

BAPTISTS

Summer 2022

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TOGETHER



Conversation and Connection



Listening Exploring Understanding

News / Interviews / Prayer / Comment / Events
The magazine for the Baptist Union of Great Britain

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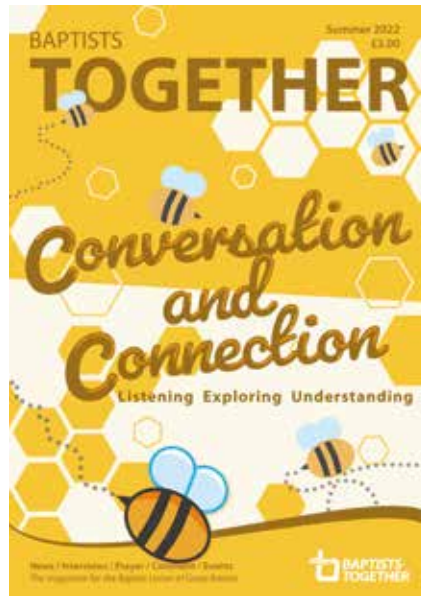
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**Alex Appiah, Trinity
Baptist Church**

CONVERSATION AND CONNECTION

From their earliest days, Baptists have long sought to support each other. *'The three notes of walking in fellowship, watching in mutual care and openness to ever-new possibilities have rung down the years in Baptist churches'*, wrote theologian Paul Fiddes in a 2016 *Baptists Together* article exploring covenant. He explained that 'walking together and watching over each other' was not just a matter for individual believers in a local congregation, but for congregations too, who walked together in 'association' with each other and beyond. This is in response to Jesus Christ who, 'as the maker of the New Covenant, is gathering us together and who stands in the midst of his people as the risen Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit'.

One of the ways we seek Christ together is through the Baptist Assembly. This year's event, both the first in-person gathering since 2019 and the first ever hybrid event, has the theme of conversation and connection:



a place to reconnect, where we can offer encouragement, support and inspiration. This edition of *Baptists Together* magazine has been birthed out of the creative conversations behind Assembly, and consequently explores some of the aspects involved in healthy conversation and connection – discerning the mind of Christ, listening well, exploring together, understanding the theological grounds for unity when we

are different, and what mutual support looks like in a number of local settings. The majority of the articles also end with conversation starters, which we have added to help you (or even your small group) reflect on the content in your own context. The theme dovetails neatly with the challenge of incoming President Hayley Young to build a bigger table, a challenge that includes welcoming those who have been excluded and cheering each other on.

With a pandemic followed by a horrifying war in Europe, steep rises in the cost of living and climate worries, we are living in an increasingly turbulent world, and our communities surely need Jesus' grace and transforming power. What does it mean to demonstrate and share Jesus at this time? As Lynn Green writes, 'He is our rock, our comfort and our inspiration, and he is always with us'. He stands in our midst, and through him, we can support and inspire each other – as we have long sought to do.

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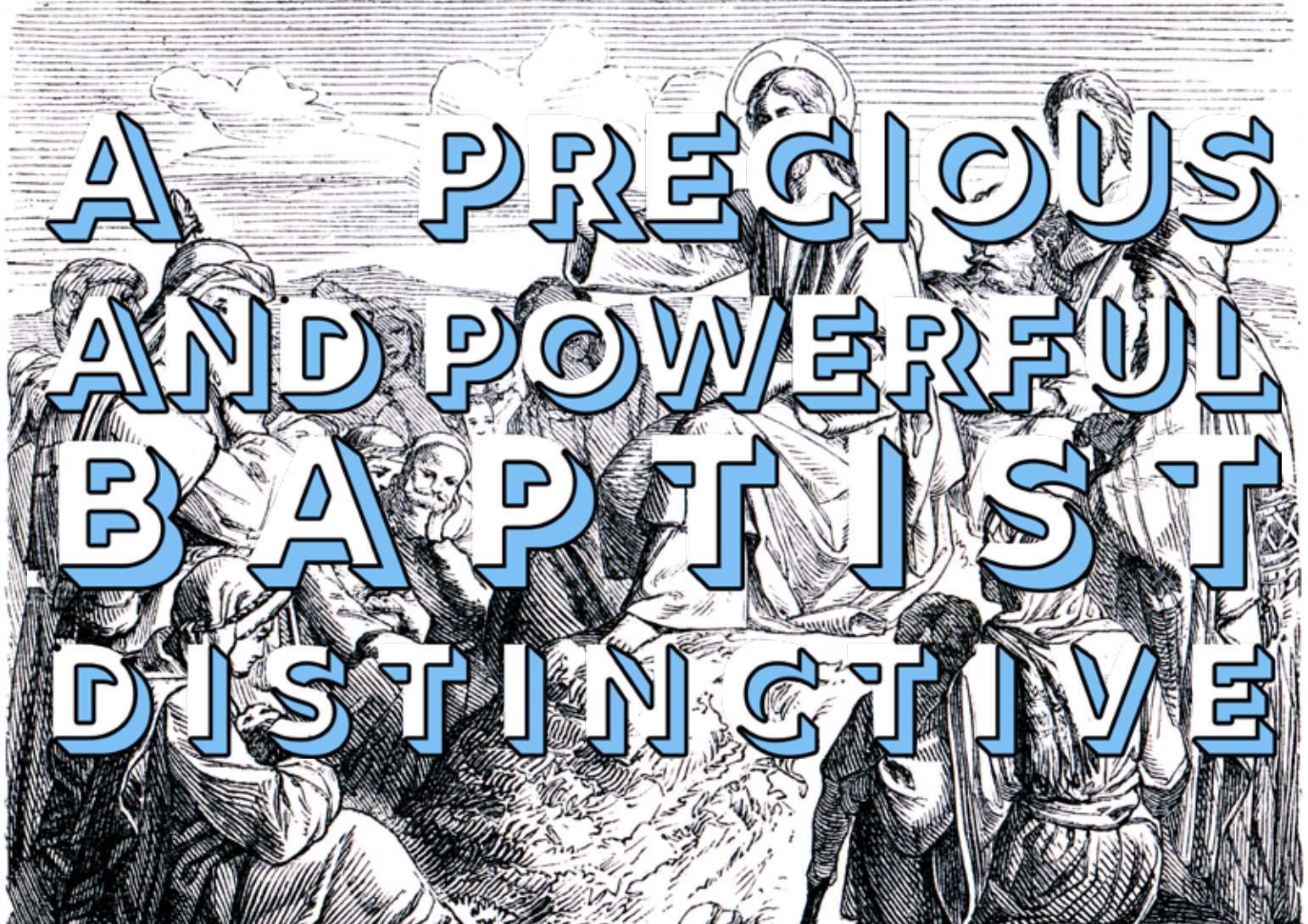


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Discerning the mind of Christ together is a gift Baptists share. Though not always easy, let's continue to connect, listen and seek God's will together in these challenging times.
 By Lynn Green

There are some things you just begin to take for granted. I realised this as a new church member was enthusiastically reflecting on their first experience of a Church Meeting. They had come from a different church tradition which doesn't discern the mind of Christ together in this way, and saw it as a fantastic opportunity to be involved in shaping the mission and ministry of the church.

As I share this, I can hear others saying they haven't had such good experiences of Baptists discerning together; times when church meetings seemed more about conflict than prayerful discernment. I guess this is sadly a reflection of our humanity and sin, and the Church Meeting is not immune from that. However, hearing just how wowed this new member was about participating made me realise afresh just how precious and powerful this Baptist distinctive is.

LISTENING TO GOD TOGETHER AS BAPTISTS

The local church is not the only place we gather to discern together as Baptists, and over the years I have had many opportunities to participate in listening to God together in other settings. I have served on appointments groups where

the outcome seemed far from clear at the outset and yet, as we listened and prayed together, a beautiful consensus emerged that surprised us with a creativity and courage we had hardly dared dream of.

WE NEED COURAGE - THE COURAGE TO GO WITH GOD, TO STEP OUT OF THE BOAT, TO WALK ON THE WATER, TO SHARE WHAT LITTLE WE HAVE

I had the privilege of being part of Council when we offered our Apology for the Transatlantic Slave Trade in 2007. We gathered at the beginning of Council bringing with us our many

questions, concerns and different perspectives. Humanly speaking it seemed like we were a million miles away from ever reaching any sort of consensus. But we had come together as Council with our eyes fixed on Jesus and ready to listen for his voice through each other. The time we spent together, the depth of sharing, the quality of listening, the genuine wrestling in prayer, turned out to be the most profound experience of Baptists discerning together I have ever experienced. There was a quiet yet incredible experience of the Spirit being at work among us, helping us to see more clearly as God sees.

THE BRILLIANT THING IS, THOUGH, THAT AS WE FOLLOW JESUS, HE IS ALWAYS WITH US. HE IS OUR ROCK, OUR COMFORT AND OUR INSPIRATION

LONGING FOR MORE

I count it a genuine honour that, as a local church minister then, I was able to be part of something of such Kingdom significance. And when you not only know the 'theory' but have experienced the reality in such profound ways, you simply long for more! I long for more because my heart's desire is to be so attuned to the Lord and so in step with the Holy Spirit that when we come together to discern who God is and what he is saying and doing we perceive these things and align ourselves with them. For me this is a key strength for us as Baptists and I believe we should not allow cynicism

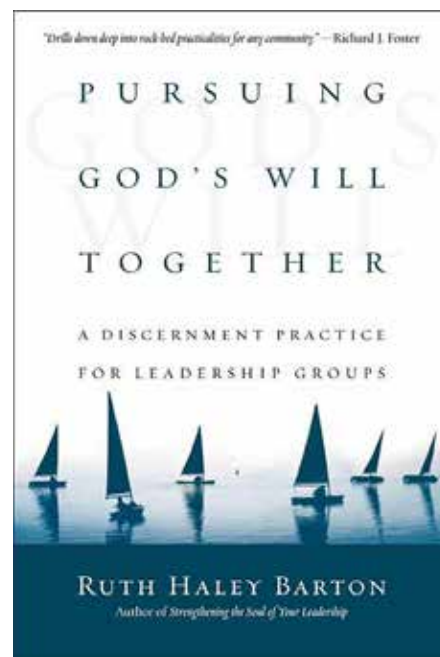
to creep in and deflect us from nurturing this beautiful aspect of our lives together. Yes, it takes excellent servant leadership to enable shared discernment but the investment is worth it. Because when we come together, encounter the Lord and discern his leading, then there is no stopping us! Responsive, flexible and fruitful discipleship and mission can be released through our corporate discernment and this is a wonderful thing. I'm excited to see what emerges from this year's Baptist Assembly, where there will be many creative connecting and conversation spaces for us to listen, learn from each other and seek God's will together.

As I look forward, I can see there are many opportunities and challenges that lie before us as a movement. In the midst of the tremendous seismic shifts we are experiencing, there is the huge potential that surrounds us to share Jesus in our contemporary culture and communities - the impact of technology, globalisation and climate change, and the offering of prophetic voices and action into the public sphere, to name but a few. It can feel a lot like we are needing to navigate uncharted territory and that our old maps can't serve us as well as they used to in the past. But it seems to me there is nothing more important at this time than to be discerning God's call to us together. In this way we will be Kingdom Cartographers, creating new maps as we explore and discover God in this unfamiliar territory.

WE NEED TO BE CHRIST-CENTRED AND OPEN TO SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION AS INDIVIDUALS

THREE CORE ASPECTS OF DISCERNING TOGETHER

A resource I have found particularly helpful in developing discernment practices is, *'Pursuing God's Will Together – A Discernment Practice for Leadership Groups'* by Ruth Hayley-Barton.



As I have reflected on this book and think about our journey ahead, it seems important to me that we pay attention to the core aspects of discerning together.

Firstly, ironically, in order to discern well with each other, **we need to be Christ-centred and open to spiritual transformation as individuals.** The discernment of the group is greatly enhanced through the participation of discerning

group members. Attending to our own discipleship - through the spiritual disciplines of silence and solitude, engaging with Scripture, prayer and self-awareness - is key. Then our openness to the Lord will flow through into our shared life and be demonstrated through the fruit of the Holy Spirit and a genuine, open-handed desire for God's Kingdom to come above anything else.

In a world dominated by efficiency and hurry, **it is also good to remember that often discernment takes time.** Much of the time involved is invested in relationships and in careful listening to the Lord and to each other. But it also takes time to perceive what God is doing. In the same way that the disciples struggled to understand Jesus' approach and purposes at times, we too need to wait and be open to what God is really doing. I am conscious, too, that there are times when I need time and space to loosen my attachment to things being a certain way and be able to step into imagining new possibilities with God.

I think my final reflection about discerning together would be that **we need courage.** The courage to go with God, to step out of the boat, to walk on the water, to share what little we have. This is because I believe that a commitment to discerning together is a commitment to adventure! If we are genuinely seeking what God is doing and getting on board with that, we are heading out of our comfort zone. The brilliant thing is, though, that as we follow Jesus, he is always with us. He is our rock, our comfort and our inspiration.

Baptists discerning together – it's not always easy, but it's beautiful and it's worth it. It's what we do, it's part of the best of being Baptist.

RESPONSIVE, FLEXIBLE
AND FRUITFUL
DISCIPLESHIP AND
MISSION CAN BE
RELEASED THROUGH
OUR CORPORATE
DISCERNMENT

CONVERSATION

What conditions make for wise discernment?

In your context, how do you ensure that all voices are heard and listened to?

STARTERS



Lynn Green is the General Secretary of the Baptist Union



Baptist Union General Secretary Jonathan Edwards presents the statement of apology to representatives of the Jamaica Baptist Union – Spring 2008



I AM BECAUSE YOU ARE, AND WE ARE

The African philosophy
Ubuntu demonstrates the
interconnectedness of our
humanity. It can teach us,
writes Charmaine Mhlanga

*'Umuntu ngumuntu
ngabantu'*
Zulu/Ndebele

*'Munhu munhu nekuda
kwevanhu'*
Shona

*'A person is a person through
other persons'*
English

Embedded in our Baptists Together vision is a series of five culture values. The first states that we 'Seek to be a movement of Spirit-led communities: As those who have encountered the living Christ, to intentionally seek his will and purpose for our local churches and **every expression of our shared life**' (Galatians 5:22-25).

In the context of this edition of Baptists Together magazine, it is important to linger on this latter phrase.

As someone born in Zimbabwe who is now ministering to a congregation in Luton, I believe Ubuntu can give us a fresh perspective on our shared life together.

WHAT IS UBUNTU?

The late Archbishop Desmond Tutu described **Ubuntu** in its simplest form as **'the essence of being human'**. He continued: "It says a solitary human being is a contradiction in terms.

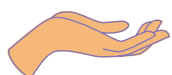
I can't be a human being on my lonesome[...] Ubuntu says, my humanity is bound up in yours; **I am, only because you are**; a person is a person through other persons."

In this way Ubuntu speaks of the ethics of **interdependence**: everything you do impacts and affects me, and everything I do impacts and affects you. Ubuntu, therefore, demonstrates the interconnectedness of our humanity.

Philosophically, Ubuntu (Zulu/Ndebele) /Hunhu (Shona) carries with it a plethora of aspects. These include a spirit of togetherness, of oneness, of solidarity, of community - an intentionality of seeking the good for others. Ubuntu/Hunhu describes our humanity as **'the expression of our shared life'**. We are sharing hopes, dreams and aspirations from one generation to the next; we are sharing the produce of the land and the bounty of the rivers—only acquiring what is needed and not so excessive as to damage or destroy the sources of the blessing; we are sharing in our responsibility to nurture and raise children with good morals and traditional virtues of compassion and kindness.



UBUNTU CARRIES WITH IT A PLETHORA OF ASPECTS INCLUDING A SPIRIT OF TOGETHERNESS, A SPIRIT OF ONENESS, A SPIRIT OF SOLIDARITY, A SPIRIT OF COMMUNITY - AN INTENTIONALITY OF SEEKING THE GOOD FOR OTHERS.



The African proverb 'It takes a village to raise a child' speaks into Ubuntu: a community responsible for the safety and wellbeing of a child, engaging in mutual support to meet the physical needs of food and shelter, and the emotional needs of a sense of belonging and being part of the community.

Such is the focus on our relationships and commitment to others, the Ugandan theologian Dennis Kilama, senior pastor of Lugogo Baptist Church in Kampala, has written: 'Ubuntu is a truth that God embedded in African culture that is affirmed in the gospel!'¹

MADE FROM THE EARTH – AND WELCOMING THE STRANGER / MY GRANDMOTHER'S GENEROSITY

A person with Ubuntu/Hunhu recognises that we are all created from the earth (dust of the ground Genesis 2:7). In Shona we speak of 'mwana wevhu'- translated 'son/daughter/child of the soil'. This understanding of Ubuntu/Hunhu is evidenced in the warm welcome of a stranger.

During school holidays, we were packed into a commercial bus, full of different people and families, and sent to the grandparents in the village so we could help with the seasonal agricultural tasks that awaited us. People sat next to one another in the bus would offer each other food and snacks prepared for the journey. What was also always evident was my grandmother's generosity and sincere welcome. If a person was lost and needed

directions, my grandmother would first offer them a drink of cold water drawn from our well and a stool to sit on under the peach tree, which provided shade under the hot Zimbabwe sun. The cup would be extended with both hands, symbolising the dignity held for the person, a sign of welcome and respect.

If we had sat down to eat, the stranger was offered a place at the table, which was everyone sitting and eating together from the same shared plates. My grandmother's welcome of the stranger extended to meal preparation—you always prepared food in anticipation of a hungry soul who might turn up.



UBUNTU SPEAKS OF THE ETHICS OF INTERDEPENDENCE: EVERYTHING YOU DO IMPACTS AND AFFECTS ME AND EVERYTHING I DO IMPACTS AND AFFECTS YOU.



WE NEED EACH OTHER – MOVING FROM I TO WE

Ubuntu/Hunhu therefore speaks to the move from 'I' to 'we' and, as such, has much to say to our times. The world has increasingly become more individualistic, with people focusing more on themselves and their needs than others. Unfortunately, some churches are not immune to this individualistic self-preservation agenda.

¹ africa.thegospelcoalition.org/article/redeeming-ubuntu

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By this move to 'we', Ubuntu can help us to start restoring what has been lost from our humanity. There is an urgent need for the repairing of our broken relationship with God who calls us into the community of Christ; the repairing of our broken relationship with one another, when we mistreat each other; and the repairing of our broken relationship with creation, when we misuse and abuse what we received from God.

The cost of change will be painful, as we break ground to genuinely embody what we say is our Baptists Together vision. How can we live out Philippians 2:2-4? *'then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.'*

Photo of Charmaine Mhlanga and Tim Judson filming for the Equality and Diversity training pack. Courtesy of The FuelCast

CONVERSATION

How are we impacting or affecting the lives of our families, churches, communities, the world?

Are we more focused on we – or I?

Do we embrace those who don't look like, don't talk like, or share the same culture as us?

STARTERS



Charmaine Mhlanga is a Minister in Training at Sundon Park Baptist Church, Luton, Bedfordshire. She is currently studying for a Masters in Christian Thought and Practice at Spurgeon's College



NEW TRAINING RESOURCE FOR BAPTIST MINISTERS

'I am because you are' – a rough translation of the word ubuntu – is also the title of our forthcoming training pack on equality and diversity. Charmaine is one of two presenters of six short videos, each containing an explanation, an interview or filmed conversation, and some questions for reflection.

The videos will be available for ministers to watch and discuss together from June.

The resource recognises that God has created us each in his image, yet in such great diversity. We are inter-connected by sharing our God-given humanity. In the videos, a number of Baptist leaders reflect on this

inter-connectedness and how they have learnt to move towards and not away from others.

'I am because you are' is only an introduction to equality and diversity. Other resources that look in more detail at particular areas of diversity will follow.

Tim Fergusson - Ministerial Development Adviser



Bee Inspired

A bee and a hive are part of this year's Baptist Assembly imagery as a helpful metaphor of our connectedness as Baptists Together.

***Baptists Together* magazine spoke to beekeeper Sarah Mist to find out more about these remarkable insects**

Sarah set up the Urban Bee-lievers social enterprise in Milton Keynes four years ago, as part of the Milton Keynes Christian Foundation. She has been a beekeeper for more than a decade, becoming besotted after taking a beekeeping class. "By week two I was completely sold," she remembers. She has since taken more courses and, having looked after thousands of honey bees through Urban Bee-lievers, her admiration has only grown. Indeed, her conversation is peppered with enthusiastic observations to underline just how much.

"The way the colony communicates with the whole entity is just insane. How do they know when to decide to swarm? How do they know when to do different jobs in the hive? Who decides?"

"It isn't the queen. Everyone thinks that, but it's a collective brain. It's just extraordinary how it all happens. In some hives during the summer, there are more than 50,000 bees."

A social network

Sarah explains that a honey bee colony typically consists of three kinds of adult bees: workers (females), drones (males) and a queen. Each member has a definite task to perform to ensure the colony's survival. The several thousand worker bees cooperate in wax comb building, food collection, and brood rearing. A honeycomb is a mass of hexagonal cells built by the workers to contain their developing larvae and stores of honey and pollen. "It's not only one of the strongest shapes you can have", says Sarah, "it's slightly tilted so the honey doesn't run out. The wax pellets are made from glands on the bees' tummies."

The queen has two key roles. She lays eggs (more than 1500 a day during peak production; up to one million in her lifetime if she lives for five years). She also produces chemicals – pheromones – which serve as a social glue, unifying and helping to give individual identity to a bee colony. These chemicals, as well as communicative 'dances', are responsible for controlling the activities necessary for colony survival.

At the right time of the year the drones will fly out of the colony and join other male bees, meeting in what's known as a drone congregation area. Here they will meet and mate with the new queens.

The new queens are here because of a decision by the colony. If the colony is overcrowded, or the queen is getting older and her pheromone is not reaching all the bees, they want a new, younger queen to survive. The workers will feed a

number of eggs solely with the protein-rich royal jelly (a female, fertilised egg becomes a queen on the basis of what she's fed). The original queen will leave and take half the worker bees with her (this is a swarm). "The remaining colony knows 'all is well' because they have a store of developing queens," says Sarah. "They hope one of those will be strong enough to get mated well and come back and continue the colony."

Although this is a mere snapshot of their life, you can begin to get a sense of how surviving and thriving take the combined efforts of the entire colony, and the behaviours necessary for this to happen.

"The more you know about bees," Sarah says, "the more you realise how incredible they are."

Why bees are vital

The crucial role colonies have on the wider environment is another aspect of the honey bee story. A significant proportion of our food is provided by bees (including solitary bumble bees) one way or another. Bees pollinate 70 types of crop - either the many vegetables and fruits we eat directly (apples, tomatoes) or the food for the animals that we then consume. An estimated one third of food we consume in the UK is pollination dependent. Commercial honeybees are considered livestock by the US Department of Agriculture because of the creatures' vital role in food production. Bees also make wax and honey - an average colony produces 14kg of honey. All this shows why the status of bees is monitored so closely, and threats to their health regularly highlighted.

'Make no mistake - bees are essential', stated the World Wildlife Fund-sponsored 2019 report 'Bees under threat from habitat loss, climate change and pesticides.' (bit.ly/beesiege)

Bees and the Bible

The Revd Lorenzo L Langstroth put it another way. Langstroth's discovery of bee-space and invention of the movable frame hive in Philadelphia would revolutionise the beekeeping industry and earn him the title, 'Father of American Beekeeping'.

In his 1853 book *The Hive and the Honey Bee*, he wrote:

'The Creator may be seen in all the works of his hands; but in few more directly than in the wise economy of the Honey-Bee.'

Beekeeper Sarah Mist of Urban Beelievers



Geoponika, a 10th-century Byzantine work on farming, says this:

'The bee is the wisest and cleverest of all animals and the closest to man in intelligence; its work is truly divine and of the greatest use to mankind.'

There are frequent references to bees, and particularly honey, in the Bible. Honey features more than 60 times, often used in the context of blessing, abundance and purity.

And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey

Exodus 3:8

They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.

Psalms 19:10

How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

Psalms 119:103

Gracious words are a honeycomb, ... sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

Proverbs 16:24

A swarm of bees are often viewed as a prophetic occurrence. In the story of Samson, they symbolise a victorious triumph over evil:

When he returned later to take her, he turned aside to look at the carcass of the lion; and behold, a swarm of bees and honey were in the body of the lion.

Judges 14:8



Urban Bee-lievers

The social enterprise Urban Bee-lievers looks after thousands of honey bees across the city in company gardens, roof tops and an urban farm. It helps create homes for bumble bees and solitary bees as well as plant flowers and trees that provide food for bees. It also runs workshops on all things honey and bee related, and produces useful and beautiful products using wax and honey. "Its vision is to help make Milton Keynes a bee friendly city", says Sarah.

Urban Bee-lievers is part of Milton Keynes Christian Foundation - an umbrella, ecumenical charity for eight social enterprises. The foundation itself was founded more than 30 years ago when Christians from different traditions sought to find new and creative ways of working with each other and the local community. Stephen Norrish, a Baptist who trained at Regent's Park College, is the Director of MK Christian Foundation. Each enterprise is staffed by young people not in education, training or employment who gain essential work experience and qualifications. They work for the enterprise for three days a week, studying maths and English. Those in charge work closely with teachers and social workers. The young people generally stay between six and 18 months, before hopefully progressing to further education, an apprenticeship or employment.

The vast majority benefit from the experience. "We often see a massive change," says Sarah. "It's hard work, but to see the young people develop social and practical skills, and grow in confidence is so worthwhile.

"Some people need to be in a different environment to school, and that's what we provide."

The Milton Keynes Christian Foundation website is clear the intention 'is not to proselytise', but 'to work in ways that express our belief in a God who is concerned for all aspects of life and particularly for hard-pressed groups in our communities.'

Sarah says the Milton Keynes Christian Foundation model is replicable, so anyone who wants to find out more is encouraged to get in touch.

"I think social enterprises like this are going to be needed more and more as young people 'fall through cracks' in our society."



MK Christian Foundation
Growing people and community through social enterprise

Visit mkchristianfoundation.co.uk/urban-beelievers to find out more or buy some of Urban Bee-lievers products like lip balms and beeswax wraps.

Follow on Instagram
[@urbanbeelievers](https://www.instagram.com/urbanbeelievers)

Bee supportive – tips on helping your honey bees

- One of the best ways of supporting bee populations is to grow bee friendly flowers and plants. “We don’t need more hives, but more flowers to provide food for the bees we already have,” says Sarah.
- Keep weeds such as dandelion and forget-me-nots as they are a great source of nectar and pollen
- Buy honey from local beekeepers (there are lots of health benefits – and it tastes delicious!)



CONVERSATION

What part do I play in the body of believers?

What ‘honey’ does my church community produce?

STARTERS



Sarah Mist has been working in the charity sector for over 20 years and fell in love with honey bees 12 years ago. With her husband Arthur she enjoys growing vegetables on their allotment and then cooking up a feast for friends and family using the allotment harvest. She is actively involved with the local C of E church community

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ARE WE LISTENING?

We need God's help to relearn the art of listening, writes Pat Took, for the sake of ourselves and of each other, for the sake of the church and of the Kingdom

"Hello", I say, looking down at the bundle in my arms. The baby peers up with squiffy eyes, straining to discern where the sound is coming from and what it might mean. In this overwhelming need to communicate we reflect the image of the God who is Word, the God who speaks life.

Three years later the little girl wakes up chattering and goes to bed without pausing for breath. Listening has become talking in the drive to uncover meaning. And from that early reversal we seem set to find speaking both more congenial and considerably easier than listening. This is not surprising, since what I have to say is already within my head,

within my mind, awaiting the opportunity for articulation, whilst what you have to say requires a pause in my thoughts and speech, a journey outwards on my part to discover your meaning. Our instinctive desire to communicate has become problematic. We have become curved in on ourselves and struggle to step generously over our threshold to give proper attention to someone else. We need God's help to relearn the art of listening, but we must decide to do this, we must make the effort to do this, for the sake of ourselves and of each other, for the sake of the church and of the Kingdom.

We must listen for our own sake. No-one's life is long enough to acquire, simply by our own discovery, the knowledge and experience we need - we depend on the wisdom of those who have gone before. Our wellbeing, perhaps our survival, depends on our paying attention to accumulated and inherited knowledge. This requires a degree of humility in those

who grow up so much more technically skilled than their elders. They have to discern that age brings a different kind of wisdom – a wisdom worth listening to. It also carries a responsibility to courtesy and love in those who are older, to listen to and learn the shape and pattern of life as it is experienced by this generation, which is so different from that which shaped us, and to discover new knowledge and new wisdom. What if that new wisdom challenges, undermines ideas we have held sacred, principles we hold dear? Perhaps at that point the shutters come down. But thoughtful discussion with those who think differently enables our own perspective to be clarified, or changed. To be genuinely open to the new and the different we need not just humility but also courage, generosity and confidence. The conversation among us on issues of gender has demonstrated the difficulty and the fruitfulness of this. In the voyage into understanding I need to listen to all the voices, the dissonant

ones, the strange ones, the harmonious ones, allowing myself to glean truth wherever it is to be found, to be enriched, to have my heart expanded and my mind broadened by them all.

And then there is you. To listen seriously to you is a proper honouring of the debt I owe to love and to humanity. It requires that I should set myself aside, my opinions, my experiences, and pay attention to what you have to say, to who you are. When this self-forgetting does not take place, conversation becomes a fraud, communication self-enclosed, impervious, fruitless as two people talk past each other in a kind of concurrent monologue – two voices speaking and no-one listening.

And just as we are called to speak the truth in love, so listening for the truth also requires love, to look for the kernel of what the other is attempting to convey – to look for the best within that. Simply as a human being I am obliged to pay attention to you because you need to be heard. And I too, needing to be heard, have a right to expect you to listen, as a matter of humanity and love. And very occasionally, with a proper reticence and care, we may be called to speak for God into the situation of someone else's life. Within the Christian community we have the gift of intentional and holy listening: confession. Many of us have known what it is to hear someone pour out the grief and distress, the regrets and hopes of their life, and listening with the greatest care to gather up those broken fragments before God in prayer. And we have seen that person go on their way liberated and restored simply for having been heard – heard by God – heard by us. The therapeutic power of being heard is widely

appreciated: the awareness of the presence of God brings hope and power to such conversations.

Above all, for the sake of the Kingdom, we need to listen for the voice of God. And those most careful in listening to each other will have the greatest facility for hearing God. That God speaks, and that his speech is personal, is the testimony of all the faithful. Most often we hear him in the words, the voice, perhaps the action of another person. Frequently it is through those who are closest, family, colleagues and friends. We must pay attention even to the most familiar because it may be God who is speaking in this familiar tone. The one who speaks in Scripture and preaching and worship, through mentors and spiritual friendships and all the wealth of the Christian tradition speaks also through the nine-to-five mundane experiences of our daily lives. But are we listening?

The difficulty we have in listening is a particular problem for Baptists who are governed by community discernment. We aim to discern together the mind of Christ. Pointless for those who come to the meeting already knowing Christ's mind, fixed already in their own opinion. Difficult when our agendas of self-aggrandisement and success run counter to the teachings of Christ, when fundamentally we do not want to know his will. Only by listening to each other within the company of pilgrims will we learn what tones are recognisably his – those that call us forward out of ourselves into demonstrations of love, into that which is generous, grace-full, hopeful. Every church meeting opens up the possibility of further conversion to the ways and priorities of Christ, provided we are listening – listening to

the least significant, the least articulate, the least sane, in the knowledge that they too might be speaking with the voice of Christ.

*In the stillness of the night,
I listen.
Only footsteps and shouts of the
guards,...
Brother, we seek and call for
thee!
Brother, do you hear me?*

Voices in the Night Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1945

? CONVERSATION

How would you describe yourself as a listener?

What has helped, or will help, you become a better listener?

STARTERS



Pat Took is a former Team Leader of the London Baptist Association, and was Baptist Union President 2011-12



Missional Posture

What does it mean to engage in missional listening? Ben Lucas shares his story

Missional listening – the briefest of introductions

Missional listening was a new term to us when our family of six were called on a pioneering adventure in rural Dorset. Back then I described it as a dual listening – one ear to God – one ear to community – and then the finding of courage to join in all God is doing. As a brief introduction – only possible with this word count – that’s still a pretty good description as it goes! I cannot even begin to contemplate how

I could share the beautiful and amazing discoveries the last five years have uncovered as we have simply been present and listened. What I can explain here is the major changes it has made to our missional posture as we lived and listened to the communities around us and to the unchanging God who is still in the mission of reconciling all things to him.

Posture towards God

As we transitioned from more traditional pastors to our new roles – we struggled. (Well in truth, I did – the others flourished!) I asked all the wrong questions, informed by scripts embedded by society, such as: How can we make our roles financially secure? Will Christians in the area join in what we are doing? Will we be successful?

The wrong questions filled with agenda.

As we listened outside the Christian bubble we had become used to, we realised that we did not have enough answers. Even though neither my fitness nor eyesight are what they were, I am still pretty decent at cricket and was quickly promoted to the first team, where I played with lads 20 years younger. I was shocked by conversations – mainly those about women. One young lad was off on a two-and-a-half-hour trip to sleep with someone – because he had ‘slept with everyone closer on Tinder’. My traditional approaches to evangelism, discipleship and worship were unlikely to translate to the people we were now called to do life with. We had all the wrong questions and not enough answers. I went to

God with a significantly different posture. Instead of asking him to bless all our endeavours and gifting, we went with the vulnerability and empty nets of the fishermen towards the end of John's gospel. We heard that we were in the right place, but were now to do this thing called mission differently. It meant laying our plans aside to truly listen to God and join in with all that he was already doing. That posture led to a new set of questions and many incredible answers as we lived life in the community.

Posture towards community

Luke 10 has always been a chapter that has spoken deeply to us and many. In our new roles it spoke to us in deeper and new ways. We noticed the "take little with you". We recognised it wasn't God trying to keep us poor but more about needing our neighbour rather than seeing them as a missional target. God was suggesting that we should have the same posture as Jesus at Jacob's well, where the vulnerable, beautiful statement "can I have some water?" began a conversation that would change the life of the Samaritan woman and many more. Instead of going to the neighbour with our neatly packaged testimony and evangelistic toolbox, we were being called to need the neighbour in our lives, finding permission to live life with them and waiting for the invitation to share our story – a story that still has the power to transform the world.

Jesus continues in Luke 10, "eat what is placed in front of you". Can there be a more radical calling to the Jewish followers of Jesus? This is a prequel to Peter

and Cornelius. This is Jesus saying – my eating habits of dining with the tax collectors and sinners are to be your eating habits. Instead of judging all that goes on in society and hoping and praying people may leave the darkness to join us somewhere else – we eat what's put in front of us – realising that light, goodness, grace and ultimately churches can organically grow right there in the most unexpected of places.

Jesus then says, "Do not move from place to place". Instead of seeing this time as a season – going after the low-lying fruit – the calling is to settle in place for the long term, recognising that it is over a lifetime that many of us will see relationships deepen and Christian community arise.

Things beyond our imagining

As we live and listen to God and community, God is doing far beyond anything we could imagine. We have little churches bubbling up, not just in the village where we live but in other villages and towns too. We have seen healing in community, partnerships built, and the most unlikely people find Jesus in the most unexpected ways. Selfishly, the greatest 'outcome' is the sense of us as a family living life in all its fullness. It feels like being present in community – needing our neighbour, living life with them, and waiting for the invitation – and coming humbly to God with empty hands, desperate for him to show us how to join all that he is doing, is exactly the life he has called us to. We do not offer missional listening as a successful blueprint or a missional activity to be rolled out across the world as a 'programme' – but we humbly

offer you the posture changes that have occurred in our own lives, hoping that they will lead you and the places and people you do life with to life in all its fullness.



CONVERSATION

How do you listen to your community?

What has surprised you about what God is already doing in your community?

STARTERS



Ben Lucas was the minister of a large Baptist church before moving to rural Dorset in 2017. He and his family are living incarnationally, engaged in missional listening.

Ben will be part of a team engaged in listening at the 2022 Baptist Assembly





A theology of unity in diversity

We may hold different views and ideas, but can we unite in Christ? Here are three theological ideas that can help us appreciate the kind of unity God spoke about in the Bible.

By Israel Olofinjana

Our world continues to wrestle with various discourses that could easily polarise us. As we continue these various conversations around different categories such as age, disability, sex and race, what is our understanding of unity and why is it fundamentally important in the current climate? Is it possible for the church to give emphasis to these important distinctions and yet unite in Christ?

In this short article I want to explore three theological ideas that can help us appreciate the kind of unity God spoke about in the Bible. This biblical unity also incorporates diversity.

Creation

The first theological basis of unity starts with *creation*, evidenced in the fact that God created one human race. Creation theology (*Imago Dei*) furnishes us with the understanding we are all created in God's image therefore affirming our equality, human dignity and respect. God created us all, meaning we all - whether male or female, south Korean or white British, young or old - originate from the same source: that is God. This doctrine also means we are all equal before God because he created us. The beauty of this creation is that, while God created one human race, he also created our distinctiveness.

God created man as well as woman, he created Nigerians as well as Canadians. This is the beauty of God's creation as, although he created one human race, all equal in his image, we are not all the same! Creation is therefore a first theological basis for expressing unity and diversity. In essence, being created by one God in his image means we are equal, but the fact that creation is expressed in different physical features, skin pigmentation, biology, history and geography means God also values diversity. This is why God is not colour blind because he created people of colour in the first instance! God himself expresses this unity and diversity in his very being. God is three distinctive persons in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, but yet the Godhead is one, in essence and purpose.



Incarnation

The second theological framework for our unity in diversity is **incarnation**. This is the theological idea that God, who created us in his image, decided to share our humanity through his Son - thus becoming human like one of us. John describes this process as 'the Word becoming flesh' (paraphrasing John 1:14). *The incarnation of Jesus expresses God's solidarity with humanity in its entire diversity.* In a way, the fact that he identifies with humanity is an expression of God's cross-cultural language and cultural intelligence. The writer to the Hebrews puts it this way:

'In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he

sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.' (Hebrews 1:1-3, NIV).

The fact that God 'speaks to us through his son' means God communicates to us and identifies with us in our weakness and vulnerability, giving us a framework for God's mission in identifying with the oppressed, marginalised and disenfranchised. Therefore, the incarnation is a theological basis for God's mission which should never be separated from unity and is expressed for all humanity. This is why John could say *'For God so loved the world that he gave his son'* (paraphrasing John 3:16). Unity and diversity are an integral part of God's mission, but a further step in understanding the incarnation as a theological basis is that it also speaks to particularity. In other words, the incarnation is contextual since, while Jesus becoming one of us identifies him with the entire human race in its diversity, he nevertheless came to us as a Jewish male born in first century Palestine. This is specific and speaks to the heart of how important it is to

recognise the various distinctives or identity markers such as our disability, sex, race and age, but at the same time the incarnation connects beyond the particular. We have to hold this in tension - God is particular but also connects with us all.

Reconciliation

The last theological basis for unity I want to discuss is **reconciliation**. This takes forward the ideas in creation and incarnation; whilst Jesus was revealed to us in the incarnation, identifying with humanity, his death on the cross achieved reconciliation - therefore recreating humanity in a new image of God. Paul puts it this way:

'For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put

to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.' (Ephesians 2:14-18, NIV).

Here Paul was describing how Jesus' death on the cross has brought an end to the cultural hostility between Jews and Gentiles. The death of Jesus on the cross is undergirded by understanding the need for reconciliation between humanity and God, but also between divided communities. Reconciliation therefore gives us a language of pursuing a just, integrated society where all humanity is reconciled and flourishing. The church was supposed to be the new community modelling this new image of God which is why Paul, in another passage, could talk about the body metaphor to illustrate the importance of different parts of the body, but how ultimately they have to function together - because if one part hurts then the whole body hurts. *'If one member suffers, all suffer together with*

it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it' (1 Corinthians 12:26 NRSV). Each member of the body of Christ is important - whether African Caribbean, a woman, a disabled person or a young person - we are all important to God.

It is therefore important in this season that we model God's creation, incarnation and reconciliation in our churches and contexts to reveal God's purpose of unity in diversity.



Israel Olofinjana is a Baptist minister and Director of One People Commission, Evangelical Alliance

He has written and edited a number of books, the latest of which is *Discipleship, Suffering and Racial Justice - Mission in a Pandemic World* (Regnum Studies, Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, 2021).

This book develops an article Israel wrote for the autumn 2020 edition of *Baptists Together* magazine.

?

CONVERSATION

'It's important that we model God's creation, incarnation and reconciliation in our churches'

What does this look like in your context?

STARTERS



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BUILDING A BIGGER TABLE

BY INCOMING PRESIDENT HAYLEY YOUNG

It is a real honour to be serving as Baptists Together President from May 2022 to May 2023 and to have this opportunity to explain the theme of *Building a Bigger Table*.

What strikes me most when I read the Gospels is Jesus' table ministry; the way he so often used the act of sharing a meal; the act of breaking bread, as a way of letting people know they are seen and heard, known and respected.

We are living in challenging times. I believe that we as a Baptist movement, are able to speak truth, grace and Jesus' transforming power into our communities and movement;

but in order to do that, first we must listen to God and to each other.

There are several areas I would like to encourage us to explore in the coming year, and I believe Jesus' table ministry approach can aid us in our understanding and in developing these areas:

DIVIDED COMMUNITIES

Our communities (both in and out of the church) can be divided: divided by race, gender, disability, sexuality, understanding of God and economic circumstances. These divisions are not just words but a dark reality for many people who are excluded, discriminated against and more.

The table to which Jesus welcomed people was a diverse table: he gathered with priests and prostitutes, with the religious elite and the common street rabble, with his disciples and his adversaries. They are all treated with equal dignity: even if he sometimes had some harsh words for them, as they left Jesus' presence he continued to love them.

As a Baptist movement we have the opportunity to bring Jesus to our communities by expanding that table: by providing the kind of hospitality that embraces everyone equally, not pulling some close and keeping some at a distance.

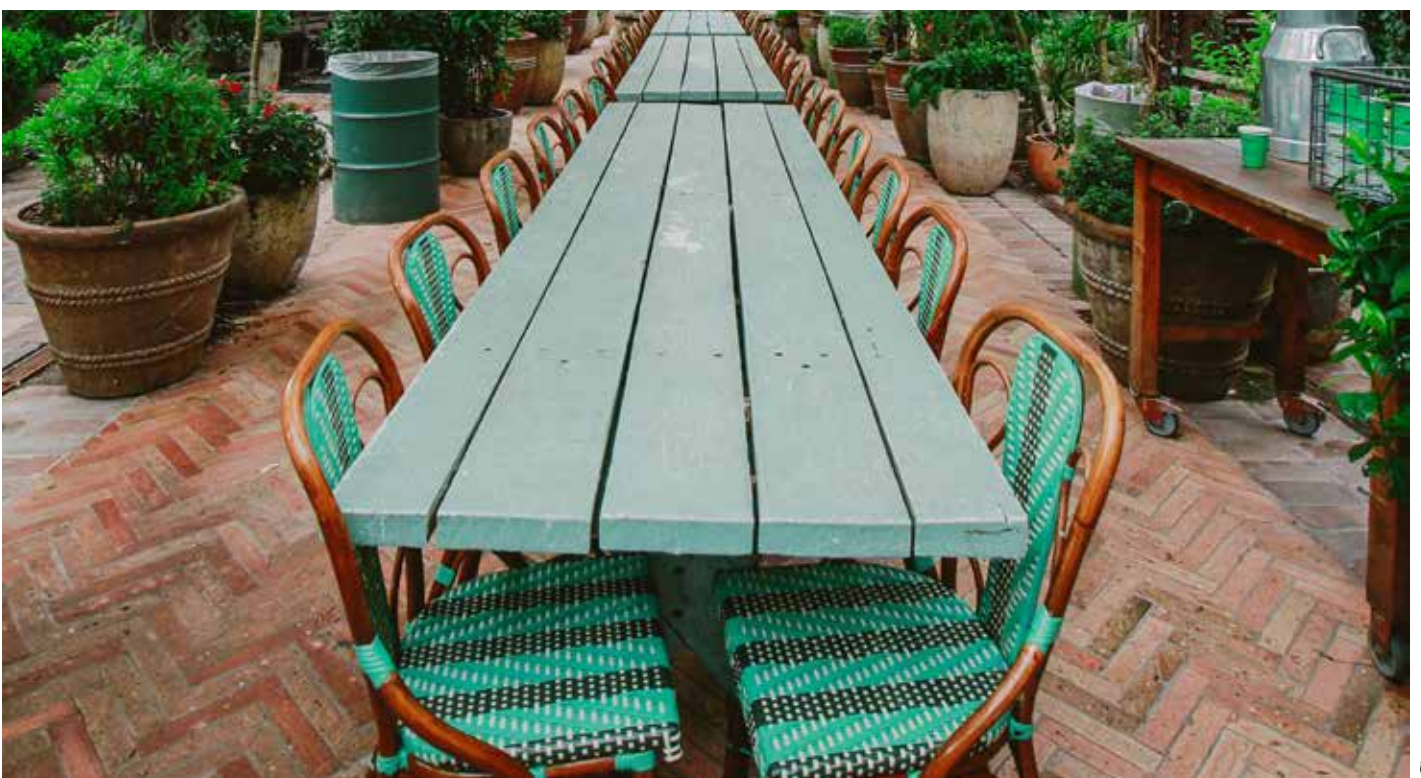


Photo by Belle Co from Pexels

This is a challenge for us in our leadership and in our gathered communities (whether that be in churches, missional communities or online). What does it look like for us to listen to each other, to hear each other's stories, to know the Holy Spirit working in each other and respect each other as disciples of Christ?

As a movement we are so varied and different, serving in many different contexts. My prayer this year is that, even in our differences and disagreements, we still cheer each other on. To allow our difference to reflect the very nature of God in community and not to let it divide us or get in the way of God's mission. That as a movement we would prefer each other's needs; that we bless each other; live to cheer others on. I believe when we do this we move away from divided communities and see the power of the Kingdom of God advancing.

IF WE ARE ABLE TO HUMBLE OURSELVES AND SEE THE 'OTHER', WE WILL EXPERIENCE GOD'S GRACE

MILLENNIALS IN LEADERSHIP

As churches and missional communities we have a challenge ahead of us about how we relate to the culture around us and the digital world. In the coming years, millennials will make up the vast majority of the global workforce. In fact, by 2030, millennials will represent 75 per cent of the global workforce. Will they represent 75 per cent of our churches?

If we are going to be serious about sharing the Gospel with millennials and younger people we need to do the work of listening - not in a passive way, but actively listening to the challenges and desires of different generations. We need to earn the right to speak truth into people's lives. We need to move away from 'shouting on the sidelines' to being incarnational in our very being in order to bring hope, love, grace and Jesus to everyone.

Everything is changing at a fast rate. In the midst of this change, we have a generation that is already redefining the world in which they want to live. So we need to engage, encourage and motivate the millennials and those younger who are already in our Baptist movement; releasing the prophetic voice of other generations to speak into our movement, our declining church and changing society.

DIGITAL COMMUNITY

There are two generations that have no or little experience of church or the Kingdom of God; so what we introduce them to now is really important. This means we have the opportunity to create something new, yet still founded on biblical truths.

Hannah Fleming-Hill, a Digital Missioner writes: 'We are in the biggest change in communication in the 500 years since the printing press revolutionised how we consumed and understood, not just religious texts but all written word, leading to a huge shift. It changed culture, altered habits, improved education and put the opportunity to consume the word of God in the hands of the people during the week, not

just from the pulpit in Latin on a Sunday. We have gone from paper to platform, from script to screen, from scribe to selfies.'

In the coming year, what might it look like to move beyond broadcasting services (as good as they are) to create the space - both the world we live in, and the digital world we inhabit - to be authentic, hopeful, compassionate, challenging and a Jesus-focused community?

MY PRAYER THIS YEAR IS THAT EVEN IN OUR DIFFERENCES AND DISAGREEMENTS WE STILL CHEER EACH OTHER ON.

WHO'S NOT AT THE PARTY?

In order to build this bigger table where people are heard, seen, known and respected, we need to be prepared to ask ourselves the question of who is missing? Who are we not hearing? Who is not being able to gather in the wonderful presence of Jesus?

This will be costly, it may be painful and cause us to engage with those we have looked at from a distance, but never really seen. We all need to do the work of addressing why people have not been welcomed in the past. But I believe, if we are able to humble ourselves and see the 'other', we will experience God's grace; we will learn to cheer each other on regardless of if we agree on everything.

Recently I have finished reading Michelle Obama's memoir '*Becoming*'¹

1 Published by Penguin (2021)

She ends the book with these powerful words:

'Let's invite one another in. Maybe then we can begin to fear less, to make fewer wrong assumptions, to let go of the biases and stereotypes that unnecessarily divide us. Maybe we can better embrace the ways we are the same. It's not about being perfect... There's power in allowing yourself to be known and heard, in owning your unique story, in using your authentic voice. And there's grace in being willing to know and hear others. This, for me, is how we become.'

Whatever our expression of church or missional communities is, we have the privilege of sharing Jesus' transforming power with those around us. My prayer is that having been 'attentive to the rhythms of grace'², we can continue to 'become' a movement that is building a bigger table.

To listen to other stories and hear what is happening during this year, you can follow my vlogs or any of my social media feeds: <https://linktr.ee/RevHayley> or scan the QR code.

CONVERSATION

Who is not at our table?

How can we actively listen to the challenges and desires of different generations?

STARTERS



Hayley Young is President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain 2022-23. She will be inducted into the role at the 2022 Baptist Assembly. Hayley is the Transitional Strategic Leader (Regional Minister) of the Northern Baptist Association



2 As President, Hayley succeeds Geoff Colmer, whose theme was 'Attentive to the rhythms of grace'

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AN UNEXPECTED CONVERSION

Our churches have seen a flourishing of social action over the last decade, but not the revival of baptisms or new members many of us have also been praying for. How are we to make sense of this – and what happens next?
By Trevor Neill


Several years ago, I found myself in conversation with a number of church members, reflecting on our experiences of working together to run a project that supported young people struggling in mainstream education. This was a ministry that had required huge sacrifice on the part of church – we gave away hours

of our time, invested significant sums of money and devoted much of our building's space to this alternative provision, but the rewards made it all worthwhile. We lost count of the number of local young people who came to us with problems that led them to the verge of permanent exclusion from school, and left with qualifications, entry to apprenticeships and a renewed trust in adults who had modelled love and patience to them.

However, in the midst of these successes that we celebrated, there was one alternative perspective: "But we haven't seen anyone saved." It was just one voice, but I suspect they spoke for many of us, giving expression to nagging doubts felt by many. We had undoubtedly witnessed redemption, but not the kind we longed for most. There had been no 'naming of the name'.



WE HOPED TO SEE GOD CONVERTING OTHER PEOPLE - BUT HAVE WE FOUND INSTEAD THAT HE WAS CONVERTING US?



My guess is that many similar conversations have taken place in other churches in the past ten years, a decade that has seen a flourishing of social action (night shelters, foodbanks, a vast array of community service undertaken during lockdowns) but not the revival of baptisms or new members many of us have also been praying for. How are we to make sense of this?

Reflecting recently on this question, I've been thinking afresh on a story from the

Gospels - Jesus' encounter with the Syrian-Phoenician woman recorded in Mark 7 and Matthew 15. Jesus is in unfamiliar territory with people traditionally seen as enemies of Israel, the region of Tyre condemned by prophets like Isaiah and Ezekiel. When this woman asks for healing for her daughter, Jesus replies in a way that strikes most of us as shockingly rude and dismissive. His mission, he insists, is only to the 'lost sheep of Israel.' But the woman persists, famously turning his slight on Gentile dogs into a plea for crumbs from the table. In a stunning combination of humility and audacity, the woman stands out as the only figure in Mark's Gospel to address Jesus as Lord and the only person who gets the better of the teacher who outwits everyone he meets. Furthermore, she also appears to be a woman who changes Jesus' mind, opening his eyes to the importance of mission to the Gentiles.

I wonder how many similar encounters have taken place in our churches in the decade just gone. Could it be that we have seen change taking place, but not in the way we anticipated, that we hoped to see God converting other people but found instead that he was converting us? We've been awakened to the reality of suffering and hardship experienced by those on our doorsteps, alerted to injustice which is both personal and structural and healed from the blindness of complacency and privilege. Having thought it was our role to 'fix' people we have discovered ways in which we need to change as well, summoned to a greater empathy with victims of deprivation and austerity. At the same time, God in his grace has been using us

in his mission - every occasion when someone is free from debt, school exclusion or other crises, reflects a 'plundering of the house of the strong man Jesus came to tie up' (Mark 3:27).

● ●
HOW MIGHT GOD BE CALLING US TO CHANGE NEXT?
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Of course, this process of conversion is not complete. How might God be calling us to change next? One possibility might be that a season of acting and doing on behalf of the marginalised might give way to a period of being with them in solidarity. It now seems that the 'new normal' beginning after two years of the pandemic will not be a promised land of economic growth or reimagined high streets, but rather a time when prices rise, belts are tightened, and when people of generosity and imagination need to speak up about how resources are shared and what 'the good life' looks like.

What words of hope might we speak to go alongside our acts of compassion? Might this be a moment when the church finds its voice, proclaiming a story that is more expansive and informed by our recent experience? Can we imagine how powerfully God might use local congregations which become true colonies of heaven, offering a glimpse of how everything will be when the coming kingdom arrives: a welcome that reflects God's healing of divisions, a sharing that reflects his generosity, words that announce new possibilities and point forward to the time when 'the old order of things has passed away'?

CONVERSATION

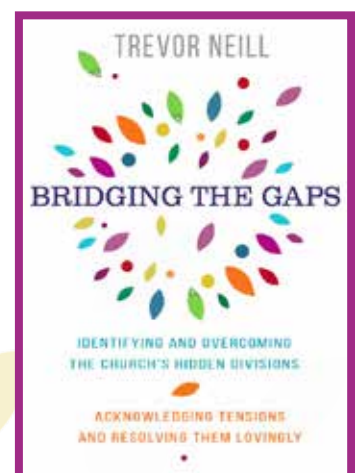
“Helped lots of people - but haven't seen anyone saved”
 How do you respond to this?

How has your involvement in social action impacted your understanding of what it means to be a follower of Christ?

STARTERS



Trevor Neill is lead pastor of Selsdon Baptist Church, London. His book *Bridging the Gaps* (Instant Apostle, 2020) shines a compassionate light on the hidden and often unacknowledged contradictions of the contemporary UK Church





GOD SAW THAT IT WAS GOOD

Let's deepen our faith by connecting afresh with the natural world, a place where God might be seen and met. Are we looking?
By Dave Gregory

Perfect Planet.
'Green Planet.'
The latest offerings in a long series of nature programmes featuring Sir David Attenborough stretching back to the 1970s.

Awakening people to the beauty and wonder of the natural world, with an increasing slant in recent years highlighting the environmental and climate crisis. There can be few people who have not at least glimpsed an episode through the years and marvelled at the stunning imagery used to inspire an awareness of how precious life on the planet is. For those of faith in a creator God, a gift of grace.

Yet do we look? Really look?
At the images presented, at

the natural world around us to which we are connected and embedded?

God 's temple... on our doorstep?

Morning Prayer from The Northumbria Community begins with lines from Psalm 27:
'One thing I have asked of the Lord, this is what I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life; to behold the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.'

A familiar passage; yet reading God's word in different seasons and settings of life highlights different things. Over the past year, on most days, I have taken time to encounter God watching my garden, either on the patio or on more inclement days through the patio doors. As the year progressed it was the word 'temple' that stood out. A word describing a building, a place where people gather for worship, to encounter God. The Psalmist expresses the desire of many through these Covid years of being able to gather with God's people in familiar places and ways. Yet, as I looked at the garden, I began to wonder whether an opportunity might be missed. Could the garden be looked on as God's temple? A place through which God might be seen and met.

Visiting the temple, one of Jesus' disciples declared: *'Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!'* (Mark 13:1). How we imagine the temple is perhaps shaped by our experience of the majestic, magnificent cathedrals across the cities and towns of our land. Places of stone, inside and out, walls unsoftened by the paintings that graced their interior in the medieval era. Solomon's earlier temple too was made of stone, but inside it could not have been more different:

'Solomon ... lined its interior walls with cedar ... carved with gourds and open flowers ... no stones was to be seen.' (1 Kings 6:14ff). Some have suggested that the interior of the temple was a depiction of the Garden of Eden, calling people back to a time when they might encounter God *'walking in the garden in the cool of the day'*: (Gen 3:8)

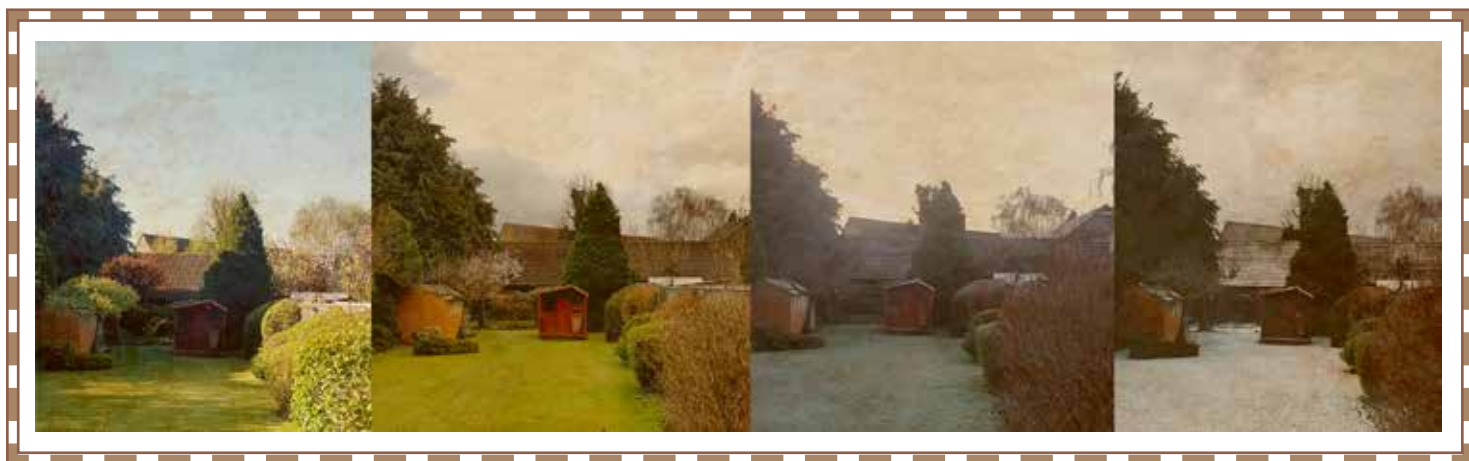
Have we lost a sense of encountering God within the wonder of creation? A diminished sense of transcendence through the natural world because we have forgotten how to look, really look?

The transcendent in everyday life

I wear glasses and I know when it's time for me to get a new pair - when the branches of distant trees no longer appear sharp. I am always amazed at the transformation of my sight when I put a new pair on! If we are to look, really look again, and seek God within the temple of his creation, then we need new glasses. Whether we are people of faith or not, we live in an age stripped of a sense of the transcendent in everyday life. If it is being sought, we assume it is contained within organised activities, such as worship or within retreat centres shaped by faith or none.

It has been so for a long time. Fifty years ago, in the small but significant book, *A Rumour of Angels*, Peter Berger asked how people in our technological age might be reconnected with this sense of the beyond in their experience of everyday life. He suggested several experiences which he named Signals of Transcendence. Among them the wonder that people commonly experience in the face of the natural world, the human enjoyment of play and our desire for the security of order.

This lack of awareness, an inability to look, has not always been so. Looking back further into history, to a more sacramentally shaped age of faith, the Franciscan Bonaventure taught that encountering God begins through the created world. There, God's creative power and creativity found in the vast diversity of life speak of the divine artist's work, while the connectedness of all things expresses God's heart to bring things to unity. Themes that reflect the shaping of creation by the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.



My garden through the seasons | Dave Gregory

‘The experience of wonder connects us with God’s creative intent and power’

For much of Christian history, art and imagery have played a significant role in our worship. It has been rediscovered in our lifetimes using video projectors, and within worship the use of images like those in natural history offerings on TV that reflect the wonder of creation. Images of nature we take beyond our church buildings and even homes through our mobile phones. Yet too often this visual encounter with creation is superficial and all too transitory. The backdrop for the lyrics of a worship song. Neither do they open a wider valuing of the created world beyond that which we see on our screens.

Combining Berger’s and Bonaventure’s ways of seeing enables us to look in a deeper, longer way to experience transcendence through the natural order. The experience of wonder connects us with God’s creative intent and power. The sheer overwhelming diversity of life that we see around us expresses God’s playful joy over what he has made, each part precious and playing their part. And the connectedness of life that science is increasingly showing us, including our reliance and responsibility to the whole community of creation, hints at God’s desire to bring *‘unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ’*. (Eph 1:10).

See creation afresh at this year’s Baptist Assembly

At the Baptist Assembly in Bournemouth this year, BUEN - The Baptist Union Environment Network - is providing an opportunity to look afresh at creation through new glasses.

‘God saw that it was Good’ is an exhibit of large images around themes of sky, trees, coast and seas and life, each linked to reflections shaped by themes of wonder, playfulness and unity that can be streamed from the internet onto mobile phones. Following the Assembly we hope it might be made available for churches and associations for use in local events within their church or to share with their local communities.

Offering a chance to begin to look at creation through new glasses. Training us to find the presence of God in the wonderful world he has gifted to us: in those wonderful images of documentaries streamed into our homes and phones; or while walking around our neighbourhood and wider afield, or just sitting, looking at your garden. Reclaiming a sense of transcendence through the natural world, seeking God in his temple. And renewing care **about** creation that might inspire in a time of changing climate a deeper desire to share in God’s mission to care **for** creation.



See this photo and others in the BUEN photography exhibition at this year’s Baptist Assembly

Photo from Martine Liu 58 | shutterstock.com

CONVERSATION

Have we lost a sense of encountering God within the wonder of creation?

What helps you connect with the beyond in your every day life? Is it nature - or something else?

STARTERS



Dave Gregory is a former President of the Baptist Union and convenor of BUEN, The Baptist Union Environment Network and chair of the John Ray Initiative. He recently stepped down from local church ministry to focus on mission around science, faith, and the environment.

For more on BUEN, visit baptist.org.uk/buen



Listening and connecting across borders and cultures

Intercultural listening is at the heart of how the mission world is changing.
By Matty Fearon

When asked to contribute an article on what ‘listening and connecting across borders and cultures’ means in the context of BMS World Mission’s work, a line sprang readily to mind. It was not mine, but David McMillan’s, who was until recently the Interim Director of Intercultural Learning at BMS. In a piece which will soon appear in the relaunch edition of *Mission Catalyst* magazine, David writes, ‘Mission should strive to be intercultural, not merely cross-cultural’. From BMS’ vantage point, the words ‘listening’ and

‘connecting’ actively move mission in the direction from being cross-cultural to becoming intercultural.

In particular, the word ‘listen’, was given an entirely new meaning for me following a conversation at the Heart of England Ministers’ Conference earlier this year. Over lunch, through her sign language interpreter, Susan Myatt talked to me about the inaccessibility and one-dimensionality of the English word ‘listen’. She explained what a poor substitute it was for the Hebrew word ‘Shema’, which resounds throughout the Old Testament. ‘Shema’ is the word that begins the foundational prayer recited by Jews at the beginning and conclusion of

each day, ‘Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad / Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.’ Rabbi Adina Allen says of the imperative opening to the prayer, “just that word alone is a powerful call”. Susan said that the Hebrew connotation bore a much closer relationship to the English action ‘to receive’ or ‘to be receptive’. Ever since our intercultural conversation while breaking bread at the lunch table, I’ve read the Bible in a new transformed way.

For those of us with ears that hear, listening appears to be the most natural of things, so incidental to being awake as to feel not even an action. However, when understood in the context of the word ‘Shema’ we realise



that listening requires effort and humility. To be receptive and to receive requires us to open ourselves up to another's experience so that heart touches heart and we are changed. Such an approach was given a framework by the philosopher Martin Buber through his notion of developing an I-thou rather than an I-it relationship. Buber describes listening as 'something we do with our full selves by sensing and feeling what another is trying to convey so that together we can remove the barrier between us'.

While cross-cultural approaches climb over the barrier, and that is no bad thing in and of itself, intercultural approaches to mission act to 'remove the barrier between us'. BMS, like many other Western mission agencies, continues to equip mission workers with the skills to cope and thrive in a different culture. Such preparation remains essential. The challenge being given more attention recently, is how mission is done in context and how mission agencies perceive their role in the future as the church in the majority world becomes the majority of the church.

In practical terms this presents significant challenges to ways of working for Western mission agencies as we come to terms with the fact that the church in the Global South is the majority church, and the future of world evangelisation will depend on mission workers from the majority world. This future is very much the present for BMS and is embodied by people like Pastor J, a missionary from the Baptist Church in Mizoram, India, who has travelled to Cambodia to build communities of faith in Phnom Penh and beyond.



As Peter Oyugi, BMS' new Director of Intercultural Learning and Collaboration, said recently, "God is re-organising the mission world".

with brothers and sisters in the majority world who are finding their voices and casting their own theology."

It is our turn now to be receptive.

Intercultural mission asks a number of questions of BMS, both strategic - such as, 'how do we divest ourselves of power and control, in particular around strategy, governance and control of the gospel?' and also theological - such as 'how much have we still to learn about the meaning of the good news that Jesus preached as the Spirit of God moves powerfully across the Global South?' David McMillan, who sparked this article into life, is clear: "The answers to these questions will not be found in talking to ourselves. They will only be found as we dialogue



Matty Fearon is the Head of Communications at BMS World Mission



...IDEAS...

FOR LISTENING TO THE CHILD

By Clare Hooper, chair of the Children, Young People and Families (CYF) Round Table

In her article 'Listen to the Child'¹ Sian Hancock urged us to take the Baptist principle of the priesthood of all believers seriously and create the space to listen to the voice and thoughts of the child in our midst. Another article I've been reminded of is Article 12 from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: *A child has the right to be heard and to participate in all decisions that affect them.*

Wow! I wonder how seriously we take this Right for the children and young people in our church or groups that are connected with us? What might it look like if we facilitated the participation of children (0-18) at a level

that works for their age and maturity? What would we need to do differently to enable their participation?

Here are some thoughts to help you begin to think through what might be possible if the participation of children was encouraged in the ministry and mission of our church or community space.

Children, Young People and Families



Joining the dots between church, home and community

The following practical ideas are suggested by members of the CYF Round Table:

Ideas for facilitating the participation of children

1 Scrabble (or Bananagrams) Prayers

We do this activity as a group of young families and it works really well. This activity helps make space for the children to be listened to and shows them nothing is too small, silly or too big to talk to God about.

Using a bag of Scrabble letter tiles the children take turns to pull out tiles and suggest things that the group can pray for beginning with that letter.

After three or four suggestions for a letter, another is drawn. The key is that there are no wrong suggestions. An adult or older

¹ Sian Hancock's article 'Listen to the Child' appeared in the Spring 2021 edition of *Baptists Together* magazine. Access it here: baptist.org.uk/listenchild

child writes down the list of ideas and after ten minutes or so you'll have a slightly weird but wonderful list that demonstrates something of what the children have felt is important to pray about.

Then take turns to pray making sure to let the children lead.

2 We are often so busy trying to run 'our' programme that we don't have space to sit and listen to children and young people. One way of making space to listen is using craft or lego, playdough or salt dough. However, I have seen many leaders who set the children off doing craft and see it as an opportunity to chat to other leaders and have a brew.

No! This is a great opportunity to do the craft alongside the children (even if you think you're useless at craft). It allows a gentle flow of conversation and chat, time for you to listen and be led by them.

3 When our church was deciding on the values that shaped its culture, we did lots of listening to everyone. We needed to settle on five. Everyone, including children, was given stickers to stick on their top five values and the ones with the most were the ones that were chosen. The voice of the children helped shaped the church we hoped to be.

Ideas for facilitating the participation of young people

1 After the first lockdown, we gave the running of our community coffee shop over to our young people for the summer. The coffee shop has been running since the 1980s but has always struggled to welcome younger

people. We gave them a budget and complete oversight so they could institute key changes such as a new menu, a proper coffee machine and a new room layout. They loved the experience and felt they had really contributed to the life of the church. All the changes have remained and when the young people visit our coffee shop, they can see how valued their input is.

2 In order to grow leaders, we must give young people leadership opportunities. At our church, the way we have done that is by giving them opportunity to run the youth and children's programmes. We do this using the leadership square:

- 1 I do, You watch
- 2 I do, You help
- 3 You do, I help
- 4 You do, I watch

This way the young people are taught how to lead groups and programmes (an area of church life they know well and are comfortable in) and then we hope will move onto leading in other areas of church life, as they feel called to do so.

A Blessing

May the child in our midst be a reminder of the Kingdom of God - let them be welcomed.

May the voice of the child be a reminder of the prophetic - let them be heard.

May the opinions of the child be a reminder that it's together we discern God's will - let them be known.

May the participation of the child be a reminder that God chose to participate as a child - let them take part.

CONVERSATION

?

How do you ensure the voices of your children and young people are heard?

Which ideas in this piece do you think you could implement at your church?

STARTERS



Clare Hooper chairs the Baptists Together CYF Round Table. Clare is a regional minister for Southern Counties Baptist Association, where she serves as the children, youth and families mission developer, and is also tutor for children, youth and families at Bristol Baptist College.

She co-hosts the CYF podcast 'Joining the dots' with fellow CYF member and regional minister Emma Mohr.

STORIES FROM THE GROUND

Living a more honeycombed life?

Andy Goodliff on how Baptist churches in Southend have sought to work and walk together.



Baptists have always affirmed the primacy of the local congregation. In almost the same breath, we believe the local congregation should recognise it is not good to be alone, hence the importance of associating with other Baptist churches. We know this, and hopefully we seek it, but the practice of associating is one that often feels less than what it should be.

In the Southend area, there are more than ten Baptist congregations. Ten years ago,

in November 2012, we had a first joint service in a while. This was part of a renewed desire amongst the local ministers to discover ways of working and being churches together. We invited Roy Searle to speak and each church brought a hexagon reflecting its life, which we displayed together as part of a desire to live a more honeycombed life.

Two years later, in June 2014, eleven Baptist congregations made a covenant together to

be more than independent churches. The Southend Area Baptist Network (SABN) was launched. The covenant was a commitment to share in worship, mission and mutual support. There was genuine excitement about what might emerge going forward.

The reality has been much harder to realise. Yes there have been some good things emerge. For a season there were regular joint services. In the early years after the covenant service, there were

shared moments of mission and learning. Particular partnerships between some churches within SABN have been encouraging. Ministerial clusters have given good support between colleagues.

At the same time, during these last ten years, there has been a difficulty in knowing how to take further steps in establishing a deeper sense of partnership and shared life, to live up to the covenant made. Getting everyone together has always been tricky. Decisions made by some churches have produced tensions in relationships. The life of SABN has waxed and waned.

Reflecting on the last ten years, one of the difficulties — one I recognise not present for most Baptist churches — is the size of the Network, partly why some churches have focused on a smaller partnership between two congregations. It's both a gift having so many churches

in a small area, but a challenge to make a Network work meaningfully.

Another issue is what might be called oversight. In the ten years we have tried passing responsibility between ministers for initiating and organising, but this has had mixed success. Perhaps the great difficulty is: it so easy to be consumed by the life of the congregation in which you are a part, that energy and time for something wider is squeezed.

Looking forward as Baptists, we need to come to value our networking and see it as an integral part of our being a Baptist church, and not just as an add on.

In the last 12 months, as SABN we are trying again to seek some of the 'honeycomb life'. We had a joint service with seven churches in October where, although not physically present, different

ministers offered recorded prayers and all shared the same sermon. We have plans for something similar in the summer. Likewise the circumstances of one church in the Network has initiated some getting together to see how they might mutually support something new emerging, and we are talking again on how we might partner together more.

SABN still exists. It will always have moments of both intentional action and fallow periods. I hope the future is one which generates a shared fellowship, and values the gifts each congregation can make to the whole. Covenant life requires humility, patience, trust and friendship — characteristics that have to be nurtured and looked after. My prayer is that across our Union of churches, associations, colleges, networks, clusters and partnerships, the Holy Spirit will be growing in us that kind of covenant life.



The honeycomb life – how Baptist churches in Southend expressed themselves in relation to each other in 2012

Photo courtesy of Andy Goodliff

“People wanted to invest in the Kingdom”

Supported by other Christians, a small Baptist church in Oxford raised £500,000 in a week. Robin Peake shares the story.



Barton Community Church (BCC) is a small church on a council estate in Oxford. Planted out of Headington Baptist Church (HBC) in 2010, its purpose is to be ‘an authentic community bringing hope to the heart of Barton through making Jesus known’.

It has grown from a Sunday bicycle workshop to a small worshipping community: Sunday@4, BCC’s Sunday expression of church, is an informal, interactive gathering which attracts around 35 people per week to a 4pm service followed by dinner. Some have lived in Barton all their lives and others have moved onto the estate to be a part of this community. The church seeks to maintain an outward focus, running a foodbank, a listening service and more recently piloting a self esteem course for teenage girls. “We’ve made many mistakes,” says Robin Peake, a member of the leadership team, “but we are seeking to try to reflect Jesus in the community. We are here to do stuff with the community, and be a faithful, long-term presence.”

“The church has always had a dream to own its own house; a ‘ridiculous’ dream”, notes Robin, “for a church with 20 members donating around £20,000.” (Barton is supported both by HBC and Southern Counties Baptist Association.)

Last year it was struggling to find a successor to its first ever minister Paul Clarke, who had left at the end of 2020. It wanted the new incumbent to live in Barton, in keeping with its vision of being a faithful presence on the estate, but the lack of a manse was proving a drawback.

So when in September a suitable property came onto the market, the church thought, ‘Let’s give this a go’. On Friday they recorded a fundraising video. By Tuesday they had £30,000; by Thursday close to half a million. Ultimately they would raise £850,000 through a combination of loans and donations, enough not only to buy a manse, but another property for homeless men.

“We were blown away” says Robin. “It’s a crazy story.”

Much of the funding came from other Christians, with most lenders loaning between £5,000 and £30,000.

“People wanted to invest in the Kingdom. It’s a wonderful expression of gospel partnership,” says Robin.

“We realised that just because people won’t join you in moving into the estate, it doesn’t mean they’re not for you.

“Living in community over time gives a credibility. Just by being there.”

With the manse now secured, Barton Community Church was in a position to call a minister in February.

Hear4You

One of the ways in which Barton Community Church serves its community is providing a listening service. Hear4You operates each Tuesday when residents are given a safe, welcoming space to chat with a volunteer listener over a cup of tea or coffee. It’s staffed by members of the church and volunteers from HBC. The church works with the social prescriber at the GP surgery, and there’s no limit on the number of sessions people can attend.

“We asked what Barton needs, and the message came back ‘Barton just needs people to listen.’ People are overwhelmed with circumstances, and loneliness.”



“It is helping us settle and integrate”

How people from Hong Kong have benefitted from conversation classes hosted at Tyndale Baptist Church in Bristol.



On Tuesday afternoons Tyndale Baptist Church sees one of its function rooms fill with people who have only recently made their home here. Its conversation classes for people from Hong Kong are led by church member and retired GP Michael Whitfield, and supported by other members of the congregation.

They explore different subjects each week, such as traditions and customs, food, and sport. The first block of five classes was in late 2021; the second in early 2022. In the session before Christmas Michael led the Hong Kongers around the church’s sanctuary. Each class has attracted around 15 – 20 students.

The classes came about after Michael met Hong Kong pastor the Revd Chi Wai (David) Wu. An experienced pastor, David was part of the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church, a para-church organisation in Hong Kong. After offering help and support to demonstrators, he was told he had to leave Hong Kong for his own safety.

David arrived in Bristol and attended a service at Tyndale last April, where he met Michael and his wife. It turned out they were living in the same road, and they subsequently became friends. David had already connected with Broadmead Baptist Church and encouraged Tyndale, through Michael, to offer the classes to help Hong Kongers learn more about British culture and improve their English language.

David encourages Hong Kongers to integrate as much as they can – and says the church’s warm welcome, alongside the conversation class, has helped him and others do just that.

“It’s an opportunity to learn about the culture and improve our English, but also to meet local people. Other church members are there as helpers. One of the biggest barriers for us is language, and understanding the culture differences.”

He points out that such a class is not on offer elsewhere, and taking an English as a Foreign Language class at a college or language centre, while useful, is costly. He is therefore encouraging other churches to do something similar: for those with suitable buildings, the costs would be low, and there would be huge blessings on both sides.



David with his wife Connie and Baptist minister Rachel Haig at her farewell at Tyndale Baptist Church

(A small number of families now worship at Tyndale Baptist Church, even though a Cantonese-speaking congregation worships on the same premises, because of their desire to integrate.)

Such conversation classes would be popular in the places where large numbers of Hong Kongers have settled, such as Manchester, Birmingham, and London, as well as Bristol where he lives. "It's not teaching grammar, but introducing us to UK culture – and the most important thing is the mindset of members of the local church. When they spot an outsider and extend friendship, it creates an atmosphere of welcome."

Michael has been only too happy to help: "I don't have any background in teaching English as a foreign language – these are conversations, not more traditional language classes. We are different generations: I'm in my 80s and the people who come are much younger!

But they seem to enjoy us talking with them, and I find it fascinating.

"It certainly feels an appropriate thing for us to do."

David is connected to more than 1000 Hong Kongers in the UK through Facebook, and says he could help to advertise any classes. He can be contacted via: chiwaiwu25@gmail.com

For more information on the Hong Kong Response Project, scan this QR code



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EXPLORING MISSION, AROUND A TABLE

Interested in having a learning conversation about mission where you live? A new resource called *Table* may help you and your small group explore just that.

John Good, Baptist pioneer in Poole, has teamed up with Paul Bradbury, an Anglican Pioneer minister, to create the innovative five-week course, which is based on five-tablecloths.

A host simply needs to prepare a meal each week and place it on top of the tablecloth where all the content and questions are laid out imaginatively.

Participants can chat, draw and scribble their way through a teambuilding process which helps them explore the theology, missiology and ecclesiology of missional community. The process also helps them make some decisions together about how they want to do life together as a missional community.

It was born from wanting an accessible course to help new communities be birthed in mission.

Prior to moving to Poole, John was assistant minister of Stopsley Baptist Church in Luton, where he had the responsibility of developing missional communities.

“We were looking for something to help move us forward - a group of enthusiastic people around an initial vision.

“But there was no easy pathway; going from an idea to an actual formed community with an understanding of a sort of semi-autonomous leadership, an understanding of community life and how to organise itself. We were really hankering after something like this.”

With Paul looking for something similar, the pair set about creating the resource.

John and Paul were excited to see that this approach doesn't need a 'qualified' leader

present to impart information. It recognises there's a lot of experience already around the table, as well as encouraging everyone to see the role they each have to play.

A pilot was developed just before the pandemic hit. "The initial feedback was really positive," says John. "People found the visual aspect helpful and said it put them in a different headspace around mission."

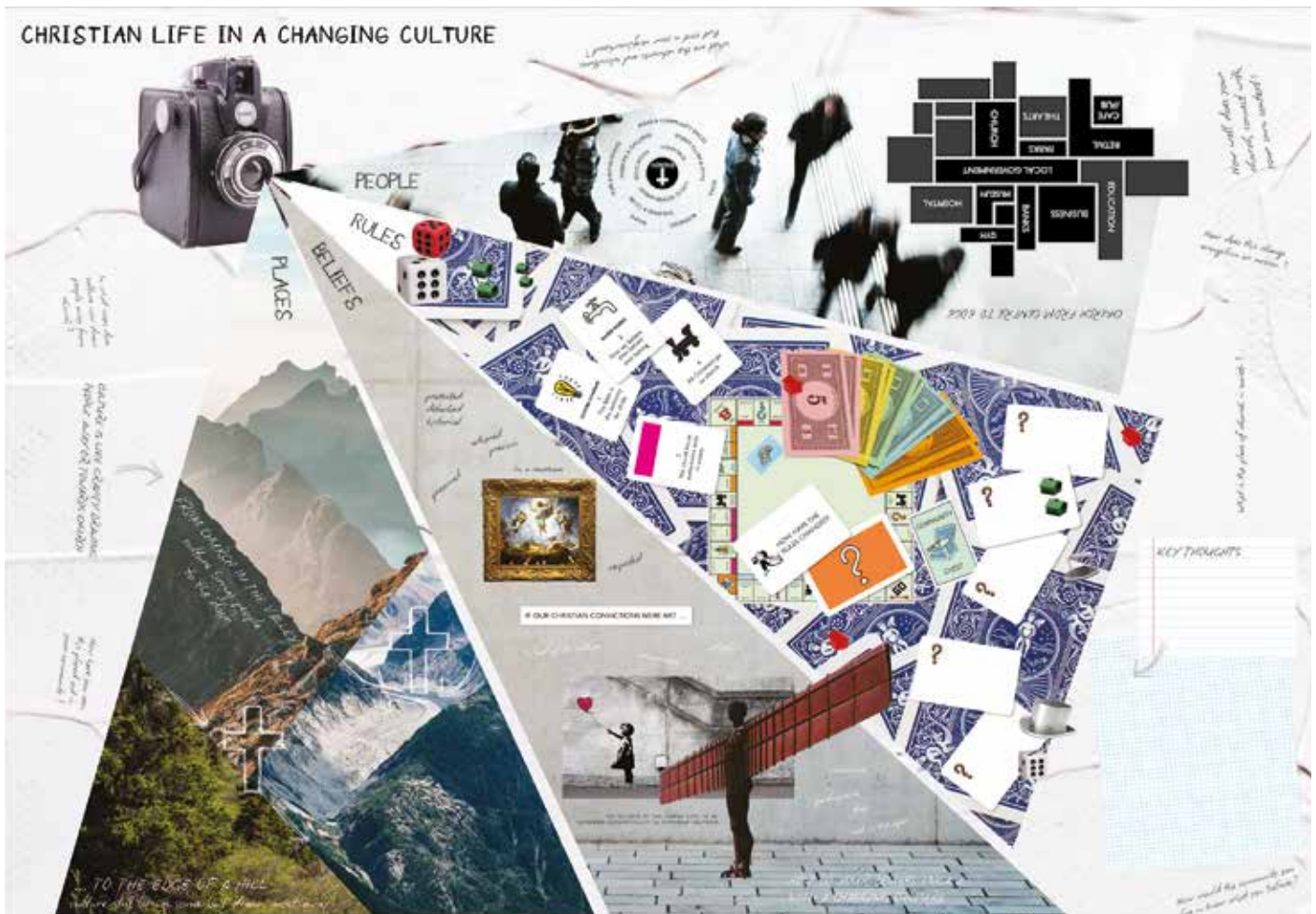
John led a webinar last November to introduce the resource on a wider scale. Most participants so far have either wanted to start a new community, or have come from a church where they wanted to start a new project; or those who have left institutional church all together, but still believe in Christian community and in following Jesus.

He says, "There has been a lot of feedback around the resource taking participants to quite surprising places. The Spirit was at work, highlighting either aspects of their shared life together, or highlighting areas of things they potentially could do or ways they could be together."

To find out more, visit www.poolemc.org.uk/resources



John Good is a Baptist pioneer minister in Poole, Dorset



Photos courtesy of John Good

A Connecting conversation

Conversations are opportunities to connect a little deeper with one another and learn more about ourselves, each other and God, writes Carmel Murphy Elliott.

Here's a practice which helps to cultivate a conversation that connects

Most human beings spend a lot of time in conversation. Many of these conversations are practical, much needed interactions that help us to get things done. But sometimes, amid seemingly 'ordinary moments', something profound happens. Some describe it an 'ah ha!' moment¹ when, in the course of conversation with another, something new is revealed to us, deepening connection with

one other and helping us to see the world in new ways. These moments are God-given gifts that enable us to stretch beyond our current perspectives into new thinking and potential ways of being, as we play with new ideas and seek to embody them in our lives.

Given the generative nature of these encounters, I have been curious about the possibility of curating such conversations and have been delighted to discover, particularly through my work as a Community Organiser, that there are a wealth of practices and tools we can draw on to help us cultivate these connecting conversations. One such approach is called the Four Fold Practice.


The Four Fold Practice is a framework that underpins 'The Art of Hosting'². It is simply an observation that great conversations happen when

people are present, when they participate, when they are hosted well and when they co-create something.

Being Present – Hosting yourself

'Hosting' is often connected with hospitality and making a welcome space for others. But have you ever thought about doing it for yourself? What would it mean to receive yourself in a warm, friendly and generous way, as you would a guest, and how might that help you to engage more fully in conversations?

This first 'fold' is an invitation to 'check in' with ourselves with kindness, to notice what and how we are feeling and to choose to show up and be present. It is not about being 'sorted' or even centred - although this fold may help us to become more so - it's

 1 *A Guide to Creative Conversations* by Anna Ruddick, Cathy Ross and Mike Pears, page 3 <https://churchmissionsociety.org/resources/guide-to-creative-conversations/>

2 <http://artofhosting.org> - a growing community of practitioners supporting each other to enable creative learning and participatory engagement

simply about noticing what's going on for us, being mindful of what we are bringing to the space (including our privileges and marginalities) and coming to the conversation with curiosity. It's an opportunity to be reminded of God's presence and to ask for an awareness of the Spirit at work in our midst.

Participating – Being hosted

To participate in a conversation is often thought of as an opportunity to verbalise our views to others. However, if we are looking to have robust, deep, connecting conversations that have the potential to impact how we see the world, we need to pay as much attention (if not more!) to listening. How would the dynamics of conversations change if, particularly those with power and privilege, more readily arrived ready to listen?

This second 'fold' is an invitation to show up with humility and

the willingness to be a learner, trusting that our conversation partners are gifted by God and have wisdom to share that will challenge and illuminate. Krista Tippett explores this idea further saying: 'Listening is more than just being quiet while others have their say... Real listening is powered by curiosity. It involves vulnerability — a willingness to be surprised, to let go of assumptions and take in ambiguity. The generous listener wants to understand the humanity behind the words of the other and patiently summons one's own best self and one's own most generous words and questions.'³

Hosting others in conversation

Hosting a conversation is more than steering people through an agenda. It's about creating and holding space where people can listen and talk well and engage deeply with one another.

Sometimes as hosts we find security in the structure of an agenda but how can we move beyond that, have confidence in the art of conversation and trust the wisdom in the room?

This third 'fold' is an invitation to be courageous in initiating conversations that matter. Taking time to prepare well beforehand gives us confidence to do this, because it enables us to be clear on the purpose of the conversation, craft questions that will help participants to explore ideas openly, think through how the learning from the conversation will be captured and what will be done with it.

The Art of Hosting and *A Guide to Creative Conversations* both offer methods, tips and tools. During the discussion, courage is required to curate rather than control the conversation. This might mean sitting in an awkward silence, guarding against bias and/or resisting the urge to fix when problems are presented.

Being part of a hosting community – co-creating

Co-creating can be messy, and when we discover that others go about things differently, we might be tempted to think 'I could get this done quicker/better by myself'! But there are riches we receive when we shift our focus from outcomes to others, and choose to commit to communal ways of working - not least that outcomes generated via contributing to a collective effort are often more sustainable, as participating in the process encourages individual ownership! So, what might help us to be a more co-creating community?



³ One of the six grounding virtues of *On Being* - <https://onbeing.org/social-healing-at-on-being/the-six-grounding-virtues-of-the-on-being-project/>

This fourth 'fold' is an invitation for everyone to bring their gifts and fully participate, not only in the continued conversation, but in any actions that arise from the conversation. Sometimes this will require people to relinquish power and encourage others to collaborate. Other times it will require people to step up or step in, believing they have something valuable to contribute. To truly be a part of a co-creating community, we have to be clear about what we can contribute, and yet take delight in honouring the gifts of the other above our own. When we're able to do this, we create a trusting and supportive environment in which we can navigate complexities, learn and grow together.

? **CONVERSATION**

What would it mean to receive yourself in a generous way, as you would a guest?

How can we move beyond an agenda and trust the wisdom in the room?

What might help us to be a more co-creating community?

STARTERS



Carmel Murphy Elliott is a Baptist minister and Community Organiser living in Manchester. She works with Urban Life (www.urbanlife.org), a small charity that helps curate space for theological reflection, particularly for those involved in mission and ministry at the margins.

PASTORAL FUND GRANTS

Empowering Acts of Kindness

Do you or someone you know need financial assistance?

The Baptists Together Pastoral Fund can help by providing a grant to allow someone to:

- Support their family during hard times or a change in circumstances
- Travel to visit a sick family member
- Receive counselling
- Continue in their current role, which may otherwise not be possible
- Take a retreat or holiday to recharge after a difficult period
- Address other needs, including hardship caused by the Coronavirus outbreak

The Pastoral Fund is normally open to anyone working in a Baptist organisation.

To find out if you qualify, and for more information, visit www.baptist.org.uk/pastoralfund or e-mail pastoralfund@baptist.org.uk



EVENTS

Baptist Assembly 14-15 May

www.baptistassembly.org.uk

Christian Aid Week 15-21 May

www.caweek.org

Thy Kingdom Come 26 May - 5 June

Global wave of prayer inviting Christians around the world to pray for more people to know Jesus

www.thykingdomcome.global

The Big Lunch 2-5 June

Coinciding with the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Weekend

www.thebiglunch.com

Pentecost 5 June

JPIT Conference 11 June

From the Ground Up: Unearthing hope and seeking justice

www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/conference

Fathers Day 19 June

Refugee Week 20-26 June

A UK-wide programme of arts, cultural and educational events that celebrate the contribution of refugees to the UK, and encourages a better understanding between communities

www.refugeeweek.org.uk

Sea Sunday 10 July

A day to celebrate the continuing impact the Bible has on individuals and communities.

www.missiontoseafarers.org/sea-sunday

Baptist World Alliance Annual Gathering 10-15 July

www.baptistworld.org/annualgathering

Keswick Convention 16 July-5 August

www.keswickministries.org

New Wine United A 23-28 July United B 29 July-3 August Sixty-One 4-7 August

The East of England Showground, Peterborough

www.new-wine.org

Creation Fest 29 July-1 August

Royal Cornwall Events Centre, Wadebridge

www.creationfest.org.uk

Satellites 9-13 August

The East of England Arena, Peterborough

www.youthscape.co.uk/satellites

Greenbelt 26-29 August

Boughton House, Northamptonshire

www.greenbelt.org.uk

Education Sunday 11 September

www.cte.org.uk/education-sunday

Peacemaking Sunday 18 September

www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/issues/peacemaking

Sam Sharpe Lecture 19 October

10th anniversary lecture being delivered by Prof Kehinde Andrews
The Maths Institute, Oxford

www.baptist.org.uk/samsharpe

For more visit: www.baptist.org.uk/events

New role to focus on the **development of younger leaders**

We are delighted to announce the appointment of Isabella Senior as Young Leaders' Development Coordinator.

Isabella joined the Ministries Team towards the start of March, having previously been working with the iNet and REACH London mission organisations in supporting their long and short-term internships. Before that she was an intern herself at New River Baptist Church in London.

Her appointment follows the recommendation of the internship project group that met throughout 2021. The group brought together 15 people from across Baptists Together who each have a heart for the development of young adults through internships.

Together they created a suite of draft resources that aim to guide young adults looking for

internship opportunities and enable churches who wish to host interns. The project group reported back to the Baptists Together Core Leadership Team in the autumn and suggested the appointment of a Young Leaders' Development Coordinator to continue the work.

Isabella's initial focus is to understand and connect with all those who currently provide



internships in a Baptist context, and with the interns themselves. Alongside this, she is working to complete a suite of resources for churches.

Isabella said: "What an exciting and key role, to support young leaders, churches, and internship providers in offering amazing internship opportunities across England and Wales!

"When I look back at how much I have learned and grown as a disciple of Jesus in both character and competence while I was an intern myself, I can't help but feel privileged in being able to bless others with my experience.

"I'm looking forward to connecting with interns and those who run (or wish to run!) internship programmes and being able to encourage them in this journey!"

FireStarters is returning in 2022

A new series of Firestarter events has been organised this year. The events are conversational spaces over 36 hours where growing Baptist churches help other churches to grow through storytelling, sharing lessons learnt, but avoiding the tendency to give set answers.

Back in 2018 the original churches had committed three years of time to share their stories. That would have been to the end of 2020 but the Covid restrictions from March 2020 meant the last conversation was February of that year.

However, by the middle of 2021 Baptist churches were reaching out to the Firestarter team, asking for the conversations to re-emerge.

Five conversations are scheduled across the country for 2022. At each, at least two fast-growing churches will share their stories of the last year.

Intentionally the focus will be post-Covid and not stories of pre-2020, as this is a new season of new opportunities and new challenges.

Upcoming events :

5-6 May, in partnership with Northern Baptist Association.

13-14 June, Blaby Baptist Church near Leicester.

29-30 June, on the edge of Reading, in friendship with Southern Counties Baptist Association.

12-13 July, at Heathervale Baptist Church, Greater London.

20-21 July, at The Well in Sheffield, in friendship with Yorkshire Baptist Association.

For more information or to book your place please contact Alex Harris at alex.harris@yba.org.uk

Baptist Union Council - March 2022

A new college application, consideration of a change to the Ministerial Recognition Rules and the first stage of our Financial Model Review were among the key items at the latest Baptist Union Council.

Around 70 people gathered at the Hayes Conference Centre in Swanwick, Derbyshire for the end of March gathering, which also included the usual finance, pensions, new and closed churches, and Key Roles Nominations updates.

Council members narrowly voted to refuse an application from St Hild's College to become a member of the Baptist Union of Great Britain. This was the first application for membership of a Baptist college since the inception of our current Union.

A change to the Ministerial Recognition Rules relating to what they say about marriage was considered, following a request in a letter signed by 70 people, mainly ministers, who are part of Baptists Together.

The requested change would mean that a minister who is in a same-sex marriage would no longer be committing gross misconduct and lose their accreditation. The Council agenda paper said the letter highlighted 'the divergence of practice between the ability of a minister to preside at a same sex marriage where the covenant with church takes priority – and the inability of a minister to enter a same sex marriage where the covenant with the Union takes priority'. The intention was to consider the request from a variety of viewpoints, not to make a decision at this time.

A series of recommendations relating to increased clarity and agreement on how the various elements of Baptists Together can collaborate for individual and collective benefit, and the consideration of alternative financial models for raising and distributing funds, was approved.

The three recommendations were offered in the first phase of the Financial Model Review,

in a report by the independent consulting practice Tricordant.

"Reflecting on last week's Council meeting, I noticed that there were many positive aspects of our time together," said General Secretary Lynn Green, "including creativity and worship, grace-filled listening, friendship renewed, laughter shared, and heartfelt intercession.

"But it was also a time when we wrestled with some very difficult issues. There was honesty, there was difference and there was pain. The light and the shade were held before God as we shared communion together; the body of Christ broken for us, the blood of Christ poured out for us.

"I am praying that in the midst of all this we will continue to fix our eyes on Jesus, seek his Kingdom and grow more fully into the fruit of the Spirit, trusting that the Lord will hold us and lead us through."

For the full report, visit: baptist.org.uk/council22



Prayers

With the Order for Baptist Ministry

The following prayers are taken from the Daily Offices of the Order for Baptist Ministry (OBM). All are available on open access at: orderforbaptistministry.co.uk/daily-office/.

A Daily Office is a sequence of prayers for daily use, using given or written prayers in a regular format, and those for OBM also give space for extempore prayer and use the Common Lectionary for three readings of Scripture — from the Psalms, the Old Testament and the New Testament.

In OBM we have a different Office for each day of the week, with a focus in each upon a different season of the Church year (such as Christmas, Lent and Passiontide, Easter and Pentecost.) There are in addition Alternative Offices for each day, and a shorter Office, giving variety for those who use the OBM Daily Office regularly. You can also find a similar sequence of Mid-day Prayers, and others for use at the end of the day, all on the website.

With a theme of discipleship for this edition of *Baptists Together*, the sequence of prayers here reflects the typical OBM Daily Office format, but draws material from a range of different days of the week.

The Order for Baptist Ministry is now over ten years old, and was formed from the desire to help Baptist ministers remain faithful to their calling as disciples in baptism and as ministers through ordination.

Members, and others, use the Daily Office as their form of daily prayer, are part of a small accountability group called a 'cell' (as in 'cell group') meeting every few weeks, and attend a

gathering of the whole community for 36 hours annually in Convocation.

A founding document entitled 'The Dream' gives shape to our life together, and that, together with the searching questions we ask of ourselves in cell groups, can all be found on the OBM website. We always welcome enquiries about our life, and for further information please contact Paul Goodliff, who convenes the Core Group of the Order.

Visit:
orderforbaptistministry.co.uk

Read more about the history of OBM – and whether, as a minister, you would like to join: baptist.org.uk/obm



Becoming present to God

Holy God,
whose power is known
through wind, fire
and still small voice,
be present with us now,
that as we pray
our hearts may burn within us.

Celebrating the presence of God

Radiant God,
in Jesus, your Son,
you have made yourself known
to those who are near
and those who are far off.

*We give you praise
that no-one is beyond the reach
of your love
and that you desire everyone to
be drawn to your light.*

We give you thanks
that your light shines
in all places and towards all
peoples
and that your light
has shone in our hearts.

*Help us this day
to walk in the light of your Spirit
as we seek to live for your glory.
In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen.*

Acknowledging our Humanity

Lord Jesus, you call us
to take up our cross and follow.

When we forfeit our soul
to gain the whole world:
Lord have mercy,
Christ have mercy

When we are distracted
from prayer and watchfulness:
Lord have mercy,
Christ have mercy

When we are unfaithful
to the Gospel through denial,
betrayal or aggression:
Lord have mercy,
Christ have mercy

When we shrink
from the implications of love:
Lord have mercy,
Christ have mercy

*Merciful God,
pardon our sin,
and renew in us,
as in all God's people,
the desire to follow Christ's way.
Amen.*

In the Daily Office we read Scripture here.

Reflecting on our roots

Living God, enable us this day
to be pilgrims and companions:
committed to the way of Christ,
faithful to the call of Christ,
discerning the mind of Christ,
offering the welcome of Christ,
growing in the likeness of Christ,
engaging in the mission of Christ,
in the world that belongs to
Christ.

Bringing our concerns

We pray for the world
in which good and evil flourish
together
like tares amongst wheat,
until the end of the Age
and Christ's coming ushers in
a new heaven
and a new earth.

*We recognise the presence of
injustice, oppression, violence,
hatred, indifference and
vengeance,
in a world which you created
very good.*

Until the day arrives when all will
be put right
and suffering, death and tears
will be no more,
*until then may your Kingdom
come
through loving service;
courageous witness to truth;
faithful standing with the poor;
and selfless hunger for the good.*

*May your Kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth, as it is in heaven.
Amen*

Extempore prayer follows, and finally the Lord's Prayer

Going to love and serve

Holy God, may we live this day
with Christ's call to discipleship
ringing in our ears.

And should this day bring us
pain,
we pray that we may meet it
with honesty and hope,
grounded in the knowledge
that even in the darkest place
we may be touched
and changed by your love.

*So may we grasp,
with all your people,
how wide and long, how high
and deep
is the love of Christ,
and be filled with the very
nature of God.
Amen.*

Optional:

+ In the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit





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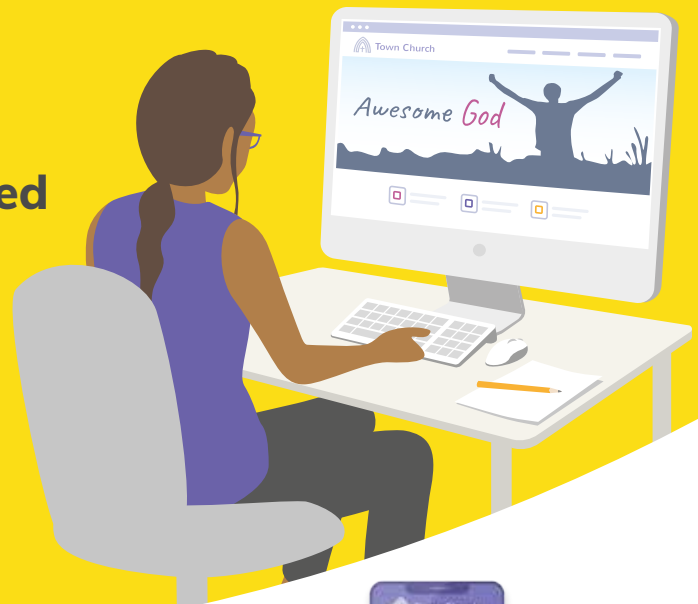
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