

An interview with

Stuart Blythe

Stuart became the Rector of the International Baptist Theological Study Centre in the summer of 2014, the first former graduate to do so. Previously he was a lecturer at the Scottish Baptist College. He has also had ministries in the Scottish Baptist churches at Springburn and Kirkintilloch.

Can you talk about how you became a Christian?

I was brought up in a family who didn't attend church, but they sent their kids to Sunday school on a Sunday afternoon. At the age of 10/11 my dad died, and clearly that had a big impact on me as a young child.

One summer not long after that I was attending a children's club in a local Nazarene church, and somehow the message on the Friday night connected with me. In hindsight I know now it was a Gospel message: it captured my heart.

You describe yourself as a 'convictional Baptist' – what do you mean by that?

I think the way we do church actually matters. In Baptist and, for me, Anabaptist practices, there is a way of doing church that resonates with the gospel. There are practices within Baptist and Anabaptist churches that are ways in which we can be a witness to the world. In that sense it's convictional, it's something that resonates with me as being important and true, and therefore I adhere to them.

Can you describe the impact IBTS has had on your life, and did you ever think that one day you'd be in this position?

No, I never thought I'd be in this position! When my wife Susanne and I went to study in Rüsclikon – the original IBTS – it was a huge culture shock, because we were suddenly exposed to a huge variety of Baptist ways of doing church. It helped us to re-explore what we believed, and why we believed it. I'd say it was the most formative period in my life.

I had gone there because I wanted to do a BD. It was the only real option in a Baptist context in Scotland at the time, so at that point, thinking that one day I'd be the rector of this institution never entered my head. I think I'm an accidental academic – I'm interested in academic study in relationship to practice.

And how would you describe IBTS' importance to the wider Baptist family?

That's something I keep reflecting on. Historically it has helped produce and provide leaders, particularly in Europe, both in Unions and in churches and some of our colleges. At present it offers an opportunity for people to study in issues related to their own context, but to do that with an international perspective.



The other thing IBTS does is look at Europe as an entity. Folk can either come and look at that European perspective, or they can come to study locally, but in the light of the international. They are exposed to the variety of views of teachers and students from a variety of contexts.

What role can Scottish churches play following the referendum on independence?

When the referendum was announced, I thought it provided an opportunity for Baptist churches to try and work out how they think the issue of mission and discipleship relates to the wider social/economic/political context. I'm not sure how many of them did that.

A number have talked about being involved in reconciliation. I hope what it has done is raise for Scottish Baptist churches that the socio/political environment is one in which we have to try and do our mission.

You wrote about Baptists not discerning their thoughts on independence through the church meeting ... do you think the church meeting has lost something?

I don't know whether it's lost something, because I'm not really sure what 'it' ever was! I think it needs to discover something: what does it mean for us to meet together and to try and discern what the living Christ is saying to us in our context? I think that should include issues of mission and ministry, rather than simply the practicalities of how we manage church, or how many cupboards should be in our new kitchen.

It is an exciting opportunity that folk in Baptist churches have.

What's your favourite worship song/hymn?

It's an old one - Be thou my vision – but probably played to a little bit of Celtic beat!

View Stuart's interview at: www.baptist.org.uk/sblythe