

## **THE BAPTIST UNION RETREAT GROUP 2013/14 SECRETARY'S REPORT**

The Baptist Union Retreat Group (BURG) continues to provide a focus within the life of the denomination for those seeking a space for silent prayer, stillness and reflection in their engagement with God and the world. BURG offers a programme of both led and individually guided retreats, supports local Quiet Days, as well as publishing a Journal three times a year and a web site resource open to all. A Conference Day is held normally once a year alongside an AGM. BURG is a member of the Retreat Association (RA) which broadens the resources BURG is able to offer.

During the past year a Group Individually Guided Retreat was held at Ivy House, Warminster (2nd - 5th December 2013) led by the Revd Brian Howden where six retreatants took time aside to give attention to their own/individual journeying with God. A Lent Retreat was held at Buckfast Abbey, Devon (4th - 6th April 2014) led by the Revd Dr Ivor and Mrs Anthea Hughes, who explored the theme, 'yearning, looking, forgetting and soaring'. Retreats, whether individually guided or led by someone introducing material to reflect and pray with enable a person to spend focused time in the presence of God giving space for God to meet with them and they with God.

The 2013 Conference and AGM was held at Manvers Street Baptist, Bath on the 11th May. The speaker was the Revd John Rackley whose chosen theme was 'Will you still love me when I'm 64?' in which he addressed themes around retirement, the future and God. Twenty one people were present for the AGM during which we particularly gave thanks for the life of the Revd Ron Ayres who was very ill and subsequently died on the 14th May. Ron was a founder member of BURG, part of the founding committee and played a significant role in the life of BURG since it's beginnings. Comments of deep gratitude for his life were expressed. At the AGM the Revd Ian Green was re-elected as chair, Mr Bill Carpenter, re-elected as treasurer and the Revd Brian Howden as secretary, each to serve for one year. Ms Janet Boyle, Membership secretary, Mrs Gill Roberts, Retreats secretary and the Revd Pauline West were elected to the committee to serve for two years. Mrs Christine Hutt and the Revd David Pountain were co-opted to serve for one year, Mrs Christine Hutt, with a view to taking on the role of Secretary at the 2014 AGM, and the Revd David Pountain with particular responsibility as editor of the Journal. The committee meets three times a year, which includes a 48 hour residential giving space for both administrative work and silent retreat. Membership of BURG at the time of the 2013 AGM stood at 118 which included 3 Colleges and 1 Church group.

The Journal published three times a year provides articles around the theme of retreats/spirituality as well as personal experiences of being on retreat. The Journal is also a place to advertise forthcoming retreats with dates, venues and speakers. An example of one of the conversations the Journal began in 2013 is whether introvert personalities respond differently to extrovert personalities in choosing to go on retreat.

A BURG website is on line at [www.burg.org.uk](http://www.burg.org.uk). This provides up to date information on retreats and events as well as resources to download. Since the launch of the website there have been 1000 hits re membership, 1800 hits re retreats, and 152 downloads for Journals and Occasional Papers. Publicity information was made available at the Baptist Assembly (3rd - 6th May 2013) in Blackpool and BURG members were present at the 2014 Assembly (10th - 11th May) in West Bromwich.

BURG was a founder member of the Retreat Association, an organisation that acts as an umbrella for denominational retreat groups as well as individual affiliates. The RA now holds a triennial Conference, publishes an annual booklet entitled 'Retreats' which gives details of many Retreat Houses around the country with details of their current retreat programmes. The Retreat Association office has now relocated to the Clare Charity Centre, at Saunderton, Buckinghamshire and is the most likely first port of call for someone wanting to know more about retreats. The RA can provide information on training courses and links to people to provide help in finding a spiritual director. Also of value are a number of information sheets on a wide range of retreat type topics, which can be located through a link on the BURG website. The Revd Ian Green is the current chair of the Retreat Association.

BURG has been kept up-to date with developments in the Order for Baptist Ministry and the possibility of offering retreats to OBM members or acting as a link to other retreat possibilities.

On a personal note, I am delighted Mrs Christine Hutt has agreed to take on the role of secretary as I step down from the committee. BURG has held a special place in my life over the past 20 years and I am grateful to God for all the relationships and life giving opportunities being a member of BURG has brought.