

## **THE BAPTIST UNION RETREAT GROUP 2011 REPORT**

The Baptist Union Retreat Group (BURG) formed in 1988, at a time when 'retreats and silence' were more readily associated with Catholics and Anglicans than Baptists, continues to promote the value of prayer and silence within the Baptist family. It offers retreats, a Journal published three times a year and a commitment to the wider retreat world expressed through its membership of the Retreat Association, a national Christian organisation set up to help people find ways of exploring and deepening their journey with God through spirituality and prayer.

The year started with the BURG Committee combining a retreat with a committee meeting over a three-day period at the beginning of February. The Committee met at Ivy House, Warminster, enjoying the space and hospitality of the house and having time to reflect on the life of BURG, what it offers and its programme. There were two further occasions the Committee met, the first being at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church for the AGM and then a days meeting at Abingdon Baptist in September.

Two led retreats were held during the year. The first at Launde Abbey in Leicestershire. The Revds Colin Norris and Paul Goodliff introduced the theme, 'Growing Edges, Dragons or Angels – finding God in the unexplored margins of your world'. The second retreat was located in an inner city context and was led by the Revd Dr Clare McBeath and the Revd Tim Presswood, taking the theme, 'The Still Small Voice'. Reflections on both retreats were written up in the BURG Journal.

It was with sadness that we received the news of the Revd Chris Hutt's death at the end of March. Chris had been treasurer of BURG for the past nine years and we are indebted to him for his expertise as treasurer and his ability to think through issues, not least his understanding of Charity Law in relationship to the BURG Constitution. We will miss Chris and give thanks to God for his life amongst us.

The BURG stand was again taken to the Baptist Assembly, held in 2011 at the Norbreck Castle Hotel, Blackpool. (29April - 2<sup>nd</sup> May) The occasion of the Baptist family gathering for its annual Assembly provides opportunity to make BURG and its work more widely known. Many conversations took place, BURG and RA materials were made available and sixteen people became new members.

This year the AGM was linked to a Conference Day held at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church on Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> June. The Revd Dr Ruth Gouldbourne and the Revd Martin Taylor introduced the theme, 'Prayer in a Noisy Place'. Those present were sent out on to the streets of the West End to experience the sights, smells and sounds of London first hand. Returning to the Church there was space to speak about the experience and insights before being led in Communion at the close of the day. The Conference was preceded by the AGM, at which the Revd Ian Green was elected as chair and the Revd Brian Howden as secretary for a further year. Mr Bill Carpenter was elected and welcomed as the new BURG treasurer. The Revd Ron Ayres, Miss Janet Boyle and Mrs Gill Roberts were elected to the Committee to serve for two years. The Revd David Pountain was co-opted to serve for one year with particular responsibility as editor of the Journal. The Revd Colin Norris co-opted at the previous AGM had stepped down in the light of taking up a new regional minister role. Membership of BURG currently stands at around 170 and includes four colleges and IBTS Prague as well as Hawkshead and Openshaw churches.

The Revd Ian Green continues to represent BURG on the Retreat Association Executive. The Retreat Association is often the first point of contact for the public in finding out about retreats. It provides resources, training and maintains a network of regional contacts that can help find a suitable guide for those looking for a spiritual director or companion. It also organises a quadrennial Conference, the next one being in 2012. Perhaps it is most well known for its annual publication 'Retreats', which as well as publishing a number of interesting articles, gives details of Retreat houses and their programmes for those looking to make a retreat. BURG makes an annual contribution to the work of the RA and values the shared journey in being a resource to those wanting to deepen their journey with God through spirituality and prayer.