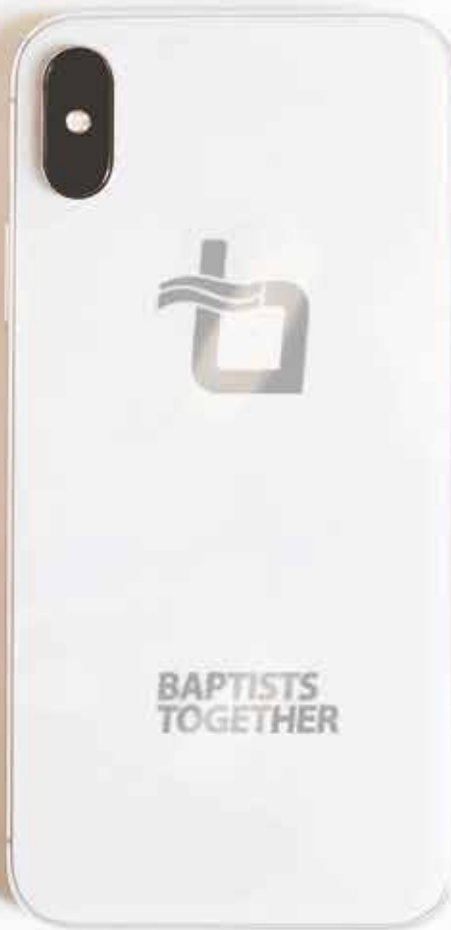


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FEATURES

- 8 Missing generation**
A millennial minister on the characteristics of his generation
- 10 Raised to dream, and dream big**
Taking risks with our emerging generations
- Church Stories**
- 20 Life at *theBarn* in Bidford**
A rural village church with a high proportion of young adults
- 21 Mitcham Baptist Church**
A medium-sized London church with a balanced age profile
- 23 Hope Baptist Church**
Intentionally seeking to bring people of all ages together
- 24 Penrallt Baptist Church**
Students growing in faith and being baptised
- 25 Holland Road Baptist Church**
Connecting with young adults in Hove

- 26 God's heart for the generations**
Shaping the work of our Joint Public Issues Team
- 28 RAF Chaplaincy**
Chaplaincy with the youngest serving RAF Chaplain
- 30 BMS Action Teams**
The best gap year in Britain?



Baptists Together and Young Adults Report
Carl Smethurst shares progress



"We need their energy, vision, passion and wisdom"
Incoming President Yinka Oyekan



LBA Internship Programme
Releasing the potential of young adults



The millennial way
Culture beats programmes every time

32 Bristol Baptist College
Developing the gifts of young adults training for ministry

38 Bridging the generation gap
An extract from Trevor Neill's new book

REGULARS

- 18 Baptist People**
An interview with Regional Minister Hayley Young
- 41 General Secretary**
Lynn Green on enabling young adults to thrive
- 42 Resources**
Books, organisations, resources and podcasts

- 44 Prayer and Worship**
Praying for young people - from the *Thy Kingdom Come* resources
- 46 News**
News from around our Union
- 48 Prayer Covenant**
In these troubling times

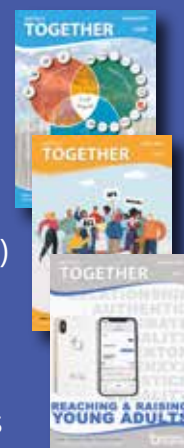
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The latter stages of the production of this magazine coincided with the outbreak of the Coronavirus and the ensuing social restrictions to contain it. Our news pages highlight a number of our responses, while our website features all our updates: baptist.org.uk/corona

Young adults - reaching and raising the next generations

'Today's key challenge for the church in the West is to reach and raise the next generations – often missing or misunderstood – yet vital to the future of contemporary society and to Christianity.'

The introduction of the recently-released book *The XYZ of Discipleship: Understanding and Reaching Generations Y & Z* by Baptist church leaders Nick and Marjorie Allan encapsulates the thoughts of many. Indeed, this challenge was central to Baptist Union Council identifying a focus on young adults as a denominational family priority just over a year ago.

This edition of *Baptists Together* magazine is a contribution to that focus – with contribution being the operative word. There are no definitive answers or magic cure-alls offered here. Instead we have sought a wide range of perspectives, specifically the voices of young adults themselves – what can they tell us about their experience and understanding of what it means to follow Jesus?



We have invited the input of those who have worked closely with and studied this generation, as well as told some of the stories of churches with a healthy mix of 18-35 year olds in their congregation.

And it doesn't end there. An edition of a magazine can only ever present a snapshot: we want to hear from you. What are you perceiving in relation to reaching and discipling young adults? What's your church's experience? As a young adult, what's important to you as you live out God's call on your life – and how can our churches be communities that support and nourish that call?

Of course, as with other denominations, we know there is a missing generation of young adults in our churches, and we must face up to this reality. But one thing we can say with certainty is that there is hope. Young adults who are serious about discipleship are finding homes in our churches, shaping them with their unique insights. And beyond our churches' walls, there is a spiritual openness and yearning among young adults for something more.

In hearing from such a variety of voices, may we collectively discern how we can reach and raise the next generations.

Editorial Group

EDITORIAL GROUP:

Beth Allison-Glenny
Micky Munroe
Colin Pye
Jonathan Somerville
Diane Watts
Dion Marie White

PRODUCTION TEAM:

Mat Gale
Paul Hobson
Mike Lowe
Mary Parker

Baptists Together

is produced three times per year by:

The Baptist Union of Great Britain
Baptist House, PO Box 44, 129 Broadway,
Didcot, OX11 8RT
Tel: 01235 517700
Email: together@baptist.org.uk
Website: www.baptist.org.uk
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LETTERS:

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or using the Baptist House address

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Baptists Together and Young Adults

How are we working strategically to release young adults into missional ministry within the Baptist family?

Carl Smethurst, author of last year's *Baptists Together Young Adults* report, shares progress so far

Hearing the voice of young adults is something that would be almost universally deemed desirable, if not essential, amongst our family of churches. There are some inspirational examples of this happening within Baptists Together on a local level, but all too often the voices that are heard on a national level have rarely included those of younger generations, until recently.

In 2018 the *Baptist Union Council* identified a focus on this generation as a key priority area. The national *Baptists Together Mission Forum* also recognised the importance of hearing the voices of young adults as they discussed how we might engage with and release this generation into missional ministry within the Baptist family. They commissioned a piece of research which would seek to engage with younger adults and those who have experience in releasing 18-35 year olds in missional ministry across the UK and beyond. Practitioners from all 13 Baptist Associations, plus representatives from BMS World Mission and the Evangelical Alliance, gathered in December 2018 for 24 hours with the following objectives:

- » To hear stories about how each practitioner has engaged with young adults and supported/trained/released them in to missional ministry.
- » To record these stories noting any particular elements/themes that might be common to all.

- » To consider what, if anything, God might be saying about how we should develop this area of our lives together as a national family of churches.
- » All of the above to be conducted with an openness to the Spirit of God speaking and leading the conversations.

This was an excellent gathering! There was both a desire to learn from each other's experiences and to hear the voice of God speaking and leading the conversations. Whilst it was apparent that those gathered worked across a range of settings from the local church to mission agencies to specific charitable projects, there were a number of discernible themes that were present in many of the stories shared. Further discussion as a group identified the following common themes as present in the majority of examples of engaging with, empowering and releasing younger adults for mission:

- 1 Effective mentoring
- 2 Creating authentic community
- 3 Appointing young adults to leadership roles
- 4 Encouraging creativity and self-expression
- 5 Creating leadership pathways

More on each of these can be found in the full version of the report which can be read and downloaded at www.baptist.org.uk/youngadults

The group then spent time prayerfully considering what God might be wanting to communicate to our national Baptist family of churches, Associations, Specialist Teams and Colleges. The outcome was a number of recommendations that the group felt God was challenging us to consider and implement across Baptists Together. The following three recommendations were prioritised as those which received greatest consensus but all are recorded in the full version of the report.

Since the Young Adults Report was published in June 2019, it is encouraging to hear that the following recommendations are beginning to be considered across the Baptist family. There are some promising initial signs of how they are being implemented in churches, Associations, National Specialist Teams and Colleges, some examples of which are given in the following.

RECOMMENDATION ONE : Create leadership pathways for Young Adults within our family of churches.

Internships/Apprenticeships

Of significant note was the number of instances where practitioners have successfully accessed Internship or Apprenticeship programmes to empower and release young adults in God's mission. There was a broad consensus that as a Baptist family we should be able to offer opportunities for short to medium-term immersive experiences for young adults in missional contexts. Some practitioners pointed to successful programmes run by other denominations that young adults in Baptist churches were being encouraged to enrol on and which inevitably led them into leadership positions outside of the Baptist family. There was broad agreement amongst practitioners that a Kingdom viewpoint rejoices that these younger adults are continuing to grow in faith, no matter what family of churches they become leaders in. However, some regret was expressed that there are very few options open to this generation in Baptist churches of Internship programmes that might lead to them exercising their leadership gifts within our family of churches in the longer term, especially when other networks of churches appear to provide more open and obvious leadership pathways to follow.

There are already some internship programmes aimed at young adults available within the Baptist family, most notably the **North West Baptist Association's** Disciple programme and **BMS World Mission's** Action Teams which have begun to operate in a UK context as well as overseas in recent years. In the last 12 months the **London Baptist Association** has launched an internship scheme (see page 14) and the **South West Baptist Association** is now receiving applications for its new year-long INVEST trainee programme (details here - www.swbaptists.org.uk/training/invest). There are a number of larger Baptist churches who are able to run their own programmes but these regional schemes mean young adults can also learn in excellent but smaller missional contexts. Costs vary but all attempt to make their programmes accessible to all, normally with bursaries given by regional Associations or other Trust funds.

Moving forwards, further work is being undertaken to discover what internship schemes are being used across Baptists Together and consideration is being given as to whether we might be able to bring those enrolled on these programmes together for networking and learning which would be recognised by our national **Ministries Team**. A work group commissioned by the BU Council is currently considering how we might fund training in the future and this may also include support for those entering internship schemes recognised by Baptists Together.

Leadership mentoring from local church, regional and national leaders

It was noted that although some Baptist churches are extremely strong in this area, it is not the norm for mentoring to be modelled within our family of churches. The group felt this needed to be addressed urgently if we were to encourage young adults in authentic discipleship and release leadership gifting in them. Examples were given of successful mentoring of young adults at local church but also regional and national levels. This gave opportunity and visible profile to young adults in all these spheres which encouraged greater engagement of others of the same generation in a movement where leadership for young adults wasn't just spoken about but actively modelled and promoted.



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Desired culture change in this area would lead to it becoming abnormal practice for a local church Minister, Pioneer, Youth Specialist, Regional Minister, National Specialist Team Leader, General Secretary, President to not be mentoring someone.

We have some way to go on this recommendation but a number of those serving in our national and regional ministry teams are now actively mentoring younger adults and there are some excellent, while not yet widespread, examples of this happening in local church settings.

Recognise and commend those who have been through these pathways to our family of churches.

Recognition of those who have completed internship schemes by Baptists Together also creates a strong sense of belonging within our national family. It is hoped that some of those completing these programmes may choose to go through our established ministerial recognition, formation and academic training programmes. There are, however, already examples of young adults serving our churches in a wide variety of ministries who may not have engaged with these processes. In a climate where there are insufficient numbers of ministers available for our national family of churches and the traditional model of pastor/teacher ministry is being expanded, creating a nationally recognised, accessible leadership pathway for young adults would not only release a new generation to multiple leadership roles (ie evangelists, children's team leaders, administrators, worship leaders, small group disciple-makers, social action pioneers, missionaries - overseas and UK) but also greater enable the resourcing of our churches with those prepared for ministry in its broadest sense.



Young Adults
18-35s and the Church

Introduction

In recent years it has become increasingly apparent that there are fewer and fewer 18-35 year olds attending our family of Baptist churches in the U.K. We are not alone. Reporting from other mainstream denominations would suggest that this is a 'missing generation' in churches across the nation. Whilst there are plenty of stories that would appear to buck this trend, statistical evidence would suggest that church attendance by those in this age range has seen a startling and accelerating reduction over the last 40 years.¹

The challenge of reaching those in this generation with the gospel of Christ has been the subject of repeated discussion by the Baptists Together national Mission Forum. Additionally, it has been noted that many of those who have grown up in our Baptist family of churches often find spiritual homes within other denominations as they grow in to young adults. A Kingdom viewpoint rejoices that these younger adults are continuing to grow in faith, no matter what church they attend! Denominational loyalty is hardly a priority for this age group and it is not, in and of itself, an objective desired by the Mission Forum. However, the question remains why those with heritage in Baptist churches so commonly find places of discipleship and service within other groups of churches as younger adults.

In June 2018, the Mission Forum commissioned a piece of research to draw on the experience of practitioners from across the U.K. who are actively engaging with, empowering and releasing 18-35 year olds in the mission of God. A gathering of practitioners took place in December 2018 and this report seeks to present the resulting outcomes and recommendations.

¹ See Peter Brierley, UK Church Statistics 3, 2018 Ed. Section 16.3 - The Aging Church

Page | 1

RECOMMENDATION TWO : Create a national culture/identity for Young Adults within Baptists Together.

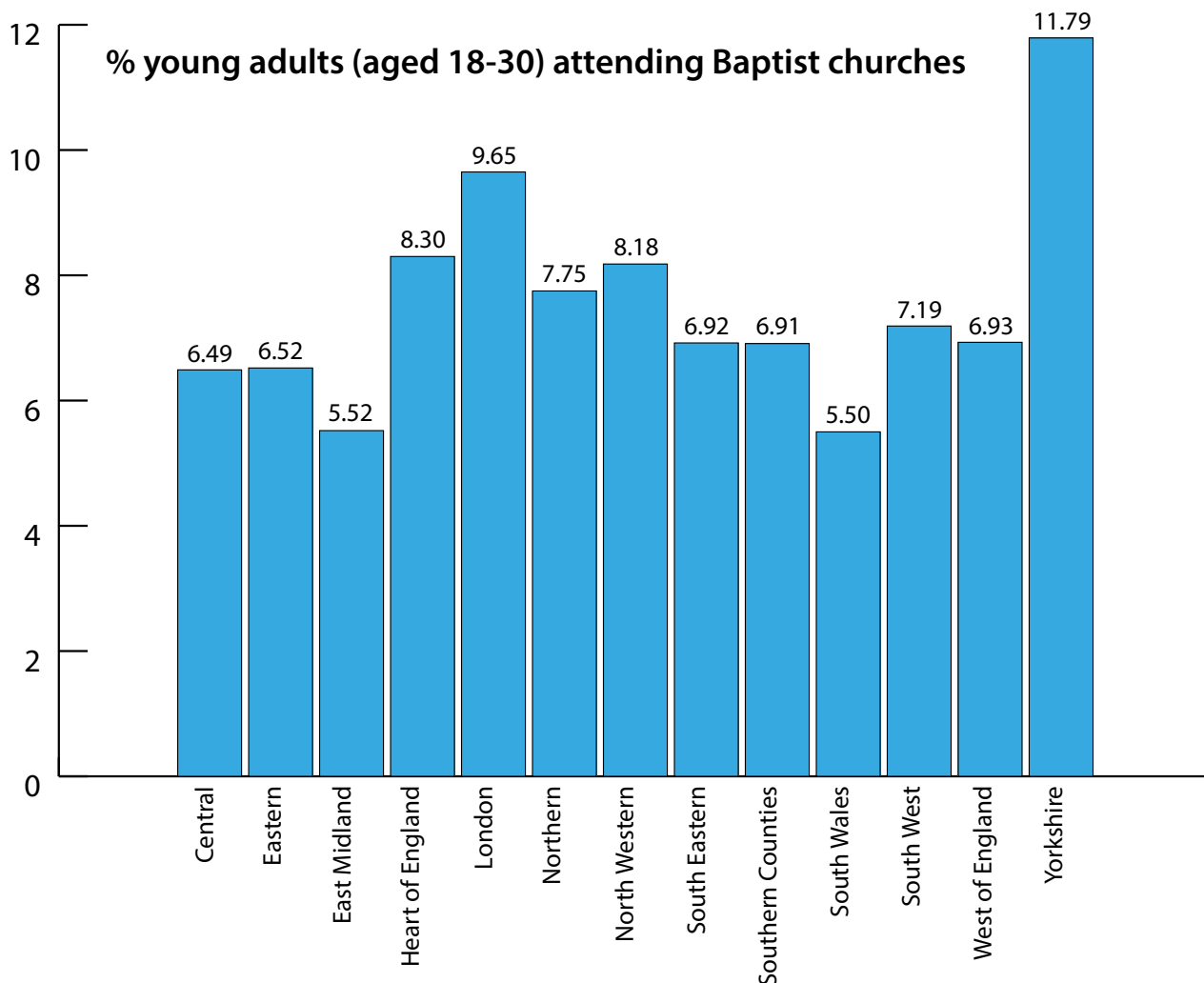
Some of the practitioners highlighted how other Christian organisations and denominations have worked hard to create a culture and identity for young adults but that this was not obviously the case for Baptists Together. The Church of England's resource churches were mentioned as an example; BMS World Mission as another which actively seeks to employ younger adults in leadership roles; while the Evangelical Alliance's Head of Mission to Young Adults, Phil Knox, was among the practitioners' group present. Various suggestions were made which may help to create a greater culture and identity for young adults within Baptists Together which included the intentional recruitment of Young Adults to regional and national roles, the greater inclusion of young adults in national events, appointing a national Young Adults 'Champion' and creating young adults' networks that would help to lead us forwards as a national family.

While recognising that we have a significant way to go to create a greater and more visible national culture for young adults within Baptists Together, there are some encouraging signs of initial progress in this area. In March 2020, the first gathering of a national **Young Adults Forum** was scheduled to take place before being curtailed by the Coronavirus restrictions. This was to have drawn together 18-35 year olds from across the country to be a prophetic voice to our national family and encourage us in ways we might engage more successfully with what is often referred to as this 'missing generation' in our churches. Those attending last year's **Baptist Assembly** will recall not just an excellent programme in place for children and young people but also parts of the programme led by and for 18-35 year olds. Although the average age of our Regional Ministers remains mid to late 50s, we do now have the first of this younger generation represented among those who are inspiring, supporting and resourcing our churches in missional ministry as part of Regional Ministry teams (see page 18). If the old adage that 'like attracts like' has any truth, we are at the very beginning of a shift in culture which sees a higher profile for young adults within our national family.

RECOMMENDATION THREE : Create a church planting programme within areas where a high proportion of 18-35s live and identify strategic Baptist churches who can be trained and resourced for mission to Young Adults.

Reflecting on the ways other denominations have sought to engage with and release young adults in missional leadership by targeting specific locations where a high percentage of young adults are represented in the local population, the group made a two-fold recommendation to the Baptist family:

- » Identify existing Baptist churches in areas with a high percentage of young adults in the local population. Offer training and resources as required to enable those churches to engage with and release young adults for missional leadership. Training and ongoing support might be offered by Baptist leaders who have experience in this area.



Figures taken from the Annual Returns figures for 2018
 For comparison, the figures from the Office for National Statistics for 2018 indicate that the proportion of young adults aged 19-30 in the UK was 15.8%

Resourcing might be from multiple streams including the local congregation, regional mission grants and possibly national mission grants given specifically for this purpose.

- » Create a church planting programme within areas where a high proportion of 18-35s live but where there are no existing Baptist churches (ie a new housing area designed with a high proportion of accommodation for younger first-time buyers and/or lower income renters), or in areas where the local Baptist church may choose not to engage with the offer of training and resourcing. The suggestion was made that it might prove helpful to provide a focused target of, say, 10 new church plants in areas with a high young adult population in the next five years.

There are some exceptional examples of Baptist churches across the country which have successfully engaged with this generation and are actively training and releasing young adults in to missional ministry. Some were represented within the group of practitioners who made these recommendations. As a national family we are not lacking in expertise but we do need to get better at sharing this strategically, particularly in areas where young adults are highly representing in the local population.

Final thoughts

We find ourselves at a point of genuine opportunity. There is a real desire within many of our churches as well as our Associations, national Specialist Teams and Colleges to find ways to engage with this younger generation and see them released in to missional leadership amongst us. We have some exceptionally gifted young adults who are part of our Baptist family and who are keen to serve in this way. I believe this is a time when we must have the courage to embrace the changes required in order to see these opportunities realised. Some of our inherited structures and systems are not aiding young adults to feel a sense of belonging to our family, and new ways of recognising and releasing their gifts need to be developed without delay. The present opportunity we have will not remain for much longer. I strongly believe that God has not finished with our Baptist family yet(!) but pouring new wine in to old wineskins simply will not do. Let's have the courage not just to embrace this younger generation, but free them to lead us in to the next season of our lives together. Now is not the time for delay... let's crack on!

Carl Smethurst is the *South West Baptist Association* Regional Minister for Mission and author of the *Baptists Together Young Adults Report*

He can be contacted at carl@swbaptists.org.uk





The Missing Generation that's right in front of us

Baptist minister and millennial Adrian Semerene offers this reflection on what his generation values, and the possibility of connection

"We're just different generations, and I will never understand your generation!"

That was how the conversation ended. Twenty minutes backwards and forwards, about a short video I showed in a recent service. While 'the rest of the church' laughed, smiled, and saw the depth of the message presented, this particular person was deeply offended and found it necessary to tell me, expecting an apology. Sure, I was deeply apologetic that offence was taken, but my dilemma came from the mere fact that if I were ever to be presented with the decision to show the video again, my actions would remain the same...

I have spent much time reflecting on this, and many other conversations through the years that seem to result in a conclusion that our generations are just 'different' and how 'times have changed'. Yet we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, called to be one. As such we must make the efforts to better understand one another, so as

to love one another, as well as reach those around us who have yet to enter into a deep relationship with Jesus. In one sense, it is easy to 'get to know' a certain older generation, because many of our churches represent and reflect them very well. However, there is a well documented 'missing generation' that is harder to get to know, simply because, well, they are missing. Please don't misunderstand me, they are not non-existent, I am one, and there are many churches across our Union that have some, or many worshipping and present in their churches... BUT, we've been called the missing generation for a reason. Most know us as millennials.

I quickly want to clarify that I am no expert, and there are many much better qualified people out there for that. Some you will find in this magazine, and I encourage you to reflect on them all. And while I also know that my experiences are not everyone's, conversations with many people in different contexts across the UK and beyond have led me to believe that

there is much similarity across the spectrum. I also hasten to add, much of these are generalisations and I apologise if you or someone you know doesn't fit with these thoughts, but please know that many (if not most) do.

So, who are millennials and what do they want out of church? These are some of the things that characterise us:

We are deeply relational: As millennials, we are not after information or knowledge. We have that at our fingertips, literally with our devices. We are looking for relationship, deep and meaningful relationships. The truth is, that type of relationship is not going to be achieved in a 1-2 hour service once a week. That relationship is built through investment of time. That relationship is built through meeting for coffee regularly; it is built through having relevant small groups in which the Bible is talked about, but where there is also scope to share each other's lives and walk alongside one another, applying the truths that we see in scripture.

One of the reasons we've seen such rapid growth on social media sites is because as a generation we want to be connected with one another regularly. Please don't misunderstand me, there is a lot wrong with social media, however, it is the drive for relationships that leads many of us there in the first place.

We seek authenticity: As millennials, we are seeking to be real with one another. We have friends and family members who are struggling with addictions, who make mistakes regularly, who are journeying through questions of sexuality and identity... or we are ourselves. We are looking for a place and people to journey life with, in all its realness and mess. We long for authenticity, and can tell when people are trying too hard to be something they are not, or aren't allowed to be who they are or for fear of judgement. Don't get me wrong, this is hard, and messy. As a Christian who holds conservative views, this can sometimes be difficult but, surprisingly, when we are open and honest with one another, and relationships go deeper, we find ways to move forward together.

We are doers: One of the ways we build that deep relationship and journey in authenticity is by getting plugged in, and doing. I have a friend who is a minister (and a great one at that); however, there is a policy he has which I disagree with. He and the team have established that new members to the fellowship are not allowed to serve in the church for a year, so that the church can better get to know them and vice versa. In part, that is a great policy, that also seeks relationship prior to service.

However, as millennial, I wouldn't attend his church. If I was told I couldn't serve, I would feel lost and would quickly find myself moving on. This may be a sad reality, but it's a truth. As a generation we believe that part of our deep relationality is serving one another and we feel cut off if we're not allowed. Often we are told that we can't serve because of our age... That never goes down well, as we believe that we may do things differently, but we can do it, because if we can't ourselves we'll find someone who can.

We are visual: I have found that we as a generation like to see things. We visualise sermons, we visualise worship, visualise our lives and futures. Some of this is cross-generational and simply explained as a learning style. Some of it is simply deeply embedded in us. We are the generation that saw our phones go from the brick to a beautiful hd screen with which we can capture the highest quality photos and videos. We are visual. Our social networks reflect much of that nature.

We are perfectionists: This term is perhaps too harsh. However, as a generation we like to see things done properly. Many of us would rather not see something done, than see it done badly. While it may seem petty, this stretches to things such as screen visuals, announcements, sermon illustrations, sung worship, etc. Much of this drive of perfectionism within church comes from a deep desire to do and give our best to God. This is often misunderstood as us trying to be 'flashy'. We are just being us.

There is much more that could be shared (we are connected, we are driven, we are optimistic and hopeful), yet this seems a good way to start. The question then becomes for many of us, what do we do to draw and connect with the missing generation? Change! Fact is, we aren't missing everywhere, there are churches who have embraced the change that is needed to welcome, engage and journey with us. But that change puts many people off. We hear change and we hear having to abandon our roots, our beliefs, our ways of doing things, our roles and so much more. While some of that is true, not all of it has to be.

The change is not about changing our beliefs, but changing how we 'express those beliefs' perhaps. In one of my previous churches, there were three elderly members of the fellowship (aged 85-93) that always stand out in my mind. These three continually encouraged me, pushed me, prayed for me, and released me to do things differently. We'd often have conversations in which they might say, "I don't necessarily like it, or understand it, but I see what God is doing in it, so I can get behind it." They spoiled me: I thought that's how it would always be. It isn't. But maybe that's how it's meant to be.

There's a missing generation because the generations before failed to connect with them. That may seem a harsh reality, but it is a reality nonetheless. I wonder what role you might have to play to reach that generation? And if you are a millennial, what is your next step to engage with the churches that may not know what to do with you? If you are part of the generations prior to us, I wonder what role you might have to play to make space, to welcome, to be authentic with the millennials right in front of you?

One thing is for sure, we need to start working together on this quickly, because there is another generation rising up, that brings with them everything that millennials do, and more, to learn from, and change and adapt for. Gen Z might have to wait until another article though, we have enough to reflect on... For now!

Adrian Semerene is minister of **Gaminglay Baptist Church**, Cambridgeshire. He became a member of



Baptist Union Council in 2019



Photos: Gaminglay Baptist Church and Gareth Squence



Creating a culture for young adults to thrive

Our emerging generations have many new dreams to birth, and an ability to think outside the box and take risks. The vital question for the Church of today is, how much are we taking a risk on them? By Nick and Marjorie Allan

Western Millennials are sometimes stereotyped as 'snowflakes'. The term is generally used pejoratively to describe a group of entitled, politically correct, militant, selfie-taking, flighty, emotionally vulnerable souls with no grip on the real world.

Broadly, this is a mistake. In the midst of some real challenges and some quirky characteristics, a generation is rising up who are fed up with the status quo and the political climate. They have witnessed what a lack of faith and spirituality has done to their parents' generation. They really care about the world around them and the world they will leave behind, and they are making small but very significant and highly creative steps to be and find solutions to problems. They are surprising us with their bold actions and they may indeed leave behind significant societal changes. It is driven by a determination, resourcefulness and resilience which belies the challenges they face.

Like yeast in the dough, entrepreneurialism runs through the veins of Generations Y and Z. This will do wonders for kingdom initiatives if we let it loose.

The question is, will our churches or kingdom initiatives take the risk and pass over the reins to these generations now? The fruitfulness of any organisation (or church) is dependent upon the degree to which we recognise the talents and giftings in those around us and empower these individuals to reach their full potential. Our emerging generations have an ability to think outside the box, whether it comes to solutions to problems in a business, dealing with the homeless of the city, or communicating in public. They are a risk-taking generation who attempt small hidden initiatives, fuelled by big thinking. They are not afraid of risks.

The vital question for the Church of today is, how much are we taking a risk on them?

Please take the time to ask yourself these kinds of questions:

- » Are we creating a culture in which young adults can dream and start something new?
- » Are we allowing them to influence our programmes, strategy, governance, communication and evangelistic initiatives?

In the UK today we see a few great examples of churches led by and shaped by millennial leaders. It is not necessary that every church leader over the age of 50 must suddenly resign in favour of young blood! But if we are serious about reaching, raising and releasing the rising generations, we must be intentional in doing so. In Sheffield we have found it helpful to deliberately create opportunities to release younger volunteers and leaders: even when that feels too early or a bit unwise. What keeps it safe is a culture of high support. People become what we call them to. If you do not know where to start on this one, we would encourage you to create a permission-giving culture where people know they can dream and be heard. As leaders, we can often mistakenly feel like we have to come up with all the dreams and ideas. That is exhausting for us and disempowering for others, but many churches operate like this. Generations Y and Z have many new dreams to birth. Let us empower our rising adults by reminding them of God's old and big story and the cause of which they are a part. Let us inspire them as to the past and believe in them for the future.

We encourage all those within church to consider the 'why' and 'how' of reaching, raising and releasing Generations Y and Z to flourish as missionary disciples in today's world. That means designing a culture which fosters church visions, values and structures aimed at:

- » Understanding them
- » Empowering them: not just into leadership and mission, but in their own exploration of spirituality and discipleship
- » Releasing the next generation to dream a kingdom dream, and have a good go
- » Powerful encounters in the presence of God
- » Having them in leadership, and being willing to be led by them
- » Helping them to process life's struggles, battles, demons. Building scaffolding around them so they may not just acknowledge their baggage, but be willing to address it deeply, and feel safe enough to journey towards emotional health and wholeness
- » Mentoring them among the multigenerational connections which the Church uniquely offers to society
- » Connecting their generation's passion for social change and justice to the Church's historic mission

Photo: The Well



When we planted *The Well* Sheffield we aimed to create a culture of momentum where people could dream and start new initiatives, but always within the premise that every activity or ministry we began needed to have a missional meaning and to be accessible for the unchurched. It was a challenge to help Christians lose their 'churchiness' and live in a different way. Discipleship means calling people to live the 'Jesus way' not necessarily the 'Church way'.

It is so important, for example, to realise that this generation has been raised to dream, and dream big. They are dreamers who are motivated by inspiration. They do not want to be managed, and much less told what to do or believe. They want to be led by leaders who create a culture in which to dream and run, providing them with support. Young adults around us at *The Well* Sheffield frequently ask the 'Why?' in relation to tasks or church structures. Outside of church, they are not used to simply being told 'it's this way'. As Generation X leaders, we have found it very important to understand the 'why' and work hard to answer it.

Our opportunity is to help these generations realise that walking in the footsteps of Jesus will lead you to the most 'whole' kind of life. What does whole-life discipleship look like? Each of us needs to have a clear understanding if we are to spur one another on. If we can help the Church of today to live like Jesus in the whole of life, the kingdom will be breaking out all over the place. We need to articulate from the pulpit and around the kitchen table what discipleship according to Jesus looks like. We need to live it, model it and inspire it in others. It is a timeless message and the kind of life all are looking for. As we live it, others will follow.

Nick and Marjorie Allan lead *The Well*, a Baptist church planted in Sheffield in 2016 which has one of the highest concentrations of young adults in our Union



This is extracted from their forthcoming book *The XYZ of Discipleship: Understanding and Reaching Generations Y & Z*, which is published by Malcolm Down Ltd in April 2020.
www.xyzdiscipleship.com





“We need their energy, vision, passion and wisdom”

Incoming Baptist Union President Yinka Oyekan explains why a focus on young adults is a key element of his Presidential year

For my presidential year, one of the critical things I'm planning to do is to gather 1,000 Baptist young adults together for a time of envisioning and to release some wild dreams.

I'm using the term 'Young Adult' as defined by Carl Smethurst in his report *Baptists Together: Young Adults 18-35s and the Church*¹. The Young Adults referred to in his paper mainly comprises millennials (or Generation Y), those entering adulthood in the first decade of the millennium (born 1982-1992); as well as Generation Z those born in the following decade (1993-mid 2000s).

We know we have around 15,000 18-35 year-olds in our movement – and we need their energy, vision, passion and wisdom in all aspects of leadership.

Characteristics of millennials

While recognising that every individual deserves to be treated as such, it is helpful to understand what makes millennials tick, which should be of particular interest as it is estimated that around 73 per cent of the Young Adult group are millennials.

The most surprising thing for me was to discover that millennials are one of the most optimistic groups of individuals of any generation². Even though many recent economic disasters like the banking crash and the recent recession have disproportionately impacted them as a group, they nevertheless have confidence and optimism about their future. Success looks very different to them than to their parents.

'success seems to mean an abundance of experiences rather than an abundance of things.'³

Generation Y, as they are sometimes called, are more interested in creating, whether that be online content, service, or products, than they are in consuming them, making them less materialistic than their parents, who were the first real consumer generation. Millennials want a lifestyle that is sustainable and fits in with their values.⁴

While often criticised for living online rather than in the real world, and having a screen stuck in front of them all the time, the truth is that millennials are deeply concerned about community. It just happens to be the case that they have multiple forms of community, some online and some offline, and they find it easy to fit into both worlds.

¹ Carl Smethurst *Baptists Together: Young Adults 18-35s and the Church* baptist.org.uk/youngadults

² *Millennials Still Optimistic*, Millennial Marketing bit.ly/millennialsoptimistic

³ *Are Millennials Redefining the American Dream?* Krystina Nguyen, Huffington Post bit.ly/millennialhuffpo

⁴ Allysia Lowe, digital marketing eofire.com/millennial-entrepreneurs/

Our Baptist family, and especially those in leadership in our family, must take the time to understand them so that we can better engage with them.

You will find that on the whole Generation Y is civic-minded. They keep up with social issues and try to stay informed. My eldest son once said to me while in the middle of some long-forgotten debate that “in the age of google, ignorance is a choice”. The matter in question was quickly resolved by googling it. Notwithstanding the recent surge in the phenomenon of fake news, this generation is adept at spotting anything which does not smack of authenticity, and quickly discards it.

And so their civic-minded attitudes make them action-oriented. A church which creates room and pathways for social engagement within the church or without will find them better engaged. They also love to collaborate and including them in church teams means leaders finding and utilising tools that will facilitate that collaborative approach to problem-solving⁵. Listening to them is an integral part of engaging them. This is the generation which received much praise and attention from their baby boomer parents and expects that same consideration to continue. They have been encouraged to believe that they can make a difference and are motivated to try.

Most surprising is that despite millennials not entirely trusting of religious institutions, there is a rising number of individuals who have absolute faith in the existence of God⁶.

Mentoring

In the early years of itinerant ministry, I mentored young adults as a priority in my ministry. And when I settled down to pastoral ministry the practice continued: some are now businessmen, others church leaders or charity workers. The list is encouraging, but I noticed that not every minister, itinerant or otherwise, took the same

approach. There seemed to be pot luck for some youngsters within the church context. I have watched with joy how Steve Clifford mentored Gavin Calver, who has now succeeded him as General Director of the Evangelical Alliance. I also am about to hand over the leadership of the English network of churches I oversee to one of my assistant ministers, who is currently doing a course at **Bristol Baptist College**.

The intentional mentoring and the creation of opportunities for leadership with Young Adults have got to become a priority in our churches. Indeed, it is hoped that every regional team and missional context will consider how to provide pathways to leadership within our Baptist family.

“What if it became abnormal practice for a Local Church Minister, Pioneer, Youth Specialist, Regional Minister, National Specialist Team Leader, General Secretary, President to not be mentoring someone? What if the majority of those being mentored were young adults?” - Carl Smethurst in the Young Adults report 2019

Baptists Together Young Adults gathering

Finally, when Mark Hirst (a millennial Baptist minister), the team he is putting around him and I bring together 1000+ young adults in Reading in March 2021, to showcase the fantastic future opportunities that lie ahead of them within the Baptist family, it must not be a one-off event. It should include a concern for our planet and many other worthy causes to which this conscientious group can give their time and energy. They are a generation in search of a worthy cause and of course,



none is more deserving than making Christ known through education, hospitals, shift work, business, ministry and many other means. Their inclusion in leadership to help find solutions will mean we are more likely to get our distinct message across to the millennial generation outside our churches and connect with Gen Z following them.

I thank God for spaces like Soul Survivor, Hillsong and others where millennials have had the opportunity to express their spirituality. It’s time for us to create Baptist spaces that others, both in and outside our movement, can benefit from as well.

Yinka Oyekan leads **The Gate**, a Baptist church in Reading. He will become President of our Baptist Union in May.



Find out more from his Presidential website howdowegrowfromhere.com

5 Tara Gentile business strategist and the founder of CoCommercial bit.ly/millennialsandream

6 Adriana Flores Adriana, contributor at *My Millennial Guide* mymillennialguide.com/what-is-a-millennial/



Photos: Yinka Oyekan





“We want to release the potential of young adults into the church and wider Baptist life”

In September 2019, the *London Baptist Association* launched the LBA Leadership Year, a new internship programme aimed at 18-25 years olds. What is it, and how’s it going?

The thinking behind the programme

“I felt that we needed a priority around young adults, particularly around hearing the voice of young adults,” notes Lee Johnson, who arrived at the Association as a Regional Minister in October 2018. “We want to release the potential of young adults into our churches and the wider Baptist family.”



“So I came with a desire to get something going. Not just to provide space for people to work in a church; it’s not simply a local church placement. If it’s within the Association, it needs to be listening and learning.”



Thinking along similar lines was Pete Herbert-James, who had joined the LBA earlier in 2018 as its Children, Youth and Young Adults Lead. Pete had previously worked with *The Kings Cross Baptist Church* for 11 years in Student and Young Adults’ ministry, during which time he had been involved in creating the LBA’s Younger Leaders’ Network, with several younger ministers across the capital.

“This is a city full of young adults and as an LBA we want to really invest in them, both within the local church context *and* to release them into the wider church family.”

“As an Association, we want to learn from young adults, to listen to their voices, so that they are helping shape what we do.”

Together Lee and Pete put together a programme which aimed to meet these objectives. It had the full support of the Association and its Board, and secured Home Mission funding to ensure as wide a range of access as possible (the funding means there is no upfront cost to the interns so costs for the training, travel, living expenses and other material/resources are covered by the LBA. The church provides the accommodation). The programme was advertised in early summer 2019, with the first intake ready to start in September.

as an Association, we want to learn from young adults, to listen to their voices, so they are helping shape what we do

What does the LBA internship programme consist of?

There are four key elements to the LBA's Leadership Year programme.

Theological and ministry training, which has involved study at Spurgeon's College.

Secondly, **leadership development training**, which involves a specific leadership training programme run by Lee and Pete with the support of other local ministers.

Placement, which has two, concurrent streams. There's a three day a week placement within a church setting, which includes Sundays. There is also a regional element: each week the interns are based in the LBA office; and an occasional national element to give a broad picture of Baptist life.

Mentoring is the fourth component, with each intern assigned their own mentor. "We recognise that's really important within any leadership development, and we know it's something that young adults really want, and is of great benefit" says Pete.

The interns

Three young adults signed up for the first year of the programme. **Nosa Idehen** (22yrs) has been a member of **Barking Baptist Church** since she was three. Last summer she had recently finished her biochemistry degree when Lee preached at her church and mentioned the internship programme.

"I was looking at what to do next. Lots of doors were closing on the medical side. Nothing made sense.

"Lee came to our church and had spoken about the internship, and my pastor suggested it to me. I felt like God was redirecting me. This was nothing to do with biochemistry. Often it doesn't go the way you plan."

She is now placed at **Frampton Park Baptist Church** in Hackney, where she has led worship, been involved in pastoral ministry alongside the two bi-vocational ministers there, organised youth nights and has just begun to provide science tuition for children in the church and community.



"Being placed in a different church has been brilliant," she says, "I've really loved it.

"It's been really interesting to see what ministers do, and gain an insight into all that goes on. It's also interesting to see how the LBA takes care of the churches. It offers a lot, but I feel churches aren't aware of this or don't take advantage.

"Next year I want to apply for medicine, but also to go back to my home church and use what I've learned this year in a leadership role there."

Lee says that Nosa returning to her home church armed with greater leadership knowledge and awareness is what the programme is for. "Nosa having a good grasp of leadership will help them enormously. Nosa taking on a leadership role, but not becoming a minister, is a just as big a success."



Matt Reeves (25yrs), is putting his experience of organising festivals to good use at **Mill Hill East Church** in North West London. Matt was working for Creation Fest when he heard about the LBA internship programme.

"I was attracted by the whole idea of learning leadership with God's presence," he explains. "It's how we can actually go from not just having general leadership skills, but learning how God's given us these gifts and how we should use them within the church. I feel like I've got some leadership skills, and I wanted to learn how I could go further and use them."

Matt has been doing 'all sorts of stuff' in the role at his church, including preaching, leading the services, and times of prayer. He describes it as being thrown in at the deep end. "I've really been challenged in stepping out of my comfort zone. I'd never done any full on, proper sort of leadership – I'd had leadership roles, but never had to lead people.

"So I've been learning about myself, and where my skills are, where I need to get help, where I need to improve in those areas of leadership. I've really enjoyed being pushed."

Just before he joined, Mill Hill were part of a group of local churches exploring the idea of a Pentecost festival, but not exactly sure how to go about it. Matt was helping to lead the Churches Together Team setting up the festival, until it was subsequently cancelled because of the national lockdown to slow down the spread of the coronavirus.





Robert Glendenning (23yrs), joined the programme having previously completed an internship in a church, but says this one felt different. "It offered both training and leadership," he explains. Rob senses a calling to leadership, and had done a foundation year studying theology at Moorlands College.

He's been based at **Cross Street Baptist Church** in Islington, an inner city church, where he has led children's and youth work, set up an Alpha Course, and even taught English as a foreign language. "That's something I'd never thought I'd be doing!"

He adds, "Aside from the theology training, I've been learning a lot about time management, a lot about what happens in the background at churches, as well as a lot of stuff leaders do: I've been able to shadow the minister at Cross Street, see what he does, everything that's involved in planning weddings, even baptisms."

Rob has enjoyed seeing all that happens at Association and national level, and is grateful for the range of perspectives he's been able to access.

"I feel that God may be leading me into becoming a pastor, but I still need to look into that," he says.

"We listen to them"

This is the first year of the internship programme, and Pete and Lee are pleased with how it's going so far.

"It's been a great learning experience for us as an Association," Pete says. "It's been great to have three interns with us this year bringing a fresh voice into all that we do, with ideas for the things that we're doing as well, suggesting different things.

"We believe it's going really well for them. They seem to be connected well in their local church."

Lee adds, "It's great to have them in the Association; and get some great input on all sorts of things. We listen to them. We seem to be getting very positive feedback from the churches and the interns themselves. They've been able to get involved with all sorts of levels of leadership in the church, so it's been a great experience for them and us. We're looking forward to next year and hoping to increase the programme."

The LBA is now taking applications for September's programme. To find out more details and to apply you can email internship@londonbaptist.org.uk

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Scripture
Union

An interview with

Hayley Young

Regional Minister/Mission Enabler at the South Wales Baptist Association.
Aged 33, she is currently our youngest regional minister

Can you talk us through your call to regional ministry?

It was birthed out of a frustration. I felt God was calling people of my age. While Baptists are fantastic in their grass roots nature, I look around at some of the structures and there's no one like me.

As I wrestled with this, I asked God, "will you raise more people up into some of these positions?"

And the response I heard very strongly was that he wanted me to go forward. I thought: I haven't got the right experience, I don't look like the others. Soon I saw that South Wales were looking...

I was invited to interview. Sceptically I thought I was there just to tick boxes. But God really started moving in my heart that this was right. I had the sense it wasn't just about my gifts and calling, but to open doors so others can follow.

So what's your role at SWaBA?

It's Mission Enabler. What's really exciting is that I'm coming alongside ministers and churches and seeing what God is already doing. I'm encouraging people to maybe try new things in new ways. There is a real openness.

There are lots of challenges and big questions. How do we transform our services and congregations to meet the needs around them? We need to fundamentally question our theologies.

I'm learning that Wales is very different. Baptist churches here tend to be traditional in the way they do things. Some churches are trying so hard. They have a heart for Jesus, and that's all they need.

Part of me is feeling not ready and inadequate, but I'm relying on God more and I am excited for all that lies ahead.



How did you come to faith – and how and when did you sense the call to ministry?

I was brought up in a non-Christian household. But when I was 17 I really started questioning things. I was studying history and religion, and during that time I visited Auschwitz. You can't go to a place like that and not have a load of questions. I looked at Christianity and other faiths.

One day on the way to college, I passed a Baptist church. I just wandered in and spoke to the minister. There was something about him and the way that he responded to my questions that seemed different to anything else I had experienced. I wanted to find out more.

By the time I went to university I was part of a congregation. At this time I just felt God calling me into pastoral ministry. A sermon at the time challenged me: you have to use the gifts that God has given you now. I prayed a lot, fasted a lot. I spoke to Christian friends who said it was a great idea, but that I was too young. I spoke to non-Christian friends who told me to go for it now.

What happened next?

I just started pushing those doors. I did an internship year with a Baptist church, and started going through Ministerial Recognition. One of the things I was asked was: "Do you think you need more worldly experience?" Having become a Christian aged 17, I already felt I had a lot of worldly experience! I said, "I don't want to grow in worldly experience, but in Godly experience."

As part of my study at *Spurgeon's*, I was placed at Hayling Island, with Jacky Storey. When she was called into regional ministry, I stayed, and just flourished.

I've had some difficult situations. Some because of my gender, some because of my age. I've had some comments about my role, that it's tokenistic. But the more you work with integrity, and the more you follow Jesus, people will come round to you.

You have a passion for seeing Millennials and Generation Z released into church leadership. Can you talk more about that?

Millennials and Generation Z have the same gifts as others, such as being gifted teachers, anointed preachers. But we also have a unique ability to speak into a rapidly changing culture. We can speak with a prophetic voice.

One example of that was the Living Lent campaign from the *Joint Public Issues Team*. The amount of millennials who took part was great.

Whenever someone comes to faith, we can speak to their generation. We know what it's like growing up in these times. We should be releasing more people into that. When that investment is made, society should be able to see there's people like me, and think 'I can relate to that'.

There's an excitement about what millennials can offer the church.

Hayley made a film called Cardboard Testimony to tell her congregation and wider community she was HIV positive, following an attack two years previously. She used words on sheets of cardboard to get the message across. The testimony was picked up by many national news outlets.

Can you tell us about the Cardboard Testimony in 2015? What are your reflections on it?

I needed to tell the congregation. Lots of people have questioned the method, but I didn't want anything to be misunderstood, and wanted a tangible reference point. There was also a recognition that our church was wider than those who come on a Sunday morning, so this was for them too.

It was a couple of weeks before the national media picked it up. I think they were tipped off. I was suddenly thrust into a media whirlwind. I had no training for this!



But God was in it, and it was very humbling. It gave me a wonderful opportunity to share the gospel. There wasn't much to say about HIV, so most of the interviews were actually about my faith and how it sustained me.

And it has opened doors. I've had the privilege of speaking to groups that would never engage with the church; we have HIV and there is a connectedness.

And how about the time you got to share a stage with Bishop Michael Curry, on the very same day he preached at the Royal Wedding?

The local ecumenical partnership contacted me about being part of the service, alongside the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby. I'm not a traditional minister in any sense, so I thought it was a sign of God's sense of humour.

I'm also not a royalist, and had not watched the wedding. But I noticed how Michael Curry was trending on Twitter.

To be with him, hear him speak, at the end of a week when Christians had been praying for non-Christians to know about Jesus; there was just this big sense of joy. God's people worshipping together, being together. ■



Church Stories

A small selection of stories from across our Union



Life at *theBarn* in Bidford

“They recognise authenticity, passion, life, grace, and positivity”

theBarn is a newish Baptist church in the rural village of Bidford between Stratford and Evesham in the *Heart of England Baptist Association*. Formed around 15 years ago as *Bidford-on-Avon Baptist Church*, it changed its name when it moved into a building that used to house a soft play facility called Bungo's Barn. “We felt we'd be known as ‘the church that meets at what used to be Bungo's Barn,’ so felt that incorporating the word ‘barn’ into our branding made sense,” explains pastor Jamie Cox. “We'd also been prophesied over, just before we moved in, and given a word about ‘a barn being for harvest;’ we'd also thought how the building is a shell, with the people the church, and a barn fitted that; for all these reasons *theBarn* has just stuck.”

Around 45 young adults are engaged in Sunday church at *theBarn*, and are part of a balanced overall age-range spread across the church. Just under half are the children of existing church members. There was a good nucleus of teenagers when Jamie arrived 10 years ago.

“When they became young adults, I asked them what they wanted, thinking the answer would be pizzas and bowling nights out,” explains Jamie. “But the answer was fuel - full Bible studies - and that's always been the case.”

Jamie explains there's a balance between Word and Spirit: he preaches for 40 minutes (“it's challenging, and Word-based”), but there's also a desire to be open to the Spirit, and there's space for that.



Photos: *theBarn*

Mitcham Baptist Church

“Not a mass movement, but one at a time”

Mitcham Baptist Church in London is medium sized Baptist church with a balanced age profile across its fellowship – including a healthy number of young adults

Philip Lutterrodt joined Mitcham Baptist Church as its minister in 2009, having previously pastored churches in Ghana and Switzerland. Throughout his ministries he’s always had a passion for young adults, empowering them, and giving them opportunities to lead and grow. Luke 2:52, the only passage to mention Jesus’ years between 18 and 30, is a key scripture for him (‘And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man’).

“This is a crucial time in Jesus’ life,” he says, “I’ve always had a desire to see a flourishing young adults’ ministry.”

This has been the case at Mitcham. More than a decade ago the church Philip was called to operated in a very traditional way, with hymns and expository preaching. Philip took a survey among the congregation and learnt that the small number of young adults there wanted something more contemporary. “They said the services were too formal, not challenging enough, and not really meeting their needs.” Others wanted a mix of contemporary and the traditional.

Rather than rush to act on what he had heard, Philip spent time in prayer and fasting. He kept things as they were for one year. After this time he began to alternate between contemporary, chorus-based worship one week, and hymns the next. Similarly, he mixed up his preaching styles, offering narrative, story-telling sermons for part of the year, alongside a more traditional, expository text-based approach. His mantra has always been “Let’s hasten slowly”.

Some didn’t agree with these changes and left, always with Philip’s blessing (“I want people to worship where the Spirit leads them”). However, over time a small number of young adults came back. “They found it more relevant to their needs, and helped them to feel more at home.”



The 18-30s in the church also value home groups, he continues. “They’re not just interested in social activity, but really do want to press into things of God in home group. They’ve always been spiritually switched on.”

The church has always had a 20somethings group, he adds, explaining that this age group tends to flock together, “so you have to provide something for them if they’re there, otherwise they’ll probably go to the city church that does.” The church seeks ways to put young people in positions of responsibility or leadership, and has in the past done some young leaders’ training and identification.

“The young adults want a place where they can confidently bring their friends”, he continues. In this respect it may help that the building in which the church meets is modern – it doesn’t have the iconography of a more traditional church, such as stained glass windows; but more of a ‘contemporary’ and ‘positive’ feel.

Ultimately this age group is attracted to a ‘healthy’ church. “They recognise authenticity, passion, life, grace, and positivity,” says Jamie.

“But I suspect that some of the reasons church works for 18-30s will be similar to the older members. They are attracted to life, Word and Spirit.”

The church also runs three ‘Stay and Play’ sessions each week in the main church hall, and has begun to build relationships with numerous families in the ‘young adult’ bracket. Jamie says: “They seem to like the atmosphere, the warm welcome and the larger sense of community. From there they can feed into our Messy Church style events and, hopefully, in the fullness of time, into wider church life.”

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“And with every young adult that turned up, I was so excited.”

Philip has always wanted the church to meet needs, be open to the Holy Spirit and not be dogmatic. Where possible this has meant giving young adults opportunities to lead, to mentor and be mentored.

When he arrived the church had a youth club, and this has been sustained. He’s always tried to encourage young adults to lead it. “When there’s less of an age gap, they can relate better. There is still a role for the older people in supporting it, but we’ve now got a very vibrant teen ministry, which is like a family. The conversations are like talking to an older brother or sister.”

He wanted a fellowship for young adults, and was praying for God to raise up leaders. This happened following the marriage of a young couple. With Philip’s support, training and encouragement, they began a group that met in their home. This group began to gel and disciple each other. When this couple moved up north because of a change in job, Philip was able to identify another young couple with leadership qualities.

“It’s going very well. It meets once a month. The challenge is when they start to have children, they find it difficult to run.

“But God has been good. The number of young adults keeps increasing. When they realise something good is happening at church, they invite their friends. It’s one at a time, not a mass movement.”

He began to sense the different age groups in the church need specific ministries. One of the consequences of this focus is that Mitcham Baptist Church has a balanced mix of ages, with roughly even numbers of children and teens, young adults, middle adults (40s-70s), and senior adults (70+). There isn’t the

same sense of a ‘missing generation’.

Features of church life include having the different age groups regularly lead services, and times of prayer. Every month there will be a special service that focuses on each of the age groups, which enables the fellowship to know more about each other. Each month the church marks birthdays and anniversaries of both weddings and deaths.

Philip says it’s important there are lots of opportunities throughout the year for the whole church family to come together, and this happens through events like Christmas dinners and visits to the beach.

He’s found that music is another way for different groups to express themselves and serve the church. There are therefore three separate music groups, a teenage gospel band, a young adults gospel band, and middle/senior adult choir. He has resisted calls to amalgamate. “People like to be with people they like to be with,” says Philip, who is also a trained psychologist. “Once they have a sense of belonging, they come, and stay.” Mentoring has an important place in the life of the church: Philip encourages all young adults to mentor – to mentor university students and teenagers in the church.

He recognises challenges. House prices in London for one, alongside lots of other styles of churches, some with a particular focus on young adults. When people start to have children they find it more difficult to sustain the energy to fully participate in ways they previously did. Philip recognises too that it’s challenging to meet the needs of different ages.

Ultimately he wants to empower people to be the person God has called them to be, and aims to create space in the life of the church to help enable this to happen. ■



Photo: Mitcham Baptist Church



Hope Baptist Church

“People just know each other better. It’s created a lot more understanding.”

Hope Baptist Church has intentionally sought to bring people of all ages together. It’s not easy, but the church is reaping the benefits.

“What’s possibly unusual about Hope is that there’s not really any age group that’s under-represented,” says Baptist minister Luke Mansfield. “There’s a really good intergenerational mix of people.”

Luke pastors Hope Baptist Church in Plymouth, a church with around 250 regulars aged between 0-90, of whom around 50 are young adults. Luke joined in Easter 2019, succeeding the late Andrew Gardiner, and said he discovered a fellowship where there had been a focus on mixing the generations.

“There was a recognition there wasn’t a mix of ages. There was a deliberate shaking up of the life (house) groups to try to get much more of a crossover. It’s something that the church has stuck at, and is really beginning to reap the benefits,” says Luke.

“People just know each other better. It’s created a lot more understanding.”

He says the younger generations ‘benefit from the wisdom of those lived years’, citing the example of mums of young children receiving care and advice of those whose children are much older. At the same time, the older people have been ‘energised’ by life with the younger ones.

The church has a number of activities where there is an intentionality about being intergenerational. It hosts a soup run each Monday night, involving people from 18 to the early 60s. Older leaders are involved in the toddler groups, while there have been a number of one off events which have worked well because the relationships have already been there.

“Being an intentionally intergenerational church is not an easy thing”, Luke continues.

“We are creatures of habit, and it’s easier to be with the people in similar situations to you.

“But in the groups where it’s really worked there has been a lot more support and discipling.”

Speaking specifically about young adults, Luke himself in his 30s, says the church tries to ‘use every resource possible’.

“So there’s a really good social media presence. We live-stream services. We simply try to meet people where they’re at.”



Penrallt Baptist Church

“The authentic welcome was attractive”

How students have grown in faith at *Penrallt Baptist Church* – despite it being in pastoral vacancy

“We don’t think these stories happen any more, that people just walk into church and find faith,” says John Thompson, “but they do and it happened here, and hopefully that’s an encouragement to others.”

John was the moderator of Penrallt Baptist Church in Bangor, and has since become its minister. In November he had the joy of baptising three young adults, all from different life situations and faith backgrounds.

One of them was 24-year-old Ryan. Christened as a child, Ryan was a regular and independent church goer in his later primary years (his parents didn’t share his faith), and during this time he was given an Armed Forces Gideon Bible. Over time the church-going stopped, but the Bible remained on his shelf.

He would pick it up again as a young adult dealing with a number of health issues such as anxiety and depression. “I noticed the question on this Gideon Bible ‘what to do when you’re feeling anxious’ and became interested,” he remembers.

“I realised I didn’t know what I believed, and wanted to find out more.”

He began to explore, and his interest in faith grew again, as it had done as a child. After reading the Bible regularly, and listening to sermons and podcasts online, Ryan wanted to attend a church. He asked a local Christian bookshop for advice, which pointed him in the direction of the nearby Penrallt.

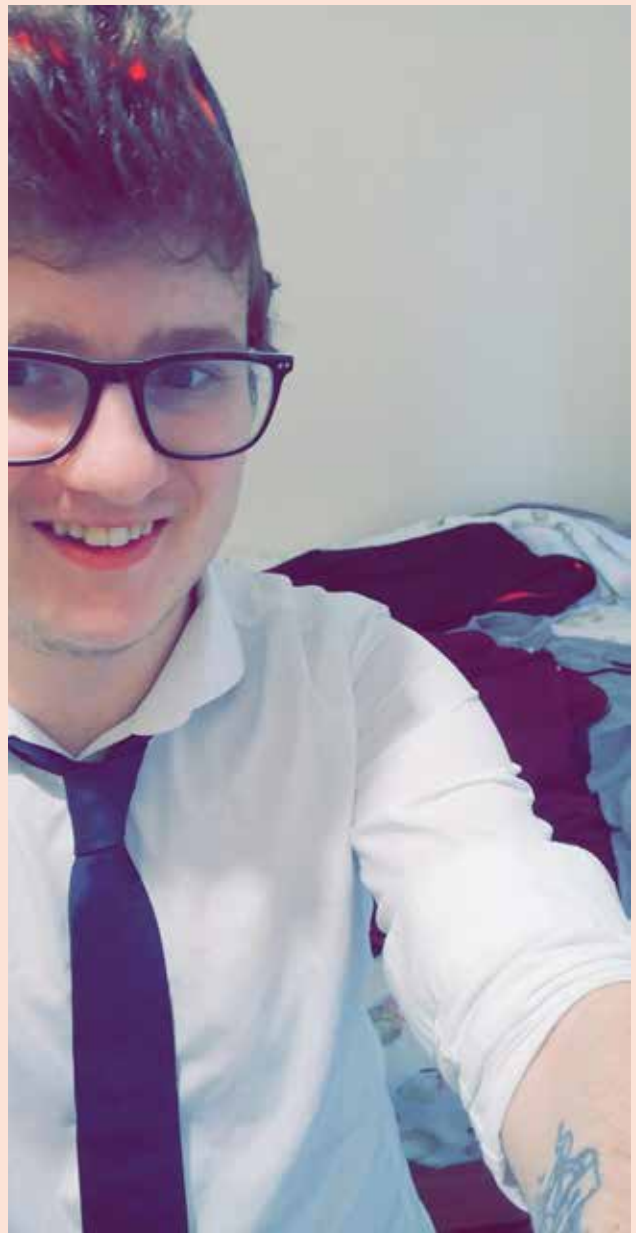
“People were really friendly, and picked up that I was new. They saw I had questions, and slowly but surely helped me to find answers.”

He began to have regular chats with John, and joined a house group.

“He found evidence of authenticity here, and it was attractive to him,” says John.

Ryan’s health was improving all the time. “I had tried a number of things over the years, but nothing seemed to click. It was only when I picked up the Bible. After 15 years of slow progress, I was finally becoming reunited with God.”

“I’ve seen Ryan grow in confidence,” adds John, “and there is a sense of peace and excitement about him.”



He’s thrilled with what he’s found in the Bible, and there’s a sense of him growing and maturing in faith.”

Ryan has moved to a degree in Philosophy and Religion, and is exploring a call to Baptist ministry.

Two more young adults were baptised alongside Ryan in November. Bangor is a university city, and a number of students worship at the Baptist church. John describes Penrallt as a welcoming, contemporary evangelical church ‘with a really big heart for one another’.

“There is something about an authentic welcome,” he says. “All this has happened in a church with a pastoral vacancy.”

Holland Road Baptist Church

“The gospel at its best is something that brings diverse people together”

Young adults connect with the Hove church for a variety of reasons

With more than one hundred 18-30 year olds in its congregation, **Holland Road Baptist Church** in Hove has one of the largest concentrations of young adults in our Union.

There are several reasons why they have connected, notes associate minister Tim Vellacott, who is nevertheless keen to stress that the church doesn't claim to have 'all the answers'.

“There are some things we do well and lots of areas we'd like to improve. Hove is a young city – there are lots of young people here, lots of students around – and there are several churches here which have more young adults than we do. But we asked our young adults about why they have connected with us, and several themes emerged.”

One is the importance of being with a variety of ages. The young adults said they want be part of a broader family, rather than mix with just their own generation. There is a focus on intergenerational relationships at Holland Road, where the church leadership team encourages intergenerational serving. One example is the worship band, which has grandparents serving alongside teenagers, while away from Sunday the congregation gathers in groups of smaller 'communities', which often see students and young adults sharing life with families and older generations.

“The gospel at its best is something that brings diverse people together,” says Tim. “We have babies being born, and people in their 90s, and everyone in between. There is a genuine valuing of the older generation, while the older generations want the younger ones to succeed,

which they see as vitally important, and they are a great source of encouragement.

“So our communities are really important. Some are more mixed than others, but as a church we really value that and want to grow in it.”

Another common theme is that the young adults have found a place to belong and serve. The church intentionally aims to give young adults opportunities to serve and lead, with one obvious example being its *Encounter* service on a Sunday evening, 'a night of worship and seeking God that is led by teens, students, 20s and those seeking to develop their gifts to serve the church'.

“We want to enable people to find and use their gifts, and that's actually true of every age,” says Tim. “But certainly the young adults have told us they have found a place to belong to and serve. *Encounter* is a great example of that principle - young people with the opportunities to lead and teach.”

A third key reason is the church's emphasis on biblical teaching alongside a willingness to explore and wrestle with contemporary issues.

Tim says: “We take scripture really seriously. We teach biblical truths, orthodoxies. But we also explore the issues of the day, and how the gospel of Jesus brings hope and life into that. We don't avoid these issues, and have been helped by the writings of Tim Keller and Tom Wright in connecting with some of them.

“We are very gospel-focused, and we've been told by the young adults they appreciate that.”

Other aspects of Holland Road include taking discipleship really seriously, and much social action engagement 'in a very Jesus-focused way'.

“As I say, we don't claim to have all the answers and there are lots of things we would like to be doing better – but this is our experience,” says Tim. ■



Photo: Holland Road Baptist Church



God's heart for the generations

Our Joint Public Issues Team has been exploring the challenge of intergenerational injustice, writes Rosella Payne

Anyone who has ever attempted reading the Bible chronologically will no doubt start to struggle as they come across the lengthy genealogies. And yet, in this we see the beauty of God's heart for the generations. As we read these in the Old Testament, we're shown a snapshot into hundreds of years of God's faithfulness to God's people, over and over again.

The Bible is also full of references to inheritance. Today, inheritance is tied up with notions of tax and contested wills, but many of these biblical references have nothing to do with finance. Instead, inheritance is a means of relationship where generations, both within families and as society, steward and pass on the gifts of God. Throughout the Bible, connection of earthly inheritance and the inheritance of God's kingdom points us to the radical grace of the Father. We are adopted as co-heirs with Christ, who provides the chance for his children to flourish.

Passing on an inheritance, whether that's a stable society, a healthy planet, secure housing or fulfilling job opportunities recognises a future generation loved by a God who adopts them into his family. Seeking intergenerational justice demonstrates a gracious relationship, and offers the gift of inheritance from one generation to the next. We can take the heart of intergenerational justice found in the Bible and consider how this applies to our social context today.



In the UK, the 20th century was dominated by the ideas of modernisation, suggesting that society was on a trajectory to get better and better. In the last century the world has changed rapidly. In 1908 (the birth year of the oldest British person), life expectancy in the UK was under 50. Now, a British child born in 2020 should expect to see the 22nd century, with a projected life expectancy of 91. Life expectancy has increased year on year. But does this really reflect whole-life flourishing?

Whilst life expectancy may be following this trajectory of improvement, many other measures have peaked and are now in decline.

Economic inequality in the UK steadily evened out over the 20th century. In 1918, the top 1 per cent received 19 per cent of all taxable income, however by the mid-1970s they received just 6 per cent. However, since the 1990s this inequality has begun to resurface. By 2018, the amount of national income the top 1 per cent received was again in double figures, at 12 per cent.

Similarly, the provision of housing has become an issue. Millennials are the first generation less likely to own their own home than the generation before. On average, 20-30 year olds are spending over a third of their post-tax income on rent, compared to the 5-10 per cent their grandparents spent housing themselves in the 1960s-70s (which would also be more likely to be spent on a mortgage than rent, giving more security in the long term). Social housing peaked at 5 million houses in 1981, but only 1.7 million remain today.

66 per cent of teenagers say the most pressing global issue is climate change. By 2050 the UK will need to survive on a quarter of current carbon consumption levels to minimize the climate crisis. This means huge changes are needed across society. Young people face the brunt of this uncertainty and rising threat.

For younger people, and coming generations, these conditions might seriously restrict their ability to fulfil their God-given potential, as they are held back by their inability to access the essentials of life.

In 2019, the Joint Public Issues Team held a series of intergenerational conversations across the country reflecting the nature of the Church as a place of generational diversity.



These conversations gave us several insights into the challenge of intergenerational injustice.

Firstly: these conversations are difficult. With polarising views and deeply personal experiences it's hard not to direct blame at one group or another. This doesn't mean that these issues should be swept under the carpet. Instead we need to recognise the importance of listening and, if need be, disagreeing well.

These conversations also offered something statistics cannot: real life experience. The testimonies of young people supported the conclusions of research, sharing their fears around secure jobs and homes as well as the threat of climate change. They also revealed the concerns that older generations have about spiraling care costs as they age, and the state of the world they are passing on.

Respectful intergenerational relations were also identified as valuable. Participants recognised the importance of older generations offering wisdom and support to future generations. They also identified the need to elevate the voices of youth and ensure future generations have a say in decision-making.

If we're truly seeking a society where all can flourish into their God-given potential, we need to listen for the intergenerational injustices that limit this. Through addressing these issues, we can reflect our hopes for a vision of God's Kingdom on earth – a kingdom in which all inherit the gifts of God.

Rosella Payne is an intern with the *Joint Public Issues Team*



A JUST ECONOMY THAT ENABLES THE FLOURISHING OF ALL LIFE



A PLANET WHERE OUR ENVIRONMENT IS RENEWED



A SOCIETY WHERE THE POOREST AND MOST MARGINALISED ARE AT THE CENTRE



A WORLD WHICH ACTIVELY WORKS FOR PEACE



A POLITICS CHARACTERISED BY LISTENING, KINDNESS AND TRUTHFULNESS



A SOCIETY THAT WELCOMES THE STRANGER

The Joint Public Issues Team has incorporated seeking intergenerational justice into the 'Six Hopes' which shape our work. Find out more at www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/sixhopes



'Padre, have you got a minute?'

Baptist chaplain Jonathan Stewart, the youngest serving chaplain in the RAF, on ministering beyond the walls of the church



Jonathan outside an A400 transport aircraft

"Padre, have you got a minute?"

These words always cause me to smile inwardly. "Of course," I reply, with an external smile to match my inward one, even when in reality I have the burning issues of emails, meetings and the general mundane to do. This question is one that I can hear several times a day, and invariably one minute is not long enough to hear what is being expressed. However, I smile because it is a small reminder of the privilege of ministering beyond the walls of the church, where those who may have never set foot in a church building before turn to 'their Padre' to talk about the challenges that life, work and a myriad of other issues is bringing to them.

I have been a Chaplain in the RAF for the last four years, having felt called to it mid way through my NAMS (Newly

Accredited Minister). I am currently based at the Royal Air Force College Cranwell which is the entry point for all officers into the RAF. The role primarily involves work with the officer cadets, with the majority undertaking a six month course in which chaplaincy plays an integral role. We deliver lessons on 'Beliefs and values' which include topics such as respect, integrity and ethics, as well as running around in muddy fields while they are on exercise, through to preaching at their graduation service. Of course, for me, this is just a temporary stop on the journey - having previously been at RAF Brize Norton and on a four month Operational deployment in the Middle East. I am also currently the youngest serving chaplain in the RAF at the tender age of 33, meaning that as we explore what ministry to 18-35s looks like, I am in a fairly unusual position!

This ministry beyond the walls reaches out to a generally unchurched and younger generation, where 95 per cent of what is done is outside of the church community. Or as one cadet said to me once "You don't really do the religious stuff do you, Padre?" However I do find myself still immersed within a community and one in which chaplaincy is placed in high regard.

I love reading about Paul's missionary journeys, but it is the account of Paul as a tentmaker that I find incredibly powerful. Though he exercised a public ministry within the Church, he also just sat with those outside the Church, serving them, talking with them, not necessarily doing the religious stuff. But I imagine that within his work he still sought to share something of the hope he had in Christ. As a chaplain, I have found something not too dissimilar;

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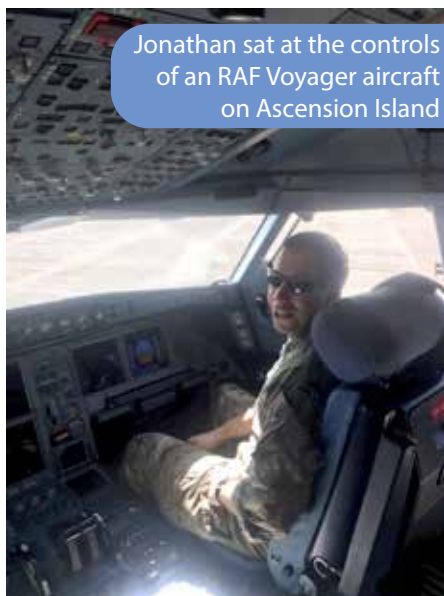
Retired Baptist Ministers Housing Organisation is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) registered with the Charity Commission under charity number 1177649.



institutional barriers are broken down as we are just asked by the organisation to sit with people, and to care for them, and out of that we get to share something of God's love for them.

Of course we can see this in any form of ministry, but what I think is special and unique as a military chaplain is that we are so immersed in the organisation. We wear the same uniform as those we serve, we move around the country like they do, we deploy overseas as they do, we miss our families like they do. We become part of their story, because their story is our story. Out of this, I believe, trust grows and those who start the conversation with "I am not religious but..." suddenly have the confidence to open up about their deepest concerns. Even though often I can't make a practical difference to their situation I have the chance to listen, and allow them to be heard. For some it seems as though they have never had that opportunity before, to have someone to listen. They might have hundreds of friends on social media but the most 'real' conversation they have had comes in a wet Lincolnshire field.

I have noticed that for a number of these young people they struggle to make relationships that are deep and lasting, but they are yearning for something more. One of the most common reasons they tell me for why they joined is that they want to be part of something bigger than themselves, and they want to make a difference in the world.



Jonathan sat at the controls of an RAF Voyager aircraft on Ascension Island

We become part of their story, because their story is our story

The military offers them that chance, and hopefully chaplaincy points them to something even deeper still.

The RAF Chaplains' Branch vision is to serve the RAF community through 'Prayer, Presence and Proclamation' aiming to achieve this by showing value, giving hope and a reason for existence beyond what we now see.

For some it seems as though they have never had that opportunity before, to have someone to listen

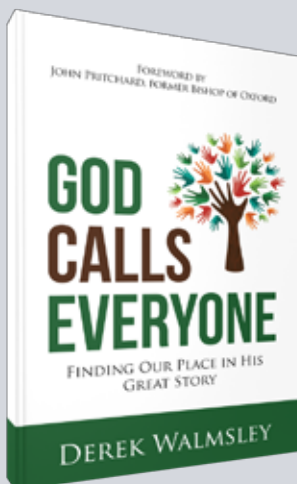
This is something that on a daily basis I really get to do and I count it as a privilege that we are allowed the freedom to support the men and women of the armed forces, to bring something of the eternal into their, so often, temporary realities. My hope and prayer is that, as the men and women of the armed forces serve their country both at home and overseas, there will always be a place for chaplains to walk that journey with them. When the worst happens, and history shows us that this happens more often than any of us would like, chaplains will be there to walk arm in arm, to encourage and support them, and ultimately point them to a relationship with the one who loves and cares for them above all.

Jonathan Stewart is a Baptist chaplain based at the Royal Air Force College, Cranwell, Lincolnshire



Photos: Jonathan Stewart

Playing Our Part In God's Mission



This is a joyous journey through the Bible to discover how God calls us all to be part of His story. It is for anyone who is trying to discern what their vocation might be, whether in a lay or ordained capacity.

'... a refreshing emphasis ...'
David Devenish



Overflow is for anyone who wants to see their church have an overflowing impact on their surroundings and who wants to play a part, however big or small, in seeing churches renewed and society transformed.

'... serves to excite and equip ...'
Anne Calver



The best gap year in Britain?

Melanie Webb makes a case for BMS World Mission's 'Action Teams' programme.



So, your child, grandchild, godchild (or 'insert young person here') wants to go on a gap year. Don't panic! BMS World Mission thinks its gap year programme, known as Action Teams, is the best in Britain. And they've got the stats to prove it.

Hear the words 'gap year', and any parent could be forgiven for feeling less than enthused. Are they worth the money? Will my lovely daughter/son really benefit from that year overseas? And since a study carried out by Randall Friesen across five organisations and 116 participants reported that young people's commitment to social justice, Christian community and evangelism typically decreased one year after Christian gap years (even to below the starting point in some cases),

you'd be right to ask those questions. So why does BMS World Mission think its gap year bucks the trend, standing head and shoulders above the rest?

A chilly forest in the UK may not be where you'd expect an overseas gap year to begin. But that's where we find the BMS Action Teamers, weeks before they'll set foot overseas. In this secret location, they undertake bonding team challenges (think swimming in lakes and camping under the stars) that prepare them for when they'll be far from home. "We got to know our team's strengths and how we could work together better," says Edward Greenwood, a former Action Teamer who is now studying International Development. "When trouble came, we were prepared."



From the training ground to overseas. Edward shared his computer programming skills with young people in Kosovo so that they could have access to better jobs.

Photos: BMS World Mission

It's here that 'Britain's best gap year' begins to distinguish itself from the rest. Every year, during a month's preparation at BMS' mission training hub, 30 young people are taught by the same tutors who train BMS mission workers. And it's not long before they put their learning into practice, speaking at local churches and leading Sunday school groups. That's all before these young people undertake their resilience-building bootcamp in its classified location.

Then, it's time to fly. Young people are sent out to locations as varied as Peru, France, Thailand and Mozambique. Six months of serving in-country is topped off with a two-month UK church tour, consolidating learning and encouraging UK churches to engage in what God is doing overseas. "We're not just interested in their time abroad," says Hannah Field, BMS Teams Co-ordinator. "We are the only gap year that invests so much time before going overseas and after." She draws on research from the Fuller Youth Institute, which demonstrates that the time invested before and after a gap year is crucial to young people's personal development.

And the evidence of that development is easy to find. "You spend all that time with people who are passionate about God," says Eleanor Hyde, a former Action Teamer who is now in her second year of studying Architecture. "That propelled me into university."



Eleanor learnt about Guinea's beautiful history and culture during her gap year there. BMS is looking for more people to serve in this nation, so full of opportunity, despite being one of the poorest in the world.

Young people like Eleanor use what's been invested in them to invest in others. "BMS taught us to value things beyond material wealth," says Sam Carrington, former Action Teamer, now working as Project Manager at Suffolk County Council. "And I think that has an impact on the way people lead." Sam believes that Action Teams gives young people the opportunity to practise leadership skills from a young age. "The gap year develops not just skilled leaders, but leaders who have values and care about people. That has to benefit society." By observing convivial Italian culture and reaching out to homeless people during his time with Action Teams, Sam learnt to value relationships and people. His experience spurred him on to become a Shadow Trustee for Suffolk Family Carers, alongside his job. "It's a secular job, but it has an impact on society. Since BMS, I've wanted to do something like this," says Sam.

The year also challenges young people, appropriately enough, to 'stand in the gap' and share Jesus' love with those in the most marginalised and least evangelised areas of the world. "The work BMS is doing is worth talking about," Katie Hutchings says, one year on from Action Teams, where she helped teachers provide education for disadvantaged children in Peru. "That's why I've volunteered to speak at BMS events."



"Action Teams made my faith more solid and gave me the confidence to say yes," says Katie.

Young people like Katie certainly feel the lasting impact of their time with Action Teams. And as for the commitment to social justice, Christian community and evangelism that typically decreased with other programmes? A BMS study showed all these values increased. "We were blown away by the results," says Ben Drabble, former Action Team lead, who carried out the research. "We have strong evidence that Action Teamers continue to grow." It's a sentiment echoed by Edward, Sam, Eleanor and Katie, all of whom say their faith and confidence wouldn't be where they are now without BMS Action Teams – from Katie just one year on from her gap year, to Sam, five years on.

So, could Action Teams be the best gap year in Britain? Take it from the young people themselves. "Action Teams was such a formative year of my life," says Katie. "I will do anything to inspire others to do it!"



Former Action Teamers reunite at 'Gravity', an event that brings together former Action Teams, one year after their gap year.

If you'd like to find out more about Action Teams, visit www.bmsworldmission.org/actionteams or contact Hannah Field on 01235 517652. Applications for Action Teams 2021/2022 will open this summer.

Melanie Webb is a writer with *BMS World Mission*



“We need to be developing their gifts”

Bristol Baptist College, the world’s oldest Baptist college, currently has a number of young adults training for ministry. All are undertaking placements in Baptist churches alongside their studies. How did they get here? How’s it going? And what are their thoughts on reaching their generation?

Jamie Reeves

Jamie is in the second year of a theology, mission and ministry course, which he’s combining with leading **Rodbourne Cheney Baptist Church** in Swindon. The 32-year-old’s journey to faith encompasses a fractured family background, despair, healing and the discovery of an evangelist’s heart to share the love of Jesus with those yet to know him.

“It’s seven years since I came to faith and there has been an incredible transformation,” he says.



“God has de-rooted lots of things, and there’s more to come. I’ve learnt it’s ok not to be ok, and have been given the grace to get through each day.”

As a child Jamie had a church background, “but left as soon as I could. It was a C of E church, and it just seemed to be a group of old people singing hymns. It didn’t do anything for me.”

His mum and dad separated when he was five. She remarried, but it was an abusive, difficult relationship, driving the young Jamie ‘off the rails’. “I took what the world offers. Sex, drugs, cannabis, drinking.”

He was able to start a career as a BT engineer, and became engaged. But when that long-term relationship fell through, many issues resurfaced.

“I actually had a job and was earning good money, but I was empty. After the break-up I began to have anxiety and depression. Eventually I just got

on my knees and prayed.” He was 25 at the time, and spoke to his grandmother about going to a church where there would be people his own age. She recommended a local Pentecostal congregation. There, he had a powerful encounter with the Holy Spirit and his faith began to grow.

Jamie soon started to realise a calling on his life. He says there was a lot of prophecy (for instance, he was told he would inherit the gifts of his grandfather, who had been a vicar). Very quickly he found himself leading an Alpha Course and a youth group. He realised he had a gift for evangelism and a heart for outreach. The church he was at believed he was being called to ministry, and he too sensed the same call.

Jamie explored different options, including Hillsong in Australia. “I didn’t have peace with any of them, until I met Steve (Finamore, Bristol Baptist College principal), and we hit it off.”

He has dyslexia, and no qualifications. To show a level of study and commitment, he did a *Prepare, Feed, Sustain* course, as well as a placement with Owen Green and Ali Boulton at the Stowe. Now in his second year at Bristol, he is thriving at the College.

"I love it here, the support is great and the community is massively important – we hold each other up. The learning is great and I love the unity with Trinity (the Anglican College with which Bristol Baptist College partners). Millennials don't really care about denominations, it's all about the kingdom. Young adults have less concern for the politics of the church."

Jamie is already putting his experience and calling to good use in a number of ways. He works alongside Swindon Youth for Christ to lead a listening service in a local secondary school, a place that had been hostile to Christianity for a number of years. The school's mental health provision had been cut, and they actually approached YFC. Jamie and the team provide a listening service to a range of pupils 'for as long as it takes'.

"We're seeing lots of anxiety. Many don't understand the concept of love. They want people to genuinely listen. We're able to listen, and it's made a difference to many of them. It's actually led to many faith-based discussions. Parents have contacted us – they can't believe the transformation." More broadly he believes churches need to consider how best to engage with secondary schools. "If we're not, we're missing a trick."

He thinks worship is a key area. "Young people respond better to the emotion of modern worship. I've grown to love hymns, but in my early years they wouldn't have meant anything to me. We need to be aware of that. Where are we providing space for young people to connect?"

Another is recognising their potential. Jamie says he is encouraging people in his church who have shown an interest in poetry, rap, media and spoken word. "Young people in Christ – we need to be utilising them, encouraging them, using and developing their gifts. We need to be equipping young adults to serve. If we are not equipping them, we will lose them. They have so much to offer!"

Richard Hall

Richard Hall grew up in Warrington, where his family were members of **Hill Cliff Baptist Church**. He sensed a call to ministry around the age of 17 or 18. He studied maths at university, with a view to then joining the army. However, he didn't get through the army selection process, at which point he re-evaluated his life and realised the call had not gone away. He returned to his home church and shared this. "No one was surprised," he remembers. "In fact they were very supportive."

Richard became a deacon at the church, who recognised he needed more leadership experience. He was able to discuss and discern his calling with his minister, and take on extra responsibilities. During this period he earned money through a number of entry level jobs, such as at McDonald's and in a haulage firm, which broadened his life experience. His interest and subsequent call to ministry has led to some interesting conversations. "A lot of people hadn't met a minister, so it gave me the opportunity to talk about it."

Richard, now 26, is in the first year of a BA in ministry, mission and theology at Bristol. He has just started a church placement at **Minehead Baptist Church**.

He continues: "I feel lucky to have been encouraged, to have been able to pray through it and discern it. My minister



very intentionally disciplined me. It can be easy to pigeon hole someone of my age and get them into youth work: while I've done a lot of that, it was good that my calling was recognised, and be given the opportunity to do things like preaching.

"If you have young people, you don't have to change everything: be welcoming, empower them to be involved, and not in a tokenistic way. Create a sense of community – people want to belong."

He's always felt a call to pastoral ministry, and possibly army chaplaincy, but for now is enjoying the academic rigour of his course alongside the church placement at Minehead.

"I imagine it will be back up north, but I'll go wherever I sense the call," he says.





Katie James

Unsure of what to do following her A-levels, Katie James, 23, embarked on a number of gap years, the third of which was an internship at **Fishponds Baptist Church** in Bristol. It was here her minister said he thought God had placed a call on her life – at the very time she had begun to sense the same thing. “I was seeking and just knew it was right.”

Katie is now in the second year of a ministerial formation degree, while working part-time at Fishponds.

“I love college life so much,” she says. “I knew I would be the youngest, but I am treated as an equal.” In her time at Bristol she has studied Old and New Testament, doctrine, spirituality and worship, all of which have impacted on her ministry at Fishponds, where she spends three days a week. “All aspects of the ministry there are influenced by what happens at college. For example, my preaching has developed so much.” Though it’s still early days, as she continues to explore her calling she thinks she may ultimately lead a traditional church.

Katie’s friends are generally non-Christians, but she says they are supportive of her direction in life. Some, when going through particularly tough periods, even ask for prayer. She makes a distinction between people’s perceptions and reality. “People my age are generally quite suspicious of church,” she says, “they just don’t like the idea of it, and think it’s judgemental.

“But I’ve found that when they come they quite like it – it’s not what they thought. It’s a big thing for them to walk through the doors. Be open and friendly, go and say hi.”

She adds: “My generation just want an authentic community, a place to belong – and they can find that in a church.”

Mike Hudson

Mike Hudson had very little exposure to Christianity as a child and young adult. After getting married in February 2013, Mike and his wife attended **Andover Baptist Church** where, during the preaching of God’s Word, he was overcome by the Holy Spirit and in that moment, realised his need for Jesus.

Soon after, Mike was deployed to Afghanistan which was a testing period for him. However, it was also a time full of blessing where he read the Bible from cover to cover.

On his return from Afghanistan, Mike began to sense a calling to ministry but was unsure and apprehensive. After several promptings he began the ‘Prepare, Feed, Sustain’ course at Bristol Baptist College. He soon became more active in church life and began his preaching ministry with opportunities to lead worship, Alpha courses and youth ministries.

In November 2016, after a conversation with Steve Finamore, the principal of Bristol Baptist College, Mike was completely convicted by the Holy Spirit to seriously pursue a calling to full time ministry and was soon commended by Ministerial Recognition.

Mike, now 31, is now two years into a four year BA in Theology. Alongside this he is the associate pastor of the **Beacon Baptist Church** in Kilmington.



At Kilmington he’s started a youth club, is involved in the normal preaching and leading duties, as well as local outreach and mission. The church has a relatively new building and is making the most of that by hosting a variety of groups.

With a young family alongside church and college demands, life isn’t straightforward, but he has no doubts he is doing the right thing. Given his own story, he says he has deep empathy for those who do not yet know Christ.

“I had a misunderstanding of what Christianity was all about – it’s only now I realise it’s about a relationship with God,” he says, before adding: “My age and younger are hungry for something more. They’re becoming aware of the lies on social media, and are suspicious of anything that’s superficial. There’s a search for genuine community. People doing life together in an authentic way – that’s something the church can offer.”





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The millennial way

For those in their 20s and 30s, culture beats programmes every time, writes Simon Barrington. Here's what churches need to know, and how they can respond

What used to work in your church for reaching young adults, but isn't working now?

We wanted to find out and so we interviewed nearly 500 Christian millennial leaders (born between 1984 and 2000) over the course of a year to find out their views on their leadership development, church, faith and the challenges and opportunities they saw in their leadership.

The results were fascinating.

Firstly, they told us that it's not so much what churches are doing, and the programmes that they are putting on that are problematic, but the way in which older leaders and members of congregations are behaving. This is deeply challenging, as it points to mindset and attitude change rather than re-arranging the chairs and the activities.

They told us that if we want to work effectively with young adults, then it is the culture of our churches that needs to change.

So what culture changes are they looking for?

1 Cultures with high levels of integrity

They are looking for cultures with high levels of integrity and authenticity. Millennials can spot a lack of authenticity from a million miles away. When asked what they admired in older leaders that they would follow, integrity was number one on the list. They want our words to match our actions, and they want to see us up close and personal. The implications of this for our churches and leaders are huge. We need to understand that trust is earned through consistency and empathy, not through position or competency, and that millennials want to come close and see things in the raw.

2 Cultures where they can fail and learn

Millennials have a high 'need for approval' and a high 'fear of failure'. Therefore, they value cultures in which people can try, innovate, fail safely and learn. In these environments, creativity, experimentation and innovation can flourish. They recognise that no-one really knows how to reach their generation effectively and therefore they need churches to be willing to take risks and to be prepared to try and fail. In contrast, blame cultures are walked away from very quickly.

3 Cultures where relationships mean everything

In our research 94 per cent of millennials said that the quality of their relationships was important or extremely important. Leadership is seen as a team game and millennials are attracted to churches with team ministries. Looking through a relational lens, for millennials the emphasis on any initiative or activity needs to be on the relational journey and the people LESS than on the activities and outcomes. This is also why collaboration and unity are vital aspects of a church's culture that young adults look for.

4 Cultures with a strong sense of purpose

Millennials have grown up having their own 'personal brand' on Instagram and social media. They have a clear sense of purpose and are able to articulate that well. They are passionate about aligning with organisations that are clear about their purpose, bold in pursuing it and that have a purpose which aligns with their own sense of purpose. They also want to be involved in shaping the sense of purpose of the organisation. Therefore your 'Why?' as a church matters. Why do you exist? How are you articulating that and how does it align with the sense of justice and fairness that are the hallmark of this generation?

5 Cultures that are focussed on developing others

Millennials told us that they love nothing better as leaders than developing others. They are a discipling generation. They want to be in close relationships where they are learning and teaching, where they are able to bring on the next generation. And they want your focussed attention and time to develop them in intentional discipling relationships.

6 Cultures that wrestle with the difficult issues

Only 48 per cent of the Christian millennial leaders we interviewed said that the Bible was the main authority in the whole of their lives. They are wrestling with how to apply Scripture in their relationships and circumstances. However, they want to wrestle with these issues and desire more than anything the openness to examine Scripture and talk and debate difficult issues.

7 Cultures that value the whole of life

Millennials want to make the whole of their life work – body, soul, mind and spirit. They want an excellent balance between being fit mentally, physically and spiritually. They don't want to become burnt out on work or activity and value having a rhythm to their lives that works for them. Therefore, they value cultures in churches that combine social, spiritual, physical and mental activities and that are tuned to the wellbeing of individuals and groups and provide safe and supportive places for this.

So, what should churches, and church leaders prioritise in changing their cultures to work more effectively with millennials, and to reach more millennials with the good news of Jesus?

1 Celebrate the ways in which millennials are seeking to live the Jesus way

There is so much to celebrate in millennial culture. We need to dispel some of the myths around entitlement, laziness, narcissism and disloyalty and recognise the values of integrity, relationship, discipling, wholeness and purpose that can transform a church's culture for the better, regardless of age.

2 Create high challenge – high support environments

Invite millennials into close relationship in environments that encourage risk taking and trying and failing, at the same time as providing high levels of support and relationship.

3 Focus on relationships

Don't advertise programmes, but rather focus on co-creating spaces in which relationships can flourish and be authentic and open. Focus on the journey as much or more than the outcomes.

4 Focus on identity and purpose

Teaching on identity is vital for this generation. There is a lot of insecurity and questioning about who we really are as individuals and together. Ask the 'Why?' questions and be prepared to wrestle with them.

5 Focus on discipleship

Create environments in which millennials are disciplined and are free and encouraged to disciple others – whether older or younger than themselves.

Above all, be more focused on long-term cultural change and behaviours than on snazzy programmes.

Simon Barrington is the Founder and Director of Forge Leadership Consultancy. He is a member of *Burlington Baptist Church*, Ipswich.

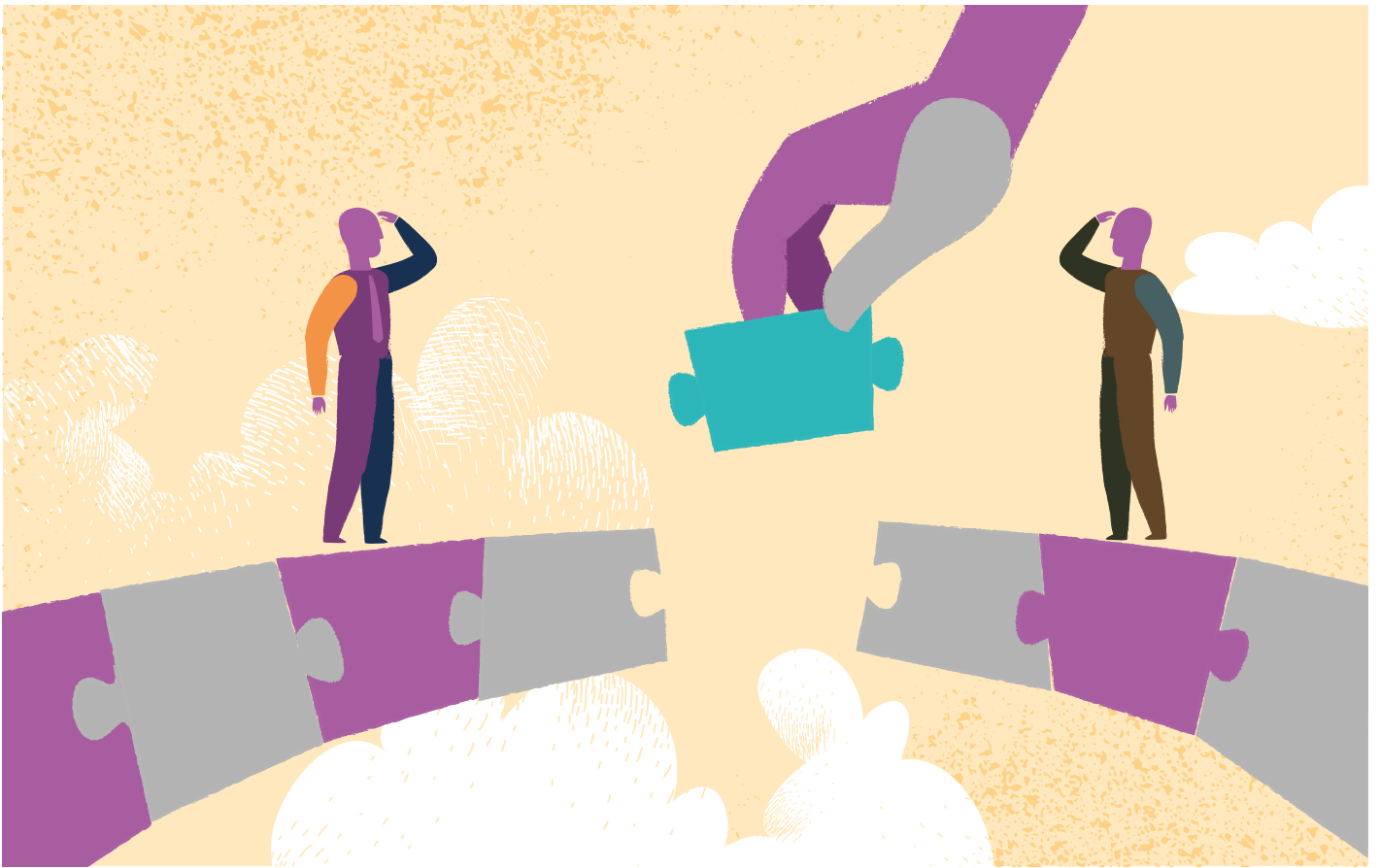


In 2018 Forge Leadership published their research into Millennials in Leadership which you can find at www.millennial-leader.com



In 2019, SPCK published the book *Leading the Millennial Way*, written by Simon and Rachel Luetchford. www.forge-leadership.com





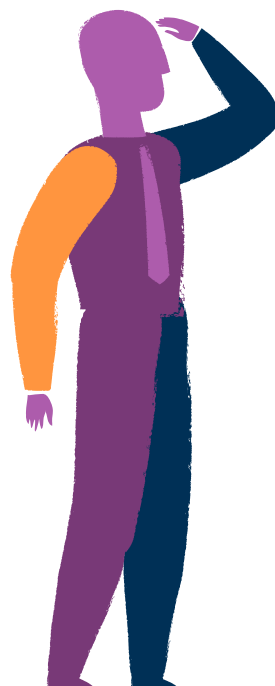
Bridging the generation gap

Experiences and expectations differ markedly across the generations in our churches. In this extract from his new book *Bridging the Gaps*, Baptist minister Trevor Neill highlights some of these differences, and reflects on how churches may go about overcoming them

Significant differences in experience and outlook are rarely spoken of in our congregations but they manifest themselves in a number of ways, leading to tensions and confusion which need to be brought to the surface to enable many in our churches to understand each other properly.

As I survey the faces and listen to the stories of some of the churches I know, I perceive an increasing divide between two groups of people.

On one side, I see an older generation who can be described as follows:



- » They are grieving the decline of many of the churches of which they have been members for most of their lives. Often, this decline is a numerical one, but it also manifests itself in other ways, such as the capacity of a church to maintain the breadth of programmes which existed in the past, for example the loss of Sunday-evening worship services or the closure of certain types of children's work which can either no longer be resourced or which are losing their cultural relevance. Sometimes this sense of loss is compounded by a disappointment in younger people who have neither the time nor the inclination to keep these older ministries going.

- » Sometimes such grief expresses itself in a desire to get back to how things were in the past. This might reflect a longing for older practices, but also a harking back to a time when the church seemed to have more status and when life seemed more straightforward, when theology and belief were more fixed and the routines of congregational life more predictable. Such longings are no doubt accentuated by the natural inclination many of us have to remember the past through rose-coloured lenses. For many parents, some of the most challenging years are spent with the sleepless nights and seemingly endless demands of looking after babies and toddlers, but years ahead we edit out the memories of our exhaustion and cherish what we regard as a special season in life. In the same way, many in our churches fondly look back on the time when everyone was fitter and could do more, and when younger families shared together in watching their children grow.
 - » In many cases, they may also be the generation who are giving the majority of the money needed to sustain an inherited model of church. Partly this is a reflection of their greater financial resources, but I suspect that it also points to their faithful adherence to disciplines such as tithing and a loyalty to organisations and institutions which is not so prevalent among younger people. This raises an important question about who will pay for church programmes and who will volunteer for leadership when final-salary pensions disappear and when people can no longer retire at an age which leaves open the opportunity for many years of good health and time to serve.
- which enable them to live out their values - working, for example, to run a foodbank or debt-counselling project. However, they may come to regard the church as a means to this end, hoping it will facilitate their own desire to make a difference but without wanting to support all of the other structures of the institution. These generations want to serve in specific ways, but without the added pressure of attending an evening service or listening to the treasurer's report at a church members' meeting.
- » They are confident, sometimes bullishly so, about their ability to lead and are keen to step forward, setting the direction of a church's worship life or its mission activities. From the millennials onwards, younger people have been brought up with a confidence about the difference they can make. Where they feel an older leader is blocking the way, their response may be to withdraw or to take their gifts and abilities to another church where more opportunities are available. This generation will not attach itself to one denominational model: people do not feel the need to always worship in a Baptist or Anglican congregation, they are attracted to churches not because of structure but on the basis of where the energy is or where the Spirit is perceived to be at work.
 - » This lack of denominational loyalty is sometimes accentuated by the practice of accessing more teaching online and less in the context of gathered worship in the local church, creating the idea of a division between where people learn and where they serve. In the same way, there are more opportunities available to volunteer time and gifts outside the local church, for example, at a night shelter or a mentoring and befriending project. This may suit a younger generation who are used to flexible working hours and accessing services (such as banking and shopping) at a time which is convenient to them, who don't want to be constrained by traditional church programmes when a certain activity has to take place at one time on one night of the week.
 - » They are under more pressure in their employment and finances, working longer hours than previous generations, often not for the reward of long-term advancement but simply to hold on to a job. In many young families, two parents need to work to earn the level of income required to maintain payments on the average mortgage. Gone are the days when churches could rely on one partner working and freeing up the other to work on its programmes.

This group differ in several ways from younger generations, about whom the following observations may be made:

- » They are equally passionate about service, but their first commitment is often to a cause and not an institution. They care deeply about issues such as justice and equality, and this will lead them to look for churches where they serve in ways



For anyone under pressure or dealing with disappointment, it can be difficult to look beyond one's own problems and empathise with the challenges or concerns faced by people in different circumstances. The best starting point for many churches faced with these issues would be a resolve to act more graciously and look more generously upon each other. What would change if the old decided to focus less on youth's lack of institutional commitment and more on its passion for causes? How would the tone of our conversations alter if younger generations made a greater effort to value the loyalty and wisdom of those who have gone before them, resisting the temptation to write off as 'tradition' any note of caution about change?



To do this, however, is only a beginning.

How can our churches become places where different generations are drawn closer together, with an appreciation of what each can offer to the other? A starting point might be an attentiveness in worship and preaching to the various changes we all encounter on the journey of life.

At whatever stage we're at in our journey, questions to ask ourselves, and for churches to help answer, ought to be ones concerning who is speaking into our lives, who has walked before us and knows us well enough to be able to speak wisdom or encouragement into our present circumstances.

An older couple or family, for example, could walk with a younger one, and there is no reason why an individual negotiating the challenges of retirement could not be supported for that season by someone who has been through the same experience a few years beforehand. Such a culture could offer enormous potential for personal growth, but it would also require

investment on the part of churches who would need to teach people skills which go beyond biblical and theological study. How can we help people to become more effective in processing their own emotions, skilful in listening and gentle in passing their wisdom on to others?

In a recent book on the necessary relearning of conversational skills, the psychologist Sherry Turkle draws upon the wisdom of Rowan Williams:

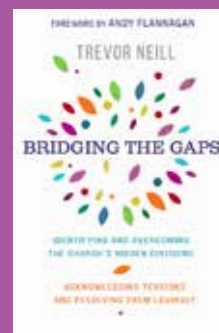
For Williams, the empathetic relationship does not begin with 'I know how you feel.' It begins with the realisation that you don't know how another feels. In that ignorance, you begin with an offer of conversation: 'Tell me how you feel.' Empathy, for Williams, is an offer of accompaniment and commitment. And making the offer changes you. When you have a growing awareness of how much you don't know about someone else, you begin to understand how much you don't know about yourself. You learn, says Williams, 'a more demanding kind of attention. You learn patience and a new skill and habit of perspective.'

It is this kind of empathy which is needed in our churches if they are to become places where the generations can properly understand each other, overcoming divisions between themselves and offering hope in a society where the young and the old seem increasingly estranged.

Trevor Neill is lead pastor of *Selsdon Baptist Church*, London



This article is adapted with permission from Trevor's first book *Bridging the Gaps*, which was published earlier this year by Instant Apostle



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“Our grass-roots movement offers a great environment for young adults to thrive”

By Lynn Green

I was 17 when I preached for the first time. I was in my early twenties when I was recognised as a Deacon by my church. I was 26 when I started training for ministry and 29 when I became part of the Fresh Streams (Mainstream in those days!) Leadership Team and began as a minister at *Wokingham Baptist Church*.

My story is definitely not unique; many, many women and men across Baptists Together could tell you something similar.

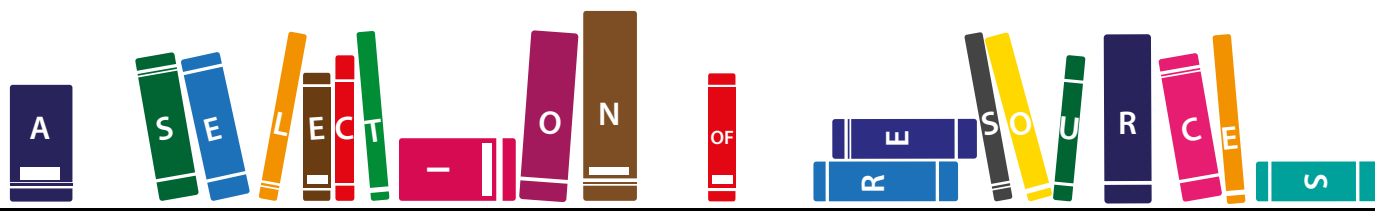
Our wonderful and distinctive dna as Baptists means that we are a grass-roots movement which offers a great environment for young adults to thrive. Our love for Jesus and God’s mission is central to all that we are and do, and being part of our movement requires a commitment to being part of sharing the good news of Jesus to the whole world. Our emphasis on local communities of believers being able to listen to God and work out what it means to follow him in a particular context provides a brilliant space for young adults to share in shaping and participating in the mission of God. Our deep commitment to seeing the whole body of Christ witnessing and serving as the Spirit enables also creates a culture where everyone has a part of play in God’s purposes.

As I travel around the UK I am so encouraged to see young adults who share our dna making a vital Kingdom contribution; those with a passion for unity movements, youth workers and evangelists who are enabling

people to encounter Jesus and be baptised, community chaplains and pioneers who are venturing into uncharted territory in response to God’s call, preachers, social media influencers, prophets with a heart for justice and the marginalised, CU leaders, community builders and all those thousands of young adults who are living for Jesus in and through their daily work. To all of you I want to say thank you. We wouldn’t be who we are without you and God is definitely at work in and through you to take us forward into the plans that he has for us and our nations.

As I travel around the UK, I am so encouraged to see churches who share our dna and are making a vital Kingdom contribution, not least in their encouragement of young adults. With leadership and preaching opportunities, mentoring and discipleship, running with innovative pioneering ideas, loving unconditionally, listening carefully to what sometimes seems like an alien culture, internship programmes, university chaplaincy, authentic community, cooking LOTS of food, willing to be challenged about justice issues, praying with young adults and generally cheering them on as they follow Jesus.

To all the churches that encouraged me in my discipleship and to all our churches that continue to do this for so many others, I want to say thank you. We wouldn’t be who we are without you and God is definitely at work in and through you to take us forward into the plans that he has for us and our nations.



Books

Changing Shape – the Faith Lives of Millennials
by Ruth Perrin



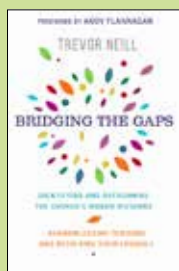
Why is it that some young Christians grow their faith and others walk away from what was once so important to them? Ruth Perrin is a research fellow at St John's College, Durham, and writes extensively on millennial faith. Her landmark study of emerging adults who as teenagers described themselves as Christians reveals what has happened to this apparently lost generation.

Leading the Millennial Way
by Simon Barrington with Rachel Luetchford



Millennial leaders are stepping into some of the most significant global leadership roles in businesses, the public sector and charities. Many are already there. Their leadership style and impact is dynamic and diverse, challenging all that has gone before. Based on original research into millennial-leaders today, this book draws on a wealth of experience to invite all leaders to better grasp and live out leading – the millennial way.

Bridging the Gaps: Identifying and Overcoming the Church's Hidden Divisions
by Trevor Neill



Are there gaps between what we believe and what we do? Does society influence us more than our theology? Why are churches often places of stress and strain rather than peace and renewal? In *Bridging the Gaps*, Baptist minister Trevor Neill shines a compassionate light on the hidden and often unacknowledged contradictions of the contemporary UK Church.

The XYZ of Discipleship: Understanding and Reaching Generations Y & Z
by Nick and Marjorie Allan



Drawing on 20 years of fruitful experience and carefully analysing Britain's present cultural context, this book explores how to disciple today's Millennial (Gen Y) generation and their teenage/early adult successors Gen Z. It will equip individuals who seek to mentor, parent or lead young adults into discipleship in the everyday and within church, as well as those of Y and Z age who are passionate to understand and disciple your own generation. www.xyzdiscipleship.com

Christian charities and resources

Youth for Christ intentionally provides resources for 7-25s, and not just teenagers.



It states: 'Stats from the Evangelical Alliance show that whilst 96 per cent of church leaders view young adult outreach as top priority or equal top priority in their ministry - only 11 per cent feel that they have the resources to equip them to reach this age group. We want to help the church in the area where it feels so poorly under-resourced.'

Its resources include Ethos, a groundbreaking series of films for young adults.

For more visit resources.yfc.co.uk/18-25s

Disciple
Youth for Christ and Freedom in Christ
A discipleship course for those in their 20s and 30s. A 10 week journey to discover who you are in Christ.

fcm.org.uk/disciple



Youthscape
Christian charity that resources youthwork through research, innovation and resources.



youthscape.co.uk

Scripture Union – The 95 campaign

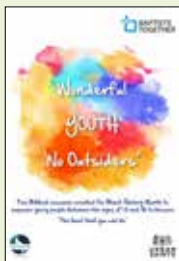
The 95 Campaign is all about gathering and equipping those with a heart for the 95 per cent of children and young people not regularly in church.

the95.org.uk



Wonderful Youth – Baptists Together

Even though there is a vast number of resources on the Christian market to enable young people to reflect on their Christian faith, few (if any) intentionally enable Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic people to see their image reflected in the resources. This Baptists Together resource aims to address that imbalance. The material seeks to affirm, both theologically and culturally, all young people between the ages of 13-16.



www.baptist.org.uk/wonderfulyouth

Tearfund - Restoration story

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Christian Aid Collective

The Christian Aid Collective is a movement for change, campaigning and speaking out against the injustice in our world and challenge the systems that keep poor people poor.



christianaidcollective.org/

Podcasts

Wise Lives – honest conversations about the authentic Christian life in contemporary culture. Podcast from The Well, Sheffield

wiselives.co.uk



Youthscape – discussions on faith, church and youth culture

youthscape.co.uk/podcast



Faith in Politics – interviews with public figures who straddle the world of faith and politics. Podcast from the interns of the Joint Public Issues Team

jointpublicissues.org.uk/podcast



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Praying for young people

The majority of Christians come to know Jesus as young people; this is something to be celebrated and excited about. However, there are fewer young people in the Church than ever before. Young people living in the UK today need our prayer.

Here are five ways to pray for young people:

1 Pray for Jesus to be known

Pray for the Gospel to reach young people across the UK, and for churches working with young people and organisations who support young people.

Pray that Jesus would be known and for God's love to be understood by young people across our nation.

Pray specifically for young people you know in your community.

2 Pray that the Bible will be shared

Engaging with young people is a challenge that many churches struggle with.

Pray that entire churches will be equipped to reach young people, and that God would bless the work of ministers, youth and school workers.

Pray that each church in your area will see sharing the message of the Bible with the next generation as an essential part of their work.

3 Pray God would call young leaders

Jesus' disciples were probably teenagers or in their early twenties when they were called by him.

Pray that God would raise up young leaders who can reach their peers; that they will build the future Church in our nation.

4 Pray for the pressures young people face

Today, young people are crippled by the pressures of our increasingly digital culture, where pornography, cyber-bullying, and online relationships are increasing. Huge numbers of young people come from broken families; there has been a rise in anxiety, depression, and eating disorders among young people.

Pray against these pressures, and for spiritual guidance from older Christians who can communicate God's love to them.

5 Pray for one young person you know

Committing to pray for one person by name can bring transformation. Take a moment to ask God to bring one young person to mind. Commit to praying for them for the next three months. You might like to use the following prayer:

Loving Father,
in the face of Jesus Christ
your light and glory have blazed forth.
Send your Holy Spirit that I may share with... (name your friend)
the life of your Son and your love for all.

Strengthen me as a witness to that love
as I pledge to pray for them,
for your name's sake. Amen.

Used with permission from **Thy Kingdom Come** prayer resources.

Thy Kingdom Come is a global wave of prayer calling all Christians to pray between Ascension and Pentecost for more people to come to know Jesus Christ.

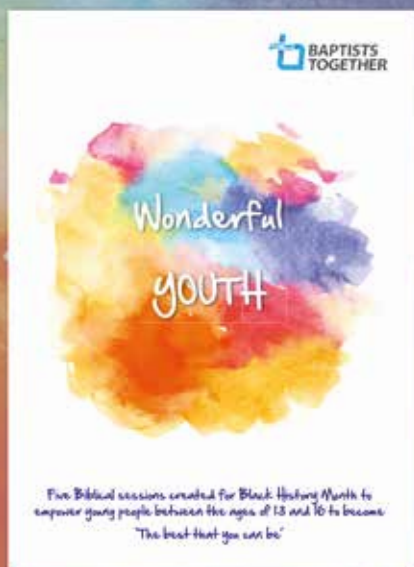
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Visit thykingdomcome.global



Resources for Youth Groups

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Sunday services - streaming and other options

With church congregations now no longer able to meet in person and church buildings closed, one of the biggest ways Christians (and particularly ministers) have had to adapt is in their Sunday services.

Several Baptist churches have opted to stream a service, either live or pre-recorded, with Facebook and Youtube popular choices. Many are also using Zoom technology, either for the service itself or the post-service coffee. Zoom allows for the gathering of people in an online space where they can interact with each other.

One aspect of streaming seems to have been, for some churches at least, an increase in attendance.

Beacon Lough Baptist Church in Gateshead is one. It has a church membership of 39. It recorded its first online service on the Friday, and when shared on Sunday 22 March it received 324 views on Facebook and 88 on Youtube. Many of the views came from outside the area, including from Scotland and Spain.

Richard Littledale of **Newbury Baptist Church** recording a sermon onto Youtube



Several chose not to opt for video. **Victoria Park Baptist Church** put different sections of the service on Facebook, such as a worship song, a prayer, Bible reading, reflection and an invitation to share stories. 'We want to use our Facebook page to create a way for people to pray, think and discuss every Sunday morning,' it stated.

'We can't meet, but we can still be the people of God.'

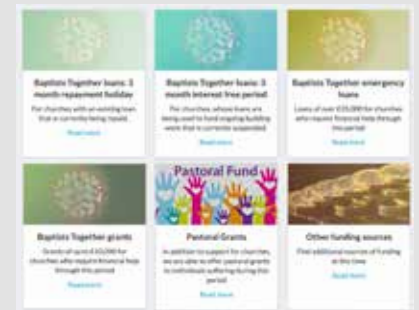
Others have emailed service sheets, with links to songs, readings, notices and other resources, or posted sermon transcripts and church bulletins for those not online.

Financial support scheme

Many member churches are already seeing an impact on their finances from the Coronavirus emergency, particularly those who rely on income from cash collections in services, room hire, nurseries or coffee shops. It is our desire to ensure that churches are financially supported through the crisis so that they can concentrate on serving their communities at this time when their ministry is more important than ever.

For this reason the trustees of the Baptist Union and Baptist Union Corporation (BUC) have agreed a package of measures to support our churches.

To find out what is being offered, visit: baptist.org.uk/coronafinancialsupport



Connecting with the wider community

The way churches can connect with their wider community is changing under the coronavirus lockdown.

For some, the restrictions have actually resulted in closer contact with neighbours. Several have reported setting up WhatsApp groups to look out for each other. Andy Glover, minister of **HBC Chester**, is one. He lives in a court with 11 homes, and all have connected to the new group he and wife Sue formed. Previously they only knew some of their immediate neighbours. "There's already talk of a 'close BBQ' to celebrate the return to normal life," says Andy.

Several churches are delivering essential items. **Upton upon Severn Baptist Church** in Worcester, led by minister Amy Wearing, is running Stay Connected Upton, coordinating the deliveries of all prescriptions from the surgery covering about 30 miles. It has encouraged the donations of essential items, and on some days delivered 100 food hampers.

Assembly, Council, Congress - plans changed

The Baptist Assembly has been cancelled following the restrictions on movement and large gatherings during the Coronavirus pandemic.

The annual event had been due to take place during the first Bank Holiday weekend in May.

Organisers are currently examining options for an event in the autumn, and will make an announcement about the new dates as soon as possible. Refunds were issued to all those who had booked for the event.

The March gathering of Baptist Union Council was cancelled as part of efforts



to slow down the virus. A number of decisions can be taken electronically, and have been circulated to members. Several conversations had been planned for discernment, and these will return to Council, which at the time of writing was scheduled to take place 21-22 October. Baptist World Congress has been postponed.



Re-thinking the kind of community that God has called us to be



Let's not ignore the lessons that this unimagined moment in our history offers to teach us, says Phil Jump

I know it's a well-worn phrase, but we really are living in quite unprecedented times. So it was something of a minor triumph that after being forced to cancel the first physical gathering of the **Baptists Together Young Adults round table** due to Covid-19 lockdown, we managed an online get together using one of the now familiar video conferencing platforms.

The vision was clear – how do we become a church that attracts and includes a generation that seems to be disturbingly absent in many of our congregations? Not at the expense of others, but in order to be a truly inter-generational community.

Yet as I navigated my way through the screen shares, comment columns and mic mutes, I increasingly came to realise that we have suddenly been forced to connect in ways and using technologies that are taken for granted by this generation. As one twelfth of a Baptist round table met in one room of my house, my eleven year old daughter was in the next, doing a home-school maths test with the faces of her usual classmates smiling from their allocated boxes on the screen of her smart phone. As we took a coffee break, my wife reminded me that we needed to book a slot with the care home Skype team, to connect and say hello to my mum (who does still insist on putting the tablet next to her ear!!)

But having watched our two eldest children make their own way into young adulthood, I also came to realise how these new technologies represent a way of life that they have both shaped and been shaped by.

Engaging with this generation is not simply a matter of finding an appropriately trendy way of attracting them to our 'business as usual' church, or even simply injecting it with an appropriate dose of alternative content. It means re-thinking and re-understanding the kind of community that God has called us to be.

Why sit in a room together to listen to a sermon, when that can just as easily be done with our friends at the local coffee shop? Why listen to that sermon, when there's a better sermon on offer in the 'up next' list on the phone screen? And even as we take those first tentative steps into this virtual reality, we quickly realise that there's a whole load of people out there who will never listen because it's Sunday morning and that's what they've always done – but will re-watch it six times on replay, and Whatsapp it to all their friends, if it has something relevant to say to them, if they believe in the person preaching it, and if they want to discover more about the Jesus in whose name it's being preached.

And so this world turns back on me – am I preaching because it's Sunday and that's what's expected of me, or because I passionately believe in something that I want others to believe in too? Because God has given me something to say that I feel compelled to put 'out there' or because I've got a weekly twenty-minute slot to fill with my words, irrespective of whether I've got anything to say? Like I said, this is a generation that challenges us not to depart from our traditions and familiarities, but to re-discover their core purpose – as one participant put it, becoming a church that is less a programme of shared activities and more a network of disciples.

As churches and ministers rush to sign up to conferencing platforms and Youtube channels, we are being forced to confront and engage with a world that already exists – not simply through the fibre optics of the internet, but in the veins of the generation who have never lived without it.

What is happening across the world right now is devastating and tragic for many individuals and families, and we must never forget that. But as we seek to mourn with those who mourn, stand alongside those who fear, and play our part in our community's response – let's not ignore the lessons that this unimagined moment in our history offers to teach us.

The question we need to ask is not why this generation aren't turning up in our world, but why, until now, have we never bothered turning up in theirs?

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

The Baptists Together website has a section dedicated to our response to the Coronavirus. It is both extensive and regularly updated - please visit baptist.org.uk/corona



A Covenant for Troubled Times

This prayer by Catriona Gorton was originally written for use by a local church community who faced very uncertain times, and wished to express their commitment via a covenant.

In these troubling times it seems appropriate to share.

'There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.'

These are troubled times
 Times of violence and hatred in a world marred by war
 Times of anxiety and uncertainty in a world wounded by greed
 Times of sadness and loss in a world of vulnerability and finitude
 Times of fear in a world where a new virus spreads rapidly threatening to overwhelm health care systems
 Times when we must face tough questions with unpalatable answers

'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no ill, for you are with me, your rod and your staff they comfort me.'

These are dark times
 Times when we need to be reminded that God is with us
 To guide our feet, one step at a time
 To illumine our minds with new understanding
 To protect us from despair, isolation and emptiness
 To enable us to 'prove' our faith in resilience and fortitude

'Now the dwelling of God is with human beings, and he will be with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'

These are, mysteriously, hopeful times
 Times in which the promises of a faithful God offer encouragement
 Times in which new possibilities can be glimpsed
 Times in which we must live the hope of eternity
 Times when past, present and future meet.

So, let us profess our faith:

*We believe and trust in God, creator of all, whose promises are faithful
 We believe and trust in Jesus Christ, who redeems all, and who calls us to follow
 We believe and trust in the Holy Spirit, who inspires and sustains us in hopeful service*

Recognising that these are troubled times, let us covenant with one another and with God

My brothers and sisters in Christ, I covenant to walk together with you in faithful discipleship for as long as God shall so direct and lead us

Faithful God, as a community of your people, we covenant to walk with you, individually and corporately, in ways we know and in ways that you will show us

*Grant us courage to face the challenges
 Strengthen us with faith, hope and love
 So that we may walk faithfully in the footsteps of him whose name we bear
 Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

This prayer is taken from *Gathering up the Crumbs* - being published in May 2020.

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