

BAPTISTS

Summer 2019

TOGETHER

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Growing healthy churches in relationship for God's mission

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The magazine for the Baptist Union of Great Britain

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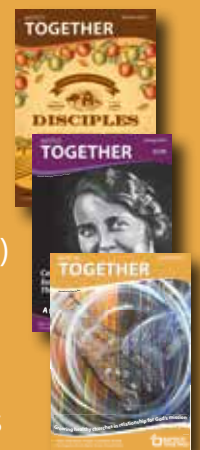
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Delivering our vision

'Growing healthy churches in relationship for God's mission.'

Our vision as a movement of Churches, Associations, Colleges and Specialist Teams.

This latest edition of *Baptists Together* magazine explores how we are *delivering* this vision. In recent years our General Secretary Lynn Green has sought to express simply and clearly what we do together, and this can be summed up in four key, shared areas:

- » **equipping our existing local churches for mission;**
- » **planting more churches and pioneering in new ways;**
- » **investing in Godly leadership;**
- » **enabling Baptist voices and action in the public square**

In her introductory piece on pages 6-8, Lynn shares more detail about each, and how they relate to our vision and values. Lynn writes of her desire for 'everyone to know what we are about, and to say that confidently!'

It does not mean that we are not doing anything else. Each Church, Association, College and Specialist Team continues to offer their own unique Kingdom contribution. But these four areas encapsulate what Baptists Together does.



Illustration: Chris Duffett

As the magazine unfolds, each of these shared areas is explored through a mixture of reflective pieces, interviews and stories from a broad cross section of people. It's not a definitive guide, more a snapshot of how Baptists are engaged in living out God's call on their lives, and alongside each other. As became clear as we gathered the stories, there was so much more we could have included. Our churches and our people up and down the country

are faithfully engaged in making Jesus known and being beacons of hope where they are.

Baptists Together: **'Growing healthy churches in relationship for God's mission.'** It's our prayer that you will be inspired and encouraged as you read this magazine.

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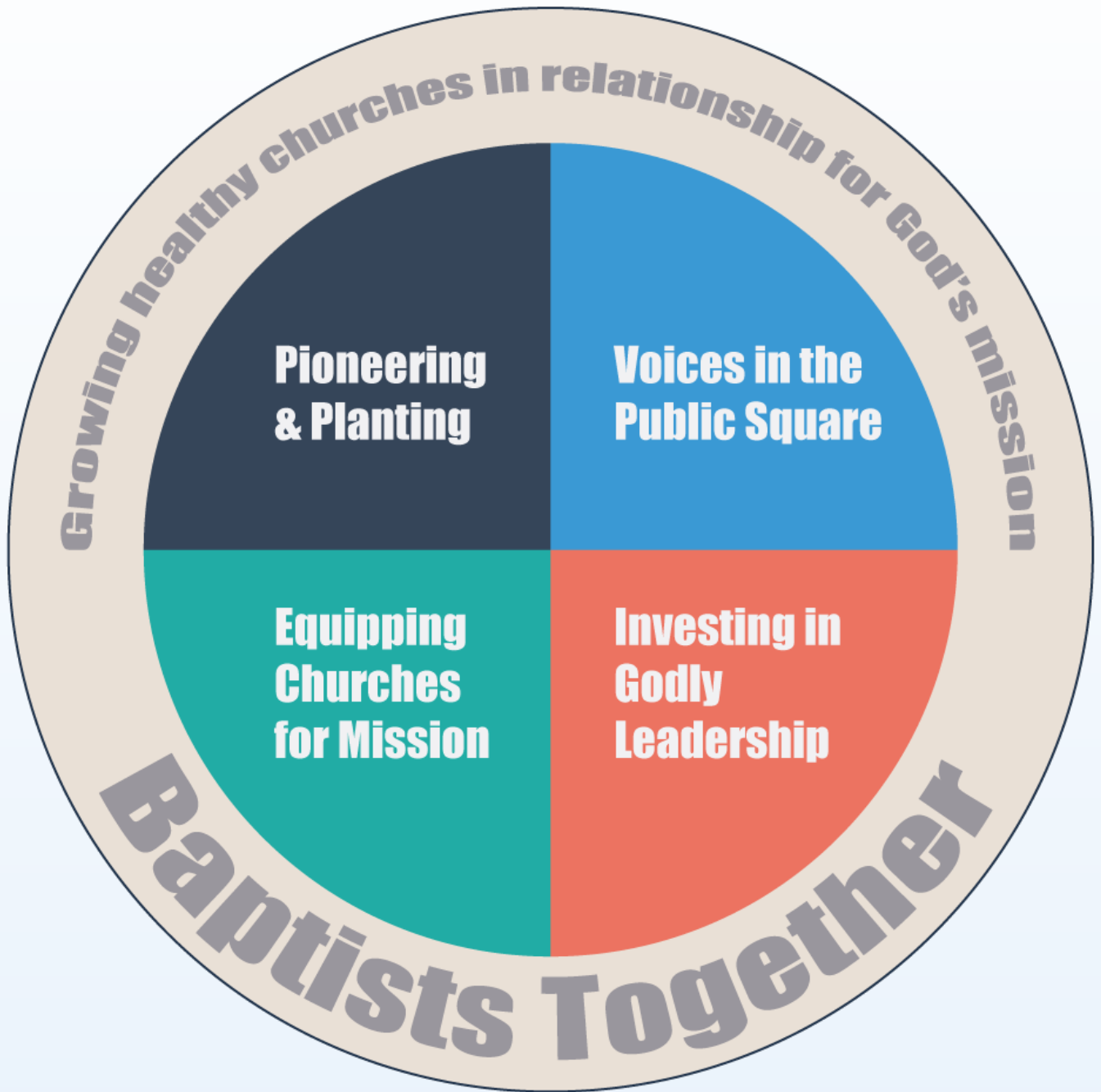
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Baptists Together: who we are, why we exist, and our four key areas of shared work

By General Secretary Lynn Green



'Why are we here?' and 'What do we do?' are among some of the key questions that healthy movements need to keep asking themselves. Questions like this are especially important for organisations with a long history – the 'why' might not have changed that much, but the 'what' and the 'how' need to be articulated and owned for each generation.

The desire for change and renewal

I recognise that for many of you, the years leading up to 2012 will seem like ages ago. But for me, visiting the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park recently reminded me of all the excitement surrounding London 2012; the sporting events, the buzz and the unforgettable experience of being in the main arena for Richard Whitehead winning the 200m at the Paralympics!

But that wasn't the only thing that was exciting me at the time! Between 2010 and 2012 a real desire for change and renewal emerged across our Baptist family and was nurtured through what became known as the Futures process. What sort of movement of churches did we need to be in the future to be able to respond to all that God was wanting to do in the UK? In those days I was a local church minister and my imagination was captured by all the conversations and passion that was being shared through initiatives like Beyond 400 and in Baptist Union Council. Baptists were a people on the move with a heart for God and his mission to the world and I wanted to be part of that. This was one of the main reasons I responded to the call to step into the role of General Secretary in 2013. Somehow, I wanted to do what I could do to fan into flame this desire for change and renewal. It felt like a new era was beginning and I had a strong sense we were ready for generational change.

Well, I am still excited and count it a privilege to be serving such an incredible Baptist family. As you read all the amazing stories in this magazine, you will see why, and I hope you will be inspired too and want to be part of what God is doing in and through Baptists today.

Why Baptists Together?

So, out of the ferment of hope and change of 2012, we set out together to make vision, reality. Encouraged by Patrick Lencioni's book, *The Advantage*, the Baptist Steering Group wanted to make progress on this journey by expressing clearly how we are answering those fundamental questions in this new era.

The first and most fundamental question was, and remains, '**Who are we?**' With all the misunderstanding about The Baptist Union of Great Britain just being the Didcot office, the new term, Baptists Together, was coined to signal that it is all about 'we' and not about 'them'. So, Baptists Together is a Union of nearly 2,000 churches, 13 regional Associations, and 6 Colleges, supported by 3 Specialist Teams. We each have our own unique contribution to make, but we choose to covenant together so that through our relationships and partnering together we can embody God's kingdom and be part of his mission more authentically.

And that takes us, neatly, to the next key question, '**Why is it that we exist?**' What is Baptists Together here for? Well, quite simply, we all work together (churches, Associations, Colleges and Specialist Teams) to **grow healthy churches in relationship for God's mission**. We are primarily a movement of local churches and so we want to see existing and new churches and missional communities growing in depth of discipleship and in seeing new believers following Jesus.

We do this together, in partnership with each other, so that through our relationships we can make a kingdom impact that is far more than the sum of our individual parts. And we want to be inspiring each other to be part of God's mission in the whole of creation, whatever that looks like in our different contexts.

Another important area that we wanted to work on was to capture and intentionally embrace a renewed culture with shared values that would serve as a constant call to us about being the sort of people that we aspire to be in Christ. So we believe that we need to be a people who...

Seek to be a movement of **Spirit led** communities. As those who have encountered the living Christ, to intentionally seek his will and purpose for our local churches and every expression of our shared life. (Galatians 5: 22-25)

Embrace adventure – being serious about discipleship, willing to take risks, pioneer and move out of the comfort zone of familiar ways of doing things. (Matthew 28: 18-20)

Inspire others – with a generosity of spirit, energise and motivate people to be all that God created them to be. (Ephesians 5: 1-2)

Feel like one team – celebrating diversity; valuing, respecting and trusting each other as we work together in partnerships - making sure everyone feels included and listened to. (1 Corinthians 12: 24b-27)



Illustration: Chris Duffett

Share a **Hunger for God's coming Kingdom** – nurturing a 'holy discontent' that arises from our desire to give practical expression to our vision of God's purpose for creation - confronting evil, injustice and hypocrisy and challenging worldly attitudes to power, wealth, status and security both within and beyond our Union. (Matthew 6: 9-10)

Having got the why and the who clear and identified our values, we then wanted to express clearly and simply what it is that we do together. No more vagaries about what Baptists Together does, I wanted everyone to know what we are about and to be able to say that confidently! Now, our Constitution does define our charitable objects, but the formal language there is neither contemporary nor easily memorable. So, in a 'back of an envelope' inspiration at Council a few years ago, I suggested that what we do as Baptists Together can be summed up in four key areas of work:

- » equipping local churches for mission
- » pioneering and church planting
- » investing in Godly leadership
- » enabling Baptist voices and action in the 'public square'

This magazine is designed to give you an insight into some of the incredible things that are happening across Baptists Together in these four areas.

As you will see, **equipping our existing local churches for mission** is very much at the heart of what we do. Whether that is local churches encouraging and inspiring each other as peers or Regional Associations walking with churches as they listen to the Lord and discern what discipleship and mission looks like in their context, or our Colleges offering pioneer formation and training for local church leaders, or the Faith and Society Specialist Team gathering and sharing inspiring stories through social media and our website...

What I pray for regularly is that every single one of our churches is clear and passionate about God's call to them in their context, and is wholeheartedly participating in the mission of God.

We do this together, in partnership with each other, so that through our relationships we can make a Kingdom impact that is far more than the sum of our individual parts

What I pray for regularly is that every single one of our churches is clear and passionate about God's call to them in their context, and is wholeheartedly participating in the mission of God.

As a grassroots movement of local churches, we are also passionate about **planting more churches and pioneering new things in new ways**. This is part of the continuing, urgent, mandate we have been given by Jesus in the Great Commission. With more than 94 per cent of the population of the UK not yet following Jesus, this is no time to be barricading ourselves within our churches! This is a time for courage, innovation, risk-taking and the embracing of adventure.

Scripture tells us that God blesses the church with those who serve through offering leadership and so it is critical for us to continue to **invest in Godly leadership**. Again, our leaders are a regular part of my prayers. I pray that every leader, in whatever sphere, will be captivated by Jesus and first and foremost be a disciple who is growing in Christlikeness. I pray that as our leaders nurture the spiritual gifts that God has given them, attentive to God's call and the leading of the Holy Spirit, then healthy churches and disciples and communities will be nurtured as a result. We celebrate and are deeply thankful for all those ministers and leaders who have served us like this in the past and continue to do so in the present. But, we also need to be praying and asking God to raise up a new generation of leaders and ministers who will challenge us and inspire us and enable us to shape a Kingdom future together.

We believe that justice concerns belong at the heart of our faith,

and a hungering for righteousness is therefore at the heart of our shared work as we seek to **enable Baptist voices and action in the public square**. The local church has a vitally important role to play in public life, and we seek to encourage our churches by equipping them with relevant information, stories and resources.

Being part of a much bigger family means that Baptist voices can be amplified and heard regionally, nationally and even globally. Additionally, through our membership of the Joint Public Issues Team, we are able to share our concerns and findings with the Government of the day.

In the vanguard...

I remain convinced that God wants to do a new thing in and through Baptists today (Isaiah 43: 18-19). I believe that as we seek to welcome and make room for Jesus and establish Beacons of Prayer up and down the country we will see existing and new churches and missional communities being Beacons of Hope, shining brightly for Jesus. God is breathing his renewing fire over his church and it is time for the Body of Christ to rise up and be all that he calls us to be.

In 2017 Jonathan Oloyede (National Day of Prayer and Worship) offered me this Word from the Lord: "In prayer, I saw the Baptist family in the vanguard of an upsurge of faith and expressions of the gospel of the Kingdom. It was remarkable, and I believe that your denomination has the grace to help move the church forward in the nation."

With Jonathan, I do believe that we are called to be in the vanguard of what God is doing in these days and I certainly want to respond to this Word with faith, willing responsiveness and wholehearted obedience. As Mary prayed, we too can pray, 'We are the Lord's servants. May it be to us as you have said'. (Luke 1: 38).

Lynn Green is General Secretary of our Baptist Union



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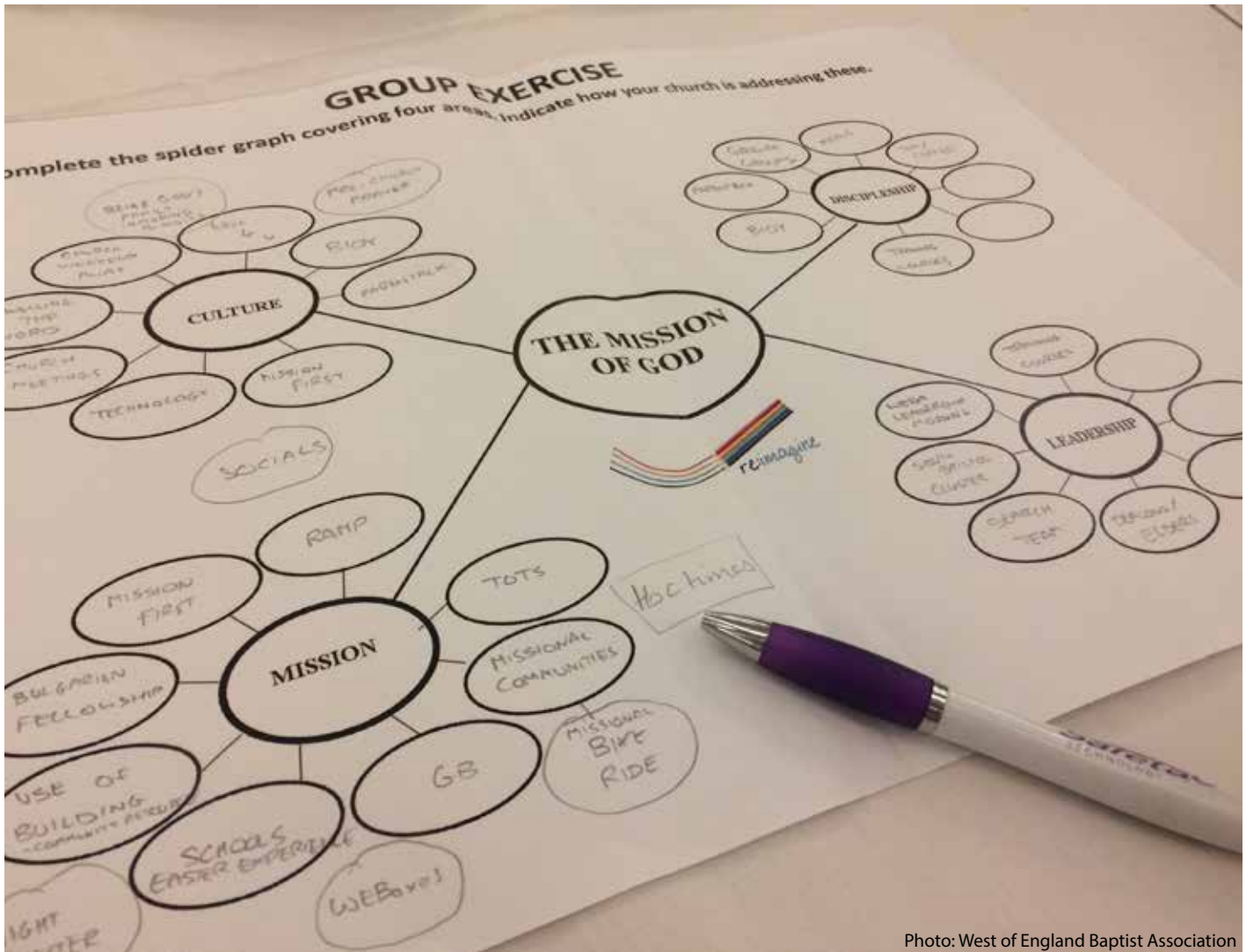


Photo: West of England Baptist Association

Equipping the local church for mission

Nigel Coles introduces *re:imagine*, a missional learning community that’s been designed especially for church leadership teams. Launched in the West of England and now being offered in other parts of the country, *re:imagine* is a process that helps churches build momentum as they transition towards putting mission at the heart of who they are.

Whether we belong to an established church or a small team in a new area, we long for people to know the good news of Jesus Christ. The reality is, however, that the church overall has been declining numerically for around a century and as Baptists, were it not for the blessing of various minority ethnic congregations and churches who have joined our Union, our decline would be much more apparent. Thankfully we have Baptist churches which are growing directly as a result of new people becoming Christians in every context. However, these are more the exception than the rule and while



we rejoice in the growth of pioneer-planting initiatives among us, both our greatest need and our biggest opportunity is to see the vast majority of our existing churches enter into a new season of fruitfulness.

It was Albert Einstein who said: “Insanity is doing the same thing, over and over again, but expecting different results”.

We need to *re-imagine*. *Re:imagine* is the name of the West of England’s missional learning community and our logo reflects two key issues, which are critical in our present climate:

Firstly, any depiction of where our Baptist churches are in terms of *overall growth* and decline puts us on the downward part of any graph. Separately we may be an exception, but together, overall, we need to see an upturn.

Secondly, team is crucial. Ministers are a key strategic investment for many of our churches, but even where there is 'a Minister' no one person can provide everything required. Alongside this, an increasing number of our churches cannot afford to pay anyone the full-time, standard stipend, so a leadership team has to be a major priority.

What's a 'missional learning community'?

'missional' The mission of God is the theological lens through which we are viewing God's engagement with the world. We are looking towards mission becoming the 'organising principle' around which we plan the life and activities of our churches.

'learning' No one learns anything simply through experience. One only learns from experience which has been reflected upon and owned to the point you are able to show another human being. We try and capture the Hebrew mindset on learning, which is more about embodying truth in real life than about a classroom. The focus throughout the whole process is upon learning by doing, as a result of experimentation. In spiritual terms, it's about taking steps of faith together, and reflecting on what God shows us, as a result.

'community' Partnership is not just a good idea, it's the way Jesus lived out his mission. If Jesus could have worked in isolation, but intentionally chose not to, why do we think we are any better? As Baptists, we claim to discern the mind of Christ together, so what better arena is there for us to develop this practice than in discipleship and mission?



Photo: WEBA



A process, not a programme

Re:imagine is a process not a programme. Anyone who talks about re:imagine as a 'programme', or 'course', is usually jumped on straight away and gently reminded that it's a process! The truth is most of us are fed up with programmes claiming to solve all our challenges in one go, but during the re:imagine process we discover a number of things:

- » We become a team in practice. We become a group of fellow disciples and throw off the burden of just meeting for meeting's sake.
- » We renew our commitment to the gospel, and more specifically, to sharing it. Our commitment was always there, but we had often become accustomed to re-telling the story solely to one another.
- » We realise not only has God not abandoned us, but he's out there, ahead of us and calling us to engage there.
- » We re-focus on Jesus and discover he's not bound by one particular style of doing things.
- » We discover a new sense of partnership... with God, the mission of God, one another, other leadership teams, the regional team and, perhaps most surprisingly, with people of peace on our own doorsteps.

The framework for re:imagine revolves around four hub gatherings of however many leadership teams are involved. These focus on one particular area at a time:

Culture: we explore our shifting, cultural landscape in order to understand our own church culture. Our intention is to become the kind of leadership team who set the thermostat for culture, within our church, according to the values of the kingdom of God.

Leadership: we explore how 'who we are' and 'how we do things' really matters. Our intention is to re-shape our 'how' in order to influence our church family to better reflect the ways of Jesus.

Discipleship: we explore the vital connection between who we are as a leadership team and our influence across our church family. Our intention is to deepen, or develop, the life of discipleship for one group of people in our church at a time. In practice, the most common response for a group of deacons has been to start with themselves.

Mission: we discern who God is bringing to our attention whom, as yet, we have not been engaging with any gospel intention.

Each hub ends with a challenge for every participating team – to make, at least one experiment designed to move things on in the relevant area. Every six months we re-group and hear how things have gone and ask one another 'what are we learning?' whether things have gone better, or worse, than we planned. In between each of our hub gatherings a Regional Minister meets with each team mid-way, simply to ask 'how are you getting on with what you decided you would address at the last hub?'

Where's the fruit? The inevitable question everyone's asking! With around thirty local leadership teams through the re:imagine process, the general outcomes, so far, for the majority are:

- » Churches have rediscovered a hope for the future.
- » Deacons and elders have become 'team' in practice.
- » Churches have re-discovered that if they want to see new people meet Jesus, they need to engage with them!
- » Leadership teams have discovered they can make a difference and the church still loves them.
- » Leadership teams have discovered they need to be the change they call others to make.

Nigel Coles is Regional Minister Team Leader for the **West of England Baptist Association**





“Re:imagine challenged us to look forward, to look at our community”

Tony Taylor on the impact of re:imagine at Bishop Auckland Baptist Church

We are a very small church meeting in a large building in a town that has still not recovered from the closure of the coal industry. However there is a general move throughout the community and especially in the churches to reach out to those in need and to generally reinvigorate the town.

Re:imagine caused our leadership team of three to reflect on the place of the Baptist church in the community and to look forward positively, not forgetting the past, but neither letting it cause us to be shackled.

We were challenged as to how we could reconnect with the community, who were not aware that we even still existed. From that first weekend away we came back with two ideas.

The first was to have ‘Street Cafe’ on an ad hoc basis after worship on a Sunday. We are on the main road into town so we set our tables and chairs up at the front of the building and invited those passing by to stop for a drink. The measure of success was last Mothering Sunday, when we gave out 40 bunches of daffodils. “You’ve made my day” responded one lady, “I have just been to see my elderly Mum. These flowers show that someone cares.”

Our second act was to say to God - “We are the current custodians of this building, how do YOU want to use it?” We have been amazed by his answers.

A weekly bible study had been started and continues. Yes there are Baptists who come, but also folk from other churches in the town.

Cultivate4Life is a charitable organisation set up to help people whose lives have been damaged get back into the mainstream. We visited their allotment and shivered in their shed. We offered them lunch once a week in return for looking after our large garden area. This has now grown so that they are replanning our garden to grow vegetables among the plants and also

create a ‘Garden of Tranquility’ for public use, especially those who need space after having come out of the adjoining hospital. Making best use of God’s garden for the local community.

At an ecumenical prayer meeting one Saturday morning I met with two people from Influence Church in Richmond, an Assemblies of God church. They planned to plant a congregation in Bishop Auckland, not to compete with others, but to complement. They had no base. They do now. For each Sunday evening they use our building and have already grown to a regular congregation of about 60, including many young people and children. They were surprised at how welcoming we were, but that was down to our knowledge that this was of God.

Growing the theme that Wednesday is now our ‘community day’ we are about to embark on a dementia project with the help of the Auckland Project. This will start with lunch and continue into the afternoon with activities, craft and music. Parallel to this, Influence Church are starting a Toddler Group in our Upper Room, also on Wednesday afternoons.

Recently we were asked to host ‘Slimming World’, also on a Wednesday, so more people will be coming into God’s building on a weekly basis. Perhaps from this group we may get volunteers to help with the lunch or the dementia group.

As another part of giving the building back to God we also now host ‘Singing the Faith’ each week. This is a choir which goes into local care homes and includes one of our members. We have also become the venue for a line dance group to which one of our members belongs.

Re:imagine challenged us to look forward, to look at our community. God has given us the impetus to reach out. This is just the start.

Tony Taylor is the Pastor-Moderator of Bishop Auckland Baptist Church



Photos: Bishop Auckland Baptist Church

A view from a regional minister – Paul Revill

We began re:imagine in January 2018 with five participating churches: Berwick upon Tweed, Bishop Auckland, Blackhill (Consett), Middlesbrough (Cambridge Road) and Morpeth. The aim of the process over two years is to encourage and support churches through the process of change to enable them to become more mission-focussed. Primarily this is about supporting the leaders of the churches as they seek to change the culture in their church life so that it is more conducive to mission, especially outward-focussed and outward-moving mission.

We started with a weekend in January 2018, staying in a local C of E retreat house, which proved a very worthwhile event and was greatly appreciated by all. This gave quite a lot of initial momentum to the church leadership teams. We particularly focussed upon the issue of culture, then have followed up with gatherings in June and November 2018 focussing on discipleship and being missional respectively.

Inevitably some have followed the process more wholeheartedly than others. I have seen positive change in each church setting, though it's not always possible to identify what has happened directly as a result of re:imagine and what might have happened through other means. Generally all five churches started the process in a place of some vulnerability. Two have had ministers leave while in the process and are now in ministerial vacancy.

One church is in the process of calling their minister in training to continue as minister when he finishes training. The process has given good opportunity to provide closer support for these churches than might otherwise have happened.

I would say that four of the churches are stronger now than they were at the beginning of the process, and all of them are engaging in fresh missional initiatives - such as delivering teas and coffees to passers by on the main road where the church is located after worship on Sundays; a church member who has been appointed a chaplain in a local Wetherspoons pub; one church which, through its interim moderator, is entering into a partnership with another local Baptist church; one which is looking to develop new missional initiatives alongside the existing congregation.

We are moving towards the final 'hub gathering' with teaching on the nature of leadership which is required to develop and sustain mission; then we plan to gather the churches at the end of the process for a final debrief; exploration of where each travels forwards from there and how the relationships and insights and changes developed over the course of re:imagine might continue into the future.

We haven't managed to gain enough interest for a new cycle to start this year, but we hope that we might run our next re:imagine from January 2020.

“It has led to a changing culture at the church”

Re:imagine at Salem Baptist Church, Cheltenham

Salem Baptist Church has been part of Cheltenham life since 1836. Its home has moved several times, and it now meets in purpose-built premises in St George's Road.

The church family is a mix of varying ages and backgrounds, with young children and members in their 80s. Minister Andy Grice joined just over a decade ago. When he arrived, the West of England Association was running a programme called *Imagine*, which explored the landscape and culture of church. He thought this looked interesting, but felt it wasn't the right time for the church to be involved.

So when re:imagine came along 'we were ready'.

"I looked at re:imagine and thought that would be something worth getting involved in as a diaconate, as part of our ongoing conversation to take seriously who we are in the mission of God. It's part of the ongoing evolution of the



church, and this was the next two to three year part of that journey. We were fully committed."

It wasn't long before the church's leadership team began to feel the benefits, Andy explains: "In the first session, something happened. We pushed through a glass ceiling. We were vulnerable with each other. Trust has deepened.

"It was as simple as getting away as a team, away from the day to day running, and that has continued. To actively set aside time to reflect seriously on our identity, calling, mission and discipleship, all the important areas we should be thinking about, has really helped us as a leadership team."

Over the process, he says "re:imagine has stimulated our thinking". It has led to a changing culture at the church where ideas are tried without fear of failure. "It's developed a level of trust. We feel able to experiment – and if it

doesn't work, that's fine. I know when I suggest something, I'm not isolated."

One example is the church decided to experiment having its AGM on a Sunday morning. It did an activity asking people to share what they liked about the church, rather than just focussing on the things that need changing. "This just changed the tone," says Andy. Salem has continued to hold its AGM on Sundays, and this has been appreciated.

There has been a development in the church's outward focussed activities, Andy continues. "The tone in our Messy Church has changed. It's no longer something that we are running for others, but a community that gathers and explores together. I credit this journey to the impact of re:imagine."

The accountability aspect of re:imagine has also been beneficial. Salem took part in the process with three other churches, and has walked closely with Regional Ministers. "It all creates a momentum, and it gives hope," says Andy.

"Are we fully organised around the mission of God?," he adds. "Possibly not, but there is a positivity and anticipation."

Addlestone Baptist Church

How a church which recognised its decline completely revamped its Sunday service

Ben Fortescue is the minister of **Addlestone Baptist Church** in Surrey. When he arrived nine years ago there were about 70 regular attendees on Sunday mornings, which saw a traditional offering of 30 minutes of expository Bible teaching, hymns and prayers. "I'd described us as an average Baptist church," Ben says.

Four years ago, Ben noticed people's attendance was becoming more erratic. Numbers were falling. Attendance was more irregular. Visitors weren't staying. If this continued, he realised, in five years time the church's very existence could be threatened.

"There was just a sense we were stagnant," says Ben. "We were in decline, and we needed to address it."

A church meeting was held, followed by several prayer meetings. Out of this a vision began to emerge of doing services differently.

But it wasn't just a different type of church – it was a culture change, explains Ben. "We needed to become much more relational. If we wanted to be a community, we had to do what a community does."

"If we wanted to be a community, we had to do what a community does."

One expression of this was sharing a meal together. Thoughts began to coalesce around an earlier, shorter service that began with breakfast, continued with a block of worship and featured a short, accessible 10-15 minute talk. All would take place around tables to allow for relationships to build. There would be no rota - this was a church family, and, like families, people were expected to muck in. If held from 9am, it would allow people the rest of the day for other activities (such as sport).

The initial thinking was to have this service once a month. "But then we felt if we wanted to bring a culture of change, we needed to be more intentional," says Ben. "So it was a case of going all in, with both feet. This would be our new way of doing church, every Sunday."

Breakfast Church began two years ago. At 9am members tuck into a selection of cereals, pastries, toast, coffee, tea and juice, all provided free of charge by the church. The talk explores the 'nuts and bolts' of the Christian faith and how our faith impacts everyday life.

There is an opportunity to worship God together, which happens in a number of ways including singing together, praying individually and as a whole, and giving God the opportunity to communicate with the congregation.

Ben is pleased at how life at Addlestone has developed. "This feels what church



Photo: Addlestone Baptist Church

should be. Having breakfast is a great way to make new friends and get to know one another better. It's family: our pastoral care is happening in a much more natural basis. It's accessible to seekers.

"There has been an upturn in numbers. The congregation had dropped to the mid 40s, but numbers are now back up to what they were. When we do have visitors, they seem much more likely to stay. They get a good welcome, have good conversations."

"Having no rotas has contributed a sense of family, and feels less burdensome. We have an atmosphere where everyone joins in."

With such a big change it was inevitable there would be some fall out. But while it wasn't easy for some members to accept, most were on board.

There is still a longer Bible seminar for those who want it after Breakfast Church, which lasts around 30-40 minutes. Even with this, the Sunday service finishes around 11am, and is taking less time than previously.

Ben believes the church needs to be more missional. Around two-thirds of visitors are staying, and Ben would like to reach more. He is reflecting on how the church can make everything more accessible to everyone. But it's all about God's leading.

"It was never our intention to go down this route. We just wanted to follow where God was leading. In a funny way it doesn't feel brave.

"I'm very excited by what's happened – but it's been very much led by God." ■



Photo: Addlestone Baptist Church

'Growing churches, helping grow churches'

Over the last two years several Baptist churches experiencing unusual growth have teamed up with a shared commitment to see people saved by Jesus

"Five months after attending a Firestarter conversation I am delighted to write that we have now seen 17 baptisms - having had only three in the last three years! And we trace God's work here directly to the lessons and encouragement of Firestarters, which was simply the most helpful event I have ever attended."

Such a comment is not unusual in the wake of a Firestarter conversation, a 24 hour Baptist-led event giving leaders and leadership teams the opportunity to be encouraged in mission and reflect on their own church and its growth. Eight such events took place last year, and a further eight are happening in 2019.

Firestarters is the name of the community formed from several Baptist churches experiencing unusual growth. In 2017, leaders of some of these Baptist churches met to talk, pray and share stories and lessons learnt. These churches are based in diverse situations; few would count as a large church, most are between 50 and 80 years old. Out of these gatherings a series of Firestarter conversations were arranged for 2018, to explore further if such accelerated growth could become normal in the Baptists Together movement. The vision was supported by a Baptists Together Mission Forum grant.

Each conversation was held over two days with opportunities to hear the stories of growing churches and attend interactive seminars on factors influencing church growth. Numbers were always kept low to ensure lots of interaction and support from other delegates and those leading the conversation.

In total the 2018 Firestarter conversations engaged 127 churches. Seventy-four of those churches received specific coaching and follow up; and specific, bespoke leadership training events were provided for seven of them.

The conversations, as indicated in the quote above, had a direct impact on the attending church's mission: seven churches had experienced twice the number of baptisms since attending a Firestarter than in the last five years, and a further 16 twice the number than in the last three years.



Photo: Alex Harris



In addition, two new congregations were launched by different churches.

Six churches lead this movement: Nathan and Sally-Ann Hunt (*Shinfield Baptist Church*, Reading), Darren Bovis-Coulter (*Limbrick Wood Baptist Church*, Coventry), Alex Harris (*The Beacon Church*, Stafford), Nick and Marjorie Allan (*The Well*, Sheffield), Pauline Wills (*Blaby Baptist Church*, Leicestershire), and Aaron Jarvis (*Londonderry Baptist Church*, West Midlands). They would like to see '100 Baptists Together churches see twice the number of baptisms in the next 12 months as the last five years'.

They say: "Firestarters is a community of churches pursuing Jesus together, drawing on the experience and lessons of churches experiencing significant and sustained conversion and new growth. It is about growing churches helping grow churches, together. It is about pursuing Jesus together, on his mission and for his glory."

In addition to the 2019 Firestarter conversations, a website now operates (www.firestartersuk.com) from which ongoing virtual coaching, mentoring and consultation with growing churches are available (such as mini-webinars). This has been aided by the appointment of a paid, part-time Firestarter Facilitator to enable the work. Firestarters is also working closely with Regional Associations.

"We are excited to see how Firestarters, strategically launched through the initial grant from Baptists Together, might grow in its kingdom impact across our family," says Alex.

Find out more by visiting www.firestartersuk.com

Upcoming Firestarters in 2019

Bristol	8-9 May
Stafford	1-2 October
Gerrards Cross	16-17 October
Reading	6-7 November
Sheffield	19-20 November

To find out more, and to book, visit www.firestartersuk.com





Investing in Godly leadership

One of the challenges we face as Baptists Together is how we identify, equip and support ministers and leaders as we seek to make Christ known in our contemporary world. The recommendations of Ignite, our major ministries review, sought to enable us to respond to the needs of today, and the future. Here is an update on what's happened so far.

"Investing in Godly leadership requires us to recognise those God is calling to ministry, and one of the things we look for is whether they are living in an authentic way that honours Christ," says Ministries Team Leader Andy Hughes.

"As we do this, we have to recognise that the range of ways in which ministry is taking place is wider than our traditional understanding of ministry. It's not only taking place in and through our churches but also in new pioneering situations, whether that's church planting or missional communities, in a wide range of chaplaincies, through evangelists, through those working with children, youth and families, in trans-local ministry and in other ways as well. We don't want to get in the way of where the Spirit is leading. In the past we might have said 'We can't accredit that form of ministry.' Now we are saying 'We want to journey with you as you seek to follow Christ.'"

Andy is encapsulating how, as Baptists Together, we are adapting the way we recognise the ministries of God's people. It's an ongoing process, but key developments have taken place in recent years.

Ignite – our Ministries Review

'Our vision as Baptists Together is to **grow healthy churches in relationship for God's mission**. The ministry of everyone, coupled with the gifts of effective leadership, is critical for us to develop and harness if we want to see that vision become reality.'

The introduction to Ignite on the Baptists Together website.



Ignite was the name given to our Ministries Review. It draws from 2 Timothy 1: 6 'For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God'. The Ignite Project Team's key task was 'to explore how we identify, equip and support the ministers and leaders that we need to inspire and engage Baptist Christians in our shared commission to make Christ known in our contemporary world.'

- » What sort of ministries will we need in the future?
- » What support will these ministries need?
- » What of these should be done locally, regionally and nationally?

What did the Ignite report say?

The report recognised that ministry is expressed in an increasing diversity of roles and appointments. We need to be responsive and flexible to adapt to these (and future) changes, while retaining a clear consistency of standard.

The report recommended a new benchmark for affirming an individual's

call to ministry that focuses on call and character, called Marks of Ministry. The term expresses ‘less of an interest in what individuals can do (although that’s still important), in favour of an emphasis on who they are and why they do what they do’.

There was a strong emphasis on continuing ministerial development becoming the norm for all ministers, advocating an intentional programme that enables all ministers to reflect on their experience and future vision to identify their on-going needs for development and training. The report recommended a more collaborative and flexible approach to ministerial formation to build on and develop effective relationships between an academic community and those who support ministry on the ground; as well as the introduction of a ministry covenant which expresses our commitment to walk together and watch over one another

What has been implemented?

Marks of Ministry

Marks of Ministry are now being used. The *Marks of Ministry: Calling* framework is used to discern the applications of those sensing a call to Baptist ministry. We’re exploring their sense of call, their relationship with Christ, their goals and aspirations, as well as how they deal with disappointment

and struggles, how they relate to others, their leadership gifting and the ways in which God is at work in and through them now. Those reaching the end of their training – the end of the Newly Accredited Minister period – will be assessed on *Marks of Ministry: Formation*, when we’re expecting them to be mature disciples, who are accountable, exhibiting a relational approach to leadership, with a kingdom focus to their lives and ministry, following the example of Christ by being servant hearted.

By focussing on calling and character as the basis for accrediting Baptist ministers rather than the role they hold, we are able to be more flexible and release a wider range of ministries. “Previously the focus was more on the office a minister held, but it led to people being boxed in,” says Andy. “Now ministers can respond to God’s leading into situations that we haven’t recognised in the past, such as setting up a community enterprise scheme to bring about community transformation and engage with people who are unlikely to ever enter a church.”

It’s also enabling people to train as hospital or prison chaplains rather than having to do church-based ministry first. Our Colleges have embraced the shift to the Marks and are providing ministerial students with initial training and formation which will provide a good foundation, whatever shape their ministry takes in the future.



Ministerial Recognition

The focus on the Marks has given us the opportunity to review the way we test an initial call to ministry. Previously there used to be a wide variety of practice across Associations. Now all Ministerial Recognition Committees (MRC) use the same processes and criteria based on the Marks.

Andy continues, “Everybody is being treated the same way. Wherever you are in the country, you’ll engage in the same process of discernment.”

Ongoing development

The remaining areas we’re working on are regarding the ongoing development of ministers and the ministerial covenant. Ministries are appointing a new member of the team who will be focussing on the implementation of this aspect of the report, as well as raising awareness of training resources for church leaders and providing space through the website for ministers to share their research and resources that have helped them. The intention of the Ongoing Marks is to ensure that ministers are continuing to grow and develop in their knowledge and skills, alongside ensuring that they continue to honour Christ through living as exemplary disciples. The Baptist Union of Scotland has already implemented this as part of their accreditation of ministers and we intend to learn from their experience.

Ongoing development is a key message for all ministers and leaders, Andy says: “It’s all too easy as ministers to be too busy to invest in our present let alone our future, to rely on our past rather than continuing to grow and develop as exemplary disciples of Jesus.”





Spurgeon’s College

A key way we invest in Godly leadership is through our six Baptist colleges, all of whom are working to implement the Ignite report recommendations. One example is Spurgeon’s College, the largest of the colleges, which has been developing a series of plans as it seeks to equip men and women for Christian mission, ministry and leadership in the contemporary world.

Degree awarding powers

In early 2018 the college governors made the decision to seek degree awarding powers. For several years its courses have been validated by the University of Manchester, which has worked well. However, the capacity to award its own degrees (and validate others) would give Spurgeon’s greater flexibility in what it offers. It could tailor courses to meet specific missional needs (see below).

The college is currently going through the registering and application process. If successful (and it believes it’s the first theological college to seek this degree-awarding power), Spurgeon’s hopes to deliver its own degrees in September 2020.

Partnership with BMS

The possibility of awarding its own degrees has led to a potential new partnership with BMS World Mission.

The idea would be for BMS to create a mission faculty and deliver courses and programmes at its training centre in Birmingham, which would be validated by Spurgeon’s.

The two organisations are in the latter stages of developing a memorandum of understanding.

“What excites me about the partnership with BMS is that if we become a degree awarding institution (God-willing) we can work with missionaries with expertise and passion to produce courses designed to enhance mission locally, nationally and globally,” says Spurgeon’s Principal Philip McCormack. “With its knowledge and expertise, BMS could create a mission faculty that could become one of the leading centres in the UK.



“This would be an example of different parts of the Baptist family working together with a common purpose that’s focussed on mission and transformation of lives.”

Pioneering

Spurgeon’s is developing a new missional leadership course for pioneers: a course that will be written and overseen by pioneers, to equip pioneers. The course is being developed to meet the pioneering needs in the Baptist family, and will enable ministers called to pioneering to be accredited. In 2018 Spurgeon’s received Baptists Together Mission Forum funding to employ a developer for the course. The recruitment process took place in early 2019. A reference group will guide the process, and there will be wide consultation with Baptist pioneers and others. It is, notes Philip, another example of imaginative thinking by different elements of the Baptist family with the aim of spreading the gospel.

In addition to the above, Spurgeon’s has invested in its IT infrastructure which will open up new opportunities in the way it delivers courses and who can access them. It is also developing its on-site facilities as it moves towards becoming a university.



“We are particularly trying to develop in a way that’s consistent with growing Godly leaders,” Philip adds. “We have been creating a strategic vision that aligns with the Baptist family, and are very conscious of Ignite. We have a certain size that we hope contributes to the wider family, and seek to work closely with the other colleges.”

“When you step back, all these plans are interrelated, they all seek to enable the college to deliver its primary function: we want to equip, challenge and train men and women for Christian mission and ministry and leadership in the contemporary world.”

“This is the purpose of the college, and it hasn’t changed.”

www.spurgeons.ac.uk





Investing in **local** leaders

A number of churches across Baptists Together function without a full-time minister, while some do not even have a minister at all. Recognising this as the reality for around half the churches across its region, the *North Western Baptist Association (NWBA)* has developed a couple of initiatives to support those who have taken on the baton of ensuring there is a Baptist presence in their communities.

One of these initiatives, Latchford, is a monthly learning day for people who have assumed a strong leadership role in a church; the person who, to all intents and purposes, is now undertaking a locally recognised ministry role, but is not recognised as such.

The day seeks to equip them with skills and learning appropriate for their everyday context. It stems from the principle: 'What is it that you need to equip you?' The day, set up by Team Leader Phil Jump, has covered both the practical (such as how to take a funeral or 'change management') to deeper reflection on who we are in Christ.

Gathering together in this way gives these local leaders a cohort, similar to the group that those attending college on a more traditional path to accreditation would have. Such a group provides an invaluable source of support and encouragement beyond the actual day itself.

Some have gone on to train to become an accredited minister; others have remained in the diaconate; others have come forward for local recognition. It has been helpful not to categorise people as they come in, and work out what box they fit in.

"It has been really, really successful," notes Jane Henderson, an NWBA Regional Minister who has delivered some of the training. "People feel encouraged and developed. It's very much a local leader training ground for individual leaders."

Phil adds that this is a creative, and counter intuitive, use of Home Mission funding: "Traditionally one of the churches that is benefitting might have received the funding to appoint a paid minister – we are able to help a dozen churches by investing in a learning programme. Yet we (the wider Baptist family) can feel a bit uneasy when we

don't invest directly in local churches. We need the courage to recognise that this is not always the best way."

The other initiative relates to Jane's ministry, who joined the NWBA team as a Regional Minister for Church Transition two years ago. Hers is an experimental, pioneering role that sees her walking alongside churches in pastoral vacancy as a companion and facilitator. "It's much more than a moderator – it's helping churches to get to know themselves," she explains.

It involves encouraging the church to think about what it can do for itself, to challenge underlying assumptions that some tasks are the sole preserve of a paid minister. She helps churches understand the gifts that exist within the congregation, and unlock that potential. "Many of our churches have very capable people", Jane says. Ultimately it's about helping the church identify who God is calling them to be.



Regional Minister Jane Henderson

Jane is embedded with two churches, with whom she works every week, and has worked on an adhoc basis with several others. They are typically small congregations, between 15 and 45.

She cites one congregation she was working with which was on the point of closure. "I said to them 'I don't have any doubt you can do this.' It was a turning point: having somebody believe in you can make such a difference."

Another church was beating itself up because it was struggling with Sunday services and how to engage with families and young children. Jane asked what people would miss if the church closed. "It turned out they were the only church doing youth work for 11-18 year olds. I said: "Maybe that's your unique place in this town."

Jane is clear to stress there are no easy answers here: naturally, every church, its situation and needs are different. Her challenge is how to develop tools that are useful, but not prescriptive.

Nevertheless, as Jane continues in the role, progress is being made.

"It's an embryonic role but I feel I'm beginning to get some good principles," she says.

"We're on the cusp of seeing the fruit of this with some of our churches. It's amazing to see churches that have lost their minister and thought 'how can we go on?'; actually realise they can."

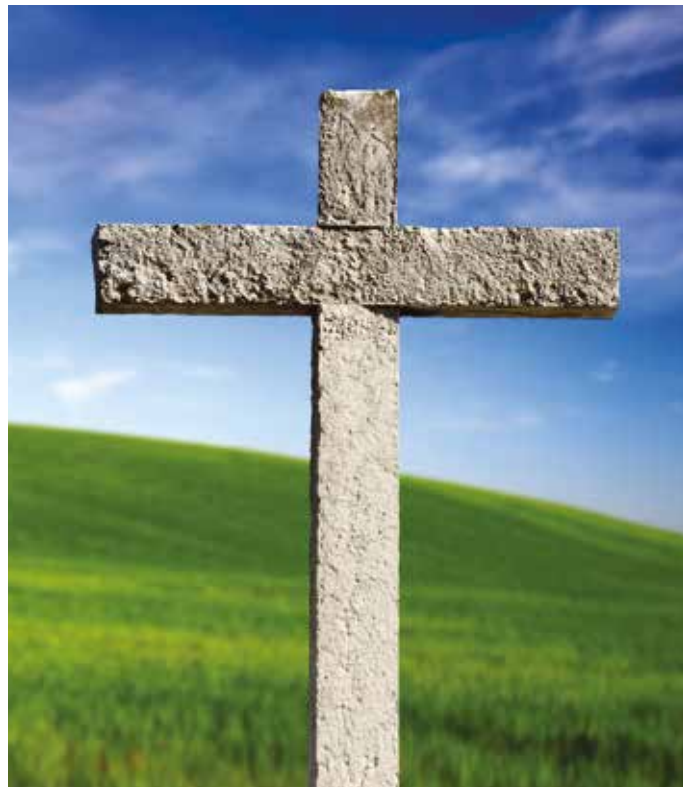
BAPTIST COLLEGES

Baptists have consistently sought to be imaginative in sharing the gospel. The Colleges were all started to make sure there were enough equipped leaders for the new churches that were being planted and the new mission opportunities that were emerging. We've been doing it ever since. Church planters, evangelists, urban missionaries, rural workers, pioneers of all kinds, along with pastors are all training with us right now and are engaging with all kinds of creative placements. So, if you are sensing a call to accredited Baptist ministry as a pioneer or are looking for training to support your current ministry, then get in touch with us. We can help you make it happen. One recent student who has planted a church in the local community centre says 'thank you all for being such an amazing college, and cheering on people like me'.

www.baptist.org.uk/colleges



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“Churches are recognising they need something different”

How the Light Project is seeking to train those called to Baptist ministry with a mandate to pioneer and evangelise

The Light Project is a diverse group of people ‘with a big heart to let others have a real experience of Jesus’, and was founded by Baptist evangelist and former president Chris Duffett in 2000. (The idea for the name ‘Light Project’ came after a young adult asked if they could train for a year’s discipleship with Chris as what they saw was like ‘light’ on the streets through what he did.)

Since then the Light Project has worked with churches and other groups to dream up and encourage others to find ways of making Jesus the talk of the town, engaging in a variety of projects from city centre chaplaincy to evangelism courses, and schools work to street art. It has trained more than 200 people through a gap year or its Foundation Degree in Theology and Evangelism, accredited by the University of Chester.

Now it is seeking to develop a new BA in Theology and Evangelism that will train and develop Baptist ministers with a mandate to pioneer. The Light Project received a grant from Baptist Insurance to help develop the course.

“Our dream is to be able to train people called to Baptist ministry who are evangelists and pioneers, who will do ministry in a different way,” explains Chris. “They will be missional listeners,

set up new expressions of church, and plant churches where there are no Baptist churches.”

Chris explains that the charity is meeting people called to Baptist ministry but not as a more traditional pastor preacher - people who don’t quite ‘fit the model’. The Light Project, with its emphasis on evangelism (all those it trains are actively engaged in evangelism) and charismatic practice (it partners with Fresh Streams, the Baptist Word and Spirit network), has something distinctive to offer.



“We recognise the importance of Baptist ministry training in the other colleges, but we feel we can offer something different.”

Churches are recognising they are needing ‘something different’ too. Chris says a couple of small Baptist churches this year have requested evangelists on placement, one with an interest in the arts in order to engage with a new creative community that is developing in their area.

“This church knew its current membership wasn’t able to engage this new community, but nevertheless wanted to do something.

“It’s fascinating to have these two stories. It shows the need for something different.”

Chris recently stepped down from his role as city centre chaplain in Peterborough to take up the role of co-principal of the Light Project College. The Light Project is currently seeking validation for the course from Chester University, and is exploring partnerships within Baptists Together. It is hoped the course can be piloted in September. “There are some hurdles,” adds Chris, “but we have great plans.”

Photos: Light Project



WHERE DO WE GROW FROM HERE?

Incoming President Ken Benjamin introduces his presidential theme

It is a great privilege to be serving as President of Baptists Together from May 2019 – May 2020 and to be asked to explain my theme 'Where do we grow from here?' in this edition of *Baptists Together* Magazine.

An invitation

Before you read on, however, I should issue a warning.

I am asking you to do rather more than read.

I am asking as many churches, ministers and leaders to prayerfully consider engaging with these words and particularly the key question that I am bringing. 'Where do we grow from here?'

Effectively, I am issuing an invitation. Of course, you can decline if you don't believe this theme is right for you and your church at this time - we are Baptists after all!

The role of President links to all four areas being discussed in this edition of *Baptists Together*. I have the honour of visiting churches, colleges and associations trying to help equip the local church for mission, seeking to support planting and pioneering as well as looking to encourage and enable Baptist voices and action in the public square.

However, perhaps the key part of the role each year is to spend time with church ministers and leaders in a variety of settings, thereby investing in Godly leaders. Whenever I do so, I ask them to consider the same question that I am asking you, namely, as a grouping of churches, together and individually:

'Where do we grow from here?'

Before we jump straight in to answering the question, I'm suggesting that there are five steps within it.

1

A Prayer

Firstly, could we pray 'where do we grow from here?' Could we spend time as individuals and churches asking our Lord for guidance on where he would point us towards genuine kingdom growth. We can be confident that this is a question our Lord would want to hear us ask.

Whenever I pray this question, I find myself needing to take it personally. In other words, I find that I always need to begin by reframing the prayer, 'Lord, where do I grow from here?' Ultimately, any ideas or answers we may have regarding where we grow from here can never bypass our own need for personal growth as disciples of Jesus.

2

Identifying 'Here'

The second element to this question is to take time reflecting, carefully and honestly, on where 'here' is. Whenever we are asked for directions, we are most helpful if we have a clear understanding of where our current location is. So, what is the current state of play, the spiritual reality in our church? How would we define 'here' for our village, town or city? For the UK, today? If our churches are declining or aging, then that's part of the 'here' answer. If we sense spiritual openness in our surrounding population, then that helps to define 'here' too. There will be positive and negative aspects to 'here' for all of us but we must face it all with honesty.



3

Who do we mean by 'We'?

How wide is our definition of 'we' when answering the question? If our mindset is just about individual churches then our answers will be limited. If our mindset includes a geographical area or if we picture churches working together then our 'we' answer will be bigger. As Baptists, part of our perspective should be that we are a family of interdependent churches.

4

Defining 'Growth'

We should acknowledge three things about growth. Firstly, we are seeking genuine kingdom growth rather than just numerical 'transfer' growth. Secondly, there is more than one type of good growth, we seek to grow as disciples as well as seeking to help grow the number of disciples. Lastly God ultimately creates growth not us, but he calls us to be good farmers, to create the circumstances where growth is most likely to happen.

5

So, 'Where'?

The last step, having considered the other four, is to look at the 'where' aspect of the question. There won't be a one-size-fits-all answer, but I am convinced that we have a one-size-fits-all Jesus.

Our overall context requires bold experiments to reach out with the good news message we have been given, then we need to share growth stories and invite each other to adapt them for our own contexts. In my own church an emphasis on Whole-Life Discipleship and Missional Communities has been vital for us and I share stories about these on my website and visits.

Imagine

I find myself imagining what our collective journey together could look like if, over the next year or more, a significant number of our churches accepted the invitation to work through these five parts to the question 'where do we grow from here?'

What good news stories would develop and be shared?

Who might find Jesus through our bold experiments?

Of course, I don't know, but I'm excited to spend the next year and more finding out.

Ken Benjamin is the minister at *Chichester Baptist Church*. He is Baptists Together President 2019-2020



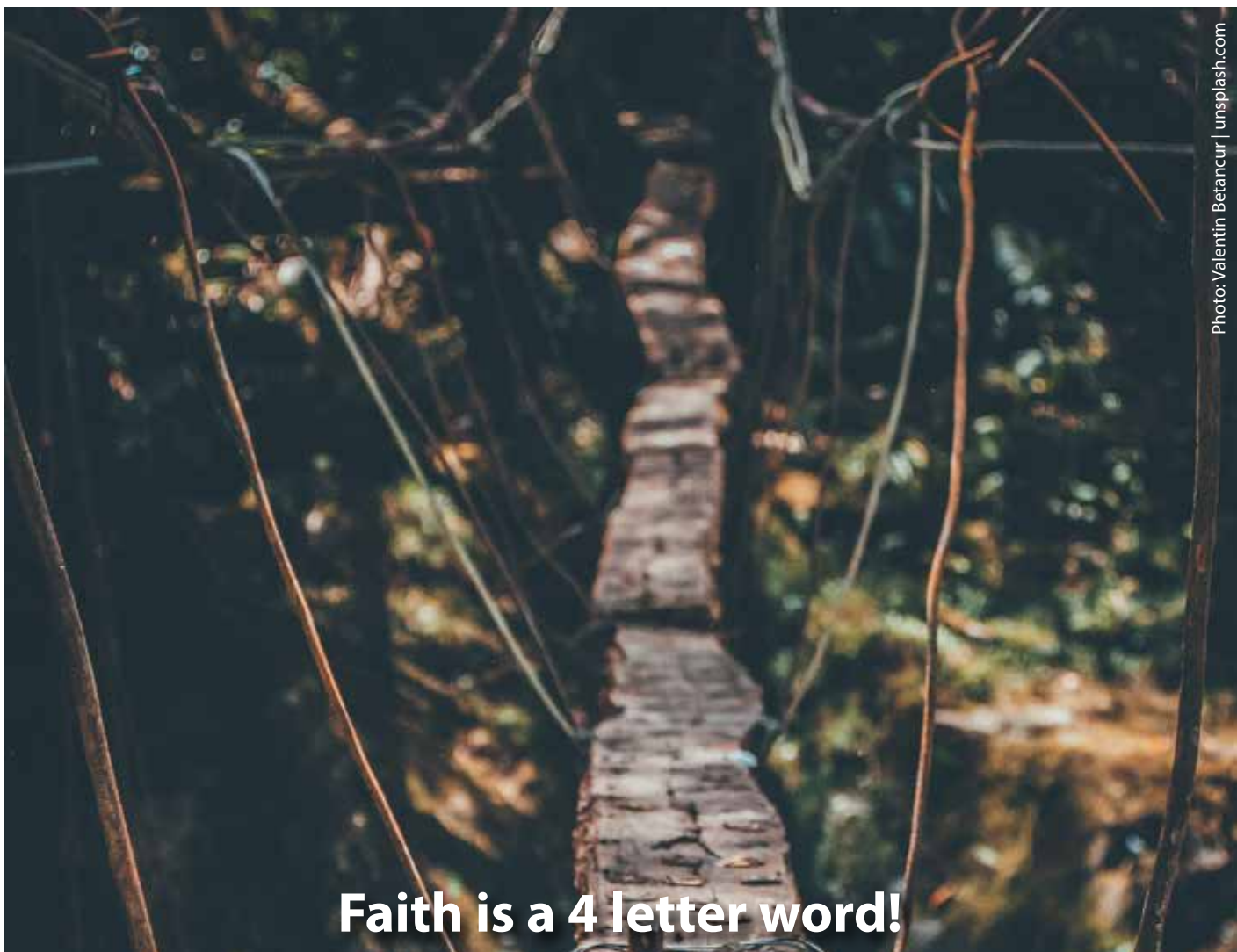


Photo: Valentin Betancur | unsplash.com

Faith is a 4 letter word!

To follow in the footsteps of the faithful we will often be called to try things we’ve never done before, writes national pioneer co-ordinator Simon Goddard: faith involves taking risks

In a word association game, what four letter words come to mind when you think about ‘faith’? Ask someone like Richard Dawkins and he’d probably use the word ‘fool’. Ask a statistician and she’d probably suggest the word ‘down’ as a more appropriate way of describing how church attendance has drastically declined in recent decades. Speak to a church member and they might describe their faith as something which makes them feel ‘safe’ in the midst of a changing world.

Somehow over the years the word ‘faith’ has become sanitised – and when churches describe themselves as being ‘faithful’ they often mean that they’re keeping the doors open and the pulpit filled. Despite the lack of visible fruit they’ll keep doing what they’ve always done because that’s what it means to be ‘faithful’ – right? Wrong!

Now, don’t misunderstand me, sometimes we are called to persevere. I’m aware of a church where the remaining members, four older ladies, gathered each Sunday morning to pray because they had a strong sense that God hadn’t finished with them yet – and they were right.

But in another church, a few miles down the road, being faithful meant that the three remaining members graciously decided to sell their chapel to release resources for a new missional work in a neighbouring community.

Being faithful means asking what God wants, and then doing it! In Hebrews 11, when you read through the hall of fame of people credited for their faithfulness, you’ll see a different four letter word emerging: **‘RISK!’** To follow in the footsteps of the faithful we will often be called to try things we’ve never done before, start things when we’ve no idea what the outcome will be, and embark on journeys with unknown destinations. It’s likely to be scary, and costly, and maybe even a little bit exciting! Abraham and Sarah, heroes commended to us by the writer of Hebrews, help us to identify four stages in any expedition of faith.



This isn't a survival 'don't rock the boat' sort of mindset – but rather a reckless 'nothing is impossible for God' approach.

Reality Checkpoint

As people of faith we are called to be those who check our reality. This means making an honest assessment about the position we are in, but then lifting our sights higher, seeking to catch a glimpse of the reality God is calling into being. Hebrews 11:1 says: 'Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see'. An elderly and childless couple, described in v12 'as good as dead', chose to believe in a reality different to the one they could currently see.

Imagine the Inheritance

There are always seeds of hope which God has planted within our churches, people who long for and occasionally speak out dangerous words of possibility. Hope points to something more than what already is and can often be heard as criticism and complaint. The result: hope is squashed, and nothing changes. For Abraham and Sarah their hope for children to inherit from them was instead enthusiastically stirred by the divine promise of 'descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore' (Genesis 22:17).

I'm sure Paul is asking for more Spirit-led imagination when he says to the church in Ephesus: 'I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe' (Ephesians 1:18-19). This isn't a survival 'don't rock the boat' sort of mindset – but rather a reckless 'nothing is impossible for God' approach. But imagining isn't enough – we then need to...

We need 'bucket-list Baptists' who will follow where they think God is leading

Say 'Yes' to God

Faith always requires action (James 2:26). Abraham and Sarah were called to leave all that was familiar behind, and to go on a journey to a land that God was yet to show them. That's not easy to do, and faith is often costly – just read what the faithful faced in Hebrews 11:33-37! We need churches with an 'even if he doesn't' kind of faith found in Daniel 3:18 – 'bucket-list Baptists' who will follow where they think God is leading, even if they die trying! A risky kind of faith that results in...

Kingdom Coming!

Indeed, John 12:24 reminds us that the seed needs to die in order for the harvest to come. Some things will need to end for the new things to emerge. Abraham and Sarah were experimental in their approach, and they got some things wrong, but they kept moving in the right direction and God's word to them was eventually fulfilled. As heirs of that same promise, God also invites us to be people of faith – those who embrace the risk of becoming partners in God's kingdom purposes.

Baptist minister *Simon Goddard* is a national pioneer co-ordinator, a role he shares alongside *Roy Searle*

MISSION IN MARGINAL PLACES



Christians are deeply embedded in the life of every city – serving faithfully, innovating in extraordinarily creative ways and living sacrificially. In this series, Mike Pears (Director of the International Baptist Theological Study Centre) and Paul Cloke explore the theologies and practices that are arising as churches seek to follow Jesus in these challenging situations.



**‘All sorts of things are emerging
– but can we do more?’**

Ali Boulton has been the pioneer mission enabler with the *Southern Counties Baptist Association* (SCBA) for almost five years. In that time she has seen pioneering grow, both in interest and in those sensing a call to it. She explains more about her role, and what she’s seeing in her Association and beyond

“Pioneering is all about doing something new to reach those who are unchurched,” says Ali, who has first hand experience of just that. Before the call to her Association role, Ali helped birth a new Christian community on a new housing development in Swindon. *The Stowe* has reached those on the edge of church life, and with no church background at all. It’s a community to which Ali still belongs (she combines her time here with her Association ministry), and can draw on as a local pioneer. Ali looks where God is leading, and seeks to join in.



“It’s not about creating a strategy,” she says. “I ask God to draw attention to opportunities and put me in touch with the right people to make them happen. It’s bringing together context, people, partners and funding. And God has been very good.”

This means that different situations are emerging, and Ali is working with a range of people: those who have felt a call to pioneering; churches (including sometimes those which are closing but have a vision to leave missional legacy); other denominations and organisations.

It involves people who have made the leap to live in areas where there is no church, and those in more established, traditional churches seeking to try new things to reach those outside their buildings.

“It’s all about asking: what is God doing? And how can we help birth and enable that to happen?”

As she seeks these opportunities and matches resources and people to them, Ali helps to nurture pioneers. She hosts a regular gathering of SCBA pioneers “where we’ve become a support to one another.” She visits and talks through ideas, and is able to give advice on practical areas. “Things like GDPR, safeguarding all look slightly different in our pioneering context.” Because she has been, and continues to be, a pioneer at The Stowe, her advice comes from on the ground experience. “We are journeying together.”

Although each situation is different, she has noticed common themes, particularly in communities without any church presence. These pioneers are fully integrated into their communities, taking on roles such as parish councillor, village hall trustee, or chair of a local community association. In this way they have become trusted, and prophetic, voices in their communities. Being so integrated means there’s a focus on both serving, and being served by, the community.

She thinks this is particularly relevant in relation to new housing, to which she feels a particular call. Ali co-leads the ecumenical New Housing Hub with Penny Marsh (*South Eastern Baptist Association*). This is a network for Christians of all traditions who have a vision



for engaging with new housing communities, and encourages people to recognise that while such developments are a political, social and council issue, they present a spiritual issue. “I believe God is inviting us to think of new ways of doing church in these developments. I really do think this is a ‘Kairos moment’. And I’m passionate about Baptists joining in.”

Ali also encourages and is encouraged by those called to pioneer in and from more traditional churches. They might not recognise it as pioneering, or they are just wanting to love people outside the church. She highlights *Thatcham Baptist Church*, which recently gave out breakfast to commuters at the train station, simply as a way of blessing them. *Thornhill Baptist Church* in Southampton has called a community minister, specifically to engage with people outside the church. One church has taken on an allotment plot, and is getting to know that community. Others have been involved in yarn bombing, knitting angels and hanging them around the community.

“Someone may have what seems like a strange idea, something a church wouldn’t normally do; it’s good to be able to talk to someone with a pioneer perspective for whom it may not seem as strange! Together we may be able to discern if this seems to be what God is doing in this context.”

She adds: “Traditional churches are increasingly asking: ‘how can we engage with pioneering?’ I’m seeing lots of things emerging from established churches, from both ministers and people in the congregations.”



Others have been involved in yarn bombing - encouraged by the yarn bombing undertaken in Ali’s community



Breakfast bags given to commuters at Thatcham railway station on ‘blue Monday’



Ali has been in the role five years this summer. She is seeing more and more people called to pioneer. "If we had endless amounts of money, I would put pioneers all over the place. We are not short of opportunities."

She is keen to stress that no pioneering is simple, and it's often not without pain. However, "it can be wonderful, and I am so committed to it."

Such a sentiment was captured by pioneer Ben Lucas, who left a large Baptist church in Bristol to engage in missional listening in rural Dorset (see opposite). He wrote in his blog ahead of the move: 'We are scared and worried. We do not have all the answers to our deep questions. We do not have all the i's and lower case j's dotted...

'But we know that God has called us, will walk with us, and give us direction and strength when it is needed.

'That is enough for us!'

Examples of pioneering supported by the Southern Counties Baptist Association

Helen Baker, Orchard Baptist Church, Bicester

Around 15,000 new houses are being built around Bicester. The town's churches are committed to reaching these different areas with new expressions of churches, and have divided up the different areas. The churches agreed that Baptists will lead the expression in the Graven Hill area, which is a flagship self build scheme.

Orchard Baptist Church has stepped out in faith and is raising money to build a manse in Graven Hill. Helen Baker, who had previously been in touch with Ali to explore her pioneer call, has now been called as a pioneer, and will be part of the new estate as it grows.

"A massive work of God has happened here," says Ali. "The church has really stepped out in faith."



John Good, Hamworthy, Poole

John Good is another pioneer to move to a new housing development, this time in Hamworthy, Poole.

"God has done all sorts of things to make this happen," says Ali. We got together as different denominations in Poole and formed **Love Hamworthy** to coordinate our response to the new development. Out of our conversation came a desire to support each other's mission across the denominations and to pray and share together."

The possibility of a resource to fund a house for a Baptist pioneer was made possible by one of the area's older churches: when Hill Street Church in Old Town began to consider the difficult decision to close, this faithful community still had a mission vision. Hamworthy had been in their prayers for a long time and a conversation began about their missional legacy.

They agreed to support a new missional venture by gifting their manse which could be sold and enable a new property in Hamworthy to be bought.

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In the meantime John Good, an associate minister in Luton, had contacted Ali to talk about his call to pioneer. It gradually became clear that God was bringing this person and context together. SCBA were about to support the mission with a half stipend and, following a discernment process involving local churches, the Love Hamworthy group and SCBA representatives, John was called to the role and he and Mim moved to Poole last October.

The story is an example of an elderly congregation leaving a missional legacy, Ali says.

John says this about the move: "What first attracted me to the role was that new builds are a blank canvas. New housing is strategic for the government but also for the Christian faith. Maybe more than ever it is town planners and developers who inadvertently are shaping the social landscape of our country.

"The idea of helping the invisible elements of community develop alongside the physical building work is a great opportunity. While church statistics would suggest that the church remains in decline, I believe that people's need for connectedness, love, truth and justice all remain fertile ground for the seeds of the gospel."

Ben Lucas, Dorset

Ben Lucas was the minister of a large Baptist church in Bristol who moved to rural Dorset in 2017 where there is no church presence. Writing in his blog he explained that he had prayed about how to see first, second and even third generation non-Christians come to know Jesus. God showed him that listening is key. Ben and his family are now living incarnationally, engaging in missional listening.

Ben and Ez Lucas and their family - pioneering in rural Dorset



Ben explains it like this: "To listen to God with one ear, and tune the other into the rural communities of Dorset, and then courageously act in love to bring them together." Reflecting this heart for listening, the project is called *Acoustic84* (84 refers to Psalm 84).

Ali says this is an example of both serving and being served by the community. A year in, and "all sorts of things are now emerging."

"They have a real heart for rural villages."

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Pioneering stories in the north

Chris and Caroline Friend – Alnwick, Northumberland

The call to train for Pioneer Ministry – together as a couple – came very clearly to Chris and Caroline towards the end of 2015. Having been a Community Worker for *Alnwick Baptist Church* in Northumberland, Chris had already been involved with initiatives around a ‘social gospel’ to reach out to the community and meet the needs of the local context. In leading Messy Church, Caroline also recognised the importance of ‘church beyond walls’ with an accessible relational gospel. They both knew that God ‘had a plan to extend his kingdom in Alnwick’; they didn’t fully understand what that might mean!

Realising the importance of listening for God’s voice, along with six others, Chris and Caroline formed a Missional Listening Team for the explicit purpose of waiting on God for words of knowledge, pictures and verses and listening to the community. From this, they started *Costa@7*, a weekly drop-in for friends of friends and those on the ‘missional edges’, providing a safe space and the opportunity to ask the bigger questions. In time, this opened up *The Gathering*: a monthly get-together in homes on a Sunday afternoon over a meal, for those who wanted to explore Jesus more intentionally. Other opportunities have followed such as chaplaincy in the local secondary school and ‘Faith Talks’: a conversational time in the lounge of a retirement complex with an eclectic group, all on a journey from the curious to the fully committed.

Walking with people has been a key element of discipleship for Chris and Caroline and has also become an integral part of their own formational training. Meeting weekly with their fellow Baptist Ministers-in-Training at Cranmer Hall, they ‘huddle’! Not to be confused with what the England cricket team do when they take the field but rather an accountability process around character and competence, requiring vulnerability, authenticity and integrity. These times together have brought the group closer as they share in the joys and challenges of ministry - facilitated and overseen by Roy Searle, Baptist Union Pioneer Coordinator and Linda Donaldson, the Northern Baptist Hub Tutor at Cranmer Hall, Durham.



In addition, they have been inspired by the Northern Rural Learning Hub - an initiative supported by Rural Ministries which brings together pioneer practitioners from Northumberland and the Borders to share stories and learn from each other. This mutually supportive network has been incredibly important to them as they seek to step out in faith and step in with God.

Chris and Caroline have just been called to lead the church as co-ministers / pioneers.

Julie Bryan – West Craven Baptist Fellowship



The Bible is full of stories where God acts to turn a challenging situation into an opportunity to further his kingdom and I believe our fellowship is at such a point in time. The *West Craven Baptist Fellowship* is a group of three small churches on a journey to become one but, with declining numbers and an aging congregation, we are challenged as we consider our future.

I was raised in one of these churches on the Lancashire/Yorkshire border and after moving away to university, I returned to the area with a husband and family. Over the last few years I’ve felt called to church leadership, but not the traditional role of minister. Taking part in the Arthur Rank Germinate Leadership course developed my leadership skills.

In 2018 I was invited to attend a gathering of Northern Pioneers at Scargill House led by Roy Searle, Simon Hall and Simon Goddard. Spending time with established and emerging pioneers was hugely encouraging; hearing stories of God at work in many different expressions of church gave me hope for our community.

I returned home challenged by the question: was God calling me to pioneer in West Craven? After much prayer and conversation with leaders in the fellowship and pioneers in the newly formed YBA Learning Community, I decided to test the call by applying for ministerial recognition and seeking training as a pioneer minister.

As I look to the future, I am hopeful and excited to see what God will do as we reach out to those outside the walls of our churches. I wonder what we’ll learn as obstacles are encountered and I pray that God will give us courage to task risks as we step out of our comfort zone and discover different ways of being church. ■

Photos: Trinity Baptist Church, Slough



“It’s encouraging to hear that God is doing new things”

Interview with evangelist Kwame Adzam, who has responsibility for church planting at Trinity Baptist Church in south London, about his experiences planting a new Baptist church in Slough

Trinity Baptist Church, numerically the largest church in our Baptist Union, has planted new congregations in the UK, Europe and Ghana in recent years. Evangelist Kwame Adzam has been at the heart of a number of these plants. One of the first was in Slough. A couple of Christians had seen Trinity’s online broadcasts and wondered if something similar could be birthed in their Berkshire town. “They had Baptist inclinations, liked the spirit of it, and wanted to be part of the Baptist church,” Kwame explains.

He carried out some feasibility studies, met the inquirers, talked with others at Trinity, and committed the process to prayer. “We just sensed it was the right thing to do, initiated by God for his glory.” Trinity pledged resources, and Kwame, who had just finished his training at *Spurgeon’s College*, moved to Slough.

The newly formed group began by prayer walking: “often in new areas there are dark spiritual forces that need to be broken down”, Kwame explains. They also set up a bible study, which began by looking at Acts “to help give a perspective of what church is about.”

They prayed for three things: to open the hearts of the people there to God; that the new team’s eyes would be open to the local needs; and to be ‘humble instruments’.

Gradually things began to happen. These were chance conversations with people new to the area and looking for a new expression of church; others looking for a bible study of depth. Numbers began to grow. In the space of three months the group had grown from five to 15.

In an audit of the town they discovered that Slough residents enjoyed live music. As a consequence they organised a live, open air gospel show with musicians from Trinity. The team walked around the crowd, asking God to show them people who wanted to engage. They duly had several conversations and found people interested in being part of the nascent church. After four months numbers had grown to 30. It was now too big as a home group, and premises were sought.

The group also began to see answers to prayer in the form of healings. “We would go out and ask God to show us people who needed physical healing,” explains Kwame.

“One person approached us with a limp. We said: “We believe in a God of healing - is it ok to pray for you?” He looked sceptical but said yes. We asked his permission to place hands on him, and pray a short prayer. We asked him what he was feeling. The pain was going and he could now bend his knee.

“We continued to pray – and then all the pain was totally gone! That Sunday he and his family came to our church.”

There were other healings, which helped to build the faith of those healed, as well as those witnessing. Musical evangelism continued to be used, and the church continued to grow. →



Photo: Jeremy Yap | unsplash.com

Kwame stayed in Slough for around nine months, helping the church to call its first pastor - Emmanuel Tekyi-Ansah - and it continues to meet Trinity Baptist Church Slough.

He returned to Trinity to strengthen the evangelistic team and seek to develop new church planting opportunities. Since then there have been plants in New Addington, Canterbury and several in Europe.

He reflects that a number of factors have been consistent. One is a people being 'right in the Word'. Those early, in-depth studies of Acts were crucial. "For every church plant to take off, you need a committed core of believers. We then give them a vision for the lost. This combination is very helpful, and helps the church grow. It enables the church plant to be a wonderful experience!"

Secondly, praying together. "When you gather people who have a passion for God and pray together, it's just amazing; amazing things happen."



Photo: Trinity Baptist Church, Slough

And thirdly, being dependent on the Spirit. "When we had the home group in Slough one evening, someone had a vision about an Asian woman crying out for her daughter. We said, if this is from you God, please show us. Later that week the person who had the vision saw the Asian woman in the street.

It turned out she had a daughter who was ill. There was a sense of being led by the Holy Spirit. She became the first Asian member of the church."

None of this means that church planting and its success is a given. Kwame stresses that "church planting is hard at times. You get lots of people saying no." But in each of the plants with which he has been involved, there has been a sense of working with God, of God being on the move.

Kwame adds: "I'm passionate about the gospel, and helping people see the amazing transforming love of God. My passion when I plant a church is to reach out to those who are non-churched.

"God is still in the business of winning people. It's encouraging to hear that God is doing new things, that new people are coming to faith. The kingdom is expanding in ways we do not know!"




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NEW for 2019!



“People know they are loved, that they belong”

Renew Wellbeing is a movement which sees churches provide spaces where it's ok not to be ok - and where people are finding faith

Renew Wellbeing is a recently formed but quickly growing charity. Set up four years ago by Ruth Rice, then pastor of **New Life Baptist Church** in Nottingham, Renew helps churches open spaces of welcome in partnership with mental health teams. Each one is a simple café-style space where hobbies and activities are shared or co-produced. They are attached to a quiet room or prayer space where inner habits of wellbeing are shared. The church partners with a mental health professional from the local council to ensure good inclusive practices for safe spaces. The phrase *'quiet shared spaces where it's ok not to be ok'* captures their essence. It's all about reducing isolation, and improving wellbeing, issues every community faces. Ruth passionately believes churches can make a difference.



“We can pray. We can put the kettle on. We can share a hobby. It really is that simple. Wherever I go, I see lots of people qualified to provide this. It comes from their own lived-in experience. And mental health services and councils are ready in a way that I've never seen before.”

Ruth set up the first space – **Renew 37** – in response to local mental health and wellbeing needs when she was a pastor in Nottingham. It opened in conjunction with an established café in the vacant shop premises next door. In 2016 Ruth acquired funding from the Cinnamon Network to replicate the Renew model, subsequently discovering a demand not only from churches but stretched mental health services which recognised the value such a space can have on the wellbeing of people struggling with life. The movement has continued to grow and flourish, so much so that Ruth stepped away from the leading her church to concentrate on Renew full-time. In 2018 she visited 57 churches interested in hearing more. She also secured Baptists Together Mission Forum funding which has further aided development.

By the start of this year, 20 Renew spaces had opened, a further four were about to and another nine were in the pipeline. “These are exciting times,” says Ruth. “We are seeing folk renewing their wellbeing, knowing they are loved, that they belong.”

Though an ecumenical movement, Baptist churches are often the catalyst.

It's also a ground-up movement which has grown organically without any concerted advertising. “God is blessing this movement,” Ruth adds.

Each space works on three simple principles: being present, being prayerful and being in partnership with the mental health team.

Ruth says each space becomes a learning zone, a place where hospitality flows both ways (giving is good for well being), a space where we learn to be quiet and reflective.

One consequence is a renewed enthusiasm for prayer. She stresses the importance of prayer: at Renew 37 the day is punctuated with times of prayer. “Having a dedicated prayer space; praying in a simple way that's not a prayer meeting, is a delight, and it's wonderful to see people so enthusiastic about prayer.” It's also one of the reasons it has resonated with churches. “We've almost forgotten our 'people of prayer, people of presence' aspect. Renew is about prayer first. We can prophetically be people of wellbeing.”

In this way she wonders whether Renew might become 'a new paradigm of church': small gathered spaces with prayer at their heart. It's a movement whole-heartedly endorsed by national pioneer co-ordinators Roy Searle and Simon Goddard, and on her journey Ruth frequently meets pioneers keen to connect with their communities. People are coming to faith and joining congregations, which is presenting new challenges. “If you are going to be with someone who's going to be unwell most of their lives, how do you do that? That's why we're developing the partnership with training developers like Sanctuary Ministries and The Wellbeing Course to help resource churches to attend to wellbeing.”



She adds: “It's certainly pioneering, and I can't see why any church wouldn't want to plant one of these.”

“We are a community of people wanting to see God's love transform our lives, our communities and our world. We believe in being church, not just going to church.”

**Find out more at
renewwellbeing.org.uk**





Photo: wellphoto | shutterstock.com

Why should the church speak in the public square on issues of justice?

Public Issues Enabler Beth Allison-Glenney offers a theological underpinning

‘Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!’

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them.

And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.’

2 Corinthians 5:17-20

Speaking and acting about issues of justice in public is an intrinsic part of sharing the gospel and is an imperative part of the mission of God.



The ‘public square’ is a phrase that is as old as many of our scriptures, and refers to the time that community issues of justice would be arbitrated in the ‘agora’, the assembly or gathering that would take place in the public square of the town. The Old Testament describes the wisdom of God crying out in the agora for justice for those who had no civic voice of their own, such as the poor, widows, orphans, strangers in the land. The prophets of the Old Testament frequently offer critique to the rulers of the day about acting justly on issues as varied as the practice of the market to immigration. Exactly what ‘justice’ meant would change in different contexts, but the continuous theme is that God’s heart was for the powerless and marginalised, and true worship as the people of God meant living in light of that mercy.

Today we often use the word assembly or gathering for our own church worship, and while worship is now viewed as a personal act, as the people of God we recognise it also has a public impact. As we gather and worship the God who calls out for justice, we are challenged and shaped into people who share the heart of God. When we pray 'your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven', this suggests our worship has an impact on our present reality, and we are called to live that out in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the question that is at the heart of the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) to which Baptists Together belongs: what does the will of God look like on earth? Where do we need to join our voice with God's wisdom?

The wisdom of God for Christians is most fully revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. Christ talked about the coming Kingdom of God, and as such named a political reality to faith. If God is a king, then this means that any earthly kingdom has a limited mandate; all governments have finite power in light of Christ's eternal reign. This was owned by the early church who talked about being 'ambassadors' for Christ, a political role of diplomacy between state powers, and who saw this entreating of governments as part of the apologetic of their faith; they saw both the possibility of governments as working for good and then also holding out the prophetic challenge that all empires will pass away before Christ.

This ambassadorial role was more than simply bartering for the church's own place and position of influence within society, but about loving those in society who had no one to speak for them. This is about following Christ in offering unconditional love to our neighbour, or even our enemy. JPIT seeks to offer that Christian diplomatic voice that cares for those who experience injustice and inequality. Our local churches can offer this voice, and as individual Christians, we can too.

This advocacy role for those who were considered the least and the last is part of an authentic sharing of the gospel. The gospel is not simply the offering of a propositional idea, but the invitation to be transformed and part of a new reality. We seek through our actions to create a reality that showcases heavenly values. If Christians are not offering this gospel hope in works as well as words, then the challenge hangs about whether we are adequately inviting people to encounter grace.

This potential of the gospel to transform society means we believe that the local church has a vitally important role to play in public life. As churches are made up of people from different walks of life and often work with the most vulnerable, they provide the chance to listen to a variety of experiences and gather evidence of what life is really like for people in our country. Furthermore, they can be a powerful force for good, speaking into



The Joint Public Issues Team pools the resources and expertise found in different churches so that we can all act as good ambassadors for Christ. We do this both by building a national picture and holding our government to account, by seeking to skill our churches in wisdom on complex topics, and through the provision of worship resources that enable Christians to seek after God's heart of righteousness.

their local community with an integrity of practice and presence that is forged over many years. JPIT provides a focal point which can gather that local evidence and build a national picture to present to the government of the day, as well as providing resources for churches who find themselves in the midst of navigating complex issues and is thus a key part of enabling mission. Our work in recent years has encompassed poverty and inequality, foodbanks, housing, refugees and the hostile environment, and gambling and alcohol.

We therefore see this early church idea of an ambassadorial apologetic re-emerging in the culture in which we do mission today. Acting on justice issues gives an authority and licence to speak about why these issues matter to us and to tell the story of the transforming God who comes to us in Christ. Studies suggest that young people are more passionate about issues of justice and equality than older generations and they are also more likely to view the church as a negative force in society. If the church engages on justice issues, then this not only helps society, but it also helps the church as we are given an integrity to speak about the God in whom we have our faith.

Action on justice issues by Christians in the public square is innately connected to sharing the transforming power of the gospel. It holds out hope that nothing is beyond the redemption and love of Christ in the power of the Spirit.

Beth Allison-Glenny is the Baptists Together Public Issues Enabler



Photo: Benjamin Edwards | creationswap.com



‘Doing what we can, being who we are’

Over the last decade Mount Pleasant Baptist Church has stepped up its social action work, all the while being open about the faith that underpins it

When Paul Lavender arrived as senior minister of *Mount Pleasant Baptist Church* in Northampton in 2007, he found a church looking to become more engaged with the needs surrounding it. Mount Pleasant began life as a preaching centre in the late 19th century, but was now based in the second most deprived ward in Northampton. “We wanted to be a safe place for those who needed it,” says Paul.

A community worker was appointed in 2008 to grow and develop the Community Action Team, which sought to engage in activities like street cleaning and litter picks. There was both on-site and detached youth work. The church set up a drop-in for homeless and vulnerable adults and significantly developed the community shop, helped with a loan from the *Central Baptist Association* to fund a café and drop-in area for people to sit and chat. As it got to know more people, the church became more aware of the plight and needs of homeless people, of rising levels of inequality and economic injustice, and this led to the setting up of a CAP (Christians Against Poverty) debt centre in 2014. Community ministry was offered through the Open Door Centre – an open door for people to come in, but also for the church to go out.

The church has made lots of connections during this time, and Paul has seen it become trusted by authorities and by the community. “Other organisations want to work in partnership with us,” he says. “They want us to help with new resolutions of problems.” One example of partnership was the local social enterprise called Good Loaf, a bakery and café that seeks to train up women whose lives have taken a wrong turn. Good Loaf has now won national awards. “In the early days we were able to promote, encourage and support the enterprise,” says Paul. He believes part of this trust is because the church will work with everyone, of all faiths and none, to see social transformation.



Photo: Paul Lavender

It has added its voice to the public square in other ways too. Mount Pleasant has been able to speak into the debate surrounding the Northampton Hope Centre, a charity and social enterprise for homeless and disadvantaged people. The centre was given 12 months’ notice of eviction in October, but argued this wasn’t enough time find suitable premises. Paul was among a number of people who work with the homeless community to speak of his concern at the move. In February

Northampton Borough Council brokered an agreement between the charity and its landlord to allow Hope to stay until suitable premises could be found. Hope praised Paul for his support.

“On the one hand we were asked to help support the work, and on the other to speak truth to power. It’s important to see the bigger picture. It is good to applaud what is provided by the local council.

Open Door - featured in the 2012 *Called Gathered Sent Home* Mission film



“We’re encouraging people to work for a common goal; for people to build bridges. The church is uniquely placed to do that because of its ministry of reconciliation.”

Paul stresses that Mount Pleasant has always been open about the faith that underpins all they do. While this can be a challenge, he encourages members to “do what you can, be who you are,” a message he shared during a seminar at the 2018 Baptist Assembly.

“We are not a statutory provider of services, we are not a social organisation, we are a church,” he explains. “We believe in justice which incorporates the whole of life. If the gospel isn’t good news for everybody else, it isn’t good news at all.”

This emphasis on faith has in turn led to many opportunities to talk about it.

“One of the great things has been being able to share faith with those in authority, and explain why we are doing it. The Town Mayor heard about our work, and asked to come along to better understand why we are doing it. He was amazed to learn that we have served over 3500 people with food over the last year – and have done so with quality, kindness and compassion.”





“There’s a spiritual darkness over young people - and we are trying to pierce that”

The Hebe Foundation, a Baptist-led youth organisation that helps people aged 13-20 discover their talents, is seeing increasing demand for its work

It’s the mid 2000s. Then, as now, London gang culture was headline news. Amie Buhari is a youth worker involved with churches, local councils and other organisations in London. She’s becoming aware of youth alienation. She knows all too much about the lure and danger of gangs, with a family member caught up in one. She is also sensing a generation’s growing disillusionment about being tarred with the same gangland brush.

Amid this environment, she’s reflecting on her youth work with growing unease. “I wasn’t happy with how we were doing it – we weren’t investing in the young people and seeing them grow.

“I knew that God had placed these burdens on my heart, and I just felt it was time to do something about it.

“So I decided ‘God, let’s do this!’”

In 2007 Amie set up Hebe Foundation, with the aim of helping young people discover and use their talents. She wanted to create events and programmes that would challenge and encourage them, giving them a safe environment to try things, learn new skills, fail and grow.



Photos: Hebe Foundation

Hebe’s first project was a play called *Gone too Far*, written by the young people as a direct response to gun crime. It toured several (mainly Baptist) churches. The following year saw *Junior Apprentice*, based on the hit TV show.

The three week project involves young people given a series of challenges and working alongside local businesses and the community. Since that first event, *Junior Apprentice* has gone from strength to strength, and now operates in six London boroughs for around 140 young people (aged 13-19) each summer. Most *Junior Apprentices* are based in a Baptist church, and as Hebe works with all faiths and none, it is giving many young people a positive association with church.

Other projects include *Urban Debaters*, a five day course in half-term where young people learn the art and techniques of debating and communication in a series of workshops. Hebe also co-ordinates mentoring for young people, and workshops for parents and carers of young people.

A new addition is *Digital Disruptors*, which ran for the first time in 2018 and gives young people an insight into the ever growing digital marketing industry. Amie says the programme has the potential to instigate a far healthier approach to social media.

“They can see behind the scenes; get an insight into the industry, and are asked to create a social media campaign that’s positive for their community,” she explains. “It’s not just about engaging in social media and being a consumer, but looking at it from a different perspective, and possibly give them ideas for a future career.

“For young people now, they don’t know any different – social media has always been a part of their existence. This helps them to appreciate it more, use it in a more constructive manner. So it’s a really exciting programme.”

That Hebe was approached to work in partnership to develop and run *Digital Disruptors* is an indication of the regard in which it is held. Amie won the 2016 Wise Women in Leadership Award, and a 2017 Point of Light Award with a letter of recognition from Prime Minister Theresa May.



It has received Home Mission funding through the **London Baptist Association** to assist churches in developing their youth departments and youth community involvement within their communities. The BBC has come calling on occasions for comment on youth issues, and Amie is keen to build on the advocacy doors that are beginning to open up.

“The longer you are in the field the more people are likely to partner, and this was the case with Digital Disruptors. We were approached as a grass roots organisation with a track record.

“The key is the difference in the young people. When people volunteer they can visibly see the difference. It’s amazing the growth! It comes quite quickly. It’s very evident to see.

“We are seeing young people become lawyers, create businesses, breaking free of the boxes that society is putting them in. We are seeing a lot of change.”

In 2017 Hebe marked its 10 year anniversary, and Amie is feeling the call to work with and empower young people more than ever. She says the same issues are still there from a decade ago, but have worsened. She talks about a cloud over young people, and a spiritual darkness.

“There are more issues with broken families. Fewer girls are coming to us with teenage pregnancy, but mental health issues have risen. Everything is magnified; the potential to be exposed is higher; more complex issues.

“So we have to do things differently. The things that worked in the past won’t necessarily work now.

“We are trying to pierce through that cloud. I want to get people to catch that!”

Amie is also a member of the Baptists Together **Children, Young People and Families Round Table**, bringing her experience of outreach in the inner city to a national conversation.

Amie would like to bring the Junior Apprentice and other Hebe projects to other areas of the country. She says issues around drugs, alcohol, not enough youth provision and poor mental health are common to all parts of the country, which makes the programmes transferable.





“We have an opportunity of being a new generation of abolitionists”

An interview with Baptist minister Dan Pratt, Anti-Slavery Coordinator for the Eastern Baptist Association

How did modern slavery become a major justice issue for you?

While pioneering *57 West*, a church rooted among the homeless community in Southend-on-Sea. Meeting people who had been exploited, sometimes for decades. John, for example, had been offered work, accommodation and food with a travelling family. He found himself working for 14-16 hours each day. Money was deducted from his wages for the food (sometimes only a sandwich a day) and accommodation (a dirty caravan, sometimes shared with the boss's dog). When John tried to leave he was beaten and threatened. John worked for this family for 20 years.

He only escaped his captors when arrested and sent to jail for crimes he was forced to commit. Upon his release John found himself homeless on the streets of Southend, and came to *57 West* to our community meal.

Other stories of exploitation emerged. It became clear that traffickers and exploiters were targeting Southend and other towns to recruit the vulnerable and homeless community. I gradually learned that labour exploitation falls under the crime of modern slavery, and about other forms of modern slavery (sexual exploitation, forced

criminality or domestic servitude). I was astounded that within the UK it's estimated there are tens of thousands (with some estimates as high as 136,000) of victims of modern slavery yet to be found.

Providing pastoral care to survivors of modern slavery gave greater insight into their stories and experience. Their trauma and suffering made me both sad and angry at the injustice they had experienced. Finding solace within scripture in God's anger towards injustice, as he called his followers to care for the orphan, widow and vulnerable in society, I have tried to channel my anger of these injustices towards action.

What have you done about it?

In response to exploitation locally, we realised the community needed to learn more about modern slavery, how to spot the signs, and how to respond if we suspected something was amiss. We invited a local Police Anti-Slavery Co-ordinator to lead a workshop. The event was well attended by people from the church and wider community so we started to regularly run awareness-raising workshops within the borough. Having completed Essex Police training on modern slavery, I facilitated 35 awareness-raising workshops in 2018. These were for

churches, charities and youth groups. Resilience building workshops were conducted with groups identified to be at-risk of exploitation, including the homeless community, those with mental health challenges, and children and youth from areas of deprivation.

Through increasingly working with the police, 57 West obtained funding from the Essex Police and Crime Commission to develop the Southend Against Modern Slavery (SAMS) Partnership. Working towards a Slavery-Free Southend-on-Sea, SAMS Partnership has four objectives:



- 1 to Partner Together
- 2 to Raise Awareness
- 3 to Safeguard
- 4 to Act

Thirty faith communities and charities are now partnering together following the partnership launch in May 2018. Ten community leaders have been trained to conduct awareness-raising workshops, and Localised Anti-Slavery Action Groups have formed.

How has your work in this area enabled you to speak in the public square?

There have been lots of opportunities. In developing SAMS Partnership there has been intentionality in building relationships with local police and the council. (And with police and statutory budget cuts, these partners have been receptive to partnership work towards shared interests).

I've presented at the council's Safeguarding Board Conference for front-line professionals about community responses to modern slavery. I participated on (and now chair) the Independent Advisory Group for the District Police, which brings community leaders together to provide healthy accountability for Police policy and practice. I've worked alongside the police during their Operation Aident, weeks of action against modern slavery, which enabled participants of SAMS Partnership to accompany the police to businesses which are high risk for modern slavery, such as car washes, nail bars and massage parlours.

In partnership with Essex University and their Social Work Department, SAMS Partnership co-organised a Modern Slavery Conference to raise awareness. And through upscaling this work within the **Eastern Baptist Association** (EBA) and hosting Anti-Slavery Summits in Norwich, Cambridge and Chelmsford, similar opportunities have presented within those locations to speak into the public square. These were done in partnership with the The Clewer Initiative, the Church of England's response to modern slavery.

I am convinced that the church has something unique to speak into the public sector. Our theological understanding of God's love for the world and humanity, the dignity and value of each individual and our sacrificial mandate to love the oppressed sometimes



stands in contrast to stretched statutory obligations. Our churches often have relationships of trust with vulnerable people, some of whom will have been exploited. This puts us in a unique position to make a profound difference in the fight against modern slavery. This raises questions about how we can mobilise and equip our churches and communities to work towards slavery-free communities, and who we can work with in order to achieve this goal.

How are you attempting to help Baptists to speak and take action on this issue?

We are realising that churches are regularly encountering survivors of modern slavery. Within the EBA, a survey was conducted among our churches. Nineteen per cent had knowingly encountered victims/survivors of modern slavery. There will be many more churches who had unknowingly served victims through their church services, food banks, crèches, night-shelters and other community activities. This led to the EBA taking me on as their Anti-Slavery Co-ordinator to help resource churches.

Awareness raising is key. Through our workshops there have been cases where church ministers and members have identified potential victims of modern slavery. One retired church member saw two women taken into the house opposite his. Men were frequenting the house. The women did not come out. He phoned the police. The house had been rented out, unbeknown to its owners, as a pop-up brothel. The police rescued and safeguarded the women.

This ministry is expanding within the wider Baptist family through the development of **Together Free** (www.togetherfree.org.uk), which is being set up in partnership with the EBA, **BMS World Mission**, Baptists Together and Ella's Home (who provide long-term support for trafficked women). Together Free is developing a network to connect and mobilise people and churches seeking to end modern slavery and trafficking.



Part of this will be concerned with partnering with others for them to speak and take action. To help, two national conferences focusing on modern slavery are being held in June. These will be at Luther King House, Manchester (26 June) and Regent's Park College, Oxford (27 June). A *Modern Slavery Safeguarding Booklet for Churches* is being developed, as well as theological and practical resources.

I am hopeful that as the Baptist family and our communities respond, that victims of modern slavery will be identified and find freedom, and that survivors will find sanctuary and safety in our church communities. We have an opportunity of being a new generation of abolitionists who will stand against one of the major justice issues of our time. Let's pray for God's compassion, wisdom and strength as we are Baptists Together seeking to set the captives free.

Find out more at: www.togetherfree.org.uk

RESOURCES

Photo: www.freepik.com

Equipping the local church

Re:imagine

Re:imagine is a missional learning community especially for leadership teams. It takes the form of a residential weekend and then three-day-long hub gatherings, each six months apart. It is currently delivered in the *West of England* and *Northern Baptist Associations*, and Nigel Coles is happy to explore it in other Associations. seventy-two.network/re-imagine

Re:focus

A comprehensive consultancy resource for congregations. Modules can be used by churches to explore a particular aspect of their mission and ministry. baptist.org.uk/refocus

Firestarters

Growing churches helping grow churches. A community of churches eager to grow together, learning from Baptist churches that are experiencing significant accelerated growth. Firestarters host 24 hour conversations, webinars, and provide online and face-to-face support. Numbers always kept small so relationships can be built. firestartersuk.com

Investing in Godly leadership

Baptist Training Partnership

Baptist colleges have teamed up to create a course specifically for Baptists. The course is delivered by all the colleges (sometimes in conjunction with Associations) in slightly different ways, but its core curriculum is the same, with modules on the Bible, mission, leading worship, preaching, Baptist belief and practice, theology and culture, and personal development and formation.

Called: Prepare for Service (Bristol Baptist College); *Together in Mission and Ministry* (Northern); *Footsteps and Growing in Service* (Regent's); *Equipped to Minister* (Spurgeon's) and *Pathways* (South Wales).

baptist.org.uk/colleges

Germinate Leadership

An 18-month programme for lay and ordained leaders in rural churches. The programme combines leadership theory, theological reflection on the nature of leadership in ministry and the exploration of practical leadership issues including conflict resolution, team building and group dynamics, collaboration between lay and ordained leaders, and the importance of deepening emotional intelligence.

germinate.net/training/germinate-leadership

Lead Academy

Offers a learning journey that connects churches, coaches and leaders together to release churches to their full potential.

leadacademy.net

Pioneering and planting

The Crucible Course

Crucible Course is a training programme that equips Christians to follow Jesus on the margins. It tackles a range of missional topics in creative ways.

urbanexpression.org.uk/training-and-events/crucible-course

mission shaped ministry (msm)

A one-year, part-time course which takes people on a learning journey as part of a supportive community, training them for ministry in fresh expressions of church.

missionshapedministry.org

Equipped to Pioneer

This part-time training is for anyone in Baptist churches involved in pioneer ministry and church planting.

'Equipped to Pioneer' consists of 10 core modules, five of which are offered by Baptist Colleges (sometimes in conjunction with associations) and five by the Crucible Course.

baptist.org.uk/trainingforpioneering

Voices in the public square

The Joint Public Issues Team

Churches working for peace and justice: the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) brings together our Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church.

Get engaged in public issues by supporting JPIT's campaigns and using its resources which include Bible studies, briefing papers, podcasts and poetry.

jointpublicissues.org.uk

The Cinnamon Network

The Cinnamon Network serves the nation by making it as easy as possible for local churches to help those most at need in their communities. Set up sustainable social action projects, find funding and get the right support and training.

cinnamonnetwork.co.uk

Together Free

A Baptist-based network working with local communities and churches to end modern slavery and human trafficking.

togetherfree.org.uk

Find all our resources in our Resource Library:
baptist.org.uk/resources



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**Christian Aid Week****12 - 18 May**Support and pray for the work of Christian Aid
www.caweek.org**Pray for Schools****Fortnight****12-26 May**Bringing together people from local churches and others involved in education
www.prayforschools.org**Baptist Assembly****18 - 19 May****Telford**Join us with a group from your church
www.baptistassembly.org.uk**Big Church Day Out****25-26 May****West Sussex**Contemporary Christian music festival
bigchurchdayout.com**Thy Kingdom Come****30 May-9 June**A global prayer movement, inviting Christians around the world to pray between Ascension and Pentecost for more people to come to know Jesus Christ
www.thykingdomcome.global**The Big Lunch****1-2 June**Millions of people getting together to share food, have fun and get to know each other better
www.thebiglunch.com

Events

**Environment Sunday****2 June**The Sunday nearest the UN's World Environment Day
Arocha.org.uk**Pentecost****9 June****Father's Day****16 June****Refugee Week****17-23 June**A programme of arts, cultural and educational events that celebrate the contribution of refugees to the UK, and encourages a better understanding
refugeeweek.org.uk**Baptists Together****Modern Slavery****National Summit****26 June (Manchester)****27 June (Oxford)**Learn how to work in partnership with local agencies to make your communities slavery-free
www.baptist.org.uk/modernslaverysummit**Sea Sunday****14 July**Churches around the world praying for seafarers, their families and those who support them
www.sailors-society.org/ seasunday**Keswick Convention****13-19 July; 20-26 July; 27****July-2 August**keswickministries.org**Soul Survivor****20-24 July, Kinross****3-7 August, Stafford****17-21 and 23-27 August, Peterborough**soulsurvivor.com**Naturally****Supernatural****Stafford****27 July-1 August**naturallysupernatural.co.uk**New Wine****27 July-2 August,****4-10 August****Shepton Mallet, Somerset**www.new-wine.org**Greenbelt****23-26 August****Boughton House,****Northamptonshire**www.greenbelt.org.uk**Education Sunday****8 September**www.cte.org.uk**Annual Sam Sharpe****Lecture****22 October (London) and****24 October (Birmingham)**Professor Verene Shepherd on the theme of Reparations
www.baptist.org.uk/samsharpe**For more, visit****www.baptist.org.uk/events**

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