

Ministers Conference



**9-10 February
@ Waterfront
Community
Church, Swansea**

Around 70 church ministers, chaplains and pioneers gathered from across South Wales Baptist Association and the Baptist Union of Wales for our joint conference. We returned to Waterfront Community Church in Swansea for a third year and received the usual wonderful hospitality.

Key note speakers were Lynn Green, General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, and Rachel Jordan-Wolf, Executive Director of Hope Together.

Worship was led by Tim Barker (Youth Leader and Schools Worker at Bethel BC, Whitchurch) and Jon Forman (Pastor at Blaenau Gwent Baptist Church)

A variety of seminars were offered, including: reimagining membership and baptism in contemporary Wales, with Cardiff Baptist College; Sharing Jesus around the world with BMS World Mission; A Project Violet dialogue for women to share experience and men to understand more about being a good ally.

The Foolish Power of God

Our conference opened with Lynn reflecting on the 'foolish power of God' from 1 Corinthians 1:18-31. Lynn encouraged us that whilst there is much change within society, our Baptist identity has something key to offer at this time. Our roots are in being a people of 'movement' and not 'institution'. We can use this to help us adapt in a changing world, rather than to hold the status quo. God's foolish power is also seen in the 'mighty little things'. Showing a picture of a dandelion with the seed being blown in different directions, we were encouraged that as we offer ourselves in ministry, we often don't know the impact that has on others. However, as Baptists who hold to the priesthood of all believers as part of our DNA, it is essential to help release everyone in our churches to minister, being particularly mindful of the barriers that some face. Thirdly, the foolish power of God is seen in the incarnation. As followers of Jesus we need to be working on our 'incarnation within our communities'. Against a national background of decline in church attendance, our efforts are making a difference!



Lynn Green led two Bible studies...

“There are signs of spring!”

Rachel says of herself that she has been passionate about introducing others to Jesus throughout her life. She and her husband, Darren, church planted eight years ago in East London, and Rachel leads Hope Together, a charity set up to ‘help everyone everywhere know Jesus’.

Rachel used an illustration from CS Lewis’ Narnia books – we are seeing signs of spring rather than winter – in terms of people’s openness to Jesus. Her talks were informed by analysing research. A ten-minute survey was carried out amongst 4000 UK adults between January and February in 2022. Telling us that statistics can be our friend she was able to highlight some important principles.

Whilst census headlines tell us about the drop of in those who identify as Christians (now under 50%), we shouldn’t be disheartened. The number of those who are actively practicing their Christian faith remains steady at about 6% of the population in Wales. Practicing Christians are identified as those who regularly attend church, read the Bible and pray. Rather than focus on the declining number of ‘cultural’ Christians, we should focus on their potential openness to hearing about Jesus. Furthermore, 18% of the population in Wales believe in the resurrection as the Bible describes it. A further 29% believe in the resurrection, but that the Bible contains some elements that should not be taken literally. This means nearly half the population are potentially open to the central message of the Christian faith. It can be so easy to be discouraged and assume that people won’t be receptive to us sharing Jesus... but Rachel’s message came across loud and clear... there are many who are more interested than we might think!

We need to share Jesus...

In Rachel’s second session, she continued to look into the statistical research to help us understand possible ways to share Jesus. Over 62% of non-Christians in Wales know a Christian. If everyone shares their faith, that is a huge reach! Only 2% of non-Christians know a church leader, so it highlights the importance of the whole church joining in. However, only 24% of non-Christians who know a Christian say that person has ever talked to them about Jesus. It highlights the challenge in recovering our calling to ‘go and make disciples of all nations’.

When looking at how people come to faith, we discover that the top answer is ‘growing up in a Christian family’. The next highest answer is ‘from reading the Bible’ at 24%. This means that even the simple act of giving someone a Bible can have an enormous impact. Rachel shared how she and her church go out onto the streets, set up a plastic table and put up a sign offering free Bibles. The attractive version of Mark’s gospel is ready to give away and has led to many positive interactions as Rachel shared stories with us. Overall Rachel’s message was clear... we should be encouraged. People are open to hearing about Jesus and when they do, they are responding. Spring is here!



An increasing spiritual hunger...

On the Tuesday morning, Lynn spoke from Luke 5:1-11 and the miraculous catch of fish. Her perspective from a national role is that there is an increased spiritual hunger in Wales and England. Whilst this isn’t true everywhere, there are surprising stories of people unexpectedly responding to the gospel.

We were encouraged to note that Jesus was not preaching in the synagogue but by the lake. We need to be those who have the courage to leave the building and go out to meet people where they are at.

In v4, Simon is invited to go into deeper water. The teaching of Jesus led to action... his teaching should always lead us to action and the call is to go from shallow water into deep water. This means leaving the comfortable place of shallow water, but we can see the fish are actually in the deep water.

The miraculous catch of fish meant that partners in other boats were needed. Together they shared in the miraculous catch! We might need to think about who our partners are.

Finally, Lynn encouraged us to look at the impact of Jesus on Simon and his partners: they left everything and followed Jesus; what they previously thought of as everything, they discovered was nothing. Sometimes Jesus calls us to leave something behind as we follow him.