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# Raising the spiritual temperature in Portishead

New Baptist initiatives are beginning to emerge in north Somerset - Lindsay Caplen explains why prayer has been key



“I think we really underestimate the power of prayer to prepare the ground,” notes Lindsay Caplen.

“Faithful, persistent prayer breaks up the ground for God to plant his seed.”

Lindsay is a Regional Minister in Webnet with a focus on pioneering and planting. Given such a focus, she feels it's important to be grounded in a local context of pioneer/planting.

She ended up living in Portishead when she moved to the Association, because for historic reasons there was a manse there. Portishead is a rapidly growing coastal town just west of Bristol of nearly 20,000 people. There is no Baptist witness here, though several initiatives had been developed over the years that are no longer operating.

It meant she and husband Andrew 'were stepping into a space that had been steeped in prayer'.

“Something that looks like it didn't flourish, or didn't really get off the ground, actually raised the spiritual temperature. I think it prepared the ground, and has allowed someone else to then come on in – we have found such a hunger to talk about spiritual things.

“So honouring what happened before is really important.

Nothing done in God's strength is wasted.”

One initiative to have emerged is the Salt House Church, which Lindsay describes as 'a fresh planting of the Lord.'

Lindsay prayer walked the area during the lockdown months - and an ensuing sabbatical - which involved much missional listening and deepened her sense that God was calling her to plant something fresh.

This has involved embedding herself in the community in appropriate ways; including introducing herself as a Baptist minister on a neighbourhood app which has led to several conversations; and joining a regular, but ad hoc predominantly male gathering outside Parsons Bakery.

The connections Lindsay made led to a weekly meet-up at her house called Open Table – a diverse mix of regular churchgoers and unchurched. She sensed God revealing the need for a network of easily replicable simple church gatherings across Portishead and nearby villages.

There's a Hong Kong aspect too, with a number of Hong Kongers having moved to Portishead (where it's cheaper to buy) after initially settling in Bristol, and a new Christian community forming.

The intention is that these simple churches would meet once a month to worship together, share testimony, preaching and teaching. This has in turn led to the calling of Baptist ministers Paul and Barbara Reville to work bi-vocationally as part of the new project, a calling 'steeped in prayer'.

The emerging work became known as Salt House at the end of 2023: there is a lighthouse and salt marshes nearby, and the community is seeking to become 'more salty and more lighty,' where they can have a greater positive impact in society, as ambassadors of the Kingdom of God.

“The diversity in such a small gathering is both awesome and challenging! We are therefore stepping out in faith, and certainly need prayer,” says Lindsay. “From its foundation God has been the focus. It's all needed to be based in prayer.

“We're not asking God to bless what we're already doing - we're actually saying, 'God we need you at the heart of our strategy here.'

“But the trajectory of Salt House is very exciting – it has the potential to multiply disciples and churches in a pioneering way, with the benefits of both small and larger churches.”