



Candidate Information

Further to our call for nominations for the position of Baptists Together President in 2026-7, and following the stipulations of our constitution, we have received four nominations and these are now offered for election. We are pleased to share with you here the information they have provided and ask you to prayerfully consider which candidate you believe should serve as Baptists Together President. The question for discernment is *who is God calling to be the President of our Union in the coming season?*

Alex Afriyie

Theme: “Walking Worthy”

MY PASSION

I have been the minister of London Network Church (East Acton Baptist) for over 30 years. I have a great passion for evangelism, discipleship and church growth. I have a real desire to see renewal and revival in the UK and across our Baptist movement. With that in mind I enjoyed serving as a director and moderator of London Baptists over a 6-year period and also being involved in the BU Council and the BU leadership in various ways since about 2010.

I have always had a passion for the local church and over the years, led my church in relational and community outreach. In recent years I have been involved in the leadership of the London Turning and it has been a delight to see many people responding to the gospel on the streets and discipling people from many different backgrounds including former Muslims, the homeless, refugees and many Millennials and Gen Zs. Another area that is important to me is training and mentoring the next generation of leaders and I am presently studying a masters in Transformational Leadership.



PROPOSED PRESIDENTIAL THEME: WALKING WORTHY

If I am elected president of the Baptist Union of Great Britain the theme on my heart is “Walking Worthy”. I believe we have a great movement that has incredible historical roots based on biblical foundations of a believer’s church, believers’ baptism, discipleship, and freedom of conscience. I would love to have the privilege of travelling the country and ‘shouting about’ all the incredible things that are happening in our Baptist family in small and large churches, Associations and Colleges.

THREE WAYS WE CAN WALK WORTHY

There are three ways I want to encourage us to “walk worthy of our calling” (Ephesians 4: 1) emphasised by the apostle Paul:

- Firstly, I want to encourage us to maintain the unity of the faith.
- Secondly, I want to remind us to celebrate the unity of the faith in diversity.
- Thirdly and finally, I want us to courageously speak truth in love.

Alex Afriyie is married to Dorcas with 3 grown up children and enjoys swimming, reading, travelling and trying to speak French.

Charmaine Mhlanga

GOD who reminds us that in Him we are significant, we matter and have a vital role to play. The question I had to ask was who does GOD need me to be? In reflecting on that question, I believe that GOD created me to worship and out of my worship is the birthing of service to Him and His creation.

My journey as a child of GOD begins in the beautiful country of my birth, Zimbabwe, Victoria Falls, in the Hwange district to my loving parents. Sadly, my mum passed away when I was 14 years old, the same year I gave my life to the LORD. Throughout that season of grief, GOD kept me and sustained me. GOD blessed me with authentic, loving and caring relationships.



I have lived in the UK for over two decades. Prior to training for church ministry, I worked in health and social care in operational and strategic roles, working for local government and private sector social care providers. I have interests and involvement with matters of racial equality and justice; immigration and asylum; quality control and quality assurance; leadership, science and technology; mentoring, coaching and training.

I am part of the Baptist Union Racial Justice Hub and Churches Together (Luton) Racial Commission. I had the privilege of participating in Project Violet, which sought to explore the experiences of women in Baptist ministry and understand the challenges they encounter, with the goal of addressing these issues. I am fully committed to taking action on the recommendations both personally and within my community.

I joined our local Baptist Church in Luton in 2007 after being a regular attendee from 2005. I did my ministerial training at Spurgeon's College, where I am currently serving as a Trustee on the Board of Governors. I am the sole minister at Sundon Park Baptist Church which has been my spiritual home, training church and currently continue to serve.

THEME: RESTORING RELATIONSHIP

John 17:21 "[...] that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me".

In March 2024, our Baptist Family concluded a consultation regarding the eligibility of accredited ministers to enter into same-sex marriages. The outcome sparked a range of reactions within our Baptist community, resulting in feelings of pain for many. Our BU Council has emphasised the importance of ongoing dialogue and mutual respect within our family as we navigate these complex issues. In this spirit, my hope is to focus on rebuilding and restoring relationships.

Developing quality relationships rooted in a radical kingdom approach will require a deep commitment to working intentionally and in unity toward restoration and true reconciliation. This will begin with a recognition that kingdom relationships are not transactional or superficial; they are transformative and grounded in the values of GOD's kingdom—love, grace, humility, justice, and forgiveness.

A radical kingdom approach challenges us to prioritise unity over division, understanding over judgment, and service over self-interest. It calls us to see others as image-bearers of GOD, worthy of dignity and love, even when reconciliation feels difficult or costly. It will require intentional work—proactively seeking to mend broken relationships, addressing underlying wounds, and creating spaces where people can come together in truth and vulnerability.

Restoration in this context will involve addressing both personal and systemic brokenness. On a personal level, it means embracing forgiveness and fostering healing by letting go of bitterness and resentment. On a broader level, it

involves confronting and dismantling systems of injustice, inequity, and exclusion that perpetuate division and harm. True reconciliation is only possible when we are willing to confront these realities and commit to justice and peace. Unity, as a cornerstone of kingdom relationships, is not about uniformity or agreement on every issue but about a shared commitment to walking together despite differences. It is a unity rooted in love, patience, and the belief that we are all part of one body with Christ as the head. This unity requires humility, a willingness to listen and learn, and the courage to embrace discomfort for the sake of growth and deeper connection.

Ultimately, developing relationships in this way is a reflection of the Gospel itself. Just as Christ reconciled us to GOD through His sacrificial love, we are called to embody that same love in our relationships, offering grace, pursuing peace, and standing together in the hope of restoration. When we approach relationships with this kingdom mindset, we become instruments of GOD's redemptive work, reflecting His glory in our interactions and creating communities that point to His greater purpose.

Unity will require humility, and my hope is that we strive to walk together in humility as we work toward restoring relationships. As a candidate for the role of Baptist Union President, I am deeply committed to collaborative and restorative leadership. I am devoted to ensuring that every voice is valued and heard with intentionality. Transparency, fairness, and integrity are principles I hold steadfastly. I am committed to building and nurturing relationships, even with those whose perspectives may differ from mine. I am passionately dedicated to promoting equality, diversity, and inclusivity, striving to ensure that everyone has equal opportunities to succeed, contribute meaningfully, and feel respected.

In the symphony of recovery, "the success of coral reef restoration can be heard in the soundscape." To create this beautiful harmony, we are called to take responsible care of one another and of GOD's creation. I believe that we are equipped with the capacity to nurture and restore, approaching this work through prayer, lament, repentance, and renewal. With hearts anchored in love, we are inspired to persevere, not growing weary in doing good, as we continue to love GOD, love His people, and care for His creation.

Carl Smethurst

Theme: Partnership in the Gospel

Introduction

My name is Carl Smethurst and I am an accredited Baptist Minister, presently serving as the Regional Minister Team Leader for Mission for the South West Baptist Association (SWeBA). I'm married to Philippa, and we have two daughters, one in her late teens and the other who will turn twenty shortly.



I am a member of the national Baptists Together Core Leadership Team and of the organising team for the national Mission Forum. It is my privilege to see not just what God is doing across the SWeBA family of churches, chaplains and pioneers, but also to glimpse how God is so clearly at work amongst us nationally.

Sadly, all too often the narrative surrounding the Christian church in the U.K. is one of decline, disaster, and irrelevance. If we're not careful, that narrative can rub off on us and we can become demotivated or disillusioned. Yet, our Baptist movement is blessed with wonderful, committed people in our churches, chaplains and pioneers who are gifted in communicating the message of the gospel of Jesus in different ways in their very different contexts.

Hundreds of stories can be told of local churches in inner cities, suburban towns, and rural villages who are actively playing their part in seeing the Kingdom of God come in their communities. Our chaplains in healthcare, education, the military, sports, and industrial sectors tell stories of daily opportunities to share Jesus in word and deed. Our pioneers report God-made appointments with 'people of peace' as they seek to be the catalysts that see the fabric of local communities transformed so they greater resemble the shape of God's Kingdom. Across our Baptist movement we're hearing of new communities of faith springing up, seeking Jesus together.

Presidential Theme

In 2026-27, I'd love us to spend a year intentionally sharing and listening to these stories of ordinary people who are persevering in their faith and seeing signs of God's Kingdom as they serve Jesus. But I'd like to us go further than that. As a Baptist movement, we are called to 'Partnership for the Gospel' in committed, covenant relationships which manifest in us praying for each other, working together, and providing for each other's needs.

The Apostle Paul prays with joy for the Philippian church because of their 'Partnership in the Gospel' (Philippians 1:4-5). In 2026-27, I'd like to invite us to allow the Holy Spirit to speak to us through God's Word, particularly Paul's letter to the Philippians, about what that partnership should mean for us today. In our polarised society, I believe a powerful witness to the world would be for us to re-learn how we partner together in our diversity for the sake of the gospel of Christ. I'd love us to engage together in a hopeful conversation about what 'partnership in the gospel' looks like for us as a Baptist movement in these days, with our focus being on seeing God's Kingdom come amongst us.

Let's be inspired by God's Word and impacted by the Holy Spirit. Let's learn together how God calls us all to 'Partnership in the Gospel'.

Joanna Williams

"I think that being kind, sharing with others and listening to people are all ways to create peace. Please consider me for this important role. I am ready to spread kindness wherever I go." (Ashler, age 9 applying to be a Young Peace Ambassador with The Blackley Centre)

I love these words – I wish I had written them! It is easy, isn't it, to become bogged down in the complexity of living as a disciple of Jesus in the world and the church today, and there is something about the energy, simplicity and freshness of these words that inspires me and captures my vision for the important role of President. My calling was to a ministry of reconciliation, so I am borrowing Ashler's words as a way of introducing myself to you.



My name is Joanna ('Jo') Williams and I have been joint minister at Blackley Baptist Church (West Yorkshire) with my husband Andy since 2016. We are also joint Directors of The Blackley Centre for Peace and Reconciliation. I love living and working in the north of England, having grown up in London and Essex. I have been a part of Baptist churches the whole of my life, from dedication at Highams Park Baptist and baptism at Chingford Mount, to ministry at Sion Burnley and Blackley (and membership at Buckhurst Hill, Avenue (Southend) and Didsbury (Manchester)) being nurtured, loved and held by these churches and our Baptist family, and I am profoundly grateful. After 13 years' teaching in Secondary schools, I did a MTh at Edinburgh with formation for ministry at Northern. Andy and I have 2 adult daughters, Megan and Alys, and share our home with Rosie the dog and Jasper the cat, as well as caring for my mother, Jenny.

Whilst working as Regional Tutor (NWBA) for Northern Baptist College in the early 2000's, I developed a specialism in Conflict Transformation. I trained as a mediator with Bridge Builders Ministries and Mediation Northern Ireland, working for Smile Mediation, and as a Training Partner for Bridge Builders. Since 2005 I have delivered training in handling and transforming conflict for many organisations, including our Baptist Colleges. It has been a joy to serve the denomination in this way. It has also been a huge privilege to journey with individuals, congregations and ministers who have struggled with relationships, communication, or conflict over the last 25 years. Thank you for allowing me to be part of your story.

At Blackley (both Church and Centre), we have a focus on peace. The congregation is quite small, although blessed with a large and amazingly beautiful Grade II listed chapel - this combination brings inevitable challenges with which I know many of you will identify! At a time when sadly many churches are facing closure, we have explored how we can continue to be God's people in this place: growing God's realm of justice and peace, sharing the love of Jesus to our local and regional community, recognising the challenges of brokenness, division and intolerance that seem prevalent in our world today. Our focus at Blackley is 'Gathering for Peace' and this gives a shape to the life of our small but faithful and determined church community. As President, I would be excited to walk alongside other churches who are thinking creatively about how to be church whilst looking to the future.

I co-founded the Blackley Centre for Peace and Reconciliation, which focusses on growing and restoring good relationships through dialogue, training, and mediation between and within communities, faiths and families, creating a place of retreat and restoration in the beautiful West Yorkshire countryside. Our 'Paths of Peace' course recently trained a cohort of Baptist ministers (including a Regional Minister) in mediation skills, with another one starting this March. We also have a fabulous project training children in local schools (including Ashler!) to be Young Peace Ambassadors. One headteacher said this project had been transformational, creating a culture change in the way their school handles conflict.

I was humbled to receive a nomination for BU President, but heard in it a prompt from God, to consider what I could offer the denomination. I really love our Baptist way of being church. I value the breadth, diversity and tolerance of our dissenting tradition where, despite sometimes deeply held differences, we can see our siblings as the beloved of God, following Jesus faithfully and carefully, discerning together, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, God's will

and God's way. But I recognise that this is not easy, and I would consider it a privilege to bring my skills and experience to help our denomination heal and restore. My theme as President would be around our responsibility and our calling to be restorative, reconciling communities. This is borne of deep listening, creating heart-space as well as mind-space to understand each other. Reconciliation is not a precursor to the Gospel – it is the Gospel!

'So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.' [1 Cor 5]

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