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Embracing God's Mission



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And how do we join in?





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Embracing God's Mission

As Baptists Together we release a lot of resources into front-line mission. Indeed, through our giving to Home Mission last year some 300 ministries and mission projects were supported and empowered.

But embracing God's mission is not simply a question of resources. That's why, in the articles that follow, we start off with a basic question: what is God's mission? And how is that often different from our mission? It invites us to understand that God is already at work; our task is to find him and join in.

How to do that? John Rackley has three questions every church might want to ask (p8-9), while Lynn Green outlines a vision of Baptists working together in an increasingly joined-up manner (p10). Talking of being one team, Alisdair Longwill digs deeper into the aforementioned Home Mission: is it for the mission of God, or the sustaining of a church? (p24-5)

As this edition began to come together, we started to see a God who is a supernatural God, meeting people in dreams, challenging and transforming, meeting people outside of the church. Indeed, the mission strategies and plans of the church are nothing when compared with the hand of God already at work in the world. This does not mean that we should cease making Jesus known, but as we pray, prepare and plan to engage in mission, we should do so expecting God to use the impossible to bring people into a relationship with him.

Photo: Paul Claydon



The images on the cover of this edition include one such example. Last year mystery patterns began to appear on a beach in Southend. What were they? Who was behind them? Initially dubbed 'Sandbanksy', the artist was later revealed to be a Baptist minister. When we spark people's interest, we can invite them to come and discover.

Mission can be one of those words that breathes fear into Christians – but it shouldn't be so. As you read this edition of *Baptists Together*, we pray for an excitement about what God is already doing, alongside a renewed sense of knowing where to join in.

The Editorial Group

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Joining in with God



Are we joining in with what God is already doing or are we waiting for him to join us?
Victoria Boulton shares how God can be at work in the unlikeliest of places,
 even an unbuilt housing estate

Photo: Ali Boulton

Go where God is. This is the beating heart of mission. In 2008 Ali Boulton, the Pioneer Mission Enabler for **Southern Counties Baptist Association**, was called by God to move to an as-yet unbuilt housing estate in Swindon. It was hard, from the outside, to see that God was there: cow fields and construction sites don't make an obvious home for a church. But we view the world through imperfect glass.

We miss the possibilities. We can't make out the hazy futures or the shape of the Spirit where it's resting.

God was there in those cow fields and that construction site. And he was there for the community that would grow on it. Though Ali's view was imperfect, the invitation was clear: "Come and join me where I am".

Call from God

"I had a personal experience of a call from God," says Ali. "But I soon discovered that God was already at work – there was an ecumenical group comprised of church leaders praying for the area, a local Chaplain who had made a connection with the builders and the local council and a Baptist regional ministry team who had already discerned a call to be present in the new housing area. Far from initiating a new work of God, God had graciously allowed me to join in with the work he was already doing."

Professor Kirsteen Kim describes this as the nature of *Missio Dei* in her book *Joining in with the Spirit*. She writes: 'Christian mission is finding out where the Holy Spirit is at work and joining in'.

This is where our view is imperfect. We are not the arbiters of mission: rather, we go where God is and join him. When Ali and the other members of **The Stowe** group – a small network of Christians called to the community – first arrived, it was with a commitment to letting God shape the mission.

Photo: Ian Britton



Ali Boulton at the Baptist Assembly 2012

Everything that was happening was his design.

Trusting God's lead

The Old Testament narratives reveal a God who sends out people into uncertain destinations to ends that are unclear. Abram is told to go to "the land that I will show you" (Genesis 12:1) and Moses was led by a cloud and a pillar of fire (Exodus 13:21). Neither created their own plans or strategies but rather had to trust God's lead as he revealed the way to them.

Similarly, in the New Testament, Jesus sends out the 72 into the towns and villages where 'he himself was about to go' (Luke 10:1). The only sign given them that the Holy Spirit was at work: that a person of peace would emerge (verses 5-6). This lack of human control is an underlying principle as God sends out people into the world to do his mission. In case we are in any doubt as to our calling, the apostle Paul makes it clear that we are called to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor 5:7).

This was the experience of The Stowe. They had been sent out into unknown territory with an imperfect view of the future. But the work of God's Spirit was revealed through signs: partners – or people of peace – emerged. Is this really God at work?

The Stowe had committed to fluidity and, sure enough, God made it clear where he was and where he wanted them. God's Spirit surprised them;

his mission was not what they might have chosen. Some activities seemed obvious, good and right – fun and games on the grass, toddler gatherings and even a 'God Club' for the local children. But when the community asked for a Halloween party, people started to question: could this really be God's Spirit at work?

"However, after God challenged us through the Apostle Peter's experience in Acts 10, it became clear that it was," says Ali. "It was at this event that we were asked to do a nativity play, which was instrumental in the journey towards being asked to start a church gathering, and people coming to faith. We had to learn to lay down our lives and agendas to join in with the Missio Dei rather than create our own plans."

For The Stowe, laying down their lives and submitting to the Missio Dei meant not talking about God but waiting for others to bring him up (in line with 1 Peter 3:15).

God was there

God was clearly already there. He kept coming up; in coffee with the community, when interceding in rivalries and hurts. God was already doing things in people's lives. He'd called The Stowe there to bless the community. All The Stowe needed to do was make it known that they were Christians, and then to go out into the community to unconditionally bless and serve.

"God provided the money from an unexpected source to provide welcome baskets," says Ali. "The Stowe joined in with this provision and visited people with baskets for the first year as people moved in. Conversations and encounters on the doorsteps showed that The Stowe was not bringing God to this new area but that God was already there."

God was waiting for The Stowe in many other places: in empowerment classes, helping people cope with their daily lives; in litter picking and Easter egg hunts; in pamper evenings and football matches. God was there. So when The Stowe arrived, people were ready to respond. There were housing associations, council initiatives and ecumenical groups to support them. God was there.

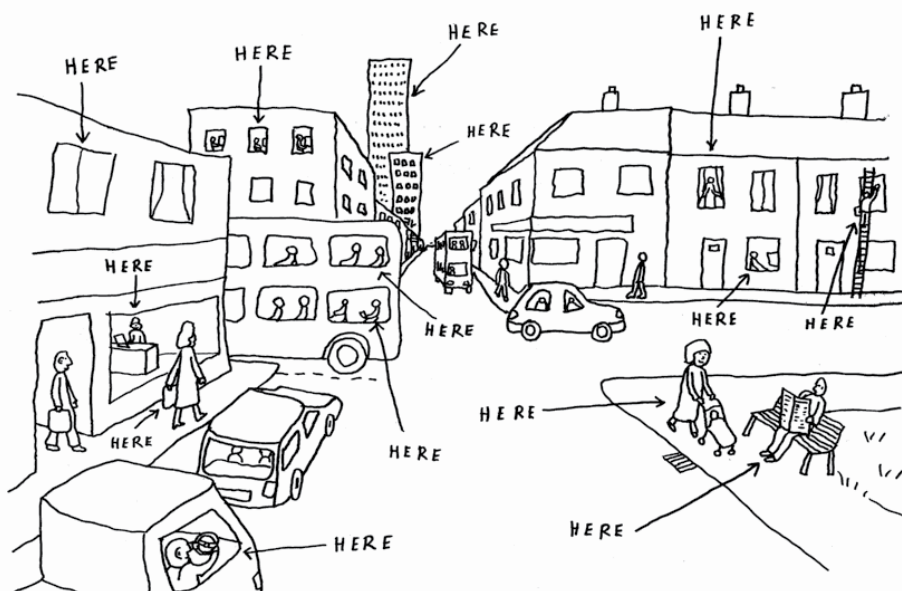
Mission belongs to him

God is there. This is a story that continues, through struggling and financial difficulty and opposition. Mission isn't easy. It's not a lazy afternoon activity and doesn't always meet with praise. It's not about choosing where to bring God – it's about finding God and joining him in the work that he's doing. Mission belongs to him. We are just one of the tools that he uses to do it.

And we have to continue to search for him. We have to go where God is. We have to listen for his invitation. In 2014, Ali Boulton was appointed to head up pioneering mission for the Southern Counties Baptist Association. For Ali, the new mission is the old mission, but on a wider patch; to find where God is waiting throughout Southern Counties and to empower Christians to join him in his mission. "Already there have been surprising coincidences, the emergence of people of peace and the joining of people and place that indicate that God's Spirit is at work," she says.

Pray to God. Listen for his voice. And go find him where he is. Remember, we are viewing the world through imperfect glass. We see only a cow field where soon there will be a community. But God sees it all and God knows it all. He wants us to join him in his mission.

WHERE THE CHURCH IS

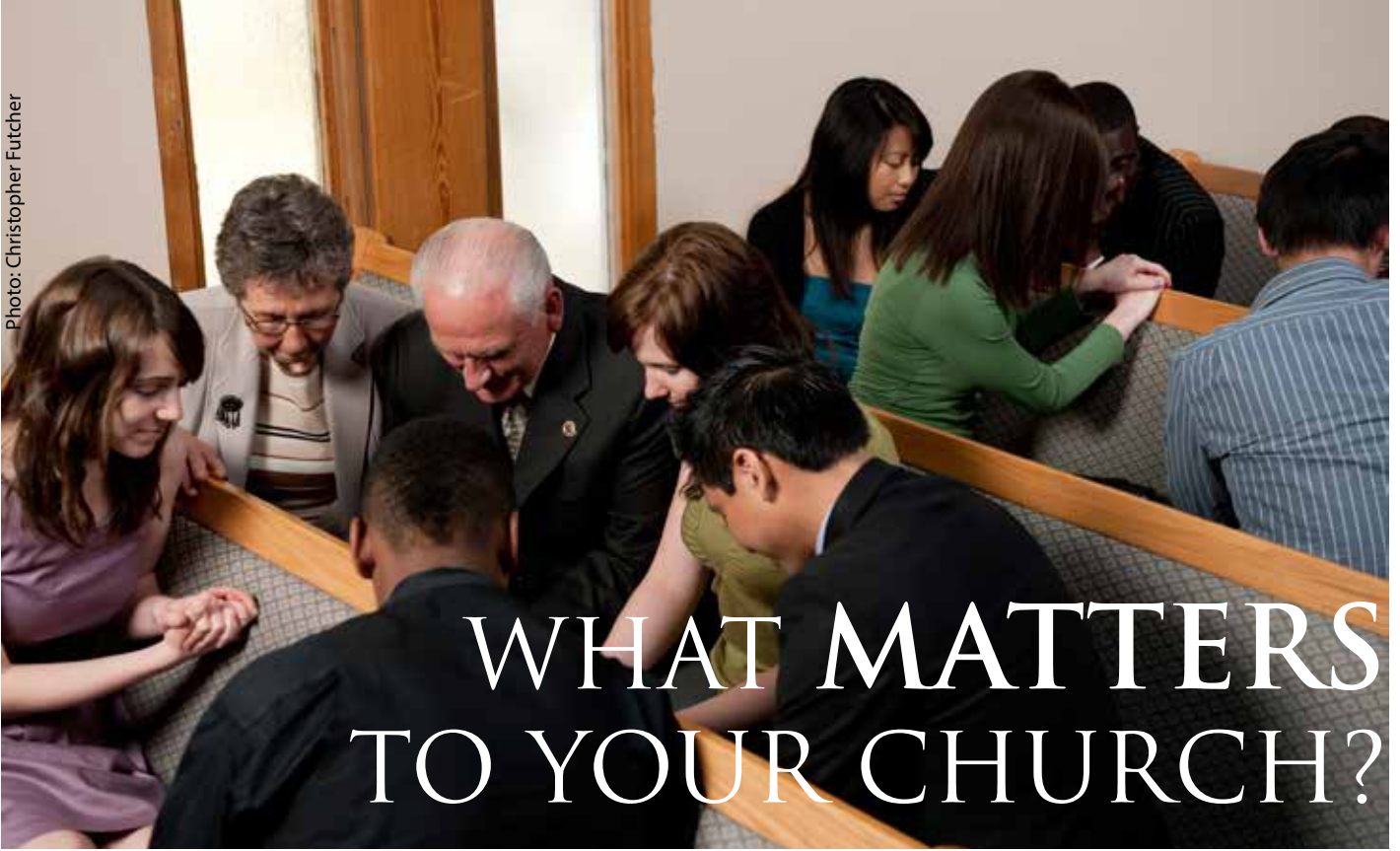


Cartoon: Dave Walker - used with permission

CartoonChurch.com

Victoria Boulton is a writer and Ali's daughter-in-law





WHAT MATTERS TO YOUR CHURCH?

Taking time out to reflect on why we do what we do as a church can be a challenging prospect. **John Rackley** considers three questions that might help us start the journey

A church has just called a new minister and together they are looking at how they can develop their involvement in the neighbourhood ...

A church is finding that they are struggling with maintaining their present programme of activities and realise they need to cut back ...

A church has struggled on with ideas they know are no longer meeting the needs of the gospel ...

It is time to do some tough thinking and strong praying. So what next?

It is not always easy for churches to start questioning their life together. Often what is happening is important and might have strong support. The decision of whether or not to review what has been going on is sometimes painful. On the other hand, sometimes it has all become a bit of a strain. Volunteers are scarce, so are results and confidence is draining away. The approaching crisis must be accepted as an opportunity.

When such experiences are faced with honesty and courage God will start a 'new thing' through his people and the coming Kingdom will be glimpsed.

A few years ago I had to speak at a united service in Nailsea, Somerset. I didn't know any of the churches and we would be worshipping in a Roman Catholic church building. I wanted to talk about the shared mission of the churches. My scripture was Mark 2:1-12 (Jesus forgives and heals a paralysed man). These verses are about motivation and priority. I came up with three questions which became the basis of my talk.

So imagine yourself going into your church on a Sunday morning for the first time. You might look at the notice boards or respond to whoever speaks to you first. Unconsciously you are asking the first question...

What matters here?

It may well be on the mind of a newcomer and it should have a similar priority for the congregation. It's a tough question because it is about what we really think is important and how we come across.

It goes beyond simply making a list of what happens but requires that we ask why we do what we do. For instance:

- » What is it that takes up much of the time at a church meeting?
- » What is the issue that the deacons' meeting regularly avoids because it will cause conflict?

One way of using this question is to approach people who use the premises but don't join in worship and ask them what they think your church stands for.

The next question is not as simple as it sounds.

Photo: Steve Debenport



Does God matter here?

Of course God matters to a church! Move on. Well, not so fast. Can we be that sure? I don't think we should be in such a rush. I wonder whether a common but un-examined reason for reaching out to others is actually no more than a recruitment drive for our organisation. God doesn't matter so much as keeping our show on the road.

There are three ways God is pushed out of a decision about the mission of a church. This happens when we reduce our mission to wanting:

- » people to join us to help us do what we are already doing
- » people to join us so that we can stand down
- » people to join our church because it will make us look good

In other words, the maintenance of a church is being mistaken for the work of God in the world. In contrast, the shape and life of a church needs always to be a response to the Gospel. So we come to the final question.

Does what matters to God matter here?

The mission of the church begins with the Mission of God. Or putting it another way, God is the initiator, we respond. God loves so that we know we are loved. God was in Christ reconciling the world to him. And so it goes on.

No matter how effective, honoured and well-supported an activity of the church, it needs to reflect the nature of God for it to be a partnership with God.

But some may ask: how do we know what matters to God?

Here are a few areas of research:

- » Look at your neighbourhood and consider who Jesus treated as neighbours
- » Study Isaiah 56 onwards as a vision of what a God-focused society might look like
- » Read Micah and Amos, two prophets calling their people back to God-like values
- » Live one year in the life of your church reflecting on what the Bible says about the issues that regularly affect people's lifestyles and decide what you can do about them
- » Avoid the temptation to tell God your vision; pray for the faith to see his vision for you

God is in all things thus we move from the threshold of the church into the mission of God; its hidden but powerful momentum swirls around the events and experiences of people's lives.

John Rackley is a Baptist Minister living in Leicestershire



What do you think matters to God today?
How do you ensure that your church is in step with God's priorities?
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General Secretary Lynn Green:

Photo: Ian Britton



One thing clear to me as I meet Baptist leaders and churches around the country is that we are serious about mission. Everywhere I go I am inspired by the different ways that we are participating in God's mission. This edition of *Baptists Together* magazine illustrates that brilliantly. What particularly encourages me is the way that Baptists are looking for what God is already doing in their communities and then developing their own unique mission engagement around that. I am seeing passion, intentionality, compassion, creativity, sacrifice, focus, boldness, faith, and the growth of a new entrepreneurial, thinking-outside-the-box mindset. We understand that we need to be 'out there' if we want to embody the good news of Jesus in our communities. So that's all good then? Just need to do more of the same then? Well yes ... and no ...

Yes we do need to keep on responding to God's call in the places where we are, engaging in mission locally; this is very valuable and important for us as Baptists. But, in addition, I believe that we also need to develop more joined-up thinking in mission so that we can release something even more significant. Imagine what the Lord might do through us if we were able to think more intentionally from an area, regional and national perspective.

Recently I have had the great privilege of meeting with ministers and

What if the churches in your area saw themselves as one team?

leaders from both the London Baptist Association (LBA) and the Eastern Baptist Association (EBA). I have been really encouraged as I have heard ways in which joined-up thinking in mission is emerging. Drawing inspiration from the vision for mission and church planting which launched the LBA 150 years ago, fresh energy and focus is being released in the capital. In one particular area there are lots of congregations existing in unhelpfully large and outdated buildings. Churches

and leaders are meeting together to prayerfully seek God and discern what a 'one team' approach to mission might look like. In the EBA I heard about North Norfolk ministers and churches meeting together to pray and hear from God about their locality. This has led them to see new opportunities for church planting and plans are already beginning to unfold!

These are two great examples of how our commitment to freely associate and work together is enabling our mission to become more than simply the sum of its parts. Of course this sort of working together cannot be imposed but rather needs to be invited and demands a great deal of humility from all. Imagine if the churches and leadership in your locality got together, saw themselves

as 'one team' and began to really pray and seek the Lord about mission on a larger scale? Imagine if some churches saw that their buildings were now in the wrong place or could be developed differently and that capital could be released to enable congregations to be replanted in new settings? Imagine how smaller churches who struggle to sustain legal and compliance requirements might willingly re-imagine themselves as a missional community of a sister church?

As evidence is emerging of more connected thinking in our Associations regionally, the bringing together of a Baptists Together Mission Forum is providing a context in which to share and inspire each other nationally. Encouraged by Council, the Forum has begun a piece of research (entitled

Imagine what the Lord might do through us if we were able to think more intentionally from an area, regional and national perspective

'Fit for Mission' – see p35) to enable us to gauge a clear picture of the health of our churches across Baptists Together. This will help us prayerfully discern the opportunities for mission that a 'one team' approach might generate. But, let's be honest, none of this will be truly effective unless

we, as leaders and local churches, are prepared to lay ourselves down and seek his Kingdom above all else.

That is what I am praying for and I would love it if you could be praying for this with me. ■

An interview with

Jenni Entrican

Pioneer, mentor and former teacher, Jenni Entrican will be President of our Baptist Union between 2015 and 2016.

It'll be a lesson in courage, she says.



You were previously a teacher. What led you to leaving the profession and begin training as a Baptist minister?

Yes, previously I was a teacher in a Junior School and just after an Ofsted visit (where I had a really good report!), I had a sense of unease about whether this was where I would spend the rest of my working life. After quite a bit of reflection and prayer, and with my husband's support, I gave in my notice for the end of the academic year, not really knowing at that point which direction I might take. I looked at a couple of possibilities and then, out of the blue, I received a letter from a female friend to say she felt that I should train for the ministry – and this was someone who didn't actually believe in women ministers!). I can still remember the sense of shock, and I wrote out a list of reasons why I shouldn't go down that route. But at the end of the list I wrote, that, if I were honest, there was something deep inside which told me that I wasn't as shocked as I was making out. As this was such a big step, I wasn't going to do anything else about it until I got a clear message from God. The very next day another friend suggested that I should go into the ministry and I burst into tears!

You were the minister-in-training at Chipping Sodbury Baptist Church, and from there you went on to lead a church plant, a new expression of church called Jacob's Well. What was the thinking behind this?

Prior to my training another friend and I had started a weekly group called 'Friends and Neighbours' so I had real heart for engaging with women about life and spiritual matters. My training at **Bristol Baptist College** further broadened my thinking about mission and in particular about how to relate to people in the 21st century in, what was becoming increasingly obvious, a post-Christendom culture. Chipping Sodbury was exploring the possibility of church planting and it became clear that, rather than plant something that looked essentially the same as the parent church, a more considered response was to engage with the issue of how to connect spiritually with those who wouldn't be likely to come to 'standard' church.



Photo: Mary Parker

So what does Jacob's Well look like, and has it reached who you hoped it would?

Ok, not a big question then!! Jacob's Well is a small group of people who are investing themselves within a high priority neighbourhood in Yate, a small town near Bristol. (I'm no longer the minister there. It is being led by those who started the church with me.) It is still a tender plant and probably doesn't look much like what you might term 'established church'. It does however have core convictions that would not be out of place in any Baptist church – God at the centre; building community; serving others; adventuring with God. Prayer, the sacraments, empowering one another being Jacob's Well gathered and scattered. They try to live out their faith with no sacred/secular divide.

In the last few years they have built really strong links and contacts within the community, and have been the catalyst for change that has brought new hope into the area. The journey to get to this point was long. Initially we spent time deconstructing church ... and reconstructing it. We got involved in the local Mind Body Spirit fair, learning how to talk with folk about their spiritual lives. We saw ourselves as a network of people. We hung out in a community centre. We grew a community garden, and baked bread with folks, and gradually we were led to focus on this particular area using all those experiences.



Photo: Jenni Entrican





Photos: Jenni Entrican



Members of Jacob's Well

It has reached people. A few have become Christians. In the early days quite a number of disaffected Christians found healing with us. Numerically it hasn't grown much beyond 30 adults and children, but what it has done is found out what it means to be an authentic Christian presence in this area, and it is being a sign of the Kingdom as this group blesses this community.

As your ministry has evolved, you have taken a particular interest in others in pioneering situations. How will this influence your presidential year?

Yes, I've been very involved with ***Incarnate Church Planting Network*** nationally, locally, even with links into Europe. As a pioneer, one can feel quite isolated. It's sometimes unclear as to how to do and be this alternative Christ-following group and still engage with the established church. Part of the remit for those involved in new expressions is to question as well as initiate new things. Change can be exciting, but also bewildering and it can also be tricky to explain to the more established church groups. Support and opportunities to discuss and question and struggle together are important. So all of that will influence how I approach the year.

I want to excite people with the possibilities of change, but also how allowing oneself to be vulnerable, not to be the one 'in control', can take you to an important place spiritually. As much as is feasible, I want to really engage with those whom I meet. Being 'inclusive' is one of our Union's core values. In Jacob's Well we learnt that being inclusive is not only about being welcoming to people, it's far more about how anyone can have their voice heard, so that we value and empower one another. Somehow I want to model that. I'd love to take different people around with me on my year.

In what ways can the established church and those exploring new expressions of church or in pioneering situations support each other?

You would hope that they could, but sadly I think there's a considerable amount of distrust between the two, both feeling that they have been/are being criticised by the other. And there have definitely been instances of hurtful,

insensitive comments on both sides. There is something liberating and creative about taking the opportunity to do things differently, and unfortunately that can come across as 'nothing that the older model does is worthwhile'. Conversely you can have an established church that is overly critical of the new, as though those engaged in it were not also trying to follow the leading of God's Spirit.

It isn't easy – either way – but both sides are being blinkered if they cannot see that God is involved with both. My desire is that we develop a greater openness to one another, so that there is actual dialogue and support and learning ... how that actually comes about, I have no ready answer. Actually one of the reasons it's so difficult is that we are all already stretched, so it's difficult to find the energy to engage in this.

The overall theme for your Presidential year is 'Daring Greatly'. Could you unpack this a little?

The expression, 'Daring Greatly' comes from the title of a book by Brené Brown, a research Professor at the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work. (Of course it was not originally her phrase, but American President, Theodore Roosevelt's). A couple of years ago at an Incarnate Gathering, I watched a TED talk Brené gave on her research about the importance of vulnerability. It was funny, moving and really thought-provoking.



As a group we shared how what she was saying related to our ministry, our sense of who we are, our expressions of leadership. Subsequently I read the book and her premise that having the courage to be real, to put yourself in a vulnerable position, is not only liberating, but can transform – as the sub-title says, ‘the way we live, love, parent and lead’. It made a big impression on me.

So Daring Greatly is about courage - the courage to step out from behind the masks we wear, to give one another the permission to be ... real. To step out from behind what Eugene Peterson in *The Message* calls, our ‘fig-leaf words’ that hide the reality of the authentic WORD. It’s about having the courage to open ourselves up to largeness, new possibilities; having the courage to contemplate and even embrace change.

God’s Spirit is forever calling us to grow, to develop, to engage with the culture, the context, the problems of the day. It’s about courage to look at our spiritual practices, our relationships, how we are building community, being accountable – courage not just for ourselves as individuals, but as communities of Jesus’ followers. Courage to look at Jesus more closely. Who did he hang out with? How did he talk to people? What was his take on organised religion? He used a lot of stories, asked questions, subverted the religious mores and boundary markers. We need to find courage to move beyond what we are comfortable with – giving ourselves and others permission to move beyond the shape we’ve boxed ourselves into. I read on a greetings card recently – ‘Life begins at the end of your comfort zone.’

So Daring Greatly is about courage - the courage to step out from behind the masks we wear

It’s not about doing more. I sense that in the main, people just can’t do any more. Many are exhausted and even disillusioned. It’s about being and doing differently. Discovering what that means for you, and your Christian community, in your context.




In what ways might we see you over the next year?

I’ve offered some suggestions to the Associations about the kind of things I’ve got experience in and what warms my heart, particularly around the areas of mission, spirituality and women. And already I have a considerable number of interesting and creative invitations across the country. There are still spaces in 2016! I am really interested in just going to hang out with people, eat with them, see what they are up to, have ‘holy conversations’. Invite me!

Also, I’ll be taking part in the Assembly in May, and there’s going to be a website www.daringgreatly.org.uk (due to go live in May). At present we’re looking at three aspects to that – a creative monthly blog on some of the issues within the Presidential theme, contributed by invited others; regular letters or musings from myself; and something called ‘Giving Voice’ that stems from my desire for us to listen to one another and for people’s voices to be heard. It will kick off at the Assembly. Come and see! ■



courage to ...

-  **be real**
-  **step outside the box**
-  **follow Jesus**

Jenni Entrican
Baptist Union President 2015-16



www.daringgreatly.org.uk





Photo: Mitch Karunaratne

BUILDING MISSION

A church building can be something of a millstone, draining resources and time. But for others this most visible symbol of their presence can be their very springboard to mission. Three congregations share experiences of using their facilities to engage with the community.

The rebuild

“The benefits of having a contemporary building and what it says are immense,” says James Bloice-Smith, minister of **Headington Baptist Church** in Oxford. “We couldn’t have predicted that – we didn’t go into the project for those reasons – but that has been an outcome.”

Headington Baptist Church underwent a major rebuild in 2005-6. Its premises, built in 1901, had become cramped and run-down for its growing 100+ congregation. The church felt it was important to remain where it was, right in the heart of the community, despite the challenges of being in a conservation area. While there was some opposition to its plans, its design was commended as a ‘decent example of modern architecture’ by city planners, planning approval was granted and the new £1.4m three-storey building opened towards the end of 2006. It was subsequently shortlisted for the 2007 ACE/RIBA Award for Religious Architecture. Deliberately designed to be airy and welcoming (glass frontage; the coffee area being part of the sanctuary, separated by sliding doors), the building generated ‘a huge amount of goodwill’ among neighbours.



Photo: Headington Baptist Church

It has transformed the church, James says, in ways both measurable and less obvious.

Most obviously it has given the congregation the freedom to host a range of activities, such as Alpha, cooking, marriage courses, and self-esteem courses. The basement is a simple hall which has ‘really enhanced’ the children’s work and youth work: before the rebuild there wasn’t much of a youth group, but many children are now staying on as teens. Because it’s a desirable space it has been used



Photo: Headington Baptist Church

by outside bodies not connected with the church, such as polling and council displays for community projects. General church attendance has grown, with around 350 people connecting each month, and the church has had to move to two Sunday morning services.

The icing on the cake, James says, is the story of the man who came in some weeks within opening and said, “I can see that something interesting is here – what’s happening?”

An elder showed him round – and he hasn’t stopped coming. “This man was a successful businessman, but after reaching a particular stage in life he began to ask: ‘is this it?’” He has since got married and become a Christian.

“Of course, you can’t do this type of thing without there being a cost involved,” James continues. “People have been paying for this building for a long time. But the facilities have helped us in many ways. Having a building is our most visible presence in the community – it’s more difficult if that building is painting a picture of decline and being from a different era. And we are certainly functioning differently as a church compared with before. We believe it has been a great investment in terms of enabling mission.”

The collaboration with another congregation

“It’s been absolutely terrific,” says deacon and church secretary Chris Swaithe, “we simply never thought anything like this would happen.”

Chris has been a member of **South Street Baptist Church** in Brierley Hill, about four miles from Dudley for more than 40 years. Over the past decade he has seen the church’s under-used and crumbling facilities transformed into a hub of activity serving the local community in innumerable ways.

Developments began in 2006 when local Christians met to discuss youth provision in the area. Amblecote Christian Centre, an independent Pentecostal fellowship, based two miles away from the Baptist church, realised they shared South Street’s burden for Brierley Hill, a place with many indicators of high social deprivation. But while it had the building in the community’s heart, the Baptist church, with a regular meeting of 10 members, was lacking the numbers to act.

From these conversations came a germ of an idea. The two very different fellowships realised they needed each other and subsequently joined in partnership to form the Brierley Hill Project, a community support centre addressing the needs of the Chapel Street Housing Estate and surrounding area.



Photo: South Street Baptist Church

South Street is the hub of the project. A combination of grants – including from the National Lottery and Heart of England Baptist Association (HEBA) – and fundraising provided the resources to renovate and ready the building. The Project officially opened in 2008 and since then has seen hundreds come through its doors to access a range of services.

Currently there is a drop-in with job search and CV writing help and crisis support, a toddler group, and a

foodbank. A toddlers’ programme runs most mornings, and a café operates twice a week in the building. The fellowship runs one of the sessions and the charity Top Church Training (TCT) the other as part of its training programme. TCT provides a one-to-one intense practical support and mentoring service for young people aged between 16-25 who are NEET, (Not in Employment, Education, or training) at risk of becoming NEET, or who are homeless in the Dudley borough.



Inside the Brierley Hill Community Project



Photo: Stacey Simpson



Each Friday morning the project engages people in graveyard maintenance. The church also runs a Tuesday evening group (the Lavender Box) where anyone can come in to do anything connected with knitting, dressmaking or just have a cuppa and a chat. At the other end of the spectrum there's a session for MCing and rapping.

With everyone from the Baptist fellowship involved, Chris says the work of the project and the church is 'intertwined'.

"There is a symbiosis between church and the project. But we don't go and throw Bible tracts into their hands, that's not what people are looking for," he says. One of the biggest problems we had initially was giving people the confidence to come in, but the barriers are far more diminished.

"It all comes from a love for these people, and wanting to help them where we can, and we have built up trust. We are just who we are, and we never give up on anyone."

The church is growing: regular attendance has doubled and there is café church once a month. Through Home Mission it has twice been able to call a community pastor. The first did some valuable work before realising he had a calling to work with young people. In July members will be joined by Samson Ake, currently at Junction Baptist Church in Derby, and his wife Ellie, who is training at Northern Baptist College.

"Above all, this is a Spirit-led venture" continues Chris, a story of Christians working collaboratively and joining God's mission in an area of desperate need. At its heart is a small Baptist church that was facing an uncertain future. "We are a church that has hung in there," muses Chris. "We felt we had a purpose and have been proved right. It's the sort of thing that happens to other people, isn't it?"



Photo: South Street Baptist Church



Inside the Brierley Hill Community Project

Photo: Stacey Simpson

BUILDING ADVICE

Tips from the Arthur Rank Centre on making the most of your building

- 1 The most important task for any church is to try to work through, honestly, and prayerfully, what it means to be the people of God in their own community, location and circumstances. So working on a mission statement for your place of worship is the first step.
- 2 The two areas you might want to look at are:
 - » How your building can become a valuable tool for mission and meeting pastoral needs
 - » Wider use of the building by the community
- 3 Spend some time thinking about your building:
 - » When was the last time you really looked at your building and how it functions?
 - » What does your building say about you?
 - » How does it speak to you and how does it speak to others?
- 4 Start thinking about how people engage with your building:
 - » What does it mean to your congregation?
 - » What does it mean to the wider community?
- 5 Think of ways of getting people into your building and asking them what they think about the church and if they have any ideas on wider uses – an open day, exhibition, practical workshops?
 - » Ask them what they like about living in this area?
 - » Who misses out in this area?
 - » What services are lacking?
- 6 Download the **free** Health Check from the **Churchbuild** website for a 'quick and easy way to find out which are your biggest constraints, and the best opportunities for improvement'.
www.churchbuild.co.uk/church-building-health-check



The listed building

“At times it is difficult – but far from being a burden we see it as an opportunity,” says Philippa King, the development manager at the vast **Memorial Community Church in Plaistow**, East London. The Byzantine-style building opened in 1922 as the West Ham City Mission, whose congregation at the time envisioned ‘a great cathedral church towering above the mean streets of West Ham, witnessing to the love of God and welcoming, as to a house of beauty and peace, burdened and weary hearts.’

Fast forward 80 years and the picture was different. When Memorial Community Church was formed in January 2006 (the congregation of Memorial Baptist Church welcoming the neighbouring St Andrew’s Church) the building was ‘in a bad way’.

The newly-formed congregation set about repairing and redeveloping. There was a desire both for sustainability, and to develop as a hub for the community, explains Philippa. “We were clear that we want to do good for the community, holistically and practically, and be accessible to everyone.”

Soon after the church merger, work with homeless people began. *The Bridges Project* offers a breakfast every Saturday, which during winter is accessed by over 80 people a week. On Mondays there is now a drop-in for homeless people.

A charity called *Alternatives*, which supports vulnerable mothers through its *We Are Family* project, meets in the building. During the research process the congregation discovered there was little in the way of provision for elderly people, and as a result started a group on Tuesdays.



Photo: Heritage Lottery Fund

Studying the bells at Memorial Community Church

The arts have been an exciting development. Newham has lots of artists but no galleries. During renovation work on one of the towers, a number of people noted that its high ceilings and airy nature made it a potential gallery.

The church teamed up with the local Rosetta Art Centre and has now hosted several exhibitions. “We had the space, they had the artists,” notes Philippa. The most recent focused on slavery and human trafficking, featured performance art and saw a real coming together of the church’s social and community work with the art community.

Restoration of the church’s 10 memorial bells has also generated many links, particularly with local schools interested in the area’s history. The names of 200 local people killed in the First World War are cast into the bells.

This is just a taster of what’s happened. Although three phases of repair work have made the building watertight, there is still a lot of redevelopment work to be done, notably to put the front doors back at the front of the building, and later this year it will carry out another audit to discern people’s needs.



Exhibition at Memorial Community Church

Photo: Mitch Karunaratne





How black majority churches are redefining the UK's religious landscape

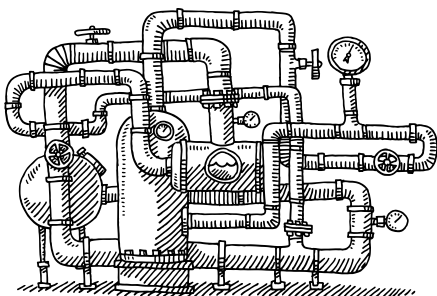
Nationally, there is a decline in church attendance and growth across most denominations. But black majority churches are growing significantly. Why? And how can other churches learn from them? By listening and reconnecting, writes **David Shosanya**

Once a year I am invited to **Spurgeon's College** to deliver a lecture on *Mission in a Black Majority Church Context*. There is always a sense of expectation as students wait in anticipation of what is about to be said. The majority of students are open and curious. Inevitably, a few students are less certain and consequently not fully at ease with the subject matter. However, the students are sufficiently cognisant of the fact that there must be explainable reasons for the exponential growth of churches that are disproportionately populated with Christians of African and Caribbean Heritage (my preferred description).

Generating heat

The lecture usually starts with an analogy that I believe captures the current need for co-operation between white British Christians and sisters and brothers from an African and Caribbean heritage. It goes like this: African and Caribbean heritage churches/Christians can be likened to a state-of-the-art boiler that has the inherent capacity to generate and distribute significant amounts of heat without much effort. I then suggest that the problem with the boiler is that it is disconnected from the radiation system that has the capacity to carry the energy from the boiler throughout the house and consequently raise the overall temperature.

Illustration: Frank Ramsbottom



I then offer the following thought: African and Caribbean heritage Christians come with and offer a tremendous capacity for spirituality, prayerfulness and a strategic focus on mission. However, the challenge they face is that the energy they generate through these God-given disciplines and gifts is often not able to be translated into meaningful connections with indigenous communities. As a result, in the majority of cases, they are not seeing individuals from white communities come to faith. If they do they tend not to remain in their churches. The goal of ecumenical and other inter-church initiatives, I suggest to students, is to connect the efficiency of the boiler to generate heat with the effectiveness of the radiation system to distribute it. Usually the penny drops at this point and the students are able to perceive the missional imperative of ecumenical relations and proceed with a dialogical disposition. This point is important and should be noted: there is often an unconscious – but nevertheless very real – sense of unease that colours the lenses through which the subject matter is viewed.

Need for dialogue

This is not a phenomenon that is unique and particular to students. I recollect being invited, along with other leaders, to the home of a leading figure in the British Christian church scene. A conversation was initiated: an exploration about leadership, mission, African and Caribbean Christians reaching white communities and why white people do not seem able to serve under black leadership. It was a cordial discussion with each person respectfully offering their unique perspectives on the range of dynamics at play. After a short while a white leader assumed a culturally superior disposition and proceeded to prescribe what steps needed to be taken if African and Caribbean heritage churches and their leaders were to be able to exercise leadership over and be relevant, missionally and otherwise, to white Christian

communities. His comments were valid but the spirit in which he spoke was less welcomed. There was an awkward silence – one that black people are used to! We know the silent code which says “let him speak because he thinks that we have got no insights of our own to offer.” So we did, while at the same time as a matter of courtesy offering perfunctory comments to prevent the conversation from stalling. I make this point to highlight the need for genuine dialogue around this issue; a dialogue that is multi-voiced.

I have reflected extensively and asked the opinions of many fellow African and Caribbean leaders on why white individuals find it difficult to either join African and Caribbean heritage churches or sit under their leadership. I have concluded that white people can often show an attitude of superiority as well as make assumptions about the inadequacy and incompetency of African and Caribbean heritage churches. This needs to be challenged and addressed if there is to be a change.

Trying to reach white communities

In 2009 I undertook some research as part of my sabbatical study and sought to identify and understand what steps African and Caribbean heritage churches were taking to reach white indigenous communities with the Gospel. A number of themes emerged: firstly, the church leaders I spoke with had made significant attempts to modify their styles of worship to be more appealing to white individuals; secondly, they had taken on board comments about their style(s) of preaching and its incompatibility to the indigenous population; thirdly, they had explored different forms of prayer that might more easily resonate with white communities.

In some cases there were severe setbacks resulting from these modifications. Perhaps the most significant setback was that in making the required adjustments, in an attempt to be open to white British communities, African and Caribbean heritage churches/leaders inadvertently compromised the integrity and efficacy of their own religious traditions, especially the capacity faith had to serve as a wall of resistance against their experiences of racism, to the extent that they no longer adequately met the felt needs of their own members. This, in a very real sense, is the critical tipping point between African and Caribbean heritage churches self-identifying as a ‘reverse mission movement’. They grasp the very real implications of the need to genuinely and sacrificially incarnate in a manner that is contextually relevant to white communities.



Photo: The Express & Star, Wolverhampton

Why black churches are growing

Despite the very real up-hill challenges that African and Caribbean heritage churches face, they are experiencing significant growth. I want to offer five reasons for such growth:

1 Prayer

African and Caribbean heritage churches are, by-and-large, devoted to the ministry of prayer. It is not unusual for them to be involved in 7, 10, 14, 21, 30 or 40 day fasts in preparation for mission or in consecration to God.

2 Proclamation

Preaching the Word – whether from the pulpit or on the streets – constitutes a foundational part of their DNA. Closely related to the act of preaching is an unshakeable confidence in scripture as the ‘Word of God’ and its ability to change lives and communities for the better.

3 Power

African and Caribbean heritage churches take seriously the interplay between the spiritual and temporal realm. The reality of principalities and powers and the demonic is very much a feature of their world-view/spirituality. They are intentional in articulating their viewpoint as well as standing with Christ against the powers/demonic even in the face of intellectual snobbery that can reduce such perspectives to primitive thinking.

4 Strategy

There is sometimes a caricature that African and Caribbean heritage churches are chaotic. This prejudice can often prevent external observers from recognising the strategic dimensions of their mission and ministry. It is not unusual for a single African and Caribbean heritage church to have a vision to reach a city or a nation and to have mapped out a plan to realise that vision.

5 Social Action

Increasingly African and Caribbean heritage churches are engaging in practical acts of kindness to demonstrate God’s love and as a means of connecting the boiler to the radiation system.

These churches are growing significantly and redefining the religious landscape of the nation. They are being intentional in creating environments where people from all cultures feel welcomed and affirmed. There are challenges of their own that they are negotiating. However, they are unequivocally committed to being salt and light and seeing God’s Kingdom come in the UK. You can help by developing a partnership with an African and Caribbean heritage church near you – connect the boiler to the radiation system! Blessings.

David Shosanya is London Baptist Association’s Regional Minister responsible for Mission



Do you agree with David’s five reasons for the growth of black majority churches? Are there other reasons? Join the conversation at www.baptist.org.uk/redefining





For some the summer months are a significant time for missional activities. Just as Jesus did, take time to debrief, to listen, to discern and to celebrate what he has been doing, writes **Nick Lear**

The days are longer and warmer (if not necessarily any drier). Children and young people have finished their academic year and are looking forward to a long holiday. It becomes easier to drive through towns first thing in the morning and later in the afternoon as the 'school run' is suspended. The pace of life seems to slow down. And many people are looking forward to a time to relax.

Churches too seem to look forward to a summer break: many of the 'normal' activities close down for the summer. Ministers often take extended leave and (unless the church is in a holiday destination) Sunday service attendance drops.

But rather than taking a break, for some churches the summer is a significant time for missional activities. Churches run children's holiday clubs or 'holiday at home' (a holiday club for senior citizens); beach missions (if location allows); host free community events like summer fetes or even full-blown festivals; engage in community service activities and much more – never mind the Christian holidays, overseas mission trips, camps and so on. There's so much going on that many Christians need a holiday at the end of it!



Photo: Soul Survivor

By now summer activities are likely to have been planned: teams of people will have been preparing, gathering the necessary resources and trying to encourage enough volunteers to make it all happen. But do we ever stop and ask ourselves whether it is worth it? What are the criteria by which we will judge whether or not it was a success? How will your people know that their hard work and sacrifice made a difference? When the 12 and 72 came back from Jesus' mission trips (Luke 9:1-10 and Luke 10:1-21) he asked them how it went. He debriefed them. Even if the first debriefing was interrupted by a large crowd of people the 12 could gauge the impact of their mission activity by the size of the crowd that wanted to know more (over 5,000 flocked to Jesus and his friends, forgetting to bring food). So surely if Jesus did that we should be doing that too.

What are we hoping will happen?

People become believers

Our primary goal is surely that people come to faith in Jesus, isn't it? We want people to become Christians. That is why we spend so much time and effort

in these activities when the rest of the country has metaphorically rolled up their trouser legs and has a knotted handkerchief on their head. So surely one criterion for success is how many people became believers: we hope and pray that this will happen.

However, if all we are doing is counting the hands that go up in response to an 'altar call' or the number of people who 'prayed the prayer' and we leave it at that we have only succeeded in making converts. These people may be like the plants in Jesus' parable (Luke 8:1-15) that land on rocky ground, spring up quickly but just as quickly wither away. Part of our planning and preparation must surely be for how we will help these people grow as disciples of Jesus – to be good soil that will bear fruit. How have you been 'preparing the soil' in advance: building friendships and serving these people? Have you got some people lined up who can accompany these new Christians, pray for them, encourage them, answer their questions (and ask new ones)? Will you run a discipleship course? How about a baptism preparation series?

Perhaps one of our success criteria should also be how many people who expressed their faith in Jesus in the summer are following him in the winter. But what if nobody comes to faith in Jesus? Is it all a failure at that point? If our only criterion is conversion then we will have to say, 'yes'. But there are many other blessings that we should consider.



Photo: Soul Survivor

What happened to the team?

How did the team members grow in their faith as they put it into action? Where did they experience answered prayer? Who did things for the first time that they had never thought they could do? Did it bring people in the team closer together? It is likely that most or all of those things will have happened. So why not ask the team to share those things with the church? Give them a service in which they can share their blessings and encouragements with the wider church to bless and encourage them.

Perhaps one of our success criteria should also be how many people who expressed their faith in Jesus in the summer are following him in the winter

What happened to the church?

If your church worked in partnership with other churches or organisations it is likely that your appreciation of one another will have been enhanced.

There are few things like working together in mission to put theological and ecclesiastical differences in perspective. How many people who were not involved in running the activities were praying for them – how did that feel?

Other changes may need to take place in order to accommodate the people with whom you have made contact in the summer. A measure of 'success' might be increased attendance at relevant church activities or even Sunday services. Adjustments may need to be made not just to fit them in but also to make people welcome who may have no previous experience of church. Children who attend a high-octane holiday club may not expect the same every week when they come to your regular activities but there should be some similarities to provide continuity. Similarly those who are not used to church services may not know your assumed traditions about not asking questions in the sermon or not bringing in cups of coffee. That may challenge some of those 'traditions'.



Photo: robertleverittphotography.com



What happened to the people?

As well as activities that collectively involve teams within a church, often individuals or small groups will have gone away. Some might have gone to Christian festivals, others may have gone on Christian holidays as leaders or as participants; or perhaps some might have engaged in some form of mission activity with another church or mission agency. Wherever they have been it is likely that they will have experienced God at work in them and through them. They will come back excited for the gospel and keen to share what has happened. And yet sometimes they never get to share that with the rest of the church which means that the church misses out on being encouraged and the person's joy and enthusiasm can wane rather rapidly.



Photo: Laurie Burn / Totterdown Baptist Church

What opportunities will people have to share what God has done? Can they share their story in a service? Could they write it up for your church magazine or website? Could they lead a prayer meeting where the focus is on celebrating what God has done and praying for those who have been blessed by him through people in the church? How will your church embrace those experiences and enable those people to continue to use their gifts and experience through your church's mission and ministry?

It's fascinating, isn't it, that Jesus' mission trips pioneered the classic 'plan, do, review' model?

What happened to the community?

If you run an event it is fair to ask those who attended what they thought of it. That will provide you with useful feedback about how you can improve for the future but will also hopefully be an encouraging affirmation of the value of the event to those who attended.

It doesn't have to be a detailed questionnaire, but why not have a comments box available, or give out short feedback forms and ask people for one thing that blessed them and one good idea for the future? Perhaps you could have a couple of people with clipboards or video cameras roving around asking questions.

If you made a practical difference to an area of your community by cleaning up, gardening, redecorating and so on, why not take 'before' and 'after' photos so you can be encouraged by the difference you made, and ask the local people about it – that may start some interesting conversations!

Plan, do, review

If we allow Jesus' model from when he sent out the 12 and 72 to inspire us into mission we should also allow it to encourage us when we come back. It's fascinating, isn't it, that Jesus' mission trips pioneered the classic 'plan, do, review' model? So, just as Jesus did, take time to debrief, to listen, to discern and to celebrate what he has been doing. Rejoice in those who have come to faith and ensure that their faith is nurtured. Celebrate the ways in which people's faith in Jesus has deepened through what they have done for him during the summer. Look for signs of the Kingdom of God breaking out in your community and be encouraged.

God doesn't take a summer break and will be at work in and through our churches, albeit perhaps in different ways to our usual programmes and activities. You could even hold a meal to celebrate but perhaps you should have more than five loaves and two fish ready!



Photo: Tooting Junction Baptist Church

Nick Lear is a Regional Minister in the Eastern Baptist Association



mega makers!

“Who’s the Mega Maker?”

Mount Pleasant Church in Northampton connects with the local community through its summer holiday kids’ club

Mount Pleasant Holiday Club is held during the first full week of the summer holiday. We have three age groups (4-5s, 6-8s, and 9-12s) each using a mixture of Bible stories and puzzles, games, songs, crafts, drama and puppets. Last year we based it on Scripture Union’s Mega Makers – exploring the vastness of God’s love, illustrated by stories from Matthew. At the end of each morning the three groups gathered together for a time of worship and praise, interrupted only by the shout of “Who’s the Mega Maker?”, which got the rousing response of “Jesus!”.

Some 63 children attended: about one third have connections with Mount Pleasant, either through Junior Church, Brownies and Rainbows or Chatterbox (mums and tots); one third attend another church and a third had no church connection at all.

Thirty people helped run the club. In 2014 we moved the Fun Day from Saturday to Sunday. We had a lively all-age service followed by a chip shop meal and games, including a bouncy castle fun run, and ended with ice creams from a van in the car park! This was thoroughly enjoyed by over 20 families, most of whom do not come regularly on Sundays.

Holiday at Home

Holiday clubs are not just for kids, as West View Baptist Church in Hartlepool has found out

Over the past few years we have run a Holiday at Home for the over 50s. The church gets transformed into a holiday destination or a cruise liner and a range of activities are planned for the week. This has included craft, games, on-board entertainment and the occasional speaker or demonstration.



Photo: West View Baptist Church

The event is aimed at providing a time of fun and fellowship for people in our congregation and from around the community and has proved to be very popular. The idea came about after being challenged by the increasing number of older people in our community who can often feel isolated and lonely. The event is followed up during the year with a Christmas meal and over time the church has built up relationships with people in the community.



Photo: Tooting Junction Baptist Church

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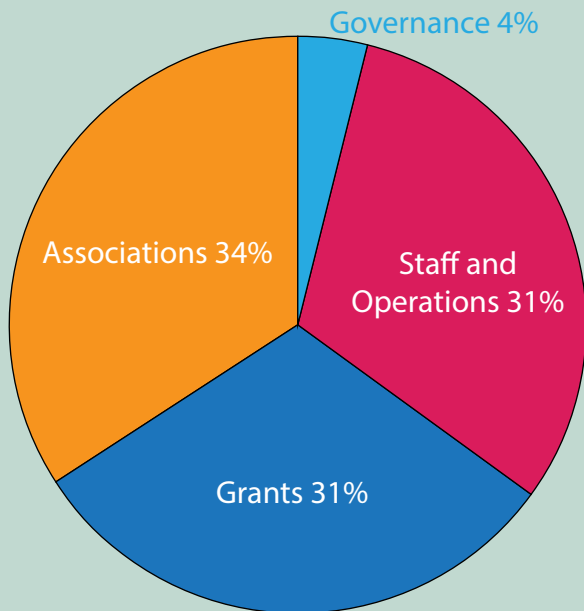
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The total amount of money raised through the Home Mission Appeal in 2014 was over **£3.9 million**.

Your money was shared between these four areas of our Union.

95% was used for charitable activities, 4% for governance, and 1% for fundraising.

Are Home Mission grants for the mission of God - or the sustaining of a church?

Both, says **Alisdair Longwill**. Let me explain...

I'm both challenged and drawn to the early description of the first disciples as 'followers of the Way' (Acts 9:2). That is, followers of the Way... of Jesus. The same Jesus, who 'became flesh and blood and moved into the neighbourhood' (John 1:14). The Jesus who said that he came, "to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:9). It's the same Jesus who spent his entire ministry reaching out to the 'community' of people who lived around him. When we put all that together it seems that the Way of Jesus is to engage in the mission of God.

"I am sending you"

I'm also challenged and drawn by the fact that Jesus' desire is for the 'Way of Jesus' to continue beyond his earthly life and ministry. For the very same Jesus who would say to his disciples, "Come, follow ME, and I will make YOU fishers of men." (Mark 1:17). It's the same Jesus, who when risen from

the dead appeared to those disciples, 'anointed' them with his peace and his Spirit and said, "As the Father has sent ME, I am sending YOU" (John 20:21) and later commissions them to "go and make disciples" (Matthew 28:19).

Living out the mission of God is clearly what Jesus intended for his followers in the first century AD.

Your giving makes it possible for purposeful churches to be sustained

It must be what he intends for us today. If this is so, then surely it must follow that the purpose of our Home Mission grants must be 'for the mission of God'.

Being called to live out the mission of God day-by-day, spending our time, energy and resources seeking to live and act like Jesus, is a formidable task. Our contemporary culture presents us with many challenges and obstacles along the way – so to merely go about this task with drive and commitment will not produce fruit in the kingdom of God. It's not enough to share the same task as Jesus – we must go about it with the same attitude and character (Philippians 2:5). We need to 'remain in him' (John 15) and be strengthened and resourced by him, be intrinsically connected to him.



Photo: Ifor Williams

Baptism in Brecon

Be transformed

It is no surprise in the light of this challenge that the apostle Paul writes to the Christians in Rome, 'Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God... Readily recognise what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it,' (Romans 12:1,2 *The Message*).

If we are going to remain close to Jesus and be transformed so that we begin to live 'Jesus-shaped' lives, characterised by the attitudes and values of Jesus, we will need a facility and a context where we can receive such equipping and enabling. Something like a community of followers of the Way of Jesus and spiritual seekers, gathering together with a shared sense of purpose. In other words, a church!

So, are Home Mission grants for the sustaining of a church? Yes! – where the purpose of that church is to nurture, equip, and enable followers of Jesus to live in the Way of Jesus and to engage in the mission of God within their local community and beyond.

Celebrating God at work

We are grateful for those individuals and churches who prayerfully and financially support Home Mission and we celebrate what God is doing in his mission through them. One example is the recently built housing estate, **Wichelstowe, in Swindon**, where Ali Boulton has been ministering, seeking to 'bless people of all faiths and none';

Brecon hilltop prayer group



Photo: Ifor Williams

showing and sharing God's grace within that community. Today, people gather in the context of toddler groups, pram walks, after school clubs and a worshipping/exploring community.

Another is **Breconshire, South Wales**, where Ifor and Penny Williams are showing and sharing God's grace among the farming community. They have hosted Alpha courses, done 'church' around kitchen tables, and week-by-week share in the joys and disappointments of the farming community.

If we are going to remain close to Jesus and live 'Jesus-shaped' lives, we will need a facility and a context where we can receive such equipping and enabling

Calne Baptist Church no longer receives a Home Mission grant – they celebrated their 'success' of 'coming off a grant' in 2014. However, they now, as a result of having received a grant in previous years, connect more effectively with children through *GR8 Zone* (a monthly Messy Church-type service for all age groups gathering together), and in small groups designed to assist in the discipleship development of their congregation.

A few years ago **Oldfield Park Baptist Church** in Bath received a Mission Project Grant from Home Mission which

made it possible to 'kit out' their church to offer a study café for local university students – giving them an appropriate and relevant opportunity to connect with local students.

These are just a few contexts enabled and supported by Home Mission. Your giving makes it possible for purposeful churches to be sustained – so that they can bring glory to God, by equipping and enabling 'followers of the Way' to engage in the mission of God.

Oldfield Park Baptist Church Study Café



Photo: Mark Cooke

Alisdair Longwill is a Regional Minister in the West of England Baptist Association



Eight Ideas for a Sacred Space

We know we have a powerful message to share, and love giving appropriate opportunities to reflect on life's bigger questions. But is there more to life than Alpha? What follows are examples of Christians creating environments of discovery that might enable people to catch a glimpse of God beyond their everyday experience.

Prayer Spaces in Schools

Prayer Spaces in Schools enable children and young people, of all faiths and none, to explore life questions, spirituality and faith in a safe, creative and interactive way.

Usually held in a classroom-sized area that has been transformed for a few days or a week, a prayer space has a range of creative activities that encourage personal reflection on issues such as forgiveness, injustice, thankfulness, big questions, identity and stillness.

Vanessa Rye, Associate Minister at **Didcot Baptist Church**, has been organising prayer spaces in the town's schools for more than two years.

"For one of these schools the timing was crucial as a year six pupil had been knocked down by a car and died from his injuries, many of his classmates were deeply traumatised by his death, some having witnessed it," she said.

"They found prayer space a safe, calm place where their emotions could be safely expressed without judgement or comment. The volunteers gave gentle support and encouraged the children to ask questions and voice fears. It proved to be the point at which many children were able to make significant progress in their experience of grief and loss."

Photo: Mary Parker



She added that "Prayer Spaces has had a greater impact on the children and staff than I could ever have imagined.

"In many ways it is such a simple idea, it isn't proselytising or preaching but offering the opportunity for children of all faiths and none to experience a quiet space where they can think, reflect and pray as they choose. The volunteers remind the children what each area is for but no-one is forced to do anything they don't want to.

"We stand back and watch the Holy Spirit at work – it is mind blowing. It is a way of expressing God's love for the children and the teaching staff, and by this expression of love God makes himself known."

Visit www.prayerspacesinschools.com

Easter Cracked and Christmas Unwrapped

For the past 20 years **Slough Baptist Church** has put on 90 minute presentations at Christmas (Christmas Unwrapped) and Easter (Easter Cracked) for Year 6 pupils from local schools. The aim is to give a positive and warm impression of being in a church and to communicate the message of these two key festivals. The fast-paced programme features a range of activities to help pupils reflect on the real meaning of Christmas and Easter.



Photo: Mary Parker

Over the years the number of churches taking part has risen. Last Christmas 15,000 pupils from 45 locations and 200 schools attended Christmas unwrapped events.

"We have been blown away by how well it has gone and the positive feedback from staff and children," says Scripture Union Development Worker Wayne Dixon, a member of Slough Baptist Church who developed the presentations. "As a secondary schools worker I'm often having chats with teenagers who can remember their visit to the church, and the positive impression it made on them."



Photo: Jenny Few

Labyrinth (1)

A labyrinth is a single path with one way in and out that has traditionally helped people step away from their own path and explore the spiritual side of life.

Using one can be a wonderful way of welcoming people onto church property. The East Midlands Baptist Association has a prayer labyrinth which was used in the Wirksworth arts festival in 2013 and 2014 by the newly-combined Methodist and Baptist congregations (**Wellspring Church Wirksworth**). "It was offered as a 'spiritual art installation' for visitors whose senses were being bombarded by images and sounds all over the town, and who might welcome an alternative experience: quiet, reflective, sacred, a means of being close to God," said Baptist minister Jenny Few.

"To say we were overwhelmed by the response was an understatement; we estimated that over 250 people spent time in the church. Not all became pilgrims, walking the labyrinth's convoluted, symbolic pathway, but many who did were moved to write a prayer or words of thanks."

Exhibitions in churches

"It invites the viewer to look through the medium to the God who can reveal himself not only through the spoken word but also through material, created things." So writes former President of the Methodist Conference John B Taylor on his denomination's modern art collection. This collection, described as 'the most important collection of religious art in Europe outside the Vatican' can be used by churches (though there is a two year waiting list). More generally curating exhibitions or art trails gives opportunities for reflection amid the busyness of modern life.

ACE (Art+ChristianityEnquiry) facilitates and encourages artists and faith communities to curate works of art in places of worship. Visit acetrust.org/art-in-churches

The Methodist Modern Art Collection: www.methodist.org.uk/prayer-and-worship/creative-arts/the-methodist-art-collection

Easter explored through art in the city: www.baptist.org.uk/easterart

Labyrinth (2)

Not all labyrinths are quiet and meditative. **Croxley Green Baptist Church**, Herts, organises more experiential and interactive labyrinths each Easter and Christmas that enable anyone to engage with the story using sight, sounds and smells. They are divided into zones, each anchored in a particular Bible verse. Props might include a table to represent the last supper, or crowd noises to represent Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem.



As well as telling the story it's also a reflective experience, with a guidebook written by senior minister David Gregory. In this way the labyrinth is designed for both children and adults

to engage with: around 500 children come each year, while there are open days for the wider community.

"It helps people of all ages explore the meaning of the Christmas and Easter story in a new and refreshing way," said youth and children's minister Jon Bishop.



"Schools are so open to coming along, it helps them meet their curriculum targets. The children really enjoy it and remember it, and some even bring their parents to the open public

sessions. It's a great way to connect with local schools, and in terms of adults we've found those on the fringes of church life take a lot from it."



Photos: Jon Bishop

Contemporary Stations of the Cross

Baptists and Methodists in Southend collaborated in 2014 on a pop-up installation in an empty shop, linking icons of the Easter story to aspects of modern life. The first station, for example, was entitled 'The Red Carpet Treatment'. Next to the front page of a gossip magazine were the words: 'Jesus arrives in Jerusalem on a donkey, a symbol of humility. Yet he is treated like a celebrity. How many of these celebrities will people still be talking about in 2,000 years?' Nearly 700 people walked through the icons.

"I had curated contemporary stations for the past decade," explains Andy Goodliff, minister of **Belle Vue Baptist Church**. "One of my deacons said to me : "You need to get this out of the church and into a more public place." I wasn't sure how to do that.

"Then I was contacted, along with Steve Tinning from **Leigh Road Baptist Church**, by Hannah Bucke, the local Methodist town centre minister. She had got use of an empty shop and wanted to tell the Easter story. I jumped at the chance to be involved. We were really pleased to have so many people visit."

<https://eastericons.wordpress.com>

Or visit Icons-on-Sea on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/iconsonsea?fref=ts>



Photo: Andy Goodliff



Photo: Chris Duffett

Street ideas

What about beyond your building? Baptist evangelist and former Baptist Union President Chris Duffett has shared some great ideas over the years.

One is to set up a market stall offering different kinds of fruit – completely free – each one representing a fruit of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

"As soon as I had put up the 'Free Fruit' sign we had a steady stream of customers. I was struck by how many people connected with what we were doing. Some people commented that they needed more peace so they asked for an apple with a label on it that stated 'peace'.

"Others just filled their arms with as much fruit as they could carry and happily went on their way with a smile on their face. Most of all, people connected with the gesture and were just chuffed to receive a piece of fruit for free. Two people broke down in tears as my small team of volunteers and I spoke with people about what we can have from God. One lady said that she needed to know that she was loved and wept as we prayed for her. This idea is so simple."

For more ideas, visit Chris's blog: www.chrisduffett.com

Feeding the 5,000 on Brighton Beach

Ok, maybe not for everyone but a brilliant idea nevertheless. Inspired by Chris Duffett's visit to Rachel Round's region during his term as Baptist Union President, Rachel, head of media at the Bible Society, and her team came up with the idea of hiring an actor to play Jesus and getting him to distribute fish sandwiches on Brighton Beach. Rachel, of **Calne Baptist Church**, said the aim of the contemporary re-telling of the Feeding of the Five Thousand was "to bring the Bible to people enjoying the last days of the summer holiday before the start of the autumn term.

"We thought if Jesus were here today, maybe he'd be on Brighton beach sharing his generous message with everyone, no matter who they are or where they are from.

The Bible is more than a book – it's a wonderful, powerful story worth exploring, living and sharing. We wanted to give everyone the opportunity to encounter scripture for themselves."



Photo: Clare Catford/Bible Society

“He has carried me”

After losing close family members, a tragic accident, and years of being pursued by God, **Wendy Reakes** finally met with Jesus

Raised by a non-Christian family, Wendy Reakes was 15 when she went to the local church to pray after her father suffered a stroke. “I was desperate”, says Wendy. “My father had recently joined AA after a lifetime of alcohol abuse, and as I’d been a child carer to my disabled mother most of my young life, I dreaded the thought of having to nurse him too.” That day Wendy went to the local church to seek strength and guidance, but the door was locked. “I was filled with resentment at the thought of no one being there to help me, so I left and never went back. Regretfully, not for another 35 years!”

Wendy says she spent a lifetime looking for something to fulfil her. “I felt an emptiness in my heart that I could never explain, and I kept hearing a voice calling my name over and over again. I remember how I used to try and shake it out of my mind because it was just so irritating. When I look back now, I like to think it was God calling me to the faith. It’s a tragedy I didn’t listen.”

Following the loss of all her grandparents, Wendy was just 21 when her beloved mother died. Some years later her only brother was diagnosed with a brain tumour and he died six months later. “I lost them all in such a short space of time”, Wendy recalls. “I felt my heart was breaking, but still I never prayed or turned to Jesus.”

Then one day she met Jake. “It wasn’t just a meeting; it was love at first sight. He was truly a gift from God, since he’s saved me in more ways than one, and he’s been the love of my life ever since.”

In June 1999 Wendy’s life changed forever when a freak accident caused her to fall from a ladder in her home. She shattered the bones in her right leg and even though the surgeons tried to repair it with pins and plates, she contracted gangrene. One day, alone in her room, she began haemorrhaging badly. She was on the verge of death, but by chance Jake turned up and raised the alarm. “By some miracle, he had the feeling I needed him.”

Wendy was revived and brought back to life, but the doctors were left with no choice but to amputate her leg. Unfortunately the gangrene spread, so she had to have two more amputations until they finally stopped six inches above the knee.

All through that time, Wendy never once turned to God to pray, but deep down, she knew she was being cared for and protected by some sort of spiritual force. “There was someone there”, she says. “I could feel it. I also believed that I lost my leg for a reason, and that one day I would find out why.”



Photo: Wendy Reakes / Clifton Photograph Company (Bristol)

Jake proposed to Wendy when she was in intensive care, and later they got married and began trying for children. “We were told by the doctors that I couldn’t conceive, but by some miracle we had twins, a boy and a girl, and they were perfect in every way.”

Nine years later, Wendy met someone who was to introduce her to God once more. “I met her by chance, as if the whole episode was destined,” Wendy recalls fondly. “Avril talked to me about God and her faith and then she asked me to go with her to church.”

The following Sunday Wendy went to **Clevedon Baptist Church** where the pastor at the time, Phil Hughes, preached on the Trinity. She recalls the day with great fondness. “When I listened to the sermon told with such passion and conviction, I was immediately hooked. It was as if the essence of the Lord had filled my mind and body with the greatest of gifts as I at last turned my life over to Jesus.”

“That was almost three years ago and since then my whole life has changed,” Wendy says. “I’d been searching for him all my life and he has carried me through all those times when I thought I was alone. I feel so blessed to have all the things I have now, especially since I discovered an aptitude for writing.”

Wendy believes she wouldn’t have any of it, if she hadn’t lost her leg. “I feel so blessed to have Jesus in my life, my husband and children, my dad, my Christian friends, and all my extended family among the congregation of Clevedon Baptist Church. Life doesn’t get any better than that,” she concludes.

Wendy’s autobiography *Saved* has recently been published and is available from Amazon. She is also the author of several novels including *Sinkhole* and *In the Shadow of Strangers*. Visit www.wendyreakes.com

GOD'S SQUAD

Christian motorcycle club



Photo: narvikk / istockphoto.com

God is interested in all aspects of our lives, including our hobbies. **Emma Walsh** shares her involvement with a motorcycle club

On warm summer evenings across the English countryside you can see fields with marquees, motorbikes, bands and tents. You can hear the sounds of laughter, revving engines and rock music. Inside the marquees are leather-clad men and women ... bikers, talking, laughing and drinking. There's one in the middle with a cross on his back. Another biker walks up and pulls him into a hug saying "Hey mate! Haven't seen ya in ages! Let me buy ya a drink. I got something to ask ya." As they head to the bar, he starts to talk about what's going on. While he's listening, others nod or smile at him, some come and ask if they can have a chat later. After a while you hear the biker with the cross on his back offer to pray for him. He looks up and says, "That would be great. Thanks."



Emma and her husband Fez

The biker with the cross on his back is a member of **God's Squad** Christian Motorcycle Club, a non-denominational ministry that was originally set up in Australia to spread the gospel to bikers and people on the fringes of society. Over the last 40+ years the club has grown to well over 300 members with Chapters (groups) around the world. We are a legitimate biker club with a patch on our backs; all of us ride motorcycles and enjoy the biker lifestyle. The only difference is that we are Christians. Many of us are bikers who have come to accept God.

The ministry of God's Squad has been called incarnational, cross-cultural and radical, but is essentially relational. We don't go preaching the gospel as most bikers see this as offensive Bible bashing. Instead, we are part of the culture, meeting them on their turf. We build friendships by spending time with them on the road and at parties. It's about sharing a common experience. When they are ready and curious, they ask about our faith which often leads to them discussing their faith.

We take on a chaplaincy role for the biker scene. We conduct services for weddings, blessings, funerals and baptisms. We spend time with them when they grieve and when they celebrate. We help when they are struggling with a moral decision or a family crisis and visit them in hospital or prison.

When we moved to Oxford seven years ago my husband Fez was already a member of God's Squad. At the time there was only one Chapter in the UK with most of the members in the north. As God's Squad became more visible in the south the numbers grew and in 2010 there were enough people to start a Chapter in the south, with Fez as President. With that

growth there has been a change in how we conduct our ministry. Five years ago it was a very male-dominated ministry but as we progressed we increasingly came into contact with more female bikers. This created many more opportunities for me to be involved. While I'm not a member of God's Squad (God's Squad doesn't have female members yet) the bikers would open up, especially when they found out I am an ordained minister. It's a significant part of the ministry in the south Chapter.

It is easy to look at a biker and assume they have no faith, but often this is not the case. Many have faith in God – what they lack is faith in church. And even those that don't believe in God still have a faith they do believe in such as wiccans, pagans or Nordic gods. While they don't believe in our God, their faith is just as important to them as ours is to us. We don't judge or condemn, but instead engage them in respectful discussions about faith. It is through discussion that we are able to share our faith.

Emma Walsh is a Baptist Minister and the Head Librarian at Regent's Park College, Oxford.

Emma and Fez are happy to visit churches or groups to talk about the work of God's Squad.

Email daemza@gmail.com for more details.

Share your experiences of using hobbies as a way of engaging in mission at www.baptist.org.uk/hobbies



Simon Goddard provides an update on what the Pioneer Collective is doing

At the end of his 'Big Hearted' presidential year Chris Duffett shared a vision for identifying, releasing and resourcing 400 new Baptist pioneers. A number of partners affirmed this vision, and gathered together to launch the Pioneer Collective in December 2013. News of this exciting initiative was communicated at the Baptist Assembly last year when we were also introduced to the stories of those who are already 'GOING to where the church isn't, DOING what Jesus does, and SEEING what happens'.

The Pioneer Collective is **not** a new 'organisation' but rather the name given to the vision itself and the growing number of pioneers who are being called to advance the Kingdom in new and creative ways. A grant from Baptists Together and BMS World Mission has meant that the Light Project can give Chris a day and a half each week to help share the vision. The Eastern Baptist Association has also enabled me to spend some of my time co-ordinating the initiative, and recently we've been joined by a volunteer administrator, Michael Hall. Other partners include Urban Expression, the Incarnate Network and Fresh Streams.

Northern Baptist Association mission strategy event

As well as supporting individual pioneers, we've been working with the Associations and speaking at regional events. In February of this year, Chris joined the Northern Baptist Association (NBA) as they launched a 'mission strategy' which included a focus on pioneering.

John Claydon, NBA Regional Minister said of the event: "Situated in *Locomotion*, the Shildon Railway Museum, we were reminded of the industrial pioneers and challenged by Chris as we focused on mission and the call to a pioneering spirit to engage our community with the good news of God's Kingdom."

Paul Revill, NBA Regional Minister (Mission) said: "I was greatly encouraged... and I hope that the evening will serve as a starting point for a greater commitment to new ways of engaging in mission beyond the boundaries of our church communities."



Photo: Northern Baptist Association

Chris is used to speaking in all kinds of weird and wonderful places including cathedrals, pubs, cafés and town halls but he thinks that the NBA wins the prize for being the most creative! He reflects that "the band were practising while the Railway Museum was still open and there was a beautiful mix of praise and worship intermingled with the noise of a Thomas the Tank Engine children's ride and museum commentary for visitors. The launch in such a venue had a feel of 'God speaking something' about it. I wonder whether the Pioneer Collective is more than just about 400 new pioneers, but rather about us all as a Baptist family. I wonder whether we need to meet in other places or in creative accessible ways for the sake of those who have yet to make sense of the story of Jesus?"



Photo: Northern Baptist Association

'If we go' - a poem by Chris Duffett

If we go where you go, where's that?
 Where do you venture off to, beckoning me to follow?
 I see you sitting on the street, urine doorway,
 Splitting an egg and mayo sandwich, and then sharing yours with the man's dog,
 Patting and scuffing and then being still,
 Placing your scarred rough hands upon the man's dreadlocked head to bless,
 I see addictions flee, hurts blossom to whole trees,
 I see a man made new, new identity,
 not 'homeless man' but loved man.

If we go where you go, where's that?
 Where do you venture off to, beckoning me to follow?
 I see you knocking on a paint-peeled knackered door,
 Waiting. Behind a baby crying and a shouting mum, hassled
 beyond her limits, trying to hold it together but can't,
 I see you gently explain the gifts of nappies and food and shalom,
 Pots of it, leaking out through the plastic Aldi bags,
 I see you embrace the little ones, hold them, giggle and laugh,
 Each wave goodness comes back, hope is restored,
 I see a mum made new, new identity,
 not 'single mum' but loved woman.

If we go where you go, where's that?
 Where do you venture off to, beckoning me to follow?
 I see you sitting with John, or is it Dave or Terry. You know,
 Your glass of red looks out of place amongst the tall pints and empties,
 You talk words of purpose and good-future,
 You address the hours of wasted time, hours upon hours of
 nothingness begin to shape into changing this place,
 For doing and helping and family and action and, and, and,
 You open up the possibilities, for where there were none
 You create new,
 I see a lonely alchi man made new, new identity,
 not boozing bloke, but loved man.

If we go where you go, where's that?
 Where do you venture off to, beckoning me to follow?
 I see you running to the park, yeah it's dark and the youth
 may spark and tell you where to go, yet you know as you say hi and kick that ball back,
 You ask if you hang out for a bit and talk about stuff, school and who's it,
 I see you with words of destiny flow like a can of Red Bull nourish and waken,
 I see dignity rise like a hurried flood, young people stepping
 into that playful dance of what can be, of Kingdom come, worth and creativity,
 I see a teenager made new, new identity,
 not 'troubled youth' but loved person.

If we go where you go, where's that?
 Where do you venture off to, beckoning me to follow?
 I close my eyes and imagine where you would be, and it's endless,
 You go where I dare not,
 Help me to clasp that hand, to step in near and far to those you simply love,
 The Un-embraced, un-known, un-wealthy, un-done, unwelcome,
 un,un,un,un,un,
 Make me see people made new, new identity, not just people,
 but each one loved and loved some more,
 If we go.

If we go © Chris Duffett 2015

Pioneer Sunday

You may want to read Chris's 'If we go' poem in church on 24 May – a date we've dubbed as Pioneer Sunday. It's Pentecost, and we think this is an ideal time to share the vision of the Pioneer Collective with your own congregation. If you visit our website (www.pioneercollective.org.uk/pioneersunday) you'll find this poem and other special resources to help you apply the message of Acts 2 in your own context. As we seek to reach the 94 percent of the UK population who are not in church Sunday by Sunday, we need to pray for that same pioneering Pentecost Spirit to stir us up that we might also GO, DO and SEE.



On Pioneer Sunday, you may also want to join us in praying for the pioneering projects that are springing up and bearing fruit across our Baptist family. We are keen to do all we can to support pioneers and as well as praying we have been working with our partners to provide places for them to gather together and share their stories. The Fresh Streams conference in January provided one such opportunity, and the Pioneer Collective was particularly blessed by a generous donation that was given from the conference offering. We were also able to be at the Incarnate Network houseparty in Derbyshire this March, another event that provided great encouragement to those who attended.

Event

For those who are pioneering in a rural context, we are pleased to be able to recommend an ecumenical event that is taking place at the Hayes Conference Centre in Swanwick from 15 to 17 June. See page 39 for details of the 'Making and Growing Disciples in the Countryside' conference.

Training

Baptists are not the only ones who are pioneering! Since the publication of the Church of England report *Mission Shaped Church* a growing network of denominations have been working together to encourage and enable Fresh Expressions. A report into church attendance last year (<http://brierleyconsultancy.com/images/2014stats.pdf>) found that, whilst church membership declined by 5 percent between 2008 and 2013, the numbers of those who are part of Fresh Expressions rose by 273percent!

Part of this growth has been due to the provision of training like *Mission Shaped Ministry*. With a grant from the Eastern Baptist Association, the Pioneer Collective has facilitated a partnership which will be making Mission Shaped Ministry an online course beginning in September 2015. Baptist churches across the UK are invited to be some of the first to benefit from 'msm online'. More details about the course, as well as information about the 20 percent 'early bird' discount on the course fee can be found at www.missionshapedministry.org/online.



The Crucible Course (www.cruciblecourse.org.uk) is another source of training available to those wanting to think more about pioneering. Modules are taught over weekends in February, May and November and they form a major component in the 'Equipped to Pioneer' programme for anyone interested in being recognised as a Baptist pioneer.

Share your stories

We know that congregations up and down the country are finding new and creative ways to communicate the love of God, and we would love to hear your story. Please do contact us: through the website (where you can also sign up for news and prayer updates) www.pioneercollective.org.uk, by calling 0845 475 4003 or by sending an email to info@pioneercollective.org.uk.

You can also share your pioneering ideas and stories on a new website created to accompany the re-publication of the *Big Hearted* book (which you can buy direct from the publishers at www.gileadbookspublishing.com/big-hearted.html or by searching for the Kindle version on Amazon). If you've read the book you can register at www.bighearted.org.uk and join the conversation by telling us what you've been doing. We look forward to hearing from you.



Simon Goddard is the co-ordinator of the Pioneer Collective



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Mission is no substitute for the real thing

I believe that there is nothing more significant that a Christian can do than introduce a fellow human being to the message and person of Jesus; that there is no more important task for a local church than to help people discover and become faithful followers of Jesus. This is a task of truly eternal proportions.

Yet for all of this, I am often less than enthusiastic about activities that many describe as 'mission'. Some might question such an apparently contradictory point of view, and I guess my response would be "it all depends what you mean by mission."

In secular terms, I would suggest that an awful lot of what we describe as mission might otherwise be called marketing. And why not? Why shouldn't we devise new and creative ways to 'get people in?' Surely we need to apply our imagination and creativity to communicating the Christian message in relevant and attention-grabbing ways. Given that our 'product' is so precious, should we not invest ourselves and our resources in 'marketing' it?

Yes I agree . . . provided that 'doing mission' does not become a substitute for being an authentic Christian community. Like many people, I can find a fair amount of security and satisfaction from being busy. But being busy can also be a great way of avoiding being real. Being busy on behalf of someone is very different from having a meaningful relationship with them. Being busy for Jesus is not the same as being shaped by Jesus – and those whom Jesus called to "proclaim the Good news" were those whom he first called to "follow me."

We have all been subjected to effective marketing. We are convinced that the product is brilliant yet discover it is not quite what it was cracked up to be once we open the box. I dare to believe that when a local church is truly functioning as it should, when local Christians are truly living as they should, they become an irresistible community. When Jesus is truly present – people can seldom keep away. In the famous gospel story, 5,000 people turned out and were fed (John 6:1-15), not because of a brilliant marketing strategy, but because Jesus was an irresistible person. The story does not begin 'let's organise a community fun-day' but 'let's get away on our own for a while'.

So, in our enthusiasm to avoid decline, before we rush to devise the latest plan to attract attention or entertain the masses – perhaps we need to ask whether the real solution is to be more authentic in our discipleship and community life. This does not demand vast resources or masses of time and energy, but a commitment to a real and living walk with Jesus; a challenge that is within the grasp of the smallest and most struggling congregation if we are prepared to make it a priority.

Phil Jump is the Regional Minister
Team Leader at the North Western
Baptist Association



Latest report from Baptist Union Council



In March the latest Baptist Union Council took place with 70 Baptists, drawn from Baptist churches, associations, colleges and specialist teams, gathering together at The Hayes Conference Centre in Swanwick, Derbyshire, for two days (16-17 March).

Ministries Project

A major part of Council's discussion focused on the Ministries Review, with an update from Roy Searle. This review is building on the work of the review of ministerial formation and other work done over the past few years. These pieces of work and continuing conversations will be used to enable the fuller review of ministry which will be presented to October Council.

Priorities and projects

General Secretary Lynn Green, presented the priorities and associated projects for our Union for the next five years to Council, which included:

- » having a clear grasp of the health of our churches;
- » to have implemented the Ministries Review Project recommendations;
- » to implement *Project Loaves and Fishes*;
- » to ensure that a strategy is developed and implemented to stabilise the Pension scheme.

Presidency and other roles

Rupert Lazar, minister of **East Barnet Baptist Church**, was nominated as the next Vice-President of our Baptist Union.

The nomination was made at this Council meeting, and will be voted on at Assembly on 16 May in Peterborough.



As no nominations were received, the Vice-President was nominated by Council, in line with our Baptist Union constitution. This was the first time a new streamlined process was used for nominations, which were sought mainly online.

For more details about Rupert, visit www.baptist.org.uk/rupertlazar

Council also affirmed the nominations of Richard Webb (minister **Scunthorpe Baptist Church**) as Moderator of Trustee Board; David Mayne (minister **Shoeburyness and Thorpe Bay Baptist Church**) as Moderator of Council, and Phil Jump (Regional Minister Team Leader **North Western Baptist Association**) as Ministries Review project leader.

To read the full report from Council, visit www.baptist.org.uk/councilmarch2015



Joining forces in UK mission
 Lynn Green recently joined leaders of other denominations to commit to renewed unity in evangelism and mission

Lynn Green, General Secretary of our Baptist Union, and the Archbishop of York, John Sentamu, planted an oak tree to symbolise church unity in evangelism at an event in March. The planting took place at a gathering organised by the Evangelical Alliance, HOPE and the Church of England, which brought together 40 church leaders to the Lake District to consider how to help more people across the UK become followers of Jesus.

The aim was to 'gather key Christian leaders to focus on evangelism,' a statement said, 'to understand the current trends in our population with regard to Christian faith and to commit to prayer and action together.'

"It was a privilege to be part of this gathering," said Mrs Green, "as I have had a sense for some time that the Lord is calling us to work together across the churches for mission."

To read the article in full visit www.baptist.org.uk/joiningforces

Fit For Mission
 Are Baptist churches fit for mission? Stuart Davison wants your help to find out



Every morning I reach down and touch my slippers 10 times – and then, if I feel up to it, I get out of bed and put them on. So goes a very old joke, but maybe there is a kernel of truth there in the way we approach our fitness for mission. We say we are a missional movement, but how much time, money and thought do we give to this; how should we invest in the future?

Baptists Together is doing a major piece of research on mission in and through the local church. How are we doing? Are we fit for mission? This research is not just a one-off piece of work; we are seeking to gain on-going knowledge to advance the mission of our churches. Where are we declining, and why? Where are we seeing growth?

An online survey will be sent out at the end of April via the Associations, with a few hard copies available for those who would like them. The survey will need to be completed or returned by 5 June for analysis over the summer, with findings to be presented to the Baptist Steering Group in September.

Stuart Davison is the Regional Minister Team Leader, South Eastern Baptist Association

Releasing money for mission

How are missional activities funded in your church? Could there be better ways of generating income? Project Loaves and Fishes has been set up to find out

As Baptists, one of our Five Core Values is being a Missional Community, a value that is given life through our churches as well as our personal actions.

But in order to increase our collective capacity to share the good news of Jesus with others, we need to understand our responsibilities towards one another at both church and individual level, as well as being good stewards of the 'family purse'. To this end, our Baptist Steering Group has commissioned a small working group to look at how we currently generate our income and whether there are other/better ways to collectively raise and release money for mission here at home.

Known as **Project Loaves and Fishes**, one of its key features is widespread consultation with Baptists across the UK. The team carrying out this work is led by David Locke and includes Rich Webb of **Scunthorpe Baptist Church** and Anne Bishop, a charity consultant who is also married to a Baptist minister. They would particularly like to hear from those within the congregations of our Baptist churches.

You can complete an anonymous online survey at www.surveymonkey.com/s/loaves. The team is also keen to hear from people directly, so if you would like to invite them to meet you, your church, or leadership team, contact them on fivebarleyloaves@gmail.com.



Correction

In the Spring issue of *Baptists Together* magazine we incorrectly stated that Linda Hopkins co-authored *Gathering Around the Table: Children and Communion*. Linda actually co-authored *Starting from Scratch* in the Grove Youth series. We apologise for this error.



A Bigger View of Justice

If you wonder what you can do to support those who've suffered gender-based violence, **Mark Craig** has some suggestions, including encouraging churches to take a visible stand against it

The issue of gender-based violence can frankly overwhelm me. The suffering is great. The problems stark, complex and uncomfortable. How do we stand in solidarity with the 300 school girls abducted by Boko Haram in Nigeria? Or with the traumatised Yazidi tribeswomen being used as sex slaves by IS groups in Syria? Or with the girls in Rotherham targeted and abused by sex gangs? Or with the one-in-three women in our world who will experience gender-based violence in their lifetimes?

One way, for me, is to recognise – with the consequent willingness to stand and be counted – that gender-based violence is a global injustice. It shamefully unites every country where BMS works. It has had an influential history. It has a dark present and – if we're not going to take a stand – it will have an unchecked future on these very shores.

A local response

That's why, as an Elder, I will be taking the *Dignity Church Charter* to our local leadership and offering it as an accessible but far-reaching way to get our own house in order. And to make that visible to those who come into it. Careful teaching, public acknowledgement, pastoral interventions and informed signposting are vital in giving our churches integrity as they address domestic abuse – and indeed all misuse of power. That's why we've taken particular care in drawing together the UK resources being offered as part of the broader *Dignity* initiative, working alongside the Faith and Society team to provide theological equipping and pastoral guidance.



You can read the *Dignity Church Charter* and sign your church up at bmsworldmission.org/dignity. The very act of displaying this certificate in a public place in our buildings will send a signal of care and clarity to people at the heart and at the edges of our fellowships.

Statistics tell us that however 'churched' folk are, they're still very unlikely to have witnessed leaders condemning gender-based violence from the front of church, or to have heard a sermon that unpacks what the Bible has to say on the subject. We hope the theological resources that have been commissioned as part of *Dignity* will support people to address that sensitively and wisely in their own contexts. You can download them all at bmsworldmission.org/dignity

An individual commitment

A second route to solidarity that I can personally endorse is becoming a **24:7 Justice Partner** to one of the BMS mission workers who is seeking to bring healing and restoration to survivors. This allows you to come alongside an individual working at the coalface of integral mission in Mozambique, Thailand or India and to enable their work.

It's an action that goes to the heart of our highest goal: to bring people to Jesus Christ and the fullness of life only he can provide.

Thanks to Annet Ttendo's work with Christian lawyers in Mozambique, I know what fullness of life looks like for a woman finally released from 20 years of domestic violence that culminated in the fracturing of her spine. I can stand with Paul and Sarah Brown as they forge an alternative livelihoods business for women otherwise condemned to the relentless cycles of Bangkok's sex industry. And I can pray with mission trainees preparing to develop the capacity of our partners in Calcutta, so intervention is possible in the lives of vulnerable young girls before they reach the brothels of Sonagachi and the abuse and betrayal which will surely follow.

Our justice ministries sit at the heart of *Dignity*, and I want to express heartfelt thanks to the churches who are already involved in these areas through the Church Partners scheme. Your giving and prayer has enabled us to put these people into position and underpins our ability to take a stand against injustice together.

Silence is not an option I want to consider.

Mark Craig is BMS Director of Communications



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Events

**Christian Aid week**

10-16 May

www.christianaid.org.uk/getinvolved/christianaidweek/**Baptist Assembly**

16 May, Peterborough

Join us with a group from your church at the 2015 Baptist Assembly at KingsGate Conference Centre in Peterborough

www.baptistassembly.org.uk**The Biggest Birthday Party Ever**

16-31 May

Churches host creative party events for their local community to celebrate Pentecost

www.sharejesusinternational.com/tbbpe**Big Church Day Out**

23 and 24 May

Wiston House, West Sussex

www.bigchurchdayout.com**Pioneer Sunday**

24 May

www.pioneercollective.org.uk/pioneersunday**Mental Health Matters Conference**

5-7 June

Cliff College, Derbyshire

A conference from the Methodist Church to provide training, support and advice about mental health issues affecting church members
www.methodist.org.uk/ministers-and-office-holders/pastoral-care/mental-health**'You Matter More Than You Think' Women's Conference**

6 June

Christ Church, Woking, Surrey

This is a one-day conference organised by *Woman Alive* and Bible Reading Fellowshipwww.brfonline.org.uk/youmattermore**The Big Lunch**

7 June

Lunch with your neighbours – a simple act of community, friendship and fun and a great opportunity for churches to be involved

www.thebiglunch.com**Making and Growing Disciples in the Countryside**

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Refugee week

15-21 June

www.refugeeweek.org.uk



Father's Day

21 June



Keswick Convention

11-17 July, 18-24 July, 25-31 July

www.keswickministries.org



Sea Sunday

12 July

www.seasunday.org/about-sea-sunday



Baptist World Alliance Congress

22-26 July Durban, South Africa

<http://bwanet.org/congress>



Soul Survivor

24-28 July, Stafford Showground

1-5 August, Lendrik Muir, Kinross, Scotland

15-19 and 21-25 August, Royal Bath and West Showground, Somerset

<http://soulsurvivor.com>



New Wine

Royal Bath and West Showground, Shepton Mallet, Somerset

25-31 July and 2-8 August

www.new-wine.org



Momentum

For students, 20s and 30s

27-31 August, Royal Bath and West Showground, Somerset

<http://momentum.org.uk>



Greenbelt

28-31 August

Boughton House, Northamptonshire

www.greenbelt.org.uk



The BIG Welcome Day

20 September

- or another date to suit your church

www.thebigwelcome.org



International Day of Peace

21 September



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www.baptist.org.uk/samsharpe

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Projects for which the Fund makes loans are usually one of three types:

- Repairs and renovations to existing Church buildings including updating heating systems and conversion to 'Greener' energy
- ◆ New buildings or extensions
- Purchase of a building for Church use



Please visit our website at www.baptistbuildingfund.org.uk where you can view more pictures from some of the projects which the Fund has been able to assist.

If you require further information or have any questions that you would like answered please feel free to contact our Secretary:- David Leverett FCA

Crugybar 66 St Mary's Road Kettering Northamptonshire NN15 7BW

Tel: 01536 522276 email: david.leverett66@gmail.com

