

#missionaladventure

There are many examples of churches being creative and fruitful in mission from across the Baptist family. These are being collated in the form of stories and podcast conversations in a dedicated section of the Baptists Together website missionaladventure.net

'Multi-congregations, but mission in ministry the priority for all'

A number of Baptist churches are exploring a multi-congregational model - a church that has a single constitution but two or more distinct congregations. They seek to grow by planting new congregations 'from within' churches that already exist.

Derby Urban Church is one. Suzie Abramian of the Missional Adventure project talks to its minister Graham Watkins.

Derby Urban Church (DUC) is a new multi-congregational Baptist church, recently started by **Osmaston Road Baptist Church**, Derby. Part of the journey of 'Ozzy Road', has been shared before (see baptist.org.uk/osmastonroad) but as of 1 August 2020, it legally became a congregation of DUC as one congregation amongst many others.

Minister, Graham Watkins says that, "Derby Urban Church itself creates one organisational structure so that each congregation and ministry can get on with doing the ministry they were called to whilst sharing their resources."

Despite its new name on all the papers, the journey and preparation for this has been in process for some time and the practice of multi-congregations has already been happening out of Ozzy Road for a while, some forming so organically it was almost hard to

see that multi-congregations were emerging until viewed in hindsight.

The social outreach from Ozzy Road is well-known in the area and particularly connects with those who are most vulnerable in the most deprived parts of the city. Their ministries include working in local schools and with the homeless, those with drug addictions, in debt and poverty. It is worth noticing how many of those ministries operate in partnership with other organisations such as Derby City Mission and Youth with a Mission (YWAM), and it is perhaps this openness to partnering with others that stands out when Graham explains their journey to multi-congregations.

Interestingly, Graham notes how they avoided starting with the structure or model of a multi-congregational church itself, instead focusing on the relationships.



He explains how mission in ministry is the priority of their church from which all else follows. It therefore makes sense that when a new missional group forms from the church but doesn't connect with what happens on a Sunday morning it is given encouragement to gather and develop at another time throughout the week. Such as the 'Friends United in Jesus' congregation which formed out of an Alpha group and now meets on Thursday afternoons because it needs to accommodate those in the group connected with the food projects following after. This group is now one of the new congregations officially recognised within the new Derby Urban Church.



As well as forming new congregations for DUC from other existing Baptist churches or from ministries that those churches were already running, there are also non-Baptist congregations which are connecting in. These churches are largely based on cultural identity which is a key issue in a city with such a high population of people from India, Pakistan and Eastern Europe.

Instead of allowing these other churches to just hire their buildings for their own services, Graham notes how important it was from the outset to work and partner with them.

This has led not only to building relationships with these other churches who might consider joining DUC in the future but also to the creation of several other social enterprises and ministries as they share their resources together, notably a Roma Bible College for young leaders from a Roma background in the UK. This ministry is led by someone from the Roma Church which meets at Ozzy Road and, along with other social enterprises, came out of a mission trip from the wider church to the Slovakian Roma village of Pavlovce.

With such a vast network of congregations already established and aiming to grow further it could lead one to ask what does whole church gathering and leadership look like within this context? Graham explains how the intention for each congregation, depending on its size and ministries, will be to have its own leadership team, and Pentecost, Lent and Harvest have been earmarked as times to have a whole celebratory church meeting in order to share the testimonies of praise, and also concerns for prayer from each congregation.



Photo: Derby Urban Church

Graham Watkins is the minister of Derby Urban Church

Considering that Derby Urban Church is, officially speaking, in its infancy, there is still much that can be taken to encourage others considering a similar missional adventure. Graham stresses the importance of knowing your church's identity before embarking on a journey like this, even if you think you know it! He reflects that they have learnt to concentrate on relationship and Kingdom ministry and found that the rest will follow, going as far as to say, "If you were to do this for any other reason than mission in ministry then eventually I think it would just fall apart."

Although structures for this have obviously had to come, it is interesting to see how there has been the willingness to allow them to be reshaped along the way, even to the point of changing entirely, because the start and heart of this has always been to be led by God for mission and Kingdom.

This story is part of the #missionaladventure web portal on the Baptists Together website, the place for you to discover a world of missional opportunities for you and your church.