

## Project Violet Podcast – Season 3, Episode 1

### Season 3 Intro

	Music
Jane	Hello, I'm Jane Day, Community Learning Tutor at Regent's Park College, Oxford.
Helen	And I'm Helen Cameron, Research Fellow at the Centre for Baptist Studies at Regent's Park College Oxford. Together we were the co-leaders of Project Violet.
Jane	Welcome to Season 3 of the Project Violet podcast. Project Violet was a research project investigating women's experiences in ministry whilst developing women ministers. It worked to understand better the theological, missional and structural obstacles women ministers face and identify ways forward.
Helen	The research phase of the Project ended in January 2025.  Currently stakeholders across Baptist life are implementing the commitments to action that they made in October 2024. Jane and I are now focusing on the academic dissemination of the Project.  In this third season we wanted to catch up with some of the work that has been going on since last October.
Jane	We hope that listening to these episodes will help you engage with some of the outcomes of the project.

#### Helen Cameron

Today, I'm delighted to welcome the Reverend, Dr Ruth Moriarty to the Project Violet podcast. Welcome Ruth. We're going to focus on the course that you've developed for Baptist churches on the church meeting, which is called Slow wisdom. But before we talk about that, it would be great to find out some more about you. Can you tell us about your current role?

#### Ruth Moriarty

Yeah, sure. So I'm the Minister of Christchurch New Southgate and Friern Barnet in North London. And that's a URC Baptist local ecumenical partnership.

#### Helen Cameron

And how did you come to be in Baptist ministry?

**Ruth Moriarty**

It's a long time ago. I've been in Baptist ministry 18 years now, but I started out life after university at Canterbury, and I worked for the YMCA, and I went to a spiritual retreat, and it was being led by a lovely lady called Joy Medeiros, and she was asking us to think about what we really wanted to do with our lives. And I prayed and felt an awkward nudge from the Lord again and again and again, and tried, then to explore that about preaching and leading in churches. And no one said, No. So here I am - 18 years now. My first church was at Woolwich, second in Pointon, which is in Chester, and now here back in North London, close to where I grew up in East London,

**Helen Cameron**

That's great. Thank you very much. So you've done this work on slow wisdom. Can you explain how, how you got into it? What was the process that took you into to working on this topic?

**Ruth Moriarty**

Yeah, so I studied for ministerial training full time, which was an incredible blessing at Regent's Park College. And I did a master's there the MTh in applied theology. And when I finished the thesis, I thought I might like to write some more but wasn't sure what I wanted to write until we had quite a significant church meeting at Woolwich talking about the building there and how we should use it. And we heard lots of different voices participating in that discussion, and a question began to form my mind, how do we do church meetings, really, as Baptists a little bit later on, back in 2012 I then started to do a piece of research with the University of Chester, which eventually was called, How do Baptists discern the mind of Christ at the church meeting. It was 10 years actually, of part time study, including two maternity leaves, which then produced a piece of research based on qualitative analysis. And it's all about the local church practice. What do Baptist churches do, normally to discern the mind of Christ. And it was a wonderful time being able to observe people, being able to then analyze what people then said to me in interviews, to code it, and then to produce some writing about discernment practice for Baptists. It was a glorious opportunity, really a lot of hard work, but a great opportunity to be able to meet Baptists from different contexts and be able to try and understand what it is we do when we discern.

**Helen Cameron**

Great thank you. And that led to you getting your doctorate, which you're to be congratulated for you, and as somebody who supervises doctorates I know what a huge amount of work goes into it, and it's wonderful that you were able to persist over that extended period and to bring your research to fruition. But when you finished your research, I guess then there's the question of, what next? What did you feel you wanted to do when you completed your research?

**Ruth Moriarty**

You know, Helen, my main aim was that it wouldn't get dusty on a shelf. So I decided to try and publish the work as best I could. So I self published it through Amazon. And then I also was very aware that there were lots of people who wanted training in discernment, and I had in mind to create a video resource, which is what I then produced five short videos on how slow wisdom might work in the local church.

**Helen Cameron**

That's great. And can you just talk us through some of the ideas that underpin this, so that we can get a flavor of the thinking that's gone into this?

**Ruth Moriarty**

Yeah. So slow wisdom, I would say, is distinctly Baptist. It's Biblical and it's spirit led. So when I say distinctively Baptist, I mean that I hope, as a Baptist minister and as a Baptist that discernment

really is at the top of our agenda, because it's one of our distinctives, and I think that's something that we should be celebrating really and enjoying. However, as a Baptist minister, I know full well that it is a very difficult experience in some churches, so there is work to be done in the church meeting, and the research really shows how slow wisdom can be used in local churches. Slow wisdom is a way of discernment. It takes time. It's why it's called Slow wisdom. It's based in prayer. It listens to and hears each member. It seeks to find consensus agreement, and importantly, is led by the prophetic contributions of church members. It's a biblical idea in the sense that when we discern together as Baptist, we believe we're gathering in Christ's presence Matthew 18, we're members of the Body of Christ. That's what that language of membership means. And we see that mostly expressed in the congregational membership. And that obviously echoes 1 Corinthians 12. And importantly, we, I think, are honoring the Baptist belief in the priesthood of all believers, where we think that God has gifted each of us to discern together from 1 Peter 2. And the other thing I really sensed was important in the work was a focus on the leading of the Holy Spirit. And I saw this most acutely, where members, who were very shy, suddenly felt like God was speaking to them. The spirit was enabling them to lead their church in discernment. And I think the church meeting is well uniquely placed, really, to be able to respond to the Holy Spirit in context, but then also to be able to lead that church on in immediate changes to mission or action. So that's what slow wisdom is about, really. It's not about doing nothing, because churches and just talking forever and ever. It's about making sure we discern well, using those six marks of wisdom and looking confidently, really, to the future, where God can lead us by His Spirit.

#### **Helen Cameron**

That's wonderful and so encouraging to hear that distinctive Baptist choice coming through. And I feel that each part of the Christian tradition has been given special gifts, and this is a distinctive gift that's been given to the Baptist tradition, and you're articulating in a way which is just so a biblically based, but also very down to earth, and that people can grasp it and do something about it. Yeah, you talked about the six marks of slow wisdom, and you mentioned them. Would you like to just go through them again so that people can just pick them out in their mind as they as they listen to what you're saying?

#### **Ruth Moriarty**

Yeah, sure. So you know, when I interview people, the biggest word that came up really was that it takes time to discern. You know, it's not a quick method to make a decision if you're going to ask a group of people to think about it and pray about it, but I'm trying to reclaim that as a benefit, so not slow, as in standing still and not doing anything moving, but that it allows space, really, for people to be able to contribute, and that that's a benefit to the process, because we will make a better decision if we just take it a little slower than just one person making the decision, and then also then move. On to thinking about listening and hearing each other, listening to every person's contribution, not on every matter, but on important missional or strategic agenda items, taking time to really hear what people think and particularly the emotions with which perhaps certain people bring. To have a discussion and enabling other members to hear and listen to each other's views. Prayer is something that I've always been passionate about, actually, ever since I was a teenager, and I think it's something that church meetings may have lost. It sounds so simple and fundamental, but often, you know, I would be observing a church meeting, they'd say, Oh, we've run out of time to pray at the end. And actually, one simple thing we can do to help us to discern, well, it's just to pray more and to lean into God's voice. In that way, consensus is an important theme in the work consensus. Agreement, for me, is about several different things. One about sort of testing the room. Sometimes you might see a minister sort of saying, you know, do you agree that we should go forward with this particular idea? And people will sort of murmur and put their hands up say, oh, yeah, that sounds like a good idea. And then there's also specific consensus where we're seeking an absolute agreement on a particular statement, and that might take much more

work, particularly small group work. The best churches that I observed use small groups to really gain agreement, and sometimes you know, as ministers, you'll know that it can take more than one bite of the cherry to get to a decision. And actually, if it takes time to do that, and you gain a real consensus, where even those you know, who perhaps always would say I don't agree, can say I'm not sure, but I'm happy to go with you, and I believe that you know God is leading us, even if I individually can't say yes, then I think we build churches that are more confident of God's leading and more able to be in the world and to be able to respond to God's purposes. You know, when we have divided churches, it's a terrible witness, isn't it? So a church that's together is very important pastorally and also for the gospel, and then also the sense of the prophetic leading was quite a strong category in the research and how it came up in interviews, particularly, and that's something that I think we need to do some more work on. Really, as Baptists, we're quite good at talking about the gospel and the kingdom, but we're not so good about talking about the move of the Spirit. And I think the spirit is very active in our churches and particularly amongst our members. And what I'm trying to do here is to honor the work of the Holy Spirit as he blesses and uses church members to help discern God's purposes for that congregation. And it's a privilege, isn't it, when someone speaks in a meeting and suddenly their common sense turns the discernment, and that's where I think the spirit speaks so powerfully in our model of communal discernment. And it means that we can be confident to proceed, confident to go forward in his in his ways.

### **Helen Cameron**

Thank you so much for that really rich and full description of what you're trying to do. Let's move on now and just talk about the training course that you've developed, which I know will be of real use to people and is available to everybody. How did you go about creating this training course?

### **Ruth Moriarty**

Well, after a pause, a short pause, after getting the printed work out, I thought, right now's the time. And I was being contacted by quite a lot of churches and colleges and all sorts of other people trying to arrange training for their churches on slow wisdom. And I realized that very quickly that there was no way I could do that and have a normal job as well. So I set about condensing five chapters into 5-10-minute videos, which, of course, was a slightly onerous task, but was useful actually, because it helps you to, you know, rethink your material, and particularly to try and think about it in a visual format. And so I did the sort of the work of condensing the material myself, but then, inspired by the Baptist Union diversity training videos, I borrowed their model, which I thought was fantastic, where they had a short video that introduced the theme and then sort of set a question, which then structured a training session. So it's on that model, where there's five, sort of food for thought type videos that are about 10 minutes long. And then I'm encouraging anyone who watches it, perhaps either as an individual, but most especially within a church group, maybe a leadership team or small group, or indeed, as a whole church, to then think about that topic and discuss it, you know, for 20 minutes or so, and then come back to the next video, and there's a Participant Guide, which will help people to do that. That's all on the Baptist Union website, [www.Baptist.Org.uk/slowwisdom](http://www.Baptist.Org.uk/slowwisdom). You can find all the videos there, and also the participant guides available there as well. It was filmed by Fuelcast, who did a fantastic job of making our church look even more glorious than it is. And I'll give a big shout out to the generous funding of London Baptist Association and Southern Counties Baptist Association, who funded the cost of the video production. And I'm also really grateful for the church members at Christ Church who were happy to take part in the filming. Sorry, and that's Linda, Roger, Diana, Patricia, Kurt and Martin. Martin's a local minister who helped me out when I was one man down, and their role really, is to bring voice to the participants who shaped the research. I tried always to lead with the real voices of real Baptists to generate this research. And so that is echoed in the videos. My sister also gave me a hand. She's a dab artist, and she provided the logos. That's Alison Jane calligraphy, and it came

together all together just in February when it was launched at Regents Park College for the Centre for Baptist studies, with a with a great do Helen, that you were part of.

**Helen Cameron**

It was a wonderful evening, and I agree with what you said about the videos and the fact that your church members took part just it just brings them to life, doesn't it, in a way in which a single-headed speaker wouldn't do so, they're a great watch, certainly from my perspective. Have you had any feedback yet on people who've used the material, or is it too early for that?

**Ruth Moriarty**

Yes. So they've certainly been watched a lot on YouTube, and either on the Baptist Union page or on the Centre for Baptist Studies page, which is great. And then I know of a couple of churches that have used them already, either at an all-church event, where they've used them as a training event, and then also another church who's used them trying to unlock a church meeting, really, where they are stuck in discernment. So that's been helpful. And they've been signposted to lots of different places. And I also happen to know that they are being used in New Zealand to help train Baptist ministers in discernment there, which is, wonderful.

**Helen Cameron**

That's wonderful to hear that there's already been some use of them, and that you're getting some positive feedback. And I really hope that that continues. We're talking as part of the Project Violet podcast series. Now I was wondering whether, in your mind, you could make any connection between the work that you've done and the work of Project Violet.

**Ruth Moriarty**

Yeah, you know, Project Violet came into being really just as I was starting to do my coding analysis of my interview scripts, so as I was, you know, trying to work out how I could name participants, and particularly participant churches, we were celebrating the centenary of Baptist women into ordination. And so I picked four important Baptist women in our in our heritage and named the sample churches after them. So that was Margaret Jarman, Edith Gates, Violet Hedger and Kate Coleman. And in a sort of parallel time, I was also part of the first MagnifyYou scheme, which was a group of women ministers who were gathered from various regions in the UK, and that was aimed at encouraging us female ministers to take on different roles within the union, perhaps to take a greater lead in regional work or in other areas of the Baptist life. And I would say that Project Violet helped to foster a desire in me to develop my thesis, to be as accessible as possible, and to be confident of the material that I had been slowly gathering and working on, and to make sure that that my voice was heard, I guess, in that research area. And then also, of course, Project Violet hosted this incredible international academic research conference, the symposium earlier this year. And Project Violet supported lots of Baptist women, really, in all sorts of contexts, which then I was able to share slow wisdom in that environment, which meant that the work was then heard about in America, Canada, Africa and New Zealand and Australia, and that facilitation of that conference meant that there was excellent networking opportunities for myself, and also a really good time to share best practice amongst Baptist female academics. And we're a rare breed, so that was quite a privilege. And then, most recently, I've also been working with Claire Nicholls, who I think you've got on the podcast at some point this time, and I've helped to develop a resource for London Baptist, but I'm sure anyone can use it about how the church meeting can function during settlement. Really trying to encourage women in their experience of calling and settlements and the church meeting. And I did a small piece of research off the back of that, to try and tell the story, really, of what it's like to be a woman going through settlement, and particularly going through that church meeting vote. There're particular influences on those church meetings, and the research on

slow wisdom helped to unpack some of those themes, which you can read about on the London Baptist website.

**Helen Cameron**

Great. Thank you very much. That's really, really encouraging, as one of the co-leaders of Project Violet, to hear about those connections that you've made. I guess we're coming to the end of our conversation now. And I was just thought this would be a good moment for you to reiterate the ways in which people can access the slow wisdom course, so that people have got that firmly in their minds and will be encouraged to go straight to it and explore what's there.

**Ruth Moriarty**

Well, the hot tip, really, Helen, is to go to [www.baptist.org.uk/slowwisdom](http://www.baptist.org.uk/slowwisdom) that will take you to the church meeting page, which has got an introduction to the work, and then also the information about all of the videos. You can download them in a low-resolution format or use them directly from YouTube. You can choose a Participant Guide and a bibliography there for people who want to do more research in the area. The book is available either from the Baptist online shop, which is a great resource. Please do check it out, or you can buy it on Amazon, and it's £10 in both. And if you also want an e book, which I did through Amazon, that's five pounds, and you can read the work in those ways too. What I'd encourage people really to do is to set aside a period of time in your church context, with your leadership team, maybe with the whole church, and allow those free resources to structure a reflection time, really, on discernment. It's all there, and I, you know, my greatest desire is that it gets used and can bless people. And you know, this is an opening conversation, really, on discernment. There's not much written about discernment for Baptists, and so I'm very happy to hear of how people have used it, how they've found it helpful, or what they could find that might be different in their practice. And I hope that it's a start of a renewal, really, of the church meeting practice, and a greater confidence in who we are as Baptists. You know, Baptist often spends quite a long time worrying about who we are. Well, one way we really are Baptist is when we discern the mind of Christ together. And I'm hoping that this resource will grant us confidence and hope in the God who calls us to discern in this way together.

**Helen Cameron**

Thank you so much, Ruth, for all that you've shared, and thank you for taking part in this podcast.

**Season 3 Outro**

<b>Helen</b>	Thank you for listening to this episode of the Project Violet podcast.
<b>Jane</b>	We invite you to go to the website if you want to learn more about the Project. <a href="http://www.projectviolet.org.uk">www.projectviolet.org.uk</a>
	Music