

Hello

I'm the Revd Lynn Green. I serve as General Secretary for Baptists Together, and one of the key aspects of my role is to nurture relationships across all the different parts of our Union

As I connect with leaders and churches, I am so grateful for all the ways in which you are all serving the Lord and sharing Jesus in your communities, especially during the challenges of recent years.

Despite everything, there are many encouraging stories of people and communities being changed by the good news of Jesus, and I hope that you are seeing fruitfulness where you are.

The reason for me being in touch with you now, is that I want to follow up on my [June letter about mission and marriage](#), to keep you in the loop on these things. Mission continues to be a central part of our DNA, as a movement - locally, regionally and nationally - and I see that in the passion, creativity and perseverance of us all. Please do check out the website and communications of your Regional Association to be inspired by what God is doing near you, and also take a look at our annual report on the website if you want to see the bigger picture of what's happening in and through our movement.

The bigger picture is always a fantastic mosaic of all the prayer, worship and mission of us all because we are not like other denominations; we are a peer movement of churches who share a common purpose to be faithful to Jesus and to participate in God's mission. We encourage and support each other in our worship and mission as we listen to the Lord and to each other, and then fan into flame the wonderful gifts of the Spirit that we see all across his body. And we're also expressing our DNA as Baptists in our conversations around human sexuality and marriage.

Since I wrote to you in the summer, our conversations about sexuality have been continuing. Now I recognise that for some of you this isn't a live issue for you in your context - and hear me, that is fine. But for those of you who do want an update, I'm going to tell you what's been happening recently.

Briefly, let me just recap the issue. As I said just now, remember that Baptists Together is a movement of nearly 2,000 autonomous churches who covenant together with a vision of growing healthy churches in relationship for God's mission. We are independent, yet we choose to be interdependent, and so what's really important to hear is that the wider expressions of our Baptist family exist to serve our churches in their mission and ministry. For this reason, when a request to change our ministerial rules was made, it was important that this request from our peers be carefully considered. In short, this request was to change these rules so that a minister who is in a same-sex marriage would no longer be committing gross misconduct and lose their accreditation.

Whilst Baptist Union Council holds the governance responsibilities for our ministerial recognition rules, they want to ensure that they are serving our churches and ministers in doing so. So, Council are encouraging feedback through a consultation process to enable Council to respond to the question that's been asked. In October, Council agreed the broad parameters for this consultation, and you can read more about this in the [Council report on our website](#).

One of the key recommendations from the Council was that we needed to draw on appropriate professional expertise in designing and delivering a consultation process. So since then, our Core Leadership Team have been working on a more detailed project brief so that we can appoint the right people to help us in this way.

The anticipated timings for the consultation period will be from Spring until the end of July and this will be confirmed once the project has started and we can give you the exact details.

Now I'm aware that the prospect of all this is causing some consultation anxiety from ministers and I can really understand that. Can I just remind you again at this stage that a primary motivation for this work is to serve our churches, and can I also reassure you that we recognise that churches will engage with this consultation at different levels. I'm aware, for example, that some of our churches have already been considering issues around human sexuality with their leadership teams and church meetings. Some, however, might understandably feel ill-equipped to lead their church in considering these issues and fear the possible fallout from embarking on a consultation. For others, as I said right at the outset, this is not even a live issue for you at the moment. So whilst Council wants to hear from as many churches and ministers as possible, because every voice is valued in this journey of discernment, we want this to happen in a way that supports and develops your mission and ministry locally and enables you to have the right conversations in your own context.

So, you may already have some feedback ready to offer when the consultation opens, as a result of the processes of discernment that have already happened in your church. Alternatively, you may want to start a conversation in the New Year using some of the resources that are already out there. You may also want to plan time into your programme over the spring and summer so that you've got the capacity to reflect and respond when the consultation goes live.

I've been asked what resources are available to churches and ministers. The first thing I want to say is, please do reach out to others in your clusters and networks to find out what resources others have found helpful. Ministers and leaders could also create some really useful peer learning opportunities about how conversations have happened in churches thus far and the learning reflections that have emerged - that would be fantastic. Please also contact your Regional Association to find out what they're offering to support you in being part of the conversation, and of course the [listening area of our website](#) continues to hold lots of resources too.

Having said all this, I am conscious that this is an unsettling time and that it's really difficult to hold this question while we discern together. Let me just say again that, during this journey of discernment our current ministerial recognition rules remain in place, and whilst it also might feel like this is taking forever, I believe that it's important that we take the time to keep listening carefully and to continue to maintain the unity of the Spirit as we seek to move ahead.

As I said from the outset, it's not just about the decision we make, but also about the way that we make it, and it goes without saying that we continue to trust that the Lord will lead us forward.

Thank you so much for your prayers for our movement at this time. Please do keep talking with your Council members and continuing to pray for them as they seek to serve us. And if you're not sure who your members are, again there's a [list of them on the website](#).

Please keep praying. Philippians reminds us *'do not be anxious about anything but in every situation by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your requests to God'*.

Please keep sharing Jesus and making disciples as we keep mission at the heart of our movement.

Please keep pursuing Christ-likeness and the Fruit of the Spirit and please make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace in your church, in your cluster, Association, College, across Baptists Together and indeed with the whole church.

And as you do these things, know that I am praying for you - praying that you may know the presence and blessing of the Lord in and through all things at this time.

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