

PROGRAMME

10:00 Refreshments

10:15 Welcome and Introduction

10:30 Joshua Searle - 'Discipleship Without Borders: Anabaptist Lessons for Baptists on Rejecting the Idea of a Christian Nation'



Joshua Searle

11:00 Discussion

11:15 Sally Nelson - 'Porous church'



Sally Nelson

11:45 Discussion

12:00 Lunch

13:00 Karen Sethuraman - 'What contributions might the Anabaptist movement offer to the Irish context today?'



Karen Sethuraman

13:30 Discussion

13:45 Gideon Diego - 'Anabaptism's Place in Modern Africa'



Gideon Diego

14:15 Discussion

14:30 Panel / Plenary - with Stuart Murray Williams

16:00 Tea and Close



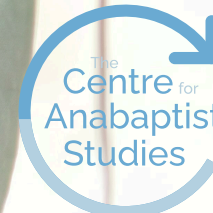
CENTRE FOR
Baptist Studies

BEYOND 500

A Baptist-Anabaptist Conversation

Programme

Thursday 27th February 2025



CENTRE FOR
Baptist Studies



About the speakers:

Dr Joshua T. Searle is a Professor of Mission Studies and Intercultural Theology as well as the Dean of International Affairs at the Theologische Hochschule Elstal (THE), Germany. Brought up in Northumberland, Joshua now lives with his family in Germany, where alongside his academic responsibilities at the THE, he is also an ordained minister within the German Baptist Union (BEFG). A graduate of Oxford University, IBTS, and Trinity College Dublin, Joshua speaks Russian and German fluently and is author of several books and articles. He serves as a founder-trustee of the UK charity, Dnipro Hope Mission, and in this capacity makes regular trips to Ukraine to support local churches and communities affected by the war. Joshua also served on the Board of Trustees of the Anabaptist Mennonite Network from 2017 to 2023.

Discipleship Without Borders: Anabaptist Lessons for Baptists on Rejecting the Idea of a Christian Nation

This paper offers an anabaptist-informed critique of the tendency in contemporary politics to intertwine Christian identity and nationalistic agendas. By drawing upon the historical witness of the anabaptists and my own personal experiences of ministry in war-torn Ukraine, I argue that the idea of a "Christian nation" is not a sacred archetype, but a profane illusion and a self-contradiction. Instead, I will argue that Baptists today are called to embrace a transformative engagement with the world that is grounded in radical discipleship and inspired by shared Baptist-anabaptist convictions, such as freedom, dignity and the importance of living out our faith as Baptists in a way that transcends political and national boundaries.

Rev Dr Sally Nelson read chemistry at Jesus College, Oxford, and worked for the Royal Society of Chemistry. She was ordained as a Baptist minister after study at LST and Spurgeon's College. In addition to church pastorates in Watford and Wetherby she has worked in hospice chaplaincy and has a daughter with complex special needs. These experiences underpinned her doctoral studies in exploring theologically the human person. Sally has spent most of the past 10 years in theological education, teaching doctrine, pastoral studies and disability theology and working with Baptist ministers in formation. She edits the Baptist Ministers Journal and is on the board of the Journal of Baptist Theology in Context.

Porous church

In this paper I will use insights from Anabaptist convictions and practices to reimagine the question of Baptist membership and the characteristics of belonging to the body of Christ in the 21st century.

Rev Karen Sethuraman is the first female Baptist Minister in Ireland, and has served as Chaplain to two Belfast Lord Mayors. She has been involved in peace and reconciliation work for over twenty years, both within and outside the church walls, and is currently the leader of SoulSpace; a peace and reconciliation hub set up for those who feel they 'don't fit' within institutional church settings. Karen is currently studying for a PhD with the Centre for Anabaptist Studies, Bristol. She is a member of the Management Board of Ireland's Future and is deeply committed to preparing and planning for a New Ireland. She is also actively engaged in significant efforts related to the prospect of a United Ireland.

What contributions might the Anabaptist movement offer to the Irish context today?

Amid increasing disillusionment with traditional church institutions in Ireland, this paper examines whether the Anabaptist movement can provide an alternative model for church planting within the Irish context. Drawing on the practices outlined in Stuart Murray's book, *The New Anabaptists*, as well as insights from over twenty years of personal experience as a minister engaged in peace and reconciliation efforts both within and beyond church settings, this paper emphasises the need for an alternative church community. Such a community would aim not only to unify individuals from Catholic and Protestant traditions but also to offer a welcoming space for those disillusioned with institutionalised religion.

Gideon Diego is a South African writer who currently lives in Dublin, Ireland with his wife and daughter. He is a graduate of Bristol Baptist College, holding an MA with distinction completed under the Center for Anabaptist Studies, UK. Gideon's writing mainly focuses on issues relating to the people and continent of Africa. His articles, which touch on literature, film, theology and music, can be assessed freely from his personal website at <https://www.gideondiego.com/>. He's also the curator of a YouTube channel called LIBRAVox, https://www.youtube.com/@LIBRA_Vox. where most of his blogs are converted into video form essays.

Anabaptism's Place in Modern Africa

The African continent is at the centre of a religious revolution. And the main outcome of this change can be found in the varied forms of spiritual expressions found in Protestant and Catholic denominations, in Pentecostal and charismatic churches, and also in Islam's prominence as an alternative to Christianity. Amongst all these forms of religious expressions, the Pentecostal and charismatic expressions have proven to be most popular amongst many adherents in sub-Saharan Africa. Added to this is a growing sense of returning to African indigenous spirituality. All this culminates in something I'd like to think of as theological 'locomotion' – this sense of chaotic movement, a back and forth, an up and down, of a period buzzing with the vitality of belief. It is in this religious climate that Anabaptism finds itself. And for anyone concerned with the future of Anabaptism in Africa this reality has to be properly appreciated, because without this assessment one does not even get to the point of asking the right questions – one of them being, what is Anabaptism's place in a continent that is oversaturated in Western expressions of Christianity?