

BAPTIST ASSEMBLY 2008

"A hope and a future – God's promise for an uncertain world"

The theme this year was a crucial one. It is so easy to be focused on the problems and crises at home and abroad. But God isn't negative! His purposes for the world won't fail and His plans for us and the world are good ones. We have much to celebrate but that doesn't mean we can afford to ignore the challenges of life. Christians cannot be ostriches and we need to go forward bringing God's love and wisdom to bear on the toughest and messiest of human struggles. God hasn't given up on our world and neither must we. So we can face the future with hope, with faith and with unity. At this year's Assembly, there was much to challenge, stimulate and encourage us with an exciting mixture of worship, main seminars and workshops.

NEW BAPTIST STRATEGY is being drafted. We must be committed to encourage one another but we are called and commissioned by Jesus to go further.

- **Prayer and worship** : these need to be given priority;
- **Evangelism and Mission** : we need to encourage evangelists; there is to be a major conference on evangelism in 2009; we must remember special areas of need : ministry to seniors, children and minority groups; church planting;
- **Diversity** : we should value everyone, irrespective of age, gender, disability or race; encouraging women for ministry;
- **Interfaith** : we need to encourage a deeper understanding of other faiths; to support Christian ministry in multi faith areas; to produce resources which enable us to present our faith in ways which preserve the dignity of those to whom we are talking; but NOT interfaith worship;
- **Creation** : churches should reflect on creation care issues; there is a need to resource churches to respond effectively;
- **Identity** : we need to reflect on the Baptist identity and what makes a Baptist church? What kind of leadership is appropriate?

HOME MISSION : *Baptist people transforming communities.*

Many examples were given of real Mission opportunities in Baptist Churches across the country, including a church in a difficult area of Inner City London. "We are non judgemental, we are about loving people, not just putting people in pews. The time will come when they will want to talk about God".

BMS WORLD MISSION

- A number of ground breaking examples of new and exciting approaches to Mission were shown.
L'Église : Over the next two years, it is possible for churches to follow the life of a missionary family in France, as they work in a difficult urban second-generation church plant in Rouen. Online videos are up-close and personal, showing the ups and downs of family and church life in a challenging context of social deprivation and multicultural diversity. The videos feature BMS World Mission workers Katie and Reuben Martin and their three young children and can be found on BMS World Mission website.
- **Bangladesh** : the use of business consultants to develop a model for Mission through Fairtrade, human rights etc., which bring evangelistic opportunities into businesses.
- **China and Zimbabwe** : Reference was made to exciting opportunities which have opened up in these countries. BMS currently supports work in 40 countries through 370 overseas workers.

It was reported at the Assembly that, due to expenditure exceeding income by an average of £300,000 for the last three years, BMS was considering the possibility of UK staff cuts in a bid to contain costs, rather than reduce mission work. However, a Baptist Times article in August states that an unexpected legacy expected to be around £750,000 (which Board members describe as a 'wonderful answer to prayer') has postponed that decision for the time being. This autumn BMS will write to every church in the Baptist Union in a bid to close the gap.

CREATION CARE is real Mission

- It merits serious Biblical attention – see Psalm 104, Gen 1 v 26-28 & Heb 1
- It means world care and world concern – the Christian faith must respond to global crises
- Creation is an urgent concern which we must pursue on behalf of those who are denied almost everything that we regard as essential for life
- The Bible calls us to be socially and environmentally responsible
- Resources to be developed for ministers and house groups: by October all ministers will have a draft of resources and an overview of six modules for churches to put into practice.

If you would like more information on the Assembly, please have a word with one of us.

Brian & Sue Kurton and Sheena Petty