



26 July, 2017

News:

Celebration for retiring Team Leader

The life and ministry of retiring Regional Minister Team Leader Richard Lewis was celebrated at the EBA annual assembly

On Saturday, July 22 a celebration of the ministry of the Revd Richard Lewis, who is retiring from his role as Regional Minister Team Leader for the Eastern Baptist Association (EBA), took place at the Annual Assembly of the Northern Sector of the EBA.

The gathering at Norwich Central Baptist Church opened with a Bible study led by President of the Baptist Union the Revd Dianne Tidball, followed by the formal AGM for the EBA and a report on BMS World Mission.

At 3.15pm the Assembly, led by the Revd Linda Turner, Moderator of the EBA, turned its attention to Richard by presenting him with a good humoured 'This is Your Life' (and Ministry)-type biography, complete with photographs displayed from throughout his life.

Linda began, 'So for the last 15 years Richard has taken part in our Association life. In January 2002 he became the Acting Moderator of the Executive Council and since then he hasn't been able to escape!'

In 2007 the Association appointed him Regional Minister for the Northern Sector and in 2015 Richard became the Regional Minister Team Leader.

The Assembly heard that Richard, 64, was born on the Gower Peninsula in South Wales. He left school aged 16 and worked in the TSB where he met Jean, who he married in 1977. They soon had four children and in 1980 Richard became President of Christian Endeavour and went to work in their head office in Leamington Spa.

While working for Christian Endeavour Richard felt the call for ministry and in 1985 became a Student Minister in Earby, Lancashire. In 1988 he was called to Shipley Baptist Church where he ministered until 1994. Church members from Shipley sent messages and delegates to the occasion, one remembering "that the church grew so much in his time that they had to have the building extended".

Richard and his family moved to Penarth in 1994 to be the Missioner / Secretary for what is now the South Wales Baptist Association. Finally in 1999 Richard arrived in the East called to be Minister at Earls Hall Baptist Church in Westcliffe on Sea in Essex, before moving to Bedford in 2007 to be inducted as Regional Minister for the EBA.

Richard's wife Jean was presented with a bouquet of flowers and thanked "for her contribution to Baptist Union life and for her willingness to share Richard and for her support behind the scenes". Richard, playing on his dislike of 'gushiness' was presented with a joke 'No Frills Retirement Gift' coffee mug, plus a cheque and a garden bench on behalf of the churches of the EBA.

Following prayer Richard was invited to pass on some reflections from his years in ministry. He said: 'My reflection is that I soon had to realise that the ministry which I have enjoyed, for most of the time, has been God's gift....

'We are called to be ministers together as a gift of God for the communities in which we find ourselves. I want you to go away from this understanding that whoever He calls to serve and to work with you, you together are ministers of the Gospel because God has called you. It is God's gift to you and you are God's gift to each other and to our communities.'

Richard then instructed the gathering to: "Dream big dreams for God and then hold your dream lightly."

He said, 'I think as a Baptist family, as Baptists together, as our Union, as the EBA, we need to dream the big dream but we need to hold it lightly. I'm not saying dismiss it, but be able to allow the dream to flex and change as we listen to each other. And we need to listen to each other. Because God, by the power of his spirit, will take that dream and he will shape it into what he believes to be the plans and purposes he has.'

He continued, 'Those of you who are ministers hear this: the success of your ministry is not necessarily what you do when you are there, the success of your ministry is when you walk out of the door for the last time. Can this church continue effective ministry and mission without you?

'I believe that if you were to look back on my 25 - 30 years of Baptist ministry, I more or less got that bit, if nothing else, right. I have allowed churches to become effective, not because of me, but without me. And that is a key principle for any of us within ministry.'

Coming to the conclusion of his reflections Richard said: 'Significant church life and growth happens when we think outside the box. My plea to you as an Association, which you are pretty good at doing actually, is think outside the box. Be bold, be strong, because God is with you.'

Following worship, Richard then presented a ceremonial staff that had been passed to him by his predecessor the Revd Paul Hills to the Regional Ministry team of the Revd Nick Lear, the Revd Simon Goddard and his successor the Revd Beth Powney as a symbol of their authority amongst the churches of the EBA before praying a blessing on them and the gathering.

Richard officially retires on 31 August 31 and Beth, minister of Sandy Baptist Church in Bedfordshire, will take up her appointment as the Team Leader and Regional Minister for the Northern Sector of the EBA on 1 September.

'A place where we can serve and bless our community'

A Baptist church in Pembroke, west Wales has given a glimpse of its exciting building project in a new film

The film shows the progress Mount Pleasant Baptist Church is making with its modern, multipurpose building.

The building's structure is in place, and its first floor is the next stage. It will have a curved, flowing roof and a very contemporary design, while the church bought the abandoned house next door and converted it into a manse.

A number of members appear on the film to explain how the building has come about, and their hopes for it.

Dave said, 'As one of the older members of the fellowship here in Mount Pleasant, this project has really gripped me and given me great excitement. When we started this project around 13 years ago, we knew full well we didn't have the money to build a new church. But God spoke to us, and the church had the vision of building new place to worship for the future.'

Hannah, from the children's team, said, 'We're looking forward to having somewhere to be able to run around and express their love for God.'

Lynn, the church's community co-ordinator, said, 'The building to me is answer to prayer, part of dreams and visions we've had as a church, but individually it's a place for the community, a place that we as a church can meet but we can go out and bring the community into.'

'The church is the people, and this building, which is going to be magnificent, is going to be used for the benefit of the community.'

Des, a deacon, explained the church is committed to creating opportunities for others to explore the Christian faith and develop ways of meeting local needs.

He added, 'We are really looking forward to this building being a place where we can serve and bless our community.'

The project has been 15 years in the making, when the church decided there was a need to build a modern facility to provide spiritual and practical support to the community. Its attempts to improve the old chapel were severely restricted when the building was listed half way through planning a modernisation project.

Currently the church, which has had a presence in Pembroke since the 1860s, is involved in its community in a number of ways, including Street Pastors, and supplying a Christmas buffet for the homeless shelter.

New campaign to reach young people not in church Christian charity Scripture Union England & Wales has laid down a call to churches across

The new campaign, which focuses on the alarming statistic suggesting that 95 per cent of children and young people don't go to church*, has been launched by the charity in their 150th anniversary year.

It is hoped that churches would join in a united vision to take the good news of Jesus beyond the church to reach young people, and that the campaign will help educate, motivate and resource churches to increasingly look outward in their children's and youth activities.

Tim Hastie-Smith, National Director for Scripture Union England & Wales said, 'If today's young people aren't in church, we need to step out and take the good news to where they are. We can't wait for them to come to us.'

'There are many practitioners nationwide who week in, week out, are working relentlessly to connect with children and young people, but there remains so many who have not heard of Jesus. We see many great initiatives already in place and we want to harness that momentum to see even greater impact across the nation.'

By supporting the campaign, churches and Christians will be able to join with others to learn and share experiences, receive free resources, advice and funding, and ultimately ensure children beyond the church have many more opportunities to meet Jesus.

As well as encouraging more 95-focused mission, Scripture Union will lead discussions and facilitate learning through the campaign, creating opportunities to listen and learn from both young people and practitioners to better understand their needs. The 95 Talks, keynote speeches by thought-leading children's and youth workers, will be live streamed throughout 2017 and The 95 Census, a survey for

children and youth assessing the state of ministry, will identify the areas that need improving and remodelling.

The campaign is also seeking to provide resources and financial support to existing outreach activities. To this end, SU have set up a Good News Fund to provide churches with investment to see their initiatives get off the ground, and many free resources will also be developed based on learnings from the campaign.

Tim Hastie-Smith said, 'Our vision for this campaign is to see a movement of Christians working together to take the good news of the gospel to children and young people who so desperately need to hear it.

'We're aware that this won't be easy. It means stepping out of comfort zones, and some difficult questions will need to be answered, but that's all part of this campaign – bringing people together so we can learn and share together.'

* Peter Brierley, UK Church Statistics 2, 2010-2020, Tonbridge: ADBC Publishers, 2014

You can find out more about the 95 Campaign, or sign up to be a part of the initiative, at www.the95.org.uk.

Making ministry possible for Mandy

Mandy Rhodes was recently accredited as a minister in the Baptist Union of Great Britain before being ordained on 9 July to serve as Associate Minister at Dorchester Baptist Church. In a recent article on the website of Sarum College, where she was a final year student, Mandy explained her journey to ministry

I came to Sarum because it was a family-friendly training course for ministers. The Baptist Union does encourage people to go to denominational courses where possible, but with two teenage children it wouldn't have been possible to spend the required two days per week away from home in Oxford or Bristol, the nearest Baptist colleges to Dorset.

I had been at the point of giving up on becoming an accredited minister when the possibility of training at Sarum opened. Sarum offers a lot of flexibility to fit study around both home life and church life.

I come from a non-church family, my first church was Pentecostal and then I moved to a Baptist context. So I had very little understanding of the full spectrum of Christian belief beyond. Training at Sarum has given me an understanding of both the teaching and the value of other traditions like Anglicanism, Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy.

I think there's a tremendous value in understanding other denominations as a minister. I never quite understood that until I came to Sarum. I have found a real richness in some of the things I've learned about the Church of England and Anglicans from studying here.

I also think there has also been a benefit to the College and my fellow students from my dissenting Baptist awkwardness. It means I tend to ask difficult but important questions rather than just going along with the flow for the sake of it.

My congregation in Dorchester have noticed that richness coming through I think, especially in how I lead worship.

Dorchester is quite a big church and we are a busy church, and so I work with a Senior Pastor, a full-time Youth Worker, and we're in the process of recruiting a part-time Children's Worker. For most Baptist Churches it would be more normal to have a single minister. We have around 300 families on the books in our parents and toddlers groups, and this alone has allowed some wonderful moments of helping people consciously encounter God's love and the Christian faith for the first time.

About 12 years ago, we had a £1.2 million rebuild. The church is at 'the top of the town', right in the heart of Dorchester, so we let the building out to companies, organisations and charities and it's busy every day. It means we're having contact every day between Christians and people who may not have any church contact otherwise. We often get lovely comments about there being something special about the Church building.

One of the best things about training at Sarum has been studying in small groups with a tutor, which I have found particularly beneficial to learning. You feel able to ask some of the questions you might not feel comfortable asking in a lecture, for example if you really haven't understood something that everyone else seems to have grasped.

Some of the tutors have opened up flashes of real, faith-changing, insight. It can be really challenging to the simplistic assumptions of faith – I would compare it to an elastic band. Your faith is challenged and stretched (almost to the point of breaking sometimes) but then it pings back, but somehow bigger than it was before.

My reflection group has been tremendous, a huge influence on me. We pray for each other, we share, we laugh, we cry together, we have really strong bonds of friendship. The journeying together at an incredibly significant moment in our lives means I have made friends for life, who will be vital supports for my ministry for the rest of my life.

I simply couldn't have gone for training as an accredited Baptist minister without the flexibility offered by Sarum, and I will always be grateful to the college for that.

Migrancy and the UK: three areas to consider

Baptist theologian Helen Paynter has written a short booklet exploring the Church's response to immigration. In introducing it here, she offers three areas for reflection that may help broaden our understanding of such a complex issue

In February last year, I made a short visit to the Calais 'Jungle' (pre-demolition), and the Dunkirk refugee camp, as part of an aid-delivery and fact-finding delegation (pictured). I was appalled at the living conditions I witnessed, which included risks from fire, disease and violence.

In particular, the predicament of unaccompanied minors disturbed me. (My full report, written on my return, can be found [here](#))

Since then the migration situation across Europe has only intensified. We all recall the surge of public interest and sympathy following the tragic death of little Alan Kurdi in September 2015.

But thousands of people of all ages have died on the perilous Mediterranean crossing since then. As I write, 2,361 people have been documented as either dead or missing on that migration route this year.

Last month, I was privileged to spend Eid with a Syrian refugee family in Beirut in their current home – a windowless garage. They told me of their struggles with employment, healthcare and education, but most of all of their homesickness for Syria. Staggeringly, Lebanon currently accommodates an estimated 2m Syrian refugees, out of a population of around 6m (which also includes around 2m Palestinian refugees). Most of the Syrian refugees are living in such makeshift accommodation, and some in camps. The Palestinians – now often third-generation immigrants – are mainly in camps.

Broadening our consideration to migrancy in general, it is clearly a complex issue with multiple causes and no easy solutions. On the one hand are millions of desperate, needy, traumatised people. And also – rightly or wrongly – some who would like to take advantage of benefits, healthcare and job opportunities not available in their country of origin.

On the other hand, the UK is currently in a time of austerity, when affordable housing is increasingly difficult to obtain, and when NHS resources are genuinely stretched. Ours is a very multicultural nation, and while in many places diversity is celebrated – such as in my own home city of Bristol – in some places and at certain times, this has resulted in tensions and occasional civil unrest.

But the more that I think about this situation, the more I am convinced that migrancy is not just a 'problem' for us to 'solve', even benevolently. A better approach would be for us to understand it as a situation in which we in Britain are already enmeshed, whether we engage with it or not.

- To what extent has our own foreign policy – whether in the recent or more distant past – contributed to the current instability which is driving people from their homes? Better historians than I will be able to contribute helpfully to this debate, but the Sykes-Picot agreement which partitioned much of the Middle East, indifferent to the distribution of various diverse people groups, would seem to me to be a prime such example.
- Another question to consider is the extent to which the situation places an ethical imperative upon us. Is it acceptable, for example, to regard migrant deaths which occur near but not inside our borders as 'someone else's problem'? To what extent do diplomatic and other efforts to reduce the emigration of refugees from troubled regions absolve us of any responsibility for those who have already travelled and are at our door? This argument was used by my then MP when I contacted her about unaccompanied minors a few months ago.
- A third area to think about is whether we are really able to hold the moral high ground when it comes to so-called economic migrancy. The tabloid newspapers trumpet about greed and envy, but what is the difference between these and the much more acceptable characteristic of aspiration? And isn't aspiration, and indeed envy, the very basis of our capitalist society?

This situation has been disturbing me for some years now, and I have attempted on a number of occasions to articulate some thoughts on the matter. Some of my earlier reflections can be found here.

Most recently, however, I have developed some of the above questions in a Grove booklet *Immigration and the Church: Reflecting Faithfully in our Generation*.

In this slim publication, I aim to offer a handful of models for understanding and reflecting theologically on some of the pressing issues that global migration presents. I don't pretend to offer answers, but I offer these thoughts as a contribution to the ongoing debate, and I welcome dialogue on the subject.

May our generation not have to answer to the charge of indifference, either in the court of the future, or the judgment of heaven.

Baptisms

Alvechurch Baptist Church, Worcestershire: Fran Sims

Bedworth Baptist Church, Warwickshire: Enid Lacey

Bilston Baptist Church, West Midlands: Joshua Jones, Sundus Raza, Kezia Lloyd

Chatsworth Baptist Church, West Norwood: Matthew Peters and Fatoumata Lewis

Earlsfield Baptist Church, London: Ademola Akitoye

Friar Lane and Braunstone Baptist Church, Leicester: Takudzwa Chingonzo

Hawkshead Hill Baptist Chapel, Ambleside: Peter Salmon, Mike Mitchel

Nansen Road Baptist Church, Ipswich: Lucas Silva

Park Baptist Church, Great Yarmouth: Edward Dengler

Sandy Baptist Church, Bedfordshire: Sarah Dowling and Bethany Dowling

Stockport Baptist Church, Cheshire: 5

Upper Beeding Baptist Church, West Sussex: Charis Butchers, Alex Butchers

Baptism stories

Edward Dengler was baptised in the sea at Great Yarmouth, which can be watched on **Park Baptist Church's** Facebook page as it was streamed live and 675 people watched. Edward is Canadian and streaming meant his Mum and Dad could watch live. Sadly Edward will return to Canada at the end of the month

At **Hawkshead Hill Baptist Chapel** we recently baptised Peter Salmon - 50 years after going forward at a Billy Graham Crusade, and Mike Mitchel, aged 83.

I am happy to let you know that Lucas Silva (Aged 13) was baptised at **Nansen Road Baptist Church, Ipswich, Suffolk** with a great time of celebration followed by barbecue for all. Families and friends of Lucas attended to witness and celebrate his baptism. It was an amazing day of glorious sunshine with a great spirit of joy. An appeal was given to all to accept Jesus as their Saviour and Lord and a good number of people responded in the prayer of salvation and commitment to follow Christ.

We thank God for the baptism of Lucas. He plays 'Drum set' in our worship team. Please pray for God's protection upon his life so that he may continue to grow in his faith. Please pray for his friends and family members who came to church first time to find salvation through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Rev. Peterson Anand