



# Baptists Together Settlement Process: Guidance for Churches<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

The Baptists Together Settlement Process (BTSP) is designed to facilitate ministers, churches, and alternative ministry settings such as local chaplaincy or pioneering, as they seek new ministry. The aim is to provide a clear and transparent process that enables all involved to discern God's calling.

This document is intended to help Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) churches, and alternative ministry settings related to Baptists Together, to navigate the settlement process. If you have questions, please speak to your Regional Minister, or contact the Ministries Team via [btsp@baptist.org.uk](mailto:btsp@baptist.org.uk)

## Contents

1. [First Steps](#)
2. [Overview of the settlement process](#)
3. [Frequently asked questions](#)
4. [Your church profile](#)
5. [Completing the PVL form](#)
6. [Ministers in settlement](#)
7. [Ministerial profiles](#)
8. [The discernment process](#)
9. [Issuing a call to a minister](#)
10. [Practical matters when preparing for a new minister](#)
11. [The induction service](#)

[Appendix 1: Newly Accredited Ministers](#)

[Appendix 2: No profiles or too many profiles?](#)

[Appendix 3: Avoiding discrimination and unconscious bias](#)

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<sup>1</sup> This guide can also be used by those seeking to fill vacancies in alternative ministry settings such as local chaplaincy or pioneering

## Abbreviations

Full terms and their abbreviations are explained as they arise, but for reference:

<b>BUGB</b>	Baptist Union of Great Britain	<b>BTSP</b>	Baptists Together Settlement Process
<b>PVL</b>	Pastoral Vacancy List	<b>CMD</b>	Continuing Ministerial Development
<b>NAM</b>	Newly Accredited Minister	<b>MiT</b>	Minister-in-Training

## 1. First steps

If you are seeking an Accredited Minister to serve your church or community, the place to start is to talk to your Regional Minister who will arrange to meet with your church leadership team. They will explore with you what help and advice you need. This might include leading a `vision day`, taking a Sunday service, or discussing the way forward with a meeting of church members or the whole congregation.

Your Regional Minister will wherever possible encourage you to appoint a moderator if you haven't already done so. A moderator can play a key role in guiding the church through the settlement process. They help you to assess what type of ministry you are seeking; how best to consider the ministerial profiles of prospective ministers; and the way in which you should discern whether a minister is called to your church. Some moderators, depending on their availability, may also be able to support the worship and pastoral life of your church.

Churches use a variety of means to establish a group of church members who will enable the search process to operate smoothly. In many churches this will be the leadership team or diaconate. In others it will be a range of church members who together represent the diversity of age, gender and race in the church, or those from different areas of church life. The group, whatever its composition, is described in this document as the `search team`.

You need to identify a small group (ideally 3 or 4 people) who can be trusted to handle any sensitive and confidential information which a prospective minister may need to share with you. While it is relatively rare for there to be confidential information about a minister it is helpful to identify such a group at an early stage. This needs to include at least one person from the search team as well as your Safeguarding Trustee and/or Designated Person for Safeguarding (DPS). For example, you could have your moderator, church secretary and your DPS. For more information about when this group may be needed, see the section about next steps in section 8.

## 2. Overview of the settlement process

1. Your church prepares a profile and completes a PVL form supplied by your Regional Minister. The church's vacancy is then listed in the Pastoral Vacancy List (PVL) which is held on a secure area on the Baptists Together website.

2. Your church chooses a review date by which you want to receive expressions of interest from ministers who are interested in your vacancy. This review date can be chosen from a list of six nationally agreed review dates set by the Ministries Team each year.
3. Ministers who have access to the PVL express their interest in your particular vacancy by sending to you their ministerial profile by the selected review date.
4. Your search team prayerfully considers all the expressions of interest which you receive to discern which ministers you would like to meet with. You then continue with your discernment process which usually but not necessarily culminates with inviting just one prospective minister to 'preach-with-a-view'.
5. Assuming the leaders and/or search team are content to recommend a particular minister, you hold a special church meeting to decide whether to invite the minister to fill the vacancy.
6. If during the above process you fail to receive any suitable ministerial profiles or you proceed with a minister but decide not to call them, you may set a further expression of interest date. This should again use one of the nationally agreed review dates. If after this, you have still not found a suitable minister, you may ask for your PVL listing to be set to an open date. This means you may receive expressions of interest from ministers at any time.

Throughout the process you should remain in regular contact with your Regional Minister who will support, advise and encourage you as necessary. This regular contact should happen at least every two months. This is so your progress may be discussed at a bi-monthly meeting held between all the Regional Minister Team Leaders and the Ministries Team Leader. They will talk through what help and support can be offered. This might be targeted, for example by suggesting to a minister that they consider your church in particular.

### 3. Frequently asked questions

#### **How long does the process take?**

Every situation is different, so this is a difficult question to answer. Once your church profile has been agreed with your Regional Minister and your search team are ready to begin receiving expressions of interest, it may be only a few months before you call a new minister. However, for all kinds of reasons the process may take longer.

You will therefore need patience during this time as you wait on the Lord and seek his will for you. Remember that the process is not the same as a typical job interview. Rather, it is about discerning which minister God is calling to serve your church.

#### **Do we have to use this process to find our next minister?**

The simple answer is, no.

However, you should note that ....

The settlement process is free to churches in membership with the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB). It is generally open only to BUGB Accredited Ministers, those in the process of becoming accredited, and Nationally Recognised Pastors<sup>2</sup>.

Whilst you can choose to advertise your vacancy in whatever way you like, you should be aware that 'external' advertising can attract a wide range of candidates, many of whom will be unfamiliar with the ways in which Baptist churches work.

Some church trust deeds specify that ministers in the church must be accredited, so you should check them to see if they allow you to call an unaccredited minister. If they restrict you to calling only an Accredited Minister, you will have to apply for a waiver from the Ministries Team to call a minister who is unaccredited.

If you appoint an unaccredited minister, you will need to follow your own process of safer recruiting. This involves taking up references and undertaking a DBS enhanced disclosure for them.

If an Accredited Minister applies to an external advert, you should contact your Regional Minister who will be able to advise you as to whether their profile has been approved.

Sometimes church members may suggest names of possible ministers themselves. This should not be discouraged, but please seek the advice of your Regional Minister before making contact with these ministers.

### **How can the wider church be involved in the settlement process?**

Whilst your church profile will need to be agreed by a church meeting, it is also helpful to involve church members as you shape the profile. It is vital that church members agree with the content of the profile, including the kind of ministry being sought. Failure to work things through properly at the beginning can make it very difficult when it comes to issuing a call.

This is a process which needs to be supported by prayer throughout and this can involve everyone in the life of the church. It can help to set aside regular times to bring people together for the specific purpose of praying about future ministry. The search team should seek to keep the wider church informed about how things are progressing, and when they are meeting. However, they should not tell the church the names of minister they are in conversation with until they invite a prospective minister to meet with the church or preach.

### **What should we be providing for our minister in terms of stipend, accommodation etc?**

Every church will want to take to heart the biblical principle of generosity (2 Cor. 9.11).

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<sup>2</sup> Nationally Recognised Pastors also have access to the BTSP. They are not the same as an Accredited Minister in that their theological qualification and level of ministerial formation is usually much lower. If you receive an expression of interest from a Nationally Recognised Pastor, their ministerial profile will make this apparent. If you are unsure what this means for you, please speak to your Regional Minister.

You should determine what level of stipend you can provide. You should not offer less than the standard stipend recommended each year by BUGB, and you should not offer a lesser stipend based on gender or marital status. This figure and other advice about remuneration can be found at [www.baptist.org.uk/stipend](http://www.baptist.org.uk/stipend).

You should also consider the health and well-being of the minister and any family they may have, seeking to provide adequate accommodation and holiday provision.

The church should encourage their minister to keep growing spiritually, professionally and intellectually. This is done by providing time and a budget for the minister to engage with the Baptists Together Continuing Ministerial Development (CMD) framework. This might include among other things attendance at ministers' conferences, retreat or study weeks, and meeting with a pastoral supervisor, spiritual director, mentor, or coach.

For your guidance the recommended terms of appointment, a suggested budget for ministerial costs and other helpful documents can be found at [www.baptist.org.uk/guidanceforchurches](http://www.baptist.org.uk/guidanceforchurches)

#### **What is a Newly Accredited Minister, or NAM?**

If a minister is newly accredited, usually because they have just completed ministerial formation at a Baptist college, they will have a probationary period to serve before being fully accredited.

The probationary or 'NAM' period usually last for three or four years. In that time the new minister is supported as they seek to embed the habits of CMD in their ongoing ministry. The church should be aware of what this will entail. For more information, please see appendix 1.

## **4. Church profile**

This key document provides ministers with a summary of the nature, context, concerns and aspirations of your church. You should take time to decide on the content and format. It does not need to be lengthy (and may be unhelpful if it is) but it should convey something of the essence of your church.

The profile should address three main questions:

1. What are we like as a church?
2. Where does God want us to go in mission and ministry?
3. What sort of ministry do we need to take us into that future?

It is helpful for ministers if the information in your profile is presented in the following order:

- A. An introductory paragraph
- B. The church as it is now
- C. The surrounding community
- D. The church you wish to see

- E. The ministry you are seeking
- F. History of the church
- G. Practical matters

For more detailed information and guidance on producing a church profile see our separate [Guide to Creating a Church Profile](#).

Once your church has agreed your church profile, you should send it to your Regional Minister. They will read it and discuss with you if they feel you have omitted anything important. They will then add their own comment to it and send it to the Ministries Team along with your PVL form.

## 5. Completing the PVL form

At the same time as you send your church profile to your Regional Minister, you should also send a completed and signed PVL form.

The PVL Form is in three sections:

**Section 1** asks you to provide the information which is needed for your church's entry on the PVL. Your entry will include a link to your full church profile. Please complete every section.

**Section 2** is a reminder about the need to provide a profile of your church.

**Section 3** lists the church's responsibilities and asks two of your trustees to sign a declaration on behalf of the church to say that you agree to these.

Only churches which provide a profile and a fully completed and signed PVL form will be included on the PVL.

## 6. Ministers in settlement

Ministers using the BTSP are testing out a possible move away from their existing ministry setting. The settlement process is designed to provide as much openness as possible whilst maintaining necessary confidentiality. Search teams should respect this and ensure churches are aware of the need to be discreet. Failing to maintain confidentiality may compromise a minister who eventually chooses to remain in their present setting. For this reason, it is not a good idea to send people to hear a prospective minister preach in their present church. Please avoid including the names of prospective ministers in church bulletins when they come to meet you and you should certainly not list them on your church website. Although your church will need to know the purpose of the minister's visit, wider publicity might be unhelpful.

Most ministers in the settlement system are either BUGB Accredited Ministers already or have been commended by their Association for ministerial training. As BUGB regard these ministers as in good standing separate references are not required. If you have any questions about references please speak to your Regional Minister.

A few prospective ministers might be Nationally Recognised Pastors. Their theological education and ministerial formation is not as rigorous as it is for Accredited Ministers. Nevertheless, the steps they have taken to gain recognition means that they also do not normally require separate references.

There are very occasionally others in the settlement system who are not accredited or recognised by BUGB, such as those from another country who are in the process of seeking accreditation. Their profile will make this clear. If the church receives an expression of interest from a person in this category, please seek further guidance from your Regional Minister.

Any minister who settles in your church must obtain a fresh DBS enhanced disclosure before they start with you. If they are an Accredited Minister, they must obtain this DBS via your Association. All ministers should have up to date BUGB safeguarding training at level 2 and 3. If you have any questions about this, you should ask the prospective minister in the first instance.

## 7. Ministerial profiles

Each minister who believes God may be calling them to a new ministry setting, and every ministerial student about to enter their final year at college, gets in touch with their Regional Minister.

After prayer and discussion together, ministers are asked to prepare a ministerial profile to introduce themselves to churches. Ministerial profiles are in a standard format consisting of four sections and all ministers are asked to answer the same questions. The name of each minister is, deliberately, not immediately obvious – instead each will have a reference code, such as AB01.

**Section A** consists of the minister's answers to twelve questions. These are listed below.

**Section B** gives the details of the minister's education and employment history.

**Section C** gives the minister's personal details.

**Section D** consists of an introduction from the minister's current Regional Minister or, in the case of a ministerial student, someone from their college. Section D will also highlight if a minister has access to the PVL but is yet to be accredited, such as a transfer from an overseas Baptist Union or a different UK denomination.

So that first impressions may be protected from assumptions about gender, age, race, education, family circumstances or previous employment, the name and personal circumstances of ministers are deliberately revealed only in sections B and C. **Search team members are strongly urged to read section A of each profile prayerfully before viewing the name and personal circumstances of each minister.** Clearly, the person to whom ministers send their profiles will be aware of the names of all candidates. But when this person passes the profiles to search team members, they should send only the profiles and not any covering letters or emails in the first instance. They should also avoid using the



names of the candidates in their own communication to the search team. Please give every opportunity for the search team to read section A of each profile before seeing the name of each candidate. Covering letters and emails can be shared later.

If you receive any profiles which do not appear to be in this format (and you are not also advertising externally), please check with your Regional Minister that the profile has come through the settlement system. Your Regional Minister has access to a complete list of all agreed profiles.

If you do advertise externally in addition to using the BTSP, please seriously consider requiring applicants to answer the same questions as above and to anonymise the first section in the same way. This is so the same open sharing expected of ministers in the settlement process is expected of all applicants, so that none are at an advantage because they have withheld information. However, please remember that profiles you receive through external advertising will not have been checked for accuracy in the same way as those coming through the BTSP.

All ministers entering settlement also complete a 'settlement form' which provides additional information about the sort of ministry they hope to exercise. Copies of these are held by the BUGB Ministries Team and each Regional Minister Team Leader. A very small number of these also contain confidential information which ministers are required to share with a church before accepting an invitation to preach-with-a-view or the equivalent final selection event – please see below.

Questions in section A of the ministerial profile are as follows:

1. How did you come to faith in Christ and what prompted you to enter Baptist ministry?
2. What have been your recent mission and ministry (or training placement) highlights?
3. Which are your strongest ministry skills and how have you used these to serve God's kingdom?
4. Which areas of ministry do you find a particular challenge?
5. What are your key priorities for a future ministry setting?
6. What are your core theological convictions and how do you apply them in ministry and mission?
7. What principles of leadership are important to you and how do they affect the way you lead?
8. How do you pursue the ongoing development of your ministry? What in your theology and practice has changed as a result of your growth and learning?
9. What practices, habits, interests and hobbies help you to sustain your own spiritual, physical, emotional and relational well-being?
10. How do you connect with and contribute to the wider Baptist family and other Christian partners?
11. Why are considering leaving your current position and how would you describe your relationship with those you will be leaving behind?
12. Are there any further matters or circumstances you wish to be taken into account?



## 8. The discernment process

### General comments

When completing your PVL form you will have designated someone in your church to receive ministerial profiles from ministers expressing an interest in your church.

After your initial review date has passed this person should send all profiles received to the search team for them to read through before you meet. Care should be taken to avoid mentioning any names so that search teams can read through section A of the profiles without making any assumptions about race or gender.

As a search team, please respect the need for confidentiality when handling ministerial profiles and destroy/delete all documents when no longer needed. Your designated contact person may keep one copy. If no progress is made over time you may care to look again at some of the people you had earlier decided not to consider. If this is the case, you should first check with your Regional Minister to see if they are still available before contacting them.

You do not know how many profiles you will receive. There may not be any, or you could be swamped with them. Appendix 2 makes some suggestions about handling both these scenarios.

It is of concern to BUGB that some female ministers, some black and brown ministers and those with a disability report that they continue to face prejudice and discrimination within Baptist churches. Though ministers are appointed as office holders rather than employees, the Equality Act 2010 still applies and offers them protection from discrimination. It is very important that you read through appendix 3 which outlines how to ensure your discernment process falls with the law. It also contains a section on how to avoid unconscious bias that unfairly disadvantages some potential ministers.

### Meeting to look at the ministerial profiles

When the search team meets to look at the profiles you have received, please pray, listen to one another and seek the Lord's will together. Don't merely ask individuals for their 'vote'. You should focus on the answers to the questions in section A and ask yourselves some important questions.

- In what ways does this minister fit with what we said in our profile that we were looking for?
- How will this minister meet our needs as a church?
- What will this minister bring to our situation that we have not thought of before?

At this stage any emails or letters which accompanied the profiles can be shared with the search team.

As a result of your prayer, reflection and discussion, identify those ministers you would like to meet with. You can meet with ministers in person or in by virtual means, or you could conduct all initial conversations via video conferencing and then meet in person if things

progress further. Such meetings would normally be held mid-week, providing some confidentiality and informality.

You can have this initial conversation or meeting with as many ministers as you wish, but please make sure you do not over-burden the search team with excessive meetings. You should also bear in mind that, in most cases, ministers will have sent their profile to other churches as well.

As soon as possible after your search team has met to identify which ministers to meet, please get in contact with all those who sent you their profile to communicate one of the following options:

1. Arrange a time for the minister to meet with the search team.
2. Explain that you are interested in them but that you are first pursuing a conversation with other potential ministers and so want to put them 'on hold'.
3. Explain that you do not feel they will be a good fit for your church and so you do not want to take things any further (at this stage).

If you follow option 2, you should ask the minister if they are happy for you to keep their profile 'on file' whilst you pursue conversations with other prospective ministers. If you choose option 3, you may still find it helpful to hold onto the minister's profile lest at a later date you decide to come back to it. If you wish to do this, please ask permission from the minister. Please note that you may keep a minister's profile only whilst it is relevant to do so. As soon as you have called a different minister or decided to withdraw from the settlement process, you should get rid of all other profiles. Please make this clear to any minister who agrees that you may hold their profile for a while.

If none of the ministers who have expressed an interest seem suitable, please contact your Regional Minister and the BUGB Ministries Team to let them know that you want to receive further 'expressions of interest'. The church's entry on the PVL will be updated with a new review date in line with the nationally agreed review dates. After two rounds of choosing review dates a church may choose to be open to expression of interest at any time.

### **Meeting prospective ministers**

It is important to remember that your meeting with a prospective minister is not like a job interview. Together you are seeking to discern God's will for the future. You should expect them to ask you as many questions as you ask them as they will wish to explore your profile just as you explore theirs. The meeting may well develop helpfully into a conversation, though you should ensure you cover all the areas you planned to discuss.

If a prospective minister is married, please talk through with them whether they wish for their spouse to attend your meeting with them. There is significant variation in how ministers and their spouses share the discernment process. Some ministers would not imagine their spouse's involvement in this initial meeting is necessary or appropriate. Other ministers see their spouse's insights as a key element in the process of discerning a call and so want them to be present. If a spouse is going to attend, you should be careful to focus on the minister in your questions, even if their spouse is given an opportunity to comment from time to time.

Of course, it is possible that you receive an expression of interest from a married couple who are both ministers and who are seeking a joint appointment. In this instance, it is best to interview them together.

Prospective ministers may find meeting with a search team quite daunting. Many people do not find it easy to talk in depth with relative strangers, so do all you can to help the potential minister feel welcome and try to put them at ease. Arrange the room as a circle rather than a panel.

Appoint a member of the search team to welcome the minister, explain the pattern and expected length of the meeting (or day) and pray at the start of the meeting.

Appoint a chairperson whose main role is to oversee the interview, keep it moving and ensure that all the necessary ground has been covered. If you have an interim moderator, this is a role they may be able to play.

Have a flexible structure for the interview with a list of possible questions, subdivided into categories with each category allocated to a member of the search team. Each person asking a question should give their full attention to the minister as they answer, leaving others to take any notes. The chairperson should move the discussion from questioner to questioner as appropriate.

You should avoid merely repeating the questions in the minister's profile. Rather, show you have read their profile by referring to their answer, and then ask them to expand on it or explain a certain detail. There is no need to go through every question on their profile if their written answers are already sufficient.

Try to give the minister space to give of their best and express what they are passionate about and gifted for. Look for practical examples in your questions and not just general principles. For example, you might ask, "Can you give an example of how you have successfully brought about a planned change in your current church?"

Possible questions might include:

- Tell us a little about your previous ministries. What do you consider to be your successes and failures, and what have you learnt from them?
- What has given you the most joy in your time as a minister?
- What in our church profile interested you so that you applied?
- What do you think are the most important issues facing Christians/society today and how should the church address them?
- What will you want to be remembered for at the conclusion of your ministry?
- How would you expect to share out your time between the different aspects of ministry?

You should also ask the minister how they engage with the Baptists Together Continuing Ministerial Development (CMD) scheme. Accredited Ministers are asked to take

responsibility for their own self-development. You should expect the minister to ask in return how you will support their CMD.

Please take care to ask questions that could be asked of any minister. Do not fall into the trap of asking questions that make presumptions about gender roles or singleness, for example. Approach the meeting with an open mind and be aware of the danger of unconscious bias, which is explained and explored in appendix 3. No-one should reach a final decision until the search team's discussion after the meeting, or until after all the meetings if several ministers are being seen.

Always give plenty of time for the minister to ask you questions, either throughout the meeting, or after you have asked your questions.

Appoint a person before the meeting who will pray for the minister at the meeting's end. Please tell the minister what will happen next and when they are likely to hear from you.

Please note that the church should cover any travel expenses incurred by the minister.

Following the meeting, the search team should discuss their thoughts and observations. The following method may prove useful:

- Take time to pray again before deliberating together.
- Ask each person to write their thoughts on a piece of paper then fold it up and put it away.
- Talk through the minister's answers to each category and consider how they did or did not show evidence of the key qualities, experience and skills you are seeking.
- Avoid definitive statements such as, "I just know this is the person," or, "The Lord told me they are the minister he is calling to this role."
- Discuss chemistry and a sense of call, but treat these as part of the process and not the overriding factor.
- Be relaxed about disagreement. Instead, explore why people feel as they do.
- Remember to use the ministerial profile and any covering letter or email as well as the interview for evidence during your discussion.
- Use a flip chart or post-it notes to capture people's views.
- Once everyone has taken part in the discussion, go around the room and ask whether they think the person should be invited and why they do or do not think it is right to proceed further. Each person can reveal what is on the piece of paper they wrote at the beginning and whether their view has changed during discussion and if so, why.
- Try to reach consensus, where the whole search team are willing to go along with a decision. Consensus, as defined here, is not unanimity, which is an unrealistic goal in most situations. Rather consensus is the readiness of all to live with the decision: it requires the consent of all present for the decision to proceed. Those who do not like a proposal can still give their consent if they are willing to lay aside their concerns for the sake of the group. They are much more likely to do so if their concerns have been properly heard.
- Consider what you will say to the church. All should support publicly what you agreed.

- Finally, ask whether the interview has given any cause for re-examining the church's profile or the process you have followed, and make any necessary changes.

### **The next steps**

After meeting with a minister or ministers, the search team should decide whether they would like to invite any of them to meet and share ministry with the wider church. For church pastors, this usually includes an invitation to lead worship and preach.

You may decide to invite two or three ministers to meet the church in this way if you wish.

After each visit, the search team should meet as soon as possible to consider reactions to their visit – both their own and those of others in the church. The second of these may be done informally or at a church meeting. If you have met with a number of ministers, you should now seek to narrow your search down to just one.

If everything seems positive and there is a real sense that a minister could be the right person for your church then the minister should be invited to a further, final occasion to meet and share ministry with the church. Traditionally, this has been known as an invitation to 'preach-with-a-view to the pastorate.' However, this final selection occasion may not involve preaching at all, depending on the role the minister will fulfil.

Before you issue an invitation, your designated church contact should ask your Regional Minister if there is any confidential information which the minister is required to disclose. It is only a small minority of ministers who will have such information.

If the answer is 'No', then you can make the invitation. If the answer is 'Yes', then one of your small group of people trusted to handle confidential information should ask the minister if there is any confidential information which they are required to disclose which has not already been shared with you. If they do not provide this information, then you should not proceed with the invitation and you should inform your Regional Minister. If the information is disclosed, then this will need to be shared with the rest of your small group of people trusted to handle confidential information. This group should then decide, in consultation with your Regional Minister as appropriate, how you should now proceed. You should also check with your Regional Minister whether the correct information has been fully disclosed.

Once an invitation has been issued and accepted then the search team should plan a programme for the visit to enable the minister (and any family) to meet as many people as possible in a variety of settings. A visit over a weekend is advisable as this would also give the prospective minister to get a feel for the area and see any manse.

As a special church meeting will be required to issue a call to the minister, a date for this should be set for as soon as possible after the visit. You will need to give the required notice to the church. Check your church's constitution or other governing document to see what this is.

## 9. Issuing a call to a minister

The special church meeting which is held after the preach-with-a-view or its equivalent is an important meeting. All present need to remember that God's will, not personal preference, is being sought.

It is vital that as many members as possible attend the meeting. Since the decision to be made is one of the gathered community of the church, thought should be given to the best day and time of day for the meeting, and the provision of childcare. Members should be encouraged to be present to share in the prayerful decision making because they need to listen to each other in God's presence.

Prayer is vital and the moderator (or whoever is chairing the meeting) should encourage an atmosphere in which all can share their thoughts, hopes and concerns. Some churches have found it appropriate and beneficial to set the meeting in small groups with a deacon or other leader in each. After prayer and sharing, the deacon reports back to the whole fellowship the thoughts of the group. Then the whole gathering reflects and considers together whether or not to call the minister to the church.

After discussion, hold a secret ballot of all those present to determine what the church has discerned.

You should inform the minister of the outcome immediately by telephone and confirm soon after with a letter. This conversation is to invite the minister to take up the ministry role, if that was what the church discerned. If no invitation is being issued, it is best to give the information straightforwardly. If the reasons for this decision are apparent, it is wise to list these before making contact. If the minister then asks for some insights into understanding the decision, you can share these. However, if the reasons are not apparent, you can only say that the church followed a careful and prayerful process but did not discern that a call should be offered.

You should give the minister some time to consider the invitation if they wish. If the invitation is accepted, then you should agree with the minister when any public announcement is made. Please ensure the church is aware that it is not at liberty to share the news until after the agreed announcement date. Once made public, the call can be celebrated.

Please ensure that, when an invitation has been accepted, that you inform your Regional Minister and the Ministries Team of this. You may be sent a feedback form to complete to assist us as we continue to develop the settlement process.

If the invitation is declined, there will be some prayerful reflection on what this means. The moderator and the Regional Minister should be of help here in discerning what God is saying to the church through this.

## 10. Practical matters when preparing for a new minister

The [terms of appointment](#) and general practicalities such as housing or other requirements should have been thought through when you prepared your profile. These will need to be finalised with the incoming minister.

You will need to discuss a date for the commencement of the new ministry. A minister usually has to give three months' notice to their existing church. A leaving student will have to complete their course.

There will be other practical matters to think through concerning housing and the welcome of your new minister and any family members. You should think through what information they will require and have it prepared, such as information about local schools, shops and amenities.

You should contact your Regional Minister to help you with these practical matters, you may also contact the Ministries Team for support.

## 11. The induction service

The induction service is a joyful celebration that acknowledges God's leading of both church and minister to this partnership. It provides the opportunity for:

- the church and the minister to express their commitment to each other through making promises;
- those gathered to pray for the church, the incoming minister and any family they may have.
- the church and wider community to mark a new chapter.

If it is the minister's first pastorate then the service may include their ordination, though this may well be conducted at their home church on an earlier, separate occasion.

Often, the service is led by the moderator, while the Regional Minister conducts the act of induction and the incoming minister is invited to choose a preacher. However, while there are suggested patterns for induction services, there is no compulsory format. As you plan the service, consult and agree the format with all those taking part.

You should consult with the incoming minister who to invite. This might include representatives from local churches; members and leaders of the wider community; members of the minister's previous or home church; friends and family of the minister. Some visitors will want to say some words of greeting. This is best done at the end of the induction service or during refreshments afterwards and is usually chaired by the moderator.



Suitable wording and orders of service for inductions and ordinations can be found in our Baptist Union publication *Gathering for Worship: Patterns and Prayers for the Community of Disciples*; Canterbury Press.

The church should cover travel expenses for any visitors involved in leading part of the service and any appropriate fee in the usual way.

Lastly, there is no such thing as a perfect minister - nor a perfect church for that matter! By God's grace imperfect people who trust him can do amazing and wonderful things for the Kingdom. Let God give you the next minister and treat that person as the gift they are. Appreciation always improves ministry.



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## Appendix 1: Newly Accredited Ministers

Newly accredited ministers, or NAMs, are enrolled on a probationary programme that typically lasts for three or four years. The purpose of the programme is threefold:

1. To provide the NAM with pastoral support and advice for a probationary period.
2. To help them embed good habits of Continuing Ministerial Development, or CMD.
3. To confirm that BUGB may continue to commend them to the churches and other ministry settings as a fully accredited BUGB minister at the conclusion of the period.

There are four key relationships that make up the NAMs' programme.

**With the Regional Association.** The Association has primary responsibility for overseeing the NAM's progress. They do this through informal pastoral care from Regional Ministers; Association days that explore aspects of ministry; provision of a mentor; and a review process that monitors the NAM's progress for accreditation purposes.

**With a mentor.** The NAM is given a mentor with whom they meet regularly during the probationary period. Their role is to offer a listening ear; advise in areas where they have greater experience; and encourage and challenge the NAM as appropriate.

**With a Baptist college.** The NAM undertakes a sequence of 'learning contracts' with one of the Baptist colleges. This involves a mixture of theological reflection, assignments, books reviews and college days.

**With a Regional Review Group.** This group is appointed by the Association to receive reports from the NAM's mentor, Regional Minister, college, and church or other ministry setting. They also interview the NAM at the conclusion of the programme and recommend NAMs to the BUGB for full accreditation.

Churches should give sufficient time to the NAM to undertake the necessary ongoing study and attend the relevant meetings. This typically takes half a day each week, though some NAMs may prefer to study in block periods. The church is also asked to cover travel and other appropriate expenses as well as pay the NAM's college fee. Please see this allowance of time and money to your NAM as not only a gift to them but as an investment in the wider Baptist family. The provisions made for NAMs are designed to establish healthy patterns for future ministry which will bear fruit for the Kingdom and in the lives of both minister and church.

## Appendix 2: No profiles or too many profiles?

### What do we do if we don't receive any profiles?

- Discuss with your Regional Minister whether they think there are ways in which your profile or website might be discouraging people from expressing an interest.
- Don't rush into making any hasty decisions.
- Continue to 'advertise' the vacancy on the PVL.
- If your profile has been on the PVL for the cycle of two review dates and no expressions of interest received, arrange to meet with your Regional Minister to talk through your options. This will include setting your listing on the PVL to be open to expressions of interest at any time. Your Regional Minister Team Leader can also take your church to the national settlement meetings that take place every two months, to see if other Associations know of ministers who may be encouraged to consider our church.

### What should we do if we are overwhelmed by profiles?

If you receive more profiles than the search team think they can read through thoroughly in the time allocated, there are a number of ways you can deal with this. Here are three suggestions:

- Delay your meeting to give enough time for all profiles to be read thoroughly by all the search team. In this case please explain this to all the ministers who sent their profiles.
- Ask a sub-group of the search team to draw up a shortlist using clear agreed criteria. They should be very clear why they feel some ministers do not make the shortlist. Once this has been done then circulate the profiles of all shortlisted ministers to the rest of the search team. Include a list, using the profile codes, of all who did not make the list and the reasons why.
- Circulate all profiles to the whole team but divide them up between the team members and ask each person to concentrate on those. They may read through the others if they have time. At the meeting, each team member explains which minister(s) from 'their' profiles they feel the search team should focus on.

## Appendix 3: Avoiding discrimination and unconscious bias

### Introduction

This appendix aims to guide you as you consider how to apply Baptist principles, the law and good practice to your selection and appointment of ministers.

Baptists Together are committed to equality of opportunity for all who have been recognised as Accredited Ministers. All Accredited Ministers and Ministers-in-Training have had their call to ministry tested, have been through formation and are commended to you.

The process churches follow for calling and appointing a minister differs in one significant aspect from that followed in employment situations. Alongside their consideration of the experience, gifts, skills, training, insight and understanding that each potential minister possesses, a search team must exercise spiritual discernment in their initial selection. The church must do the same when they are presented with a decision.

Sometimes, churches excuse unfair and unlawful discrimination against individual candidates under the cover of discernment. Likewise, what search team members claim to be discernment might in fact be an expression of unconscious bias by which candidates are embraced or dismissed too hastily.

Discernment is therefore a demanding process! As well as a commitment to prayerful listening to what the Spirit says through the candidate and through one another, your search team should read and discuss this appendix carefully before they begin to receive ministerial profiles.

### Baptist freedom and interdependency

An important Baptist principle is that each church is able to discern the mind of Christ for itself. The first clause of our Declaration of Principle which is the basis of our Union states:

That our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and that each Church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer His laws.

This means that, where the law allows, you may reach your own conclusion as a church on whether you call a minister with particular personal characteristics.

However, alongside this key Baptist principle of the freedom for each church to discern how Jesus is directing them, lies another. This is that we listen to each other in our discernment processes. We are interdependent and should be willing to learn from each other.

Please therefore note the following:

- **We cannot emphasise strongly enough that you should engage with the wider Baptist family before you come to any settled position by which you limit the**

**opportunity for someone to serve because of any personal characteristics. In the first instance, please speak to your Regional Minister.**

- **You will read below that you, as a religious organisation, may legally place certain requirements on ministers you appoint which would be considered discriminatory in other settings. However, by informing you of the liberty afforded to you under the law, we do not want this to be understood as an encouragement to discriminate.**
- **The Baptists Together website has a suite of advice under the heading Guidance Leaflet L09, to help churches avoid the risk of legal challenge on the basis of discrimination when appointing ministers, employing staff or offering goods and services. This can be found here:**  
[https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/668322/Guideline\\_Leaflet\\_L09.aspx](https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/668322/Guideline_Leaflet_L09.aspx)
- **In particular, L09 recommends that churches write and formally agree an ‘ethos statement’ prior to seeking a new minister. An ethos statement is a clear statement of the particular beliefs and values of the church with respect to any area where it is lawful to discriminate on the basis of religion and belief.**

## **Discrimination, and the Equality Act 2010**

Although ministers are appointed as office holders rather than employees, the Equality Act 2010 still applies and offers them protection from discrimination. You must not discriminate against a minister:

- in the arrangements you make for deciding whom to appoint;
- in the terms on which you offer the appointment;
- in the decision itself to appoint or not appoint.<sup>3</sup>

However, in some cases, exceptions are permitted. In certain circumstances, churches may discriminate when they make appointment decisions if that discrimination is based on their religious convictions and beliefs.<sup>4</sup> The church would apply what is called the ‘organised religion exception’ to make the presence or absence of certain characteristics an occupational requirement of the ministerial appointment. Because in other types of employment this would be unlawful direct discrimination, the use of any exception should be thought through very carefully.

The Act provides two grounds for this legitimate discrimination. You may specify that a candidate must meet a certain requirement when:

- appointing them is a “proportionate way of complying with the doctrines of the religion”; or,

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<sup>3</sup> Summarised from Equality Act 2020, section 49.

<sup>4</sup> See Equality Act 2010, schedule 9.

- appointing them is a “proportionate way of avoiding conflict with a significant number of the religion’s followers’ strongly held religious convictions.”<sup>5</sup>

In other words, you may specify a certain requirement when its absence would put the minister at serious odds with the formally agreed beliefs of your church or the strongly held convictions of many of the members.

Further, any requirement you make *must be crucial to the post*, such that the ability of a minister to promote and represent your church would be affected if they could not meet it.

As this is explained in much fuller detail in the guidance leaflet L09B, found by following the link earlier in this section.

It should be noted that you can never use any of the permitted exceptions mentioned below as a defence against any claim of harassment or victimisation.

### **Where you may have grounds for discrimination**

Under the Equality Act, the organised religion exception can only be used with respect to a minister’s sex; status as a transsexual person; sexual orientation or its outworking; marriage or civil partnership status, or status as a divorced person.

Every church is free to discern and reach its own conclusions in relation to these protected characteristics. However, as mentioned above, we recommend that for the avoidance of doubt for both church members and potential ministers, you adopt at a church meeting an ethos statement. An ethos statement that makes clear the church’s agreed views on any of the characteristics for which an organised religion exception may be made. Details of how to create an ethos statement can be found in guidance leaflet L09C. Your Regional Minister or moderator will be able to help you through the process of reflection and consultation.

If you do determine to discriminate in any way, leaning on an organised religion exception, you should make this clear in your church profile. At the very least, you should include a copy of or a link to your ethos statement in your church profile.

**Please also note that in regard to a minister’s sex, the Baptist Union Council has affirmed the ministry of women for over 100 years and is committed to gender equality in ministry. It is our firm desire that *all churches seeking a minister will make their appointment regardless of the gender of the applicants.* If your church takes a different view to this and intends to call only a man, you MUST make this clear in your profile and only after consultation with your Regional Minister.**

If the conclusion of your discussions with your church is that a minister’s sex or any other protected characteristic will be no barrier to appointment, then it is very important that the discernment of the church is honoured by the members of the search team and the church more widely. You should try to set aside personal preferences and convictions which are

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<sup>5</sup> These quotes are from the Equality Act 2010 explanatory notes, paragraph 790.

contrary to the discernment of your church. If you are unable to do this and you are a member of the search team, it would be wise for you to step down.

## **Where you cannot discriminate**

### **Disability**

The Equality Act states that you have a duty to make reasonable adjustments to enable the appointment to be offered to a minister who is disabled.<sup>6</sup> You should not make assumptions about what adjustments will be necessary without first speaking to the individual concerned. This means that it would not be appropriate to decide not to meet a minister simply because you do not think you would be able to make reasonable adjustments. The application must be treated in exactly the same way as any other. If following exploration of the necessary adjustments, it becomes clear that this cannot reasonably be achieved, you may draw the process to an end. Our hope, however, is that you will find ways of accommodating particular needs.

### **Age**

You should be careful to avoid discrimination based on the age of the applicant. You should not specify that potential ministers fit within a particular age bracket, nor should you include the issue of age in your discussions as a search team. The criteria by which you assess the suitability of a potential minister should not include their age.

You should not make age-related assumptions when considering applicants such as expecting that those in a particular age-bracket have or lack particular experience or abilities.

It is unlawful to decline applicants based on their age, whether too old or too young.

### **Race**

It is unlawful to discriminate against any candidate because of their colour, nationality or ethnic origins.

### **Terms of appointment**

When you issue a call, it is unlawful to discriminate through the terms you offer, such as the stipend or housing provision. The terms you intend to offer should be agreed prior to entering the settlement process and be clear on your profile. You should never change the terms and make them inferior just because the minister you choose to appoint might be, for example, single, or young, or female.

There may be circumstances where you improve the terms of appointment, such as if the manse is too small to accommodate the minister's family.

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<sup>6</sup> Equality Act 2010, section 49



## Unconscious bias

In addition to avoiding the overt discrimination outlined above, you should also be alert to any unconscious bias as you consider ministerial profiles and meet candidates.

Human beings are incredibly complex. Our brains process vast amounts of information in a fraction of a second. The majority of this takes place within our subconscious leading us to make instant decisions about other people. We all have our own assumptions, expectations and preferences which have built up through our lives. These can be experienced as a gut feeling, which at times can be essential in saving us from immediate danger, but in other settings can limit our ability to see the full potential in an individual. Unconscious bias can significantly skew our judgement, leading to poor decision-making. Numerous studies have shown that this individual bias can lead to significant statistical imbalances at a community or organizational level.

In the process of seeking to appoint a new minister, you should take care to examine your gut feelings. Are they generated by the Spirit and an expression of God's leading? Or are they an expression of unspoken or previously unrecognised bias? Try to look beyond your immediate reactions and be willing to explore further.

Much has been written about unconscious bias so what follows is intended only to raise awareness of the various forms of bias and the impact they can have.

- **Affinity Bias** – we recognise that the candidate shares qualities with ourselves, making them seem familiar to us and relatable. While on the one hand this seems very positive as they will fit in, it results in less diversity and creativity. We reject someone who could be very beneficial to the ministry of the church but who may be unlike us.
- **Attribution Bias** – we assume the candidate's achievements are due to luck, while their failures are their own fault. This means we focus on their faults and minimise their achievements, which can lead us to reject a minister who has much to offer because of one thing we do not like on their profile.
- **Beauty Bias** – we assume that someone who is well presented and physically attractive is successful. So we prioritise them over someone who is in fact better suited to be the next minister.
- **Conformity Bias** – we allow the views that others have about a candidate to shape our own perceptions, out of our desire to fit in. This can hold us back from contributing to the discernment process by sharing insights that may have been missed by others.
- **Confirmation Bias** – we come to an initial conclusion about an applicant and then search for information to confirm our view. We overlook some things and focus on the areas that fit our view. We may identify one thing we agree with strongly and fail to recognise that there are significant reasons why they are not suitable for our church.
- **Gender Bias** – we make assumptions about the qualities of a candidate based on our deep-seated beliefs about gender roles. This can happen even when we believe we are open to a minister of either gender. We may assume that men and women will bring certain, different, but stereotypical qualities to the role without exploring whether this is true of any one candidate.

Recognising that we have these inbuilt biases can be a helpful place to start. You will find these biases easier to spot if your search team has a diverse membership so that you get a range of views expressed about potential ministers. Be open to the range of voices. Take your time during your decision-making process and do not rush to a conclusion.

Try to:

- Keep an open mind.
- Assess all the information fully.
- Do not write someone off simply due to your initial gut feeling.
- Ask the question 'So what?' or 'Is this really important?' when you find yourself focusing on just one issue.
- Think about each minister as an individual.
- Avoid comparing one against another too early in the process.
- Write down your own conclusions about a minister and why you reached them, so you may share these with the search team.

Above all, be open to the surprising guidance of the Holy Spirit. Be imaginative as you consider what each minister – in all their diversity – might helpfully bring to the church.