



24 October, 2018

News:

Fix Universal Credit, government urged

Baptist Union General Secretary Lynn Green has joined charity and faith leaders in writing to the Prime Minister and Chancellor, urging them to fix 'failing' Universal Credit

The letter, co-ordinated by the End Hunger UK campaign, explained how Universal Credit is impacting its users.

In areas where Universal Credit has been rolled out, food aid providers report 'an increase in demand, with more people pushed into debt, destitution and hunger as a result of delays, errors, a lack of flexibility, and inadequate support,' the letter stated.

It called on the Government to reinvest in Universal Credit, improve its flexibility, and make a long-term commitment to ensure Universal Credit provides people with enough income to afford food on a regular basis.

It was accompanied by an End Hunger UK report which draws on feedback from more than 70 frontline food aid providers across the UK.

'We have all come together as part of the End Hunger UK campaign because we share a vision of a society where everyone has access to good food, and no one has to go to bed hungry,' the letter stated.

'We still believe that there is an opportunity to fix Universal Credit to prevent more people going hungry.

'We look forward to the opportunity of discussing this with you further and continuing this dialogue as we build a welfare system together that can support our most vulnerable citizens.'

Joining Lynn in signing the letter were Derek Estill, moderator General Assembly United Reformed Church, the Revd Michaela Youngson, President of the Methodist Conference, Niall Cooper, director Church Action on Poverty and Emma Revie, chief executive of the Trussell Trust.

Theology Live! line-up for 2019

A day which recognises the breadth of Baptists engaged in theological and biblical scholarship is returning at the start of next year - and a number of speakers have been confirmed

Theology Live! takes place on Thursday 10 January at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, starting at 10am. The day follows the format of BMS World Mission's Catalyst Live event, and first took place in December 2017.

This year organisers have increased the number of speakers and are planning more breaks within the day.

'Back by popular demand, following the brilliant event in 2017, we are pleased to announce the 2019 'Theology Live!', they state.

'There's a great number of Baptists engaged in theological and biblical research, and this day-event brings them together to share their thinking, fostering a community of research amongst British Baptists.

'The day will comprise a series of short papers, reflecting the diversity of current Baptist theological engagement, with opportunities to interact with speakers.'

Confirmed speakers include:

Beth Allison-Glenny
Seidel Abel Boanerges
David Bunce
Andrew Burnham
Tim Carter
Julian Gotobed
Leigh Greenwood
Claude Halm
Joe Haward
Rosa Hunt
Rob May

Sally Nelson
Gale Richards
Dan Pratt
Hazel Sherman
John Weaver

Theology Live is organised by Andy Goodliff, Steve Holmes and Simon Woodman.

Tickets are free for anyone wishing to attend. Book your ticket here:
<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/theology-live-2019-tickets-46644125836>

A little more conversation

How Gilgal Baptist Church provides a thought-provoking presence in its town's Elvis festival. By Ivor Williams

Imagine a town where every street, pub, café, hotel and chip-shop has wall-to-wall Elvis Presleys. Everywhere you look you can see ordinary people (and their children too) walking around dressed in a range of Elvis costumes – from army uniforms to gold lamé suits to Las Vegas caped jump-suits. With them are their partners dressed in polka-dotted dresses, 1950s and 1960s style, and thousands of non-costumed people wearing Elvis T-shirts, Elvis scarves, Elvis wigs and plastic Ray-Ban style glasses. Shop fronts are covered with Elvis displays and images.

For three days in the autumn, that's what happens to a small Welsh seaside town called Porthcawl.

With around 16,000 residents, Porthcawl hosts an annual Elvis Festival which, for a late September weekend, brings a staggering influx of more than 30,000 visitors. It has become the biggest Elvis festival in the world, attracting visitors and Elvis tribute artistes, mainly from Britain but also from further afield.

With a prospective audience as big as that, it's no wonder that Gilgal Baptist Church can be seen witnessing at the band stand on the main shopping street, John Street ... it's a heaven-sent opportunity not to be missed!!

Although the church can often be seen witnessing there throughout the year, the Elvis festival must be one of the highlights.

With many of the church members witnessing in the open air (often garlanded with a Hawaiian lei or two) it is the perfect way to engage with passers-by and speak to them about having faith in Jesus.

The church's approach is quite novel. While church members chat to visitors, giving out more than 200 tracts and leaflets – including 'Elvis Million-Dollar Bills' with a Christian message made up of his song titles – I sing many of the Elvis Presley gospel songs, while pastor Martin Gillard mans his 'Graffiti Board.' Curious people cross over the street to see what's going on and, hopefully, leave with something to think about, having been invited to come along and join the church in worship at a future date.

Gilgal at Elvis Festival - Mar

The Graffiti Board (a white-board) has an open-ended question about Elvis written on top and people are invited to write a comment underneath. Questions over the years have included, 'Was Elvis a Real Christian?', 'Is Elvis in Heaven?', 'What is Your Favourite Elvis Gospel Song?'

This year the question was 'Why Did Elvis Sing Gospel?'

Each year, the questions have proved to be very thought-provoking and many visitors - and towns-folk - have had some stimulating conversation with Martin and his team and have written interesting, wide-ranging answers.

The whole Elvis Festival experience has to be seen to be believed and the happy, friendly atmosphere makes it so much easier to begin talking about faith to complete strangers. In fact, it's the opposite of one of Elvis's songs ... Gilgal Baptist Church gets 'A Little MORE Conversation' about the Lord!

The church's motto is "To know Jesus better and to make Him better known" The Elvis Festival gives us a huge platform to be able to do this and we hope that as visitors leave the band stand they'll have the team's words, and maybe a gospel song, going around their head ... and, perhaps they'll be 'All Shook Up' and want to find out more about Jesus!

Tackling modern slavery: 'Prayer a great place to start'

Christian charity CARE called for the church to commemorate Anti-Slavery Day 2018 (Thursday 18 October) by dedicating time to pray for victims of modern slavery

Anti-Slavery Day is enshrined in law and is an opportunity for charities and organisations across the UK and the EU to shine a spotlight on the plight of those trapped in human trafficking.

Modern slavery is an abhorrent crime that exploits women, children and men for numerous purposes – including for sex, forced labour, domestic servitude, criminal activity and even sometimes for organ harvesting.

According to recent estimates, there were 40.3 million people trapped in modern slavery in 2016 – around 70 per cent of those women and girls. In the UK alone, the most recent estimate shows that 136,000 people are trapped in exploitation, some ten times higher than was previously thought.

In the run-up to Anti-Slavery Day CARE has used social media to publish specific prayers for victims and those working against modern slavery and there are a vast range of resources available for church leaders on the CARE website.

CARE's Senior Policy Officer – Human Trafficking, Louise Gleich said, 'Modern slavery robs people of their dignity, freedom and human rights and it has no place in our society. The sheer scale of the problem is frightening and many victims are hidden in plain sight.

'It's easy to feel overwhelmed at the scale of modern slavery and wonder how we can help to tackle it but we think prayer is a great place to start.

'We know prayer has the power to change things. If the church gets behind this issue and spends dedicated time this week praying for victims of modern slavery, just think of the amazing impact it would have.

'It is hard for those of who have never encountered or experienced modern slavery to relate to the suffering and trauma victims experience.

'Victims face many challenges as they seek to rebuild their lives and they need our prayers, as do all those amazing organisations who devote time to helping them.

'For the church to step up and commit to pray for victims of modern slavery it would not only raise vital awareness about this crime but also send a powerful message to society about how the church supports the vulnerable in society.'

The charity's call was backed by the Revd Dr Dan Pratt, Antislavery Co-ordinator for the Eastern Baptist Association. He said, 'Antislavery day gives our churches an opportunity to remember and pray for the thousands of victims of Modern Slavery in the UK today. Most of these victims have not yet been found and are still held in captivity.

'Let's pray that the suffering and exploitation of these vulnerable people will be brought to light and that God will use our churches and communities to 'set the captives free'.

'Let's pray for the survivors who have escaped abuse, that God will bind up the brokenhearted and enable them to receive adequate care, love and support.

'Let's pray for our churches that we will have the courage to go into the darkness to be Christ's light even when it is costly.'

Football takes Stalham Baptists' message to Germany

A football from Stalham Baptist Church, whose team plays in the Norfolk Christian Football League, has found its way across the North Sea to a small island off the German coast

Stalham Baptist Church football manager Josh Holebon, manager of Stalham Baptist Church football club recently received an unexpected email from Germany.

"My name is Thomas, I live in the south of Germany near the city of Freiburg.

Some weeks ago, we went to the small Island Baltrum in the Northern Sea, Germany. On a sunny day, as we walked along the dunes, I found a football with the inscription "STALHAM BAPTIST".

The football was wet and heavy. I asked myself where this ball was coming from, and later I researched and found you in the internet.

Had this football found the long way over the ocean from Great Britain to Baltrum, Germany? A distance of 250 Miles! Very interesting.

Finally, I gave the ball to some children who played in the sand on the beach and they were happy about their new friend.

That's a little story I wanted to tell you and maybe you know the answer."

David Child, one of the leaders at Stalham Baptist, said: 'A big thank you to Thomas (pictured) for tracking us down. Perhaps Josh and the SBC team has found a unique way of spreading the name of Stalham Baptist Church to the world! Who needs a message in a bottle when you can use the world's favourite game?'

Baltrum is a barrier island off the coast of East Frisia, in Germany, and is a municipality in the district of Aurich, Lower Saxony. Baltrum is the smallest island in a chain of the seven inhabited East Frisian Islands.

This story has now been followed up by the BBC, Sky Sports and the Eastern Daily Press.