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| <i>Weekly Prayers, News and Thoughts</i> |
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Welcome to our condensed Newsletter. We are publishing this in digital format to help keep us up to date with each other.

Wednesday Community Days

- Whilst we are not currently holding our indoor events due to Covid and the need to protect everyone's safety, we will continue to provide takeaway food at lunchtime each Wednesday whilst observing the appropriate safeguards.

Church Services

- We will continue to with the creation of online services which will be available via YouTube and our website.
- Audio CDs of the services are available upon request.

Bible Study

- *Takes place on Tuesdays 1pm.*
- Please use the front entrance on Cockton Hill Road, but if you are physically unable to enter that way, you may use the side entrance on Westfield Rd.
- We will be using the Sanctuary and will be socially distanced.
- Please wear a face covering, unless you have an exemption and sanitise your hands, on entering.
- The only toilet to be used, is the one by the front doors.
- No refreshments will be served, so please bring anything you need, for your own use only.
- No Church Bibles or Hymn books will be available, so please bring your own.
- ***Sorry to give so many rules, but it is so we all keep safe. Very much looking forward to seeing each one of you - John Gaines***

Sharing God's Comfort

- If you know of anyone you feel would benefit from our online offerings please feel free to share our website at www.bishopbaptists.co.uk with others so they too can enjoy our weekly online service (also available on our YouTube Channel), newsletters, blog and other items of prayer and interest.

Spreading God's Love

- Pray for those who mourn and have lost loved ones to Corona Virus, for those who have the illness, for those caring and supporting those who are ill, for those exploring the possibilities of vaccines and for the effectiveness of national strategies and personal practices in overcoming the pandemic.

Please feel free to contact the following NBA members for additional help and support:

- Paul Revill paulrevill@thenba.org.uk or
- Elaine Webster elainewebster@thenba.org.uk

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| Prayers |
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Please keep in your prayers all local churches in Bishop Auckland area and especially our Northern Baptist Association, and the work they are continuing to do to help the local people cope with the problems caused by Coronavirus and Covid -19 and continue to do the Lord's work in our towns and communities.

As the Anti Covid restrictions and various support schemes, all of which are in a state of flux and constantly changing, we must remember those who will be affected by the onset of major job losses soon across our economy. Many people are only just hanging on financially now, commonly being reliant on food banks to feed their families and who are going to be faced with more hard times. Remember them and "look out" for them.

Please continue to pray, either by yourself, or collectively, using one of the many online and social media channels for:

- ***Members & friends of our Fellowship***
- ***People, families & neighbours within your own circle experiencing difficulties.***
- ***Those who work for our benefit and welfare in frontline jobs, putting themselves and their families in vulnerable and frequently life-threatening situations.***
- ***Supermarket staff and other supply industries***
- ***Carers in Care Homes and Nursing Homes and Sheltered Housing and Hostels***
- ***Carers who look after members of their own families***
- ***Postal Workers and other delivery people who bring us our mail, food, and medicines.***
- ***All those in positions of leadership, research, development, industrial organisations, and new productions, at this traumatic time***

We are asked by NBA to pray for our Baptist Hospital Chaplains at this time of great challenge and for our NHS as they support staff and patients who also carry anxieties of their own:

- ***Rev Robert Muir - Wansbeck Hospital, Ashington***
- ***Rev Jim Wright - Lead chaplain at North Tees Hospital, Stockton***
- ***Rev Rodney Breckon - James Cook Hospital***
- ***Rev Graeme Harrison - Lead chaplain, Northumbria Healthcare Trust***
- ***Rev Liz Edwards - North Tyneside hospital***
- ***Rev Dave Etherington – Bishop Auckland and North Durham Hospitals***

Please pray for all those living, working and playing in the following communities:

- ***Dene Hall Drive***
- ***Pollards Drive***
- ***Etherley Lane***
- ***Escomb Road***
- ***Bolton Grove***
- ***Deerness Road***

Please also continue to pray for:

- ***Butterwick Hospice***
- ***Bishop Auckland General Hospital***
- ***A successful transition to the ending of lockdowns***
- ***The people who have received food through our Community Food Share***

Please give thanks for the organisations and people who contribute food, clothing and books for us to distribute to others:

- ***FareShare (via Asda)***
- ***Feeding Families***
- ***The Auckland Project***
- ***Local Donations***

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| Ascension Day – Thursday 13th May 2021 |
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In the United Kingdom it is observed on the 40th day of Easter. It commemorates Jesus Christ's ascension into heaven, as described in our New Testament.

Ascension Day is one of the earliest Christian festivals and dates back to the year 68 AD.

According to the New Testament, Jesus Christ met several times with his disciples during the 40 days after his resurrection to instruct them on how to carry out his teachings. It is believed that on the 40th day he took them to the Mount of Olives, where they watched as he ascended to heaven.

Ascension Day marks the end of the Easter season and occurs ten days before Pentecost and is usually celebrated on a Thursday.

In England, Ascension Day is associated with various water festivals ranging from Well Dressing in Derbyshire to the Planting of the "Penny Hedge" at Whitby, a small town in Yorkshire. Other customs may include "beating the bounds". In the old days, it involved beating boys with willow branches as they were driven along parish boundaries, not only to purify them of evil but to teach them the limits of their parish. In modern times, it involves people in the locality walking around their farm, manorial, Church or civil boundaries pausing as they pass certain trees, walls and hedges that denote the extent of the boundary to exclaim, pray and ritually 'beat' particular landmarks with sticks.

Processions are held, symbolizing Christ's entry into heaven and, in some countries, chasing a "devil" through the streets and dunking it in a pond or burning it in effigy – symbolic of the Messiah's triumph over the devil when he opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

The Feast of Ascension day is an often-neglected festival in the Church, perhaps because it always occurs on a Thursday.

But Ascension Day is important because it is the start of a new era in history – the era where God says to his people, 'Build my Kingdom, and I will give you the strength to do it.

Jesus had risen from the dead, eaten fish with the disciples and walked with them up to Mount Olivet. Jesus had continued to teach them from the law, the psalms, and the prophets. And then, suddenly, he was lifted-up and carried away on the clouds. Going back to glory! Hallelujah! And those who were with him watched the sky.

They waited and they watched. They watched and they waited. Until the angels asked them, "What are you doing? Why are you gazing into space?"

The question still resounds!

Why are we gazing into space? Waiting and watching! Jesus taught us. Jesus showed us. Jesus promised to clothe us with "anointedness", and with the Holy Spirit, and power to do things that he did. And indeed, the Holy Spirit came and continues to be present that we might do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

We have just marked Ascension Day for 2021

Next Sunday, 23rd May is PENTECOST (WHITSUNDAY)

Rainy Day – A Plea from a Baptist Minister

Here's a plea from a Baptist Minister: ***Could we be doing more to prioritise giving to Home Mission?***

I was in conversation with another Baptist minister who, like me, is reliant on Home Mission. This is what he often heard about Home Mission from the many people in churches near him.

Yet will it always be there?

Home Mission started in the late 1700s to support itinerant preachers, firstly in Cornwall, but soon spread to other areas. We mostly know it as the element of Baptist life that supports small churches or pioneer ministry. It is a vital part of church life because it also supports our Associations and enables the Support Services Teams to exist. Our entire denomination depends on Home Mission, and there is an assumption that it will just always "be there" as my colleague suggested.

But Home Mission will not always be there if we do not nurture it and make sure it is prioritised in our church communities. Giving to Home Mission has been gradually declining for a number of years.

It is a sad fact that although five per cent is the recommended *minimum* amount, it is well known in Baptist circles that many churches are not even close to that, while some of the wealthiest churches in our denomination often pay next to nothing. Often the reason is that they have other things they give to. Worse still they say too much goes to Support Services and next to nothing on mission.

And yet we are a denomination that is based on interdependence, not independence. While no one from outside the church can tell us what to do - that's a matter for the members' meeting - at the same time we are in covenant relationship with other local and national (and through BMS, international) Baptist churches. So why do we not make this a priority of our giving?

As a pastor of a Home Mission church myself, I cannot always understand the pressure of larger church leaders with staff and a team to lead. The pressure I have is different. We are looking, despite a generous Home Mission grant, at a £3k loss in 2021, which we can just about cope with, but not for long. The pressure is that when our small savings run out, then the only thing left to cut is me! Ministry is the biggest outgoing in our church's budget. The pressure on me is knowing that unless Home Mission is maintained for next year (there is no guarantee) then redundancy is the only option. That may mean moving to a new house, school, social support group, which is a massive pressure on any family.

The stipend is meant to mean that I can work without worrying about money, but every month the financial report comes into my inbox and I check to see if we are on track, or often below, where we should be. It makes long-term planning almost impossible, and although we have no desire to leave, we are on the settlement list "just in case", which never allows us to feel secure in our ministry.

The sad thing is while many Home Mission churches struggle to even cover the basic stipend there are many, many, more who are ready to pay way above stipend. Many cite the pressures of leading larger churches (listed above), but why do we think that ministers in smaller churches do not have equal pressures?

Covid has left many of our churches poorer, maybe through loss of giving or rental income. Some churches have finally had to tap into the rainy-day savings they have been storing up for years. But Baptist churches have been in decline for a while, and the rainy day is not Covid! If we are not careful smaller churches, urban churches and rural churches are going to disappear over the next decade, and Baptist churches will simply not exist outside middle-class suburbs. Is that really what we want to happen?

So, what could we do?

1. All churches should see 5 per cent as the minimum gift but should aim to exceed that gift if they can.
2. Churches which pay above the standard stipend could give an additional gift equivalent to the extra they pay (so if they pay their minister £4k above stipend - Home Mission gets £4k).
3. Churches with significant savings (rainy-day) could start distributing those funds to other local churches, rather than hoarding for themselves and “their” needs. The rainy day is here!
4. Legacy gifts to churches could be used to benefit other local churches (if the terms of the legacy allow).
5. Churches could add an item on the gift aid (standing order) forms for people to require a percentage of the money they are given to be go directly to other local churches.
6. The question is - why should any church do any of these things? The answer is simple: the money given is not “yours”, it is God’s. Generosity is encouraged by Paul. We do not serve money, but Jesus, and that money is given to the church, first and foremost, as a method of blessing those who do not have money. It's how Baptists support each other and is enabling ministry and mission in many places.
7. Please consider increasing your giving to Home Mission.

(By a Baptist Minister who submitted the piece for inclusion in The Baptist Times - the minister has asked to remain anonymous.)

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| "The Christian Church does so much good for all Londoners" |
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Sadiq Khan has won another four years as London's mayor, beating Conservative candidate Shaun Bailey, saying ahead of his win that *"the Christian church does so much good for all Londoners"*.

Mr Khan spoke to Premier two days before polling day, saying he finds the prayers for him when he visits churches "inspiring".

The former MP also praised churches for their role in social justice: *"Over the last five years, I've really properly understood just how much our Christian communities contribute to our city's success. I've seen in the last five years our churches stepping up to provide support for lonely Londoners, I've seen them stepping up to provide support for those sleeping rough, to those who are homeless, to young people - giving them constructive things to do."*

The Labour mayor added that churches are *"not just helping Christians, by the way, and this is one of the things that I don't think non-Christians understand ...the Christian church does so much good for all Londoners, irrespective of faith, race, background that I'm so incredibly proud of the friendship I formed with all the churches across London"*.

"I want to thank, through the medium of this interview with Premier, all those listening to and reading this, for just your practical support by your prayers. The number of churches I've gone to where I've heard for myself, the vicar, the priest, the Father, the congregation praying for me and all our leaders is just so inspiring, and I'm always struck."

(Part of an article by Sara Bentley - Premier Christian News, Sun 08/05/2021)

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| NBA Prayers |
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We are asked to pray for our NBA Leadership Team this week:

For John Claydon (Regional Minister Team Leader)

Thanksgiving: For John's twenty years of generous, gracious, faithful and effective ministry.

Prayer: The Lord will lead and provide for John and Janet as they transition from ministry to retirement.

For Paul Revil (Regional Minister Mission)

Thanksgiving: For Paul's enthusiasm and dedication in seeking to encourage us in the many ways which we can reach out with the Gospel of the Lord.

Prayer: That Paul will not be overburdened as Hayley Young settles into her new NBA leadership role which will inevitably take some time.

For Hayley Young ((Transitional Strategic Leader (Regional Minister))

Thanksgiving: For Hayley's appointment (1st September) as our Transitional Strategic Leader (Regional Minister) and as President Elect of the BU with all her gifts of leadership.

Prayer: That Hayley will settle quickly into her new role and the Lord will help her as she looks at the NBA with fresh eyes and recommends ways for us to become more effective in our witness for the Lord. That the Lord will provide housing for Hayley as she moves into our area.

For Tony Ruddie (Moderator NBA)

Thanksgiving: For all the hard work that Tony has put into facilitating the process which resulted in the appointment of Hayley as our TSL.

Prayer: That the Lord will enable Tony to continue to offer effective leadership to the NBA Council.

For Elaine Webster (PA to Regional Ministers)

Thanksgiving: For the way that Elaine has been able to support John in such an efficient and dependable manner.

Prayer: That the Lord will help Elaine to continue to support the Leadership Team in the coming days.

Mike Cross (NBA Prayer Co-ordinator)

Ephesians 1: 15-16 *"For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers".*

NBA Regional Minister Appointment

Dear Friends

It is my joy and delight to announce today the appointment of the Rev Hayley Young as our Transitional Strategic Leader (Regional Minister).

This decision was taken at our Assembly last Saturday with overwhelming support by those present and is more publicly made known today.

Hayley comes with gifts that fit her for this role and will compliment those of Paul Revill as they share in leading our Association.

In between her interview and our Assembly, Hayley was also elected to be President of Baptists Together for 2022-2023.

This enables both local and national strategic influence to work together.

We believe this juxtaposition of appointments has resonance with the word that Lynn Green gave to the minister's conference last year. (a portion of this is this is at the end of this email.)

Hayley comes to us from the South Wales Baptist Association, and we appreciate that for them and Rumney Baptist Church her departure will have mixed emotions. We pray that they will find much blessing in their new future in God's plan.

You can find out more about Hayley by going to the NBA's home page <http://www.thenba.org.uk> and watching her short videos.

Please pray for Hayley and our team as we make all the necessary arrangements and in developing deeper relationships with each other and yourselves.

It is our intention to purchase a home for Hayley to live in and we ask that you consider as churches, individually or have any suggestions to help us raise the finance for this.

The possibilities are a one-time gift, a pledge over time, an interest free loan, or one with very low interest for an extended period. Perhaps even transferring some investment form elsewhere to help the NBA at this time.

But please ensure that in doing this you do not divert any money from the giving towards Home Mission.

Yours with thanks to God for His provision so far.

(Rev. Anthony Ruddle, NBA Moderator)

A portion of Lynn Green's word:

"...God knows that you (the NBA) are small, you are the smallest association we have.

God knows that you are on the margins.

*I want to prophesy this over you: the new stuff that God wants to do across Baptists
Together is going to start in and through the NBA.*

*He has anointed you to listen attentively, and to be bold and to take risks and to experiment,
because you haven't got very much to lose, and you're small and you can.*

And we need you to do this.

You are going to show us and you are going to lead us into new ways.

*You are going to show us what's possible when we set our sails to catch the wind of the
Spirit, and you are going to be the first fruits of the new thing that God wants to do in terms
of renewing our movement.*

So don't think of yourselves as insignificant or overlooked.

That's not what God is saying over you.

Don't think of yourselves as at the mercy of secularism or decline.

Today, God is appointing you to embody and enact something prophetic in our movement.

And I want to say to you today: Have courage and let the wind of the Spirit take you and be bold in these days."

Prayers for Ascension Day

Risen Lord, draw us to you.
All authority in heaven and earth is yours.
When we hesitate
to speak your Word or do your work,
because of doubt and fear,
remind us that you are with us always,
and give us authority and power through your Word,
you live and reign, now and forever.

Amen

Risen Lord, draw us to you.
Send your Spirit to open our lips
that we may declare
the wonderful works of God;
you live and reign, now and forever.

Amen

(Prayers written by Paul C. Stratman for "A Collection of Prayers" 2021.)

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| Online Prayer |
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- Bishop Auckland Baptist Church Service
<https://www.bishopbaptists.co.uk/babc-sunday-service/>
- Northern Baptist Association Service
<https://www.bishopbaptists.co.uk/nba-sunday-service/>
- Influence Church Service (Services streamed Sundays at 11.00am and 5.00pm)
<http://www.influencechurch.co.uk>

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| Helpful Links |
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| BABC Sunday Service | https://www.bishopbaptists.co.uk/babc-sunday-service/ |
| BABC Newsletter | https://www.bishopbaptists.co.uk/newsletter/ |
| BABC Garden Blog | https://www.bishopbaptists.co.uk/church-garden-blog/ |
| NBA Sunday Service | https://www.bishopbaptists.co.uk/nba-sunday-service/ |
| BABC Main Website | www.bishopbaptists.co.uk |

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