Maung established a clinic to serve other refugees.

The association of churches that Maung participates in - Kawthloolei Karen Baptist Churches - led worship for the BWA one morning and a minister in the camp, Saw Waldo, spoke in multiple sessions. The association is of churches in the refugee camps in Thailand for Karen refugees from Myanmar.

Through Waldo's messages, songs of lament by a choir and creative arts presentations, the Karen refugees living in camps in Thailand explained the denial of protection and legal rights - including religious liberty rights - that they have experienced on both sides of the Myanmar-Thailand border.

Worship times included prayers for the refugees and other Baptists in the southeast Asia region suffering from religious persecution. Another session focused on religious liberty concerns for Baptists in Iraq.

One of Waldo's presentations came in a session with the North American Baptist Fellowship, one of six regional BWA groups.

Waldo noted that "basic human rights and religious freedom" are restricted for his people. He said refugees particularly need people to help them understand their rights and help provide education.

'Basic rights are violated,' he explained. 'Refugees are the most vulnerable people in the world.'

Two U.S. State Department members based in Thailand accepted an invitation to come hear his presentation and the session ended with NABF individuals from the U.S. each writing a letter to their U.S. representative urging more attention and support for Karen refugees in Thailand.

## **Get equipped for Mission Where You Are**

**BMS World Mission is launching a brand new course to help Christians in the UK effectively engage in mission right where they are**

God calls all of us to mission – but he doesn't call all of us overseas. At BMS, we realise that the majority of Christians won't be asked to move to another country in order to live out their mission call. We also know that witnessing to Christ at home in the UK is tough.

That's why we are launching a new course called Mission Where You Are. For the first time ever, every Christian in the UK has the opportunity to come and train with us in cross-cultural mission.

We're distilling our 225 years of mission experience into a six-weekend course for people who are committed to, or exploring, mission where they are, here in the UK. We have learnt so much about cross-cultural mission over the last two centuries – lessons from our own experiences, from the experiences of our brothers and sisters around the world and from the people we've sought to serve on four continents, and from our mistakes.

As well as using these experiences to more effectively serve overseas, we want to use them to help cross-cultural mission in the UK thrive.

If you feel called to serve God in mission in the UK – whether that's in your workplace, through your local church, or in your community – Mission Where You Are is for you!

Mark Ord, Co-Director of our training centre in Birmingham and one of those spearheading this course, believes that this training is much-needed and that many Christians could really benefit from it as they seek to reach their neighbours and communities.

'I'm really excited about this course because there are lots of Christians who feel called to mission, in their workplaces or other parts of their lives, and who really would love to get the training that we offer to our mission personnel,' says Mark.

'Britain is a challenging place when it comes to mission; secularism has got into our bones, even in Church, and it is crucial that ordinary Christians recapture a vision and confidence, as well as developing capacity, for witnessing to God's goodness where they are.'

Mission Where You Are will run over six weekends, spread over two years, and will challenge your thinking, resource your imagination and energise your engagement in mission. You will learn from experienced practitioners and trainers, reflect on your own practices, and share experiences and stories of how God is at work where you are.

Each weekend costs just £150 per person, including food and accommodation, and will take place at our mission training centre in Birmingham. For more information, dates and a breakdown of topics for the six weekends click [here](#).

**We are so excited about Mission Where You Are, and pray that it will help you and your church to reach more people for Christ. If you're excited too, you can book today by emailing Leah at [lgwilt@bmsworldmission.org](mailto:lgwilt@bmsworldmission.org)**

### **Messy Church Does Science**

**Messy Church groups are encouraged to introduce science activities thanks to a new resource developed with a Baptist minister to show how science and faith mix**

Messy Church's new project Messy Church Does Science brings together faith and science under the safety-spectacled eye of 'Dr Dave' - none other than the Revd Dr Dave Gregory of Croxley Green Baptist Church, and Vice-President of the Baptist Union 2017-18.

The resource features 100 fun and eye-opening experiments graded for mess, danger and difficulty, as well as 'big thinking' and 'big questions' links to explore the connection between science and faith.

The project's aim is to demonstrate that science and faith are complementary, and help children and adults appreciate the wonder of creation.

It has been developed with the help of a grant awarded by Scientists in Congregations, and includes input from working scientists and theologians.

Dave leads a Messy Church Science Lab as a part of a monthly Messy Church, and has a background in physics, astronomy, meteorology and climate.

He said, 'Science is fun, a gift from God that brings joy to life, helping us to appreciate his life and love all the more.'

'All of us want to share that sense with others, helping them to enjoy the wonder that science reveals all about the world and ourselves, and through it something of the God of life who lies behind it.'

There are more than 3,735 registered Messy Churches throughout the UK in over 20 countries worldwide and an estimated 500,000 people attending each month.

Over half of those that attend a Messy Church have had little or no previous connection with church. Lucy Moore, founder of Messy Church said the organisation wants to give Messy Church leaders the confidence to do riskier hands-on activities, and be happy sharing basic scientific principles along with the biblical theme.

'Messy Churches are hot on discovery, experimentation and exploration; could we encourage even more Messy Church groups to feel confident about using science in the activity time, so that families would understand that the Church celebrates science and rejoices in it?'

'Our dream is that in ten years' time nobody will be saying 'science and faith don't mix' but instead it will be common to hear, 'I had my first experience of science being fun at my local church.'

**Love and language at Kennedy House**

**How a group from Oadby Baptist Church, Leicestershire, sought to welcome people seeking refuge in their community. By Bill Davice, a church member**

In the late-summer of 2016 The Home Office opened a G4S-managed, 'Dispersal Centre' for 50 religiously mixed, ethnically diverse, male asylum seekers, aged 18-50, in a centre (Kennedy House) in South Wigston. The men can be moved at any time, and once granted or refused refugee status they must leave Kennedy House within 28 days, after which the Red Cross can offer support and advice.

Although we had very limited experience of refugees, a number from the church felt individually called by God, initially just to see what we could do. We quickly found that the managing G4S Group offered little beyond the accommodation. We also discovered that the men could not access any language teaching for their first six months.

A small group of retired teachers and helpers came together and decided to offer a programme of basic English. Classes began in October and we have seen about 30 men from ten countries take part in up to three afternoon classes per week, including sessions of one-to-one conversation. Their English levels range from zero to fluent – their education levels from illiterate to Master degrees.

We are part of the emerging Sanctuary & Inclusion Group 'Hub' based at Kennedy House, which has put in place policies and protocols appropriate for working with vulnerable adults. We are beginning to access limited funding and we work with other denominations and secular charities.

We welcome all who want to learn, although we do not have the capability for men with serious learning difficulties. Inevitably, as we get to know the men, we become aware of the traumas and dislocations they have experienced and we offer limited practical and emotional support beyond the teaching.

Our primary focus is giving them access to English and we continue to respond to the changing dynamics of the centre. Over the next two weeks our Sunday worship will focus on 'Strangers & Aliens' and we will invite the church to contribute towards 'Welcome Bags' for new arrivals.

**Oundle Baptists celebrate special anniversary**  
**Oundle Baptist Church, Northamptonshire, held a special service to celebrate the 25th anniversary of its formal establishment (Sunday 25 June)**

A number of former members joined the present congregation in Oundle Primary School where the church meets each week for Sunday worship. The service was led by the current minister, the Revd Martin Hills, while the sermon was preached by the Revd Sam Griffiths. Sam, currently of Wellington Baptist Church in Somerset, was the first minister of the church.

Also participating in the service were Mrs Val Jones, the widow of the Revd Mike Jones the second minister, and the Revd John Singleton, who acted as interim minister between 2015 and 2016 and his wife Enid.

After the service a group of people who were present at the Service of Commitment in 1992 gathered to cut a special anniversary cake.

The church originated from a small group of people who had moved to the area from different parts of the country in the late 1980s and were seeking an evangelical fellowship.

The story of the founding of the church has been written in a short booklet entitled Living Streams which is available by email from the church ([managerno.1@oundlebaptist.org.uk](mailto:managerno.1@oundlebaptist.org.uk))

**Reflection:**

**Ministers need a system to read the Bible**

**Reflections on a survey of Baptist ministers and their Bible-reading habits. By Paul Beasley-Murray**



Earlier this year I sent out a survey to ministers serving churches belonging to the Baptist Union of Great Britain in which amongst other things I asked them: "What scheme(s) are you currently using for your reading of the Bible?". I received the following answers from 175 ministers:

- The Lectionary – 13 per cent
- Printed Bible reading notes – per cent
- Online Bible notes/devotional thoughts – per cent
- Reading through a Bible book with a commentary – per cent
- Reading through a Bible book without a commentary or notes – per cent
- I don't have a regular pattern of reading – per cent

The more mathematically aware readers of this will see that the figures suggest that a few ministers are using more than one scheme.

To my surprise, almost one fifth of ministers (19 per cent) said that they have no regular pattern of reading the Bible. The survey was anonymous in the sense that it was impossible for me to know the identity of the respondents – this was to encourage honesty in the responses made. Nonetheless, I wonder whether the actual percentage of ministers not having a regular pattern for reading the Bible was actually higher.

Nonetheless, even 19 per cent is a deeply concerning statistic. Indeed, I would say that it reflects a travesty of their calling. Ministers in their ordination vows commit themselves to the daily discipline of a 'rule of life', of which the systematic reading of Scripture is central. Discipline in the Christian life – let alone in a minister's life – is not optional. As Henri Nouwen has written: "A spiritual life without discipline is impossible. Discipline is the other side of discipleship."

In this regard the words of Paul to Timothy, a young pastor, are as relevant as ever to today's pastors: "Train yourself in godliness" (1 Timothy 4.7), or as Peterson puts it in his paraphrase: "Exercise daily in God – no spiritual flabbiness, please! Workouts in the gymnasium are useful, but a disciplined life in God is far more so, making you fit both today and forever." (The Message). This need for spiritual fitness follows on from Paul's description of a good servant of Christ Jesus as one who is "nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound teaching you have followed" (1 Tim 4.6).

The lives of God's servants need to be rooted in God's Word, for "disciplined meditation on Scripture is indispensable to Christian health, and indeed to growth in godliness" (John Stott). Only so ministry be exercised with integrity. Or as Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said: "I cannot expound the Scripture for others if I do not let it speak daily to me. I will misuse the Word in my office as a preacher if I do not meditate upon it in prayer."

Some of the other responses to the question should probably also arouse concern.

How challenging are the on-line Bible notes or devotional thoughts used by almost a fifth of ministers? What kind of printed Bible reading notes are being used by almost another fifth of ministers? What is the balance between the amount of Scripture and the amount of comment? Some popular Bible reading schemes amount little more to a verse or two of Scripture followed by a paragraph or more of 'devotional' comment. This is 'thin gruel' for any Christian, let alone for ministers. Ministers need to steep themselves in the Word of God.

How stretched are those who are reading through a Bible book with a commentary? The reality is that there are commentaries and commentaries. In this respect it was interesting to discover that a third of those using a commentary said they were using the light-weight ...For Everyone series, which are full of personal anecdotes.

How systematic are the slightly over a third of ministers (36 per cent) who read through a Bible book without a commentary or notes? Indeed, how systematic are those ministers (19 per cent) who read through a Bible book with a commentary? It is all too easy to focus simply on one's favourite books or passages of Scripture. There is much to be said for a formal disciplined structure for reading the Scriptures as also for prayer.

Should we be concerned that only 13 per cent of ministers enjoy a rich and balanced diet of Scripture? For me this is the great advantage of using a lectionary for personal Bible reading: it provides daily readings from the Old and New Testaments, and also from the Psalms. What's more, the lectionary does not over-face me in terms of the amount of Scripture I read – compared to say, the Robert Murray McCheyne system, which involves reading the whole of the Old Testament once a year, and the whole of the New Testament twice a year. I have time 'chew over' what God is saying to me.

Reading Scripture is a basic spiritual discipline. I find it significant that in John's Gospel when Jesus talks about the need to 'abide in him', he at the same time speaks of allowing his words to 'abide in us' (see John 15.7). Only in this way can ministry be fruitful. True, Jesus didn't have Scripture reading in mind – but there is surely an underlying principle.

The Revd Dr Paul Beasley-Murray retired from full-time stipendiary ministry in 2014. His reflections on a 43-year career in ministry are available in a four volume guide called Living out the Call.

Paul is chairman of Ministry Today, and writes a weekly blog to which people are welcome to subscribe by entering their email address on his web-site [www.paulbeasleymurray.com](http://www.paulbeasleymurray.com)