



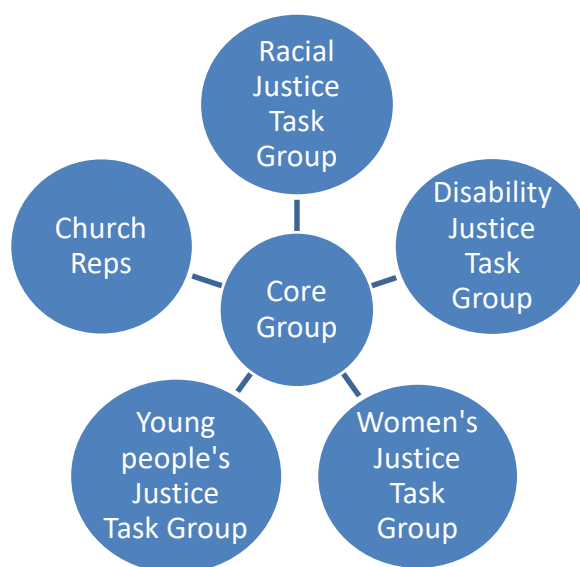
## HEBA JUSTICE HUB GATHERING 2023 REPORT AND FEEDBACK



## BACKGROUND

The second annual Justice Hub Gathering was opened by Judith Miller (Deputy Moderator of HEBA and Moderator of the Justice Hub)

The Justice Hub is a working group of HEBA, reporting to the HEBA Board of Trustees. It has been in existence since 2020, following the death of George Flloyd and is led by a Core Group, supported by five task groups.



### The role/purpose:

The Justice Hub is committed to making a difference amongst HEBA Baptists by drawing attention to matters of justice, raising awareness and supporting HEBA churches to make a positive contribution to those that are unjustly marginalised and/or left behind

### We will:

- Support churches to enable the people of God to live out a life of justice in accordance with the will of God and offer support when things go wrong.
- Support Baptists across the HEBA region to live out our values of companionship, generosity, diversity, learning and innovation.
- Be a justice conscience, speaking into 'the way we do things'.
- Connect with a network of regional and national Justice hubs.
- Be a resource for building just churches, structures and processes.
- Offer theological and spiritual accompaniment for ministers on sabbatical choosing to explore justice/injustice and personally experience vulnerable spaces.

## INTRODUCTION

This report is a summary of the gathering, feedback and suggestions from participants who will support the future development and focus of the Justice Hub.

The second annual HEBA Justice Hub Gathering was held at the HEBA Office, Sutton Coldfield, on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2023. The purpose of the gathering was:

- *To meet, pray, share and support each other on this journey.*
- *To review the work of the Justice Hub during 2022 and agree priorities for 2023.*
- *To Celebrate the Year of Disability Justice 2022 and Launch the Year of Women's Justice.*

The gathering was open to all members of the Justice Hub, HEBA Trustees and Staff and Church Representatives.

21 people attended the gathering of which; 6 were attending their first gathering, 8 were Baptist ministers, 5 were HEBA Trustees, 5 members of staff (some people wearing more than one hat).

Following a welcome from Judith Miller (Core Group Moderator) and a wonderful time of worship led by our Justice Hub Band. Rev Dave Ellis, the instigator of the Justice Hub, brought the word.

## THE WORD | REV. DAVE ELLIS | REGIONAL MINISTER

As we come to the second of our HEBA Justice Hub Gatherings, I am reminded of the words of the late Revd, Dr Joel Edwards, *“No one will thank you for speaking out about justice issues, but it’s got to be done.”*

The story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37 is a parable that resonates with me as our country continues to struggle with issues of Justice. The lead-in to the parable is a question from the expert in the law, **“And who is my neighbour?”** This is after he gives Jesus his interpretation of the Levitical law that we must love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind and then also love our neighbours as ourselves in order to inherit eternal life.

It’s a question we still ask ourselves today. **Who are our neighbours? And what does it mean to be a loving neighbour?**

For the rabbi and the Levite in the parable, they chose to look the other way. They didn’t want to get involved. Sometimes the most well-intentioned people do that around issues of race, women or disability. They choose not to engage because it’s political.

Or maybe they think they don’t have enough information to discuss it well and fear they will say the wrong things. I get that. It’s uncomfortable, but Jesus never promised His followers comfort. Instead, He calls us to take up His cross. He calls us into relationship with one another, into relationship with people who don’t look like us. He calls us to celebrate with those who are joyful and to weep with those who mourn.

When I marched in a modest peaceful Ministers of Colour protest in Parliament Square alongside other Black and Brown pastors, many white pastors showed up at the rally, a few from HEBA. They stood by my side to show me that they saw me. They came to say, *“We validate your pain, we campaign for justice together.”*

My wounds and those of Black and Brown people are not as obvious as the man in the parable, but their invisibility doesn’t make them any less life-threatening. My wounds cause stress and can lead to all sorts of long-term health issues. The world says that we can figure out ways to lay down that stress for a period of time so we’re able to pick it up again later. But the Word of God says I can place this stress at the foot of the cross and walk away from it. I don’t have to go back and pick it up again. We serve a perfect Saviour who can address everything perilous in our lives.

God uses His followers in His plan. He’s using my brothers and sisters in the dominant culture to come alongside me and shoulder some of that burden until we can lay it down forever at the foot of the cross. He used my friends who marched alongside me. They were like the Good Samaritan getting the wounded man to the inn.

## FEEDBACK FROM THE YEAR OF DISABILITY

Karen Martindale (Disability Justice Task Group Chair)

### Our Function

“To promote awareness around issues of disability justice in order to enable full participation and equality for disabled people in our churches. We seek to do this through working with Baptist churches in HEBA.”

Main ways we chose to do this (apart from our own personal advocacy, championing and signposting) was through the HEBA website (social media to a point), where we place blogs and resources and our gatherings (was to be 2, became 1 event – more on that later).

### What we learned

- This is a huge and diverse area, where needs often clash between groups.
- Racial Justice and women’s Justice are more on the agenda in society at large and in our churches, with disability towards the back of the queue.
- Disability justice is associated with financial cost in churches.
- Much more work can be done on the theology of disability
- Difficult to engage people with disability justice.
- Members of the Task Group have appreciated being able to consider the opportunities and blessings that disabled people can bring to the church.
- A blog a month was too ambitious for us, but the ones that are online are very helpful and has helped increase people’s understanding.
- Symposium is not a good way of reaching people in churches as it’s aimed at ministers and therefore can be theologically complex. People who find it hard to concentrate (and others!) found our first symposium difficult to follow. In retrospect, we should have done this differently, but we were following the pattern of the previous year. We still hope to put on a theological reflection event for church members this year!
- We look forward to seeing what we can learn from other justice discussions.

## UPDATES

### RACIAL JUSTICE TASK GROUP – Rev. Dave Ellis

During the year group members have been involved collaboratively and individually in various areas of Racial Justice:

**Gerard Goshawk** is part of the Baptist Union Racial Justice team who have produced several resources. 'I am because you are' and 'Wonderful Youth Series'.

**Anthony Narain** has helped to lead Black Lives Matter Meetings in Lichfield. This included a discussion about their local historical figure Samuel Johnson, slave owner, writer of the modern dictionary, who left most of his money to his black slave called Francis Barber.

**Monique Hyllam** started a Masters Research study looking at creating access for more Black and Asian People for Paramedics and leaders in the Ambulance Service.

**Dave Ellis** attended the Sam Sharpe Lecture by Professor Kehinde Andrew's on the theme of 'Bringing the House down.' Dave has been in a range of talks with Wale Hudson Roberts, from Black & Brown Ministers discussing the proposed changes to the MR Rules to 'Alongside Mentoring Group' for encouraging Black and Brown ministers to apply to the top Baptist jobs. Also participated in Time for Change which held two summits, both looking at how we commit to doing more together for justice in Birmingham.

**Simon Jay**, from Urban Expression, joined our Task Group, is one of the contributors to the Black Light Course. He is also involved in planning a conference in 2023 between Home for Good and the Centre for Black Theology in Birmingham about adoption of black and brown children.

As a group we want to continue with our collaborations with national and local racial justice organisations, ensuring that issues do not get forgotten by the public and are kept on churches agendas.

Suggested future project for 2023 is to produce an advent calendar from a racial justice and Black History perspective, looking at themes in the Bible like displacement, refugees, racism in the early church, current justice campaigns.

We would like to book Prof Kehinde Andrews for our 2025 Symposium. We also aim to provide Racial Justice resource on our website.

### YOUNG PEOPLE'S JUSTICE – Monique Hyllam

The focus is to encourage the cultivation of a space where young people feel seen and heard. It is important that churches create a space where young people are seen and feel safe to share. We want to encourage and support young people to share and feed into the topic of justice. Following the format of the existing groups.

Seeking volunteers aged 11-18, that would be interested in joining the young people's forum. Resources that can be shared with young people to support their learning. Sharing the information within churches to promote the group and its recruitment.

Challenge our own perspectives on the input our young people can provide. We also seek the involvement of adults who feel able to provide support to our young people.



## Church Justice Hub Representative

Justice Task Group at Chester Road Baptist Church - Dennis Ashfall



**Our aim in 2022** was to promote awareness around issues of disability justice to enable full participation and equality for disabled people in our church.

We reached out to members of the congregation and formed a small group consisting of five members that met once a month.

- We created a poster explaining the different types of learning disabilities and displayed it in our church.
- Encouraged members of the church to attend sign language courses.
- Working on providing speech to text software to support partial hearing and deaf members of the congregation during services.
- Work with people whose learning disabilities prevent them from accessing unemployment or disability benefits.
- Disseminated literature on dementia and creating a dementia friendly environment within the church.

### Fanning the Flame – Rev. Adrian Argile

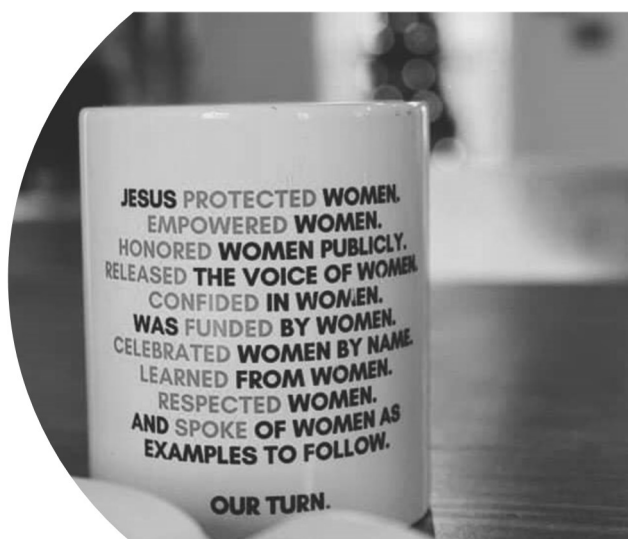
HEBA have sought to encourage women in ministry and designed a programme for 3 women ministers. The programme aims to...

- Inspire and encourage women to develop their ministries.
- Get a wider perspective beyond the local church.
- Actively support and encourage women in ministry.
- Prayerfully take down any perceived glass ceilings.

Claire Ord, Loriane Roberts and Amy Wearing are part way through this programme.

## JUSTICE HUB FOCUS FOR 2023 - YEAR OF WOMEN'S JUSTICE

Rev Denise Dobie – Women's Justice Task Group Chair



### Our aims:

- be a resource for HEBA, enabling our churches to build and share a Christlike and God-led approach to the challenges faced by women in our communities.
- support churches to utilise and develop the skills, gifts and talents of women.
- support women in ministry, those exploring vocation or finding how to fulfil their God-given potential and calling.
- celebrate the gift of women's ministry and their contribution to our fellowship and society.
- raise awareness of the wider issues that place barriers to women in society from fulfilling their potential.

## Calendar for the Year of Women's Justice 2023

**January:** Focus on Domestic Violence

**March:** Focus on Women in Ministry: *Symposium 8<sup>th</sup> March*

**May:** Focus on Women and the World of work

**July:** Focus on Women and health

**September:** Focus on Women and Exploitation

**November:** Focus on Celebrating Women and progress

Each topic in the calendar will be supported by a pack sent out to church ministers and secretaries. The packs will also be available on the HEBA Justice Webpage and Facebook page. We invite engagement and feedback from churches in response to the packs.



## FEEDBACK

Feedback was sought in a variety of ways during the gathering (mentimeter and group work) and via feedback forms following the day.

### Post-gathering feedback responses

#### ***What did you find most useful about the day?***

- Hearing stories from across all areas of our Justice Hub and hearing from other Tasks Groups.
- A chance to hear what each group was doing and a greater sense of how important and relevant the Justice Hub is.
- Meeting everyone in person for the first time and the presentation of the year of Women's Justice.

#### ***What did you find most challenging?***

- The realisation of the enormity of the challenge we are undertaking.
- When I first arrived, I did find the noise of everyone chatting challenging, but that's due to my brain injury. Remembering all that was said was a challenge also.

#### ***What do you believe should be a priority for the Justice Hub in the next year or so?***

- Making the Justice Hub known and recruiting more Church Reps. (Chicken & egg!)
- Getting our churches involved promoting all the Justice Hub work even more throughout our churches.
- Establishing the young people group.

#### ***Is there anything you'd like to see at next year's Justice Hub Gathering?***

- Booths/displays for each justice area and less of a sit down feel. Perhaps some plenary with information gleaned from actually visiting booths and engaging with the team etc? Worship is good, maybe a bit more?
- More visual aids, as it is easier for me to remember visually rather than verbally. More success stories from the hub and how we got there.
- More HEBA Trustees.

#### ***Do you have any other feedback for us?***

- It takes time for something new to be embedded and the teams are doing well so far.
- There needs to be intentional engagement with the Justice Hub Facebook Page and Website from all the groups.
- The Disability Task Group really did a great job last year.



#### **b. Improved Communication**

- Good communication, regular reminders to help churches stay involved.
- Ensure that there is an emphasis that this is not just an issue for women but for everyone.
- Regular emails with details of upcoming focus with feedback on previous focus. Inspirational stories and ideas. Keep things practical. Easy way for church to submit feedback.

### **Signposting and partnership working**

*Feedback from participants also included questions and suggestions relating to other areas of justice, for example gender, economic and social justice. With our limited resources the Hub is unable to focus on every area of justice, but we are committed to sign-posting churches to available resources and support the work of the Baptist Union in this area of work. We are always keen to hear what our churches and other local organisations are doing to achieve justice for ALL in their community.*

## SETTING PRIORITIES FOR 2023-2024

The following priorities were identified by those attending the gathering:

- I. Increase number of Justice Church Representatives**
  - Focus on recruitment and education for Church Representatives.
  - Need a campaign to highlight Church Reps and Justice Groups.
- II. Role of the church**
  - Practical ideas for how churches can highlight justice issues eg add to their agenda.
  - Encourage churches to add Justice Hub to all their meetings ie Deacons and Church Members' Meetings as a standing agenda item.
  - Our church meeting could have a different focus on disability or other justice issue.
- III. Develop Young People's Justice Task Group**
  - Youth reps and voice – what do they think is important to highlight and support?
- IV. Enabling Deaf Community inclusion**
  - Could preachers give out written transcripts of sermon and prayers, if transcript software is not available or accurate.
  - We respond to email, social media prompts, signposting us to website/blogs.
  - Need to be more proactive. Social media, Blogs -lived experiences, website.
  - Subtitles as well as transcripts for video.
- V. Communication - Improve the way we communicate the work of the Justice Hub and how we engage with our churches.**
  - Raise the profile of the Hub/HEBA. Publicity. Get the word out.
  - Blogs were very good, clear language, but required greater highlighting/sign posting.
  - HEBA website – things to be easy to find. Ticker tape on website for new news.
  - Signpost events regarding women's issues eg podcast, Radio an Women's hour.
  - A Justice Hub Conference accessible to all HEBA churches/people.
  - Justice Hub Gathering Report given out at all HEBA gatherings.
  - Feedback at points during the year.
- VI. Resources**
  - Facilitate the sharing and development of relevant Justice related resources.
- VII. Women's Year of Justice**
  - Increase awareness of Women's Justice issues and encourage churches to actively participate in taking positive steps to the challenges faced by women.

## THE BIG QUESTION

### How do we make Justice part of HEBA's DNA?

- Regular proactive communication.
- Keeping it on the agenda at board meetings.
- Development of church representatives.

## LET US PRAY

Heavenly Father, so many in this world suffering injustice feel unseen and unheard.

We so often sing 'we want to see you.' Help us to see you in others, in the situations and opportunities we encounter as we go about our everyday, waking, working walking about sleeping lives.

But more than this, You are the God who sees. No one is invisible or forgotten in your eyes. Help us to communicate your Good News that you see and hear them and each and everyone of us is valued and precious in your sight. Help us create safe spaces where people can know they are seen and their voices are heard.

Help us to hear you speaking to us through others and help us to see others with your eyes as we join in with what you are doing to bring the justice, mercy and humility of your Kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven. Amen

Rev Denise Dobie

## THANK YOU

Our second Justice Hub Gathering was an occasion for all the members of the Hub, Staff and Trustees to pause and reflect on the journey to date. I want to extend a personal note of thanks to each person who attended and have contributed in some way to the success of the day and are committed to the further development of the Hub.

We have been truly blessed to have so many people volunteering their time and energy as we seek to support our churches to develop a 'just space' where each person can flourish, irrespective of their gifts, abilities, and experiences. A safe space where all are welcome and can worship in spirit and truth.

We are a growing group of HEBA Baptists, passionate for justice and determined to make a stand. Will you join us?

Judith Miller - Justice Hub Core Group Moderator

## HOW CAN YOU AND/OR YOUR CHURCH GET INVOLVED?

### Contact:

Rev Dave Ellis – Regional Minister

Email [de@baptist-heartofengland.org](mailto:de@baptist-heartofengland.org)

