



8 November, 2017

## News

### **Baptist Union Council: November 2017**

**Mission and pioneering were a key focus at the November 2017 Baptist Union Council.**

**Reflection on the 10th anniversary of The Apology, a new season for the Baptist Assembly, proposals for a new online directory, and progress towards meeting the pension deficit were also on the agenda.**

The role of Council is to discern the broad strategic direction of our Union. George Ayoma, minister of Fleetwood Baptist Church (NWBA) led worship over the two days at the Hayes Conference Centre in Swanwick (2-3 November). Opening the gathering and using Exodus as his text, George gave a picture of Council, churches, colleges and Associations journeying together in faith.

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### **Mission and pioneering**

The opening day was punctuated by three key sessions devoted to mission and pioneering, led by our Union's pioneer co-ordinators Roy Searle and Simon Goddard.

They challenged us to be 'bucket-list Baptists', to have a bigger vision and be willing to do things differently in changing times.

In the first session they spoke of the importance of understanding where we are, or as Roy noted, 'defining reality.' The world and the Christian context is changing, with fewer people in church.

Simon argued that the shift we are experiencing is more significant than the Reformation, and is as big as the change the third century church experienced. We are in the post-Christendom age where the church is being pushed to the margins of society.

'The nature of being and doing church is changing,' Simon said. 'But I want to say these things in context of faith – God does not want to leave us where we are – he wants to walk with us.'

Council members were given a picture of the four seasons – spring, summer, autumn and winter – and were asked to name which aspects of our Union most closely relates to each one.

The most popular season was autumn with 35 comments, but spring wasn't far behind with 28. There were 16 comments about winter in various contexts, alongside five mentions of summer.

'This is encouraging,' said Roy, 'there were lots of comments about new ways of doing church, lots of fresh vision and energy. But there were some very pertinent comments about it being fragile growth – how will it survive?'

The second mission and pioneering session, which took place in the late afternoon, was titled "What is good?". There was a focus on spring, on noticing the new things God is doing among us. Council members were asked to reflect on where God is at work, and to see if they could discern any themes or patterns.

Roy spoke of learning from farmers in his former home in north Northumberland, of how they are continually surveying the land, learning and adapting. 'As missional people we need to be men and women who can survey the land, recognise patterns and threads, and respond accordingly. We need to chart some of the things where we're seeing signs of growth.'

Members gathered in small groups around tables, and a number of patterns emerged in the an ensuing feedback session. These included:

- New forms of church, such as Kahaila and 57 West
- The number of Iranians coming to faith in our churches across the country
- Young leaders being appointed in some places
- Leaders laying down power and congregations being empowered

- People intentionally planting in communities where isn't a strong Christian witness.
- A growth in chaplaincies, particularly where there hadn't been chaplains before
- Churches finding new ways of being incarnational, such as Chichester with its missional communities
- Churches seeing needs in communities and responding to those needs
- Young people who are happy to share the faith in normal life
- Diversity of people coming into ministry – there isn't a mould for Baptist ministers.
- Growth in relational unity and partnership – ecumenically and among Baptists, particularly grass roots up
- Inspirational leaders, unashamedly calling people to Jesus
- Authentic and vibrant prayer that's resulting in engagement with community
- Lots of churches concentrating on people God's given them; doing less but doing it better.

The final session, on Thursday evening was entitled "So what?" Roy and Simon both shared glimpses of what they had seen on their travels. Roy said the picture was mixed: on the one hand, we're ageing and declining. However, people are recognising the need to change, and God is raising pioneers up among us.

Simon commended the ministry of Urban Expression, which plants congregations in areas of urban deprivation, but added that he believes renewal is going to come from existing congregations - pioneering is a willingness to try something new. He spoke about being "bucket list Baptists" - of churches and people being willing to take a risk.

Roy said if we're serious about pioneering, we need to resource it. He invited Council members to think about where we need to deploy our resources and energies. There were five areas to consider: Ecclesiology, Leadership, Resourcing, Partnerships, Scenario planning

The recommendations will be passed to the Mission Forum for consideration and implementation.

### **Apology**

This was the 10th anniversary of Baptist Union Council offering an Apology for Slavery. General Secretary Lynn Green was a council member at the time, and reflected on what happened.

Lest We Forget Like many others she arrived at the November 2007 meeting wondering how we could offer an apology for something someone else had done. But through prayer and deep listening, 'our friends David Shosanya, Joe Kapolyo,

Richard Kidd and Graham Sparkes enabled us to come to a place where we began to see differently and understand our share in and benefit from our nation's participation in the transatlantic slave trade.'

It was 'the most profound experience of understanding the mind of Christ together,' she said. 'It was a profound moment and I was changed at that Council.'

She then reflected on the journey since the Apology, and paid tribute to the ongoing work of Wale Hudson-Roberts, Justice Enabler and the significant contribution of the racial justice working group over the years. She highlighted the intentional development of our relationship with the Jamaica Baptist Union; the development of Justice Hubs, a range of resources (Lest We Forget study guide, Pentecost People, the Journeying to Justice book); the Sam Sharpe Project including the annual lecture; the establishing in our culture values that speak into this (feel like one team; celebrating diversity; Sharing a hunger for God's coming Kingdom; a holy discontent) and the intention that 20 per cent of Council members be drawn from the BME community.

But Lynn said that more needs to be done. 'We are 10 years on; while we have done many good things; we haven't done enough. Saying sorry is not enough. Words alone don't change things. Our hearts need to change. It's about repentance, turning around and walking in another direction, so that we can build Christlike relationships with all people.

'Just because we said something in 2007, we need to live it in 2017. We need to create together a genuinely new space for us all to live in.'

Following Lynn's reflection, George led Council members in the following covenant prayer.

### **Key Roles Nominations**

Lynn's Apology message was reflected in the report of Rupert Lazar, moderator of the Key Roles Nominations Team. He reminded Council, and in particular Associations, of the importance of keeping diversity in mind when appointing their representatives to Council.

However, work is progressing: a discernment day in autumn had worked well in terms of networking and building relationships, and it is hoped that Council will have four new co-opted members at its next gathering - all under 40, two female, one BME and one lay.

Phil Jump, North Western Baptist Association Regional Minister Team Leader was appointed as a trustee. Marjorie Allan, of The Well in Sheffield, was appointed to the Accompanying Group of the Baptist Steering Group.

### New churches welcomed

Eight new churches joining our Union were welcomed and affirmed by Council. The churches 'speak of our context and changing demographic, which is something for us to celebrate,' noted Faith and Society Team leader Stephen Keyworth in introducing them.

The churches are:

- 1 New Growth Ministries (EBA)
- 2 Lighthouse Community Church (SEBA)
- 3 Genesis Baptist Church (LBA)
- 4 International Praise Centre (LBA)
- 5 Pentecost Baptist Church (LBA)
- 6 Betel Romanian Baptist Church, Croydon (LBA)
- 7 London Chinese Baptist Church, Bow (LBA)
- 8 Darlington Baptist Church (NBA)

Four churches are ceasing membership of our Union for a variety of reasons. All the fellowships were prayed for.

### **Baptist Assembly**

Council members were asked to consider a proposal to commit to up to three two-day Assemblies from 2019. At the previous Council members had agreed that for the foreseeable future we will continue with one-day Assemblies, so plans are coming together for Peterborough on 12 May 2018.

However, what's really valued is the opportunity to meet friends and colleagues with similar interests, explained Stephen Keyworth, Faith and Society Team leader: that's the 'consistent voice heard in all the surveys and conversations around Assembly and our general life as Baptists Together.'

Since last Council there has been the Baptist Assembly in Harrogate, which, due to the generosity of the event hosts, saw a communion service on the Sunday morning. Stephen said it had been a good experience and allowed people to connect.

With no venue yet booked for 2019, a new proposal was brought before Council members to consider a season of longer Assemblies.

He invited Council members to reflect on the difference between the Assembly – the only place where churches are directly represented and where the AGM needs to be held – and the Baptist Assembly as a teaching and celebration event.

People had different expectations about it. Celebration and / or deliberation? Praise and /or prayer/listening?

If longer, the Assembly could feature some elements we are not currently doing, such as deliberation and engaging with leaders in specific areas, as well as increase opportunities for connection.

There is a cost implication. 'How much are we prepared to invest?' Stephen asked Council.

There was widespread support among Council members for a longer Assembly. 'Investing in togetherness in this way is serious,' said John Claydon, Regional Minister Team Leader Northern Baptist Association. 'How do you measure relationship capital? It seems in going to one day there is something we have lost.'

There was concern about the cost, in light of the current financial picture. However the motion was carried with a small number against or abstaining.

The proposal had not been agreed with BMS World Mission, and would require further discussion following Council.

### **Directory**

Council members were asked to consider a proposal for a new Baptists Together Online Directory.

A petition had been brought to the previous Council in March calling for the reinstatement of the Baptist Union Directory, which had ceased production as part of the reorganisation of the Futures process. Council members had commissioned Stephen Keyworth, Faith and Society Team leader, to investigate ways in which this information could be made available.

Stephen said there were a number of reasons for not bringing the directory back in printed form; including cost (the Futures process had taken away the Communications department, which produced the resource), duplication (each Association has a directory in some form), and developments to our database.

He offered an alternative, presenting a report outlining what a new online directory would look like.

Much of the information contained within the printed directory was already available on the website, the report stated. Two key areas were missing: lists of Baptist Union churches, and of Baptist Union accredited ministers.

Council directory A new 'Online Directory' section could contain these lists, and serve as a landing page from which to obtain the majority of the information previously held in the printed directory.

Churches would be listed alphabetically by town, and provide the latest statistics (members, children, young people, baptisms). The list will be updated after each Council.

Ministers would be listed alphabetically with the name of their current post and association. Stephen explained much thought had been given on whether to provide contact details, with advice taken from our Union's Data Protection Officer. Although this could have been done in light of our current Privacy Statement, 'there is a lot of difference between providing contact details in a printed book which people need to buy or access from a public library, and providing them on a website freely accessible to anyone anywhere.'

'We therefore took the view most people would not want their details published this way,' he said.

He explained there is sufficient information on the list of accredited ministers, alongside our church finder facility, for users to make contact via church websites in most cases. Where this is not possible, people are encouraged to contact the Ministries Team, who will pass their message on to the intended recipient.

The list will be updated after each Ministerial Recognition Committee, and when other changes need recording. 'We can change it quickly and keep the data up to date,' said Stephen.

His report concluded: 'The one Online Directory will enable users to easily find information about churches, ministries, other partner organisations and our structure. 'We hope that this will be a valuable tool to help ministers, churches and other users navigate the wealth of information which is freely available on our website.'

The proposal was warmly received by Council. Glen Graham, a Baptist minister who is blind, said this was the first time 'people like me have been able to have an accessible directory.' Paul Revill, regional minister of the Northern Baptist Association, called it 'a fantastic piece of work.' There were questions about whether the list would include unaccredited ministers, or missional projects that are not constituted as churches. Stephen responded that thought would be given to this, and given that the facility is online, changes could be implemented quickly.

Council members approved the proposal. The new online directory will be available to all users sometime shortly after Council.

### **Charitable Incorporated Organisation**

The next phase of the Baptist Union of Great Britain becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) took place. BUGB is currently an unincorporated

charity, and the previous Council saw members vote unanimously to accept the Trustees recommendation that BUGB incorporates as a CIO.

This time Council members were presented with a draft constitution. Rich Webb, moderator of Trustees, explained that the constitution has been drafted to meet the requirements in the Charities Act 2011 for CIOs, but otherwise mirrors as closely as possible the current BUGB constitution for the unincorporated charity. Members were given a chart explaining the main differences between the current and new constitution, alongside an explanation. They were asked to consider the specific wording on a small number of clauses, before voting to approve that the constitution proceeds to the next stage of the process.

There will now be a consultation period for BUGB members to consider the CIO constitution. A letter was sent to members on 6 November (more details here). In February 2018 BUGB Trustees will consider any amendments and approve the final draft, which will be brought to March Council. Assembly 2018 will be asked to adopt the new CIO constitution.

### **Finances**

A number of sessions concerned our Union's finances. Due to higher than expected legacies compensating for shortfalls in other areas, a small surplus is forecast for 2017, Richard Wilson, Support Services Team Leader reported. He noted that the 2018 budget process is well underway. Both Associations and Specialist Teams will have reduced funding and are required to make savings.

Members approved a three per cent increase to subscriptions for 2018, in line with inflation.

Treasurer John Levick spoke of the wider financial picture. He said our Union is facing a funding gap in the coming years with inflation pushing up costs and Home Mission on a downward trend. We are looking at sustainable financial models 'not because we are driven by money, because we want a missional future.'

Council members were invited to discern and reflect on a possible revised subscription model, and a more collaborative approach to setting the Home Mission budget.

### **Pensions**

Malcolm Broad, moderator of the Baptist Pension Scheme Employers Group (EG) which represents churches, gave an update on the "Family Solution" to the pension deficit. The idea of a series of proposals across Baptists Together to significantly reduce the pension debt and ensure that church deficit payments don't rise had been introduced at the last Council. 'When we met as an Employers Group, the key aim was to eradicate the deficit in the ministers' benefit scheme within 10 years or sooner, without paining our churches anymore,' said Malcolm.



He explained there had been meetings with pension specialists. Independent specialist pension lawyers and an independent firm of actuaries had been appointed. He said there is tangible evidence that a family solution can work, and outlined a series of proposals and projections that would reduce the deficit by half.

The EG will be putting the proposals to the Pension Trustee next week, so Council members were asked not to communicate them.

### **RBMHS**

A special general meeting of the Retired Baptist Ministers Housing Society (RBMHS) was called to approve a change of constitution to a CIO, and a separate charitable trust corporation to act as holding trustee for the CIO. The change mirrors BUGB becoming a CIO.

The change was approved and RBMHS will become the Retired Baptist Ministers Housing Organisation (RBMHO). Under the new structure, members of Council will no longer be the members of RBMHS (the BUGB Trustee Board will appoint eight of the RBMHO trustees.)

‘This is the last time this meeting will meet,’ noted RBMHS chair Bill Johnston. ‘With the change of constitution you have just disbanded yourself.’ He said if Council valued RBMHO bringing updates going forward, it would be happy to do so.

### **Prayer**

The two days were wrapped in prayer and acknowledgement of God’s presence. George led members in the following creed:

*We believe in God: Who has created as is creating, who has come in Jesus – the Word made flesh, to reconcile and make new – who works in us and others by the Holy Spirit.*

*We trust in God.*

His prayer on Friday morning focused on families in ministry; people who have left ministry; and others just starting ministry. Council held in prayer the family of Barrie Smith, a former Regional Minister and Council member who has died after a battle with cancer.

The Thursday evening prayer session was live streamed on Facebook. Churches were encouraged to join in, and add their prayers and reflections in the comments. The video has been viewed more than 2500 times.

## **Mass shooting at Baptist church**

**Baptists have been responding to the mass shooting at First Baptist Church in Texas, which took place during morning worship on Sunday and left 26 people dead and a further 20 injured**

Among the dead was Annabelle, the 14 year old daughter of pastor Frank Pomeroy and wife Sherri. He told reporters the church's tragedy will exalt Christ.

'Christ is the one who's going to be lifted up. That's what I'm telling everybody. You lean into what you don't understand. You lean into the Lord ... Whatever life brings to you, lean on the Lord rather than your own understanding. I don't understand, but I know my God does. And that's where I'll leave that.'

Sherri added that 'as much tragedy as Annabelle's death entails for our family, we don't want to overshadow the other lives lost yesterday.'

She continued, 'Now most of our church family is gone, our building probably beyond repair and the few of us that are left behind lost tragically yesterday. ... Please don't forget Sutherland Springs.'

Baptist Press reported that local pastors and field personnel with the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention (SBTC) began providing grief counselling within hours of the shooting.

Southern Baptist Convention President Steve Gaines and SBC Executive Committee President Frank S. Page arrived in Sutherland Springs on Tuesday to offer prayer and encouragement.

On behalf of the SBC, the North American Mission Board has offered to cover funeral expenses for all shooting victims in coordination with the SBTC.

Mr Gaines, pastor of Memphis-area Bellevue Baptist Church in Cordova, Tennessee, told Baptist Press SBC leaders want to help First Baptist however they can.

'Yesterday as we prayed at Bellevue for the families of those slain and also the others who were wounded at First Baptist Church, Sutherland Springs, I sensed the need to go there and try to minister to the pastor and his wife and their devastated congregation. I discussed it with Frank Page and Jim Richards, and we all agreed to go and help any way we possibly can.'

'Our Southern Baptist family grieves with this beloved church and the community it serves. Our prayers are ascending steadily to God's throne of grace. May God bring healing and hope to these that are hurting.'

First Baptist Church is affiliated with the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, which has shared specific prayer requests:

Pray for the children in the community. Friends and relatives were killed. Pray for the counseling process with the children and families.

Pray for the local pastors as they shepherd not only their own people, but also others throughout the community.

Pray for Pastor Frank Pomeroy and his family. Ask God for healing of damaged emotions and grace to move forward.

Pray for the affected families as they lay to rest their loved ones and navigate this tragedy in their own lives and future.

Pray their faith to not fail in this horrible season of grief.

Ask God to give our leaders greater insight and receptivity to guard against such future acts. Ask God to bring protection to our gatherings that this evil be restrained.

In the UK a prayer image posted on the Baptists Together Facebook page was shared more than 200 times (including by General Secretary Lynn Green), making it one of our Union's most widely shared posts. Tony Peck, General Secretary of the European Baptist Federation, also posted, saying 'Our hearts and prayers go out to our Baptist brothers and sisters and all others affected by this shooting in Texas.'

Lynn also wrote to Jim Richards, who leads the SBTC, assuring him of the prayers of British Baptists. 'We are standing in prayer with the church and community at Sutherland Springs and asking that the Lord will be your rock, comfort and hope in the midst of such pain and grief.'

### **Bags of hope at Halloween**

**Laird Street Baptist Church took to the streets on Halloween night and no, we were not trick or treating, writes minister Cathy Buntin**

Bag of HopeWe were giving out UCB Bags of Hope. A partnership of UCB, One Hope and World Vision, each bag contained a full colour Bible-based booklet, the Bible App for Kids Book of Hope, some sweets and chocolates. We gave out 200 bags to people passing the church and knocking on the doors of the local community.

What a great opportunity to connect with the people who pass our church and live in close proximity. People were blessed with these bags of hope and we were really encouraged by the response we received.

We trust God that people's lives will be changed by the books they read and the love shown to them by our church fellowship. We even had Honey, one of our deacon's dogs, helping us.

Cathy Buntin is minister of Laird Street Baptist Church, Birkenhead

### **Summer mission in Plymouth**

**This year a group of young people from Buckinghamshire came to inner city Plymouth for a mission week. How did it go?**

#### **How it came about**

Marianne: Two years ago our church sent a youth team to Moldova with Mission Direct. It was fantastic and the teenagers got a real feel for mission. So when they asked if we could go somewhere in the summer of 2017 we began to pray and seek out where God might want to send us.

For several months I contacted mission organisations, but as I wanted to take teenagers as young as 13 (start 'em young I say!) our options were limited and step by step, prayer by prayer it became clear that God was asking us to think differently.

Our church minister sent out some emails to ask if there were any churches that might like to borrow a youth group and things fell into place. The youth group got so excited and the whole idea just felt right - inspired by and infused with God!

Michael: We were approached by our regional minister Carl Smethurst as to whether we would be able to take a team of young people over the summer. We are a small urban church with limited resources, so while I knew there would be some logistical difficulties, I also felt the opportunity was too big to refuse.

So I created a basic plan for the week and sent it to Marianne to see if the activities would be appropriate.

#### **The planning**

Marianne: We raised a lot of money for our last mission but this time we wanted to cover our costs so that the churches we were going to serve wouldn't have to sacrifice too much, and we could eat, sleep and give money as needed.

We were a decent sized group with some very young members so I knew it would be hard for churches to host, but I also believed that God had called us to do this and he had it in hand. Some of the teenagers raised their money, some parents paid and we were also supported by the mission committee at our church and several of our church members.

Almost all the members of the youth group came to one or other (or both!) of the mission weeks and being in the UK gave us a bit more flexibility. The two weeks we

were doing were very different and that meant I could plan who might suit each week as well as separate some siblings. We were willing to try anything the churches asked us to do.

Michael: The key things we had to get in place were accommodation and food: we do not have a lot of spare rooms in our church, so we had to think more laterally. While talking with Ruth Sayers, a local CMS mission worker, she mentioned a hostel owned by a local lady from one of the Anglican churches. I asked her to inquire and as it was free we booked it straight away.

The other big issue was food. I asked a local chef who has helped us in the past and who works at the local homeless shelter about whether he could help provide lunches. It was a no hesitation 'yes' and he agreed to do it for free at first (but we felt we should give him some money for costs anyway).

While the plan was good, we did have a few issues: our plan for a fun day was scuppered by the venue pulling out, but we found other things to fill our time, including a local pub that was having its own fun day and needing a face painting team!

I did a walk around with a locally-based youth worker at each venue to assess health and safety risks, and that opened my eyes to so many other possibilities. Rather than being a chore, it actually created opportunities.

### **The week**

Michael: We tried to mix fun with hard work, so while we did get lots done, we also included a beach day, a zoo trip and a shopping afternoon.

But other than that, there were lots of activities we managed to do during the week. We had several trips to a local retirement home (one scheduled – the rest because the team and the residents enjoyed it), we tried out a Youth Café at a local café, we yarn bombed the local high street with pom poms and we painted a mural on a wall in a house the church uses. So many great activities and the team were so positive and energetic, it was brilliant!

Marianne: It was fascinating to see how another church so different from our home church worked. The teenagers were pushed out of their comfort zones and had to just step up in ways that surprised us all.

They loved having some time off and time together, they fell in love with another church and have talked about it a lot since we got back. I'm often proud of my bunch of teenagers, but I was extra proud of the way they did things that they would not have had the confidence or opportunity to do at home.

## **Aftermath**

Michael: The energy of the team was infectious and a real boost to the church. One of the residents at the local hostel has asked to be baptised. The service at the retirement home has doubled in number. The Youth Café made connections that we are hoping will turn it into a regular activity.

All in all, it was hard work but so worth it. We were so sad to wave the team goodbye.

Marianne: Once we recovered we led a feedback evening service for our own church, sharing the things we did and learnt, and the things we believed God showed us to bring back home. So often churches can get stuck in a comfortable rut and the mission really opened our eyes to new ideas and inspiration.

We're going to be leading a morning service before Christmas and are trying out a whole load of new ideas. We also want to maintain contacts with the churches we visited; we have a photo wall up all about our adventures; and four of the youth group are now getting baptised as well, which is cause for celebration.

## **Conclusion**

Michael: This was such a positive week for us as a church. We would love to do this type of thing again, it made such an impact on us and on the community around us!

Marianne: At first I was worried that the youth group would be disappointed by the lack of "glamour" in a UK mission - I mean, they were thinking suntans, elephants and unusual food, and instead we got rain and takeaway chips! But, seriously, God sent us and God knows best. It's made a lasting impact on each and every person to went on our mission and that's exciting.

A huge thank you to everyone who took a risk on a mystery bunch of teenagers.

**If your church would be interested in doing a similar week South West Baptist Association would like to hear from you:**

**<https://swbaptists.org.uk/mission/mission-opportunities/>**