

BAPTISTS

Spring 2021

# TOGETHER

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Our Identity  
Listening to conversations

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The magazine for the Baptist Union of Great Britain

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TOGETHER



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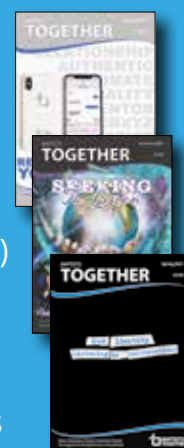
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# OUR IDENTITY: LISTENING TO CONVERSATIONS

It's been a period of such upheaval that no one has been unaffected. Certainly churches have had to adapt in ways that would have been unthinkable this time last year. The life we knew before Covid-19 has at the very least been put on pause; in all probability it's unlikely to ever be what it once was. Our full withdrawal from the European Union, now the transition period has ended, adds to the atmosphere of change.

It's natural to ask foundational questions about who we are and what we do at such a time, and the magazine editorial group took this as its starting point. Our previous edition focused on what we might be learning from God during the pandemic; our current offering seeks to step back and explore something of our general identity as Baptists. Under the authority of Jesus, we acknowledge there are huge differences in approach and understandings. One piece suggests that 'to be Baptist is simply to participate in the conversation about what it means to be Baptist' (p10), we therefore offer a space to listen to some of the conversations taking place among us right now.



After our General Secretary Lynn Green reminds us about why and where we can draw our confidence with her reflection on Hebrews 10, Andy Goodliff asks directly what it means to be Baptist, and emphasises the importance of knowing and interrogating our past. We then hear briefly from the Baptist Historical Society about four distinct areas of our tradition.

Church meetings and making space to hear from one another (and how God might be speaking through us) is another area of focus, as are mission and different areas of justice. We hear from several churches on how the Covid restrictions have impacted thinking on meeting together, buildings, and singing. Other pieces highlight the identity of ministers in relation to the new focus on Continuing Ministerial Development, and the thinking behind a new resource that seeks to make our churches safe spaces for all. We are delighted too to share an international perspective on Baptist identity from Luke Shaw, pastor and past president of the Jamaica Baptist Union.

As ever, we hope there is much here to reflect on and inform as we make space to listen to the different voices among us. And conversation is a two way street – do drop us a line to comment on anything in the edition, or with suggestions for future editions – we'd be delighted to hear from you. The world is changing, but may the Baptist commitment to walking together and watching over each other be as strong as it ever was.

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The views of individual writers expressed in this magazine do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editorial Group or Baptists Together.

**Photo credits:** Unless otherwise stated, photos are taken from Baptist Union archives

### *Baptists Together*

is produced three times per year by:

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Registered Charity Number: 1181392

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LYNN GREEN

# Identity and Confidence

*This edition of our magazine is opening up a great space for us to continue the conversation about our identity as Baptists in today's world. I want to contribute to that conversation by sharing about confidence and identity.*

Confidence was already a word that was resonating in my heart as I stepped into the role of General Secretary in 2013. Not only were we being stirred to nurture our confidence in the Gospel, there was also a sense that we needed to be confident in who we were as Baptists. The passage of Scripture that has been important to me when thinking about confidence has been from Hebrews 10. As with many other things, verses that God has been laying on our hearts over many months and years have taken on greater depth and significance during this pandemic.

## Confident Disciples

Our confidence in the Gospel begins with being confident disciples. Sometimes people have shared with me that they are unsure about their relationship with God and their eternal destiny. Hebrews 10:19 however, speaks of the confidence we can have; 'since we have confidence...' There is no debate here, our relationship with God and all that that means are stated as simply

how things are. And this sort of confidence is not just for 'super Christians', nor for the arrogant, but for EVERY follower of Jesus.

We have confidence.

Our confidence is rooted in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and we can draw near to God and have full assurance of faith because of that. Our confidence is rooted in grace. Christ has made a way for us and, imperfect as we are, we are welcomed into God's family to share in God's purposes for humanity and the whole of creation.

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***'Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus...'***

*Hebrews 10:19 (NRSV)*

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## Confident Churches

As I said earlier, passages like this have taken on greater significance during this pandemic. This is particularly true of Hebrews 10:23-25. In the latter half of 2020, as the full impact of the Coronavirus and its sustained uncertainty and challenge were being felt, the vital need for us to support and encourage each other was becoming crystal clear as I prayed and waited on the Lord.

We want to support and encourage each other to be confident churches. For each and every church to know that they are loved by God; precious and beautiful. For each and every church to be clear of his unique call to them in their context and be content to simply pursue that; nothing more, nothing less.

But these verses also talk about spurring one another on and this is a robust turn of phrase. Lots of the time it has certainly felt like all we could and can do is to keep putting one foot in front of the other. But surely this is the point? Our call as disciples and as churches is to spur each other on; cheering each other on and willing each other to persevere. When one feels overwhelmed, another comes alongside to encourage and support us and to lift our hearts to God's call and Kingdom purposes. And there have been so many ways that we have been spurring each other on in these unprecedented times. New prayer networks have sprung up, digital expertise has been shared, content for online services has been offered, imaginative mission ideas and opportunities shared, financial support made accessible, specialist advice provided and social media spaces have enabled leaders to share that they are struggling and be encouraged and prayed for. It has been great to see how leaders and churches have been embracing a bigger Kingdom vision. Maybe we have needed to have a greater sense of being 'Backs against the wall' for us to really grasp what it means for us to 'feel like one team'.

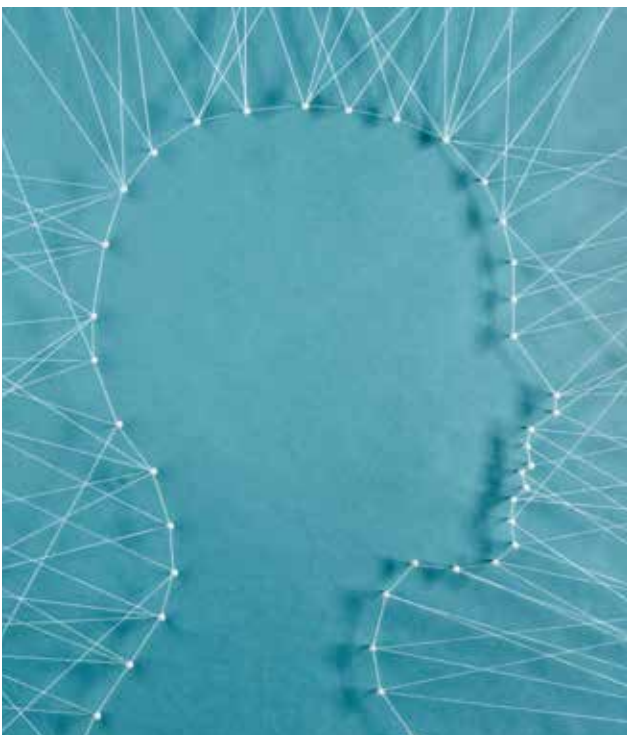


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***'Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.'***

*Hebrews 10:23-25 (NRSV)*

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## Confident Movement

Interestingly, the writer of Hebrews was communicating with a community of believers who were facing very challenging times themselves. For them it was about persecution. In the face of such challenges there was the temptation for them to give up on the Christian faith, to throw in the towel and go back to the safety and familiarity of Judaism. It seems that being at the vanguard of a new faith movement was turning out to be a tough gig! The letter to the Hebrews is an impassioned exhortation to these embattled believers: Don't give up, you've found something so precious in Jesus and come so far. Keep going! Despite all the challenges, don't shrink back now! Remember who God IS, his presence with us and his promises now and for eternity.

Like those initial recipients, we too have been catapulted into a prolonged season of upheaval and uncertainty. Finding ourselves in the thick of a global pandemic and also negotiating the final stages of Brexit have brought us into an in-between place which we could never have predicted. So much about church that we have come to take as read, has been thrown up in the air. The demands of discipleship and leadership have been overwhelming and exhausting at times and there have been moments when we have felt like throwing in the towel. All this impacts our confidence, not only as disciples and churches but also for us as a movement.

Back in 2017 Pastor Jonathan Oloyede, Global Day of Prayer, shared with me a word for the Baptist family.

*"I saw the Baptist family in the **vanguard** of an upsurge of faith and expressions of the Gospel of the Kingdom. It was really remarkable and I believe that your denomination has the grace to help move the church forward in the nation."*



## Vanguard.

Now that is not a word that springs to mind for most Baptists! Our narrative about ourselves is much more likely to be making jokes about interminable deacons' meetings, a reluctance to change (How many Baptists does it take to change a lightbulb? CHANGE!?) and church meetings preoccupied with the colour of the tea cups.

## Vanguard.

I believe that we need to nurture our confidence as a movement and our confidence in who God has called us to be in these days. This is not an arrogant confidence that brashly swaggers around thinking that we are better or more important than anyone else. No, this is a Godly confidence that believes that God has called and gifted a modest movement of churches, for such a time as this. God needs us to gather our confidence in him and his call because we have a unique part to play in the church in the UK at this time. We are far from perfect, but by God's grace, we have a role in his Kingdom purposes.

## Vanguard.

So often we only see the barriers and challenges that our way of being church creates. But I believe that now is the time to focus on our potential and look for ways

that we can free ourselves to respond to God's call and step up to the plate. God sees our ability to embrace, celebrate and hold together different perspectives as a gift. God sees our desire to see every disciple participate in discerning the Lord's leading as a gift. God sees our collaborative DNA - the priesthood of all believers - as a gift. God sees our communities of belonging as a gift. God sees our grassroots capacity for swift, responsive and contextual action as a gift.

Above all God sees our heart for him. He sees that we have waited for him and made room for him to speak and act. He sees that we have opened ourselves, our churches and our movement to him as we have said, "Lord, you are welcome here."

The question is, can we see ourselves as God sees us? Can we ditch our negative human narrative about ourselves and have confidence as a movement in how God has shaped us and all that he has entrusted to us? Confidence in our identity.

## Vanguard.

Confident disciples, confident churches, confident movement.

Now is not the time to shrink back.

**Lynn Green is our General Secretary**

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# What Does It Mean To Be Baptist

Mission  
Core Values  
No Hierarchy?  
History  
Together  
To Baptise

ANDY GOODLIFF

Why we need to be both stewards and interrogators of our story,  
and - with the Spirit's guidance - be open to improvisation

I wonder what is it to be a Baptist? I wonder what matters most? One Baptist has said that 'to be Baptist is simply to participate in the conversation about what it means to be Baptist.'<sup>1</sup> It is suggestive of the early Baptist understanding that being Baptist was a commitment to 'walking together and watching over another in ways known and to be made known.' What has always been important to Baptists is the recognition that Christ calls us into fellowship, and with this an accompanying trust that Christ guides and empowers the local church for its life together. At the heart of being Baptist from its beginnings to its present is a commitment that walking and watching requires talking and listening — a conversation — which we usually name the church meeting. To be Baptist is to engage in conversation, blessed in the tie (Christ) that binds our hearts together in love. This doesn't mean the conversation is all sweetness and light, there has been and is often disagreement and tension and occasionally (in the history of the Baptist Union) some have parted company, including one of the most famous Baptists, Charles Spurgeon himself.

Thirty-five years ago, in 1986, Brian Haymes published a little book called *A Question of Identity*. It was something of a small bestseller in the Baptist world. Suddenly Baptist identity was on the agenda, it became the subject of discussion in the Baptist Union Council, and in the following decades Baptist theologians — among them Nigel Wright, Paul Fiddes and Steve Holmes — have put forward their own understandings of what makes us who we are.

Haymes' little book began by noticing that Baptist identity was changing in ways which were both positive and negative. In the wider Christian world of the 1980s there was the growing impact of the charismatic movement, the ecumenical movement, an increased identification by many with the Evangelical Alliance, and at the same time a waning of a historic nonconformist identity (shared with the URC, Methodists and others). Likewise in the broader world there was an increasing individualism, marketization, and globalisation, which were altering our relationships in all directions.

As part of that Christian and wider world, Baptist identity was being shaken up. In 1991, Nigel Wright issued a 'challenge to change.' This was not something new, as Baptists have always been changing and each generation has to ask 'who are we?' We currently live in a context that is being changed by Brexit, a pandemic, and a renewed awareness of racial injustice. All of these should make us ask, who are we today?

We have to admit that all the conversation about Baptist identity since *A Question of Identity* has not produced a settled answer to the question, and perhaps that is the point. There remains an on-going contestation about what is important and what matters. And here we must say 'and ever was it so.' Baptists have always had something they were contesting whether it was hymn-singing, the doctrine of the Trinity, the Lord's Supper, ecumenical membership; today's conversation has more recently been focused on issues of human sexuality.

‘At the heart of being Baptist is a commitment that walking and watching requires talking and listening - a conversation.’

If it is right that to be a Baptist is to participate in a conversation, then the conversation cannot just look to what is happening around us, it also has to look back, which is to say we need to acknowledge tradition. The word tradition means that being Baptist was not something we invented, but is a (hi)story that started before us, over 400 hundred years ago. Being Baptist today means we walk in the tracks of those who have come before us. The understanding of our being church owes something to Thomas Helwys, Dorothy Hazzard, Charles Spurgeon, Ernest Payne, Fred George, Margaret Jarman, and many others. What does this mean for the conversation?

It means, I suggest, three things:<sup>2</sup>

**First** it means, we need to be stewards of our story. In other words, we are those who believe it's important to know the past, and to treasure the insights and practices our forebears laid down as a gift of Christ both then and now. To engage in Baptist history means we might avoid constantly reinventing the wheel and it can instil in us a sense of gratitude and humility as we uncover the wisdom and light that enables us to recognise a continuity in some form with earlier Baptists. We might mention here in broad terms, the practices of communal discernment; believers' baptism; the shared reading of Scripture; associating with other churches; and a call to mission and evangelism.

**Second**, it means we also need to be interrogators of our story. By this I mean we see it for its gifts and for its failures. No tradition is pristine and perfect, and so it requires re-evaluation, a sifting of views and practices which overlooked or brought harm. Sometimes this will

mean retelling the story, highlighting different persons or moments whose part has not been rightly acknowledged, eg the contributions made by women and persons of colour.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes it will mean a questioning of not only the past, but of the present too. It will admit that most of the thinking and writing on Baptist identity has largely been done by white men.

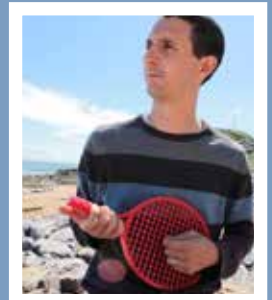
**Thirdly**, it will learn to improvise. In his 2014 BMS Catalyst Live talk Glen Marshall showed how improvisation,<sup>4</sup> and with it imagination, is important for jazz to be jazz, but also for the church to be the church. Improvisation is a means of keeping the story going, continuing the conversation, and being open to the Holy Spirit speaking through the past and in this moment. The Baptist story is one that has undergone regular improvisation through its four hundred year history, from the embrace of singing, to overseas mission, women in ministry, to ecumenical partnership. Our story is not one that fixes things in unchanging Articles or Dogma, but at its best is always responding to what is happening within, around and coming to us. The witnesses of old fuel our imagination to faithful improvisation in the present. Tradition then is not dry and dusty, but is something living — Baptists are a living tradition. History is always just behind us and the future is always just ahead of us, and we live in a space that invites us to look back and to look forward, so the conversation of who we are and who God is calling us to be is one that has the character of truth, patience, humility, faith and hope.

‘We are pilgrims on a journey,’<sup>5</sup> summoned by God to walk together, to listen to and to talk with one another, as churches, associations, colleges and as a Union, with an open Bible, open hearts and minds to the Spirit's guidance, treasuring and questioning our story, receptive to the stories of others (be they Baptist or not), so that we may become a community of trust that improvises our life with Christ together for the kingdom and God.

‘Improvisation: being open to the Holy Spirit speaking through the past and in this moment.’

Pilgrim God,  
thank you that you speak to us.  
Help us to listen and talk together  
that we might discern your way  
for our time.  
Thank you for the wisdom you give  
us in the witnesses of our past.  
May the stories of their faithfulness  
and frailties,  
inspire our imagination  
to new faith and hope in Christ,  
the source of our baptism  
and pioneer of your mission.  
Amen.

Andy Goodliff is the minister of Belle Vue Baptist Church, Southend.



He is the author of *Renewing a Modern Denomination: A Study of Institutional Baptist Life* (2020)

- 1 Cited in Steven Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future* (Baylor, 2016).
- 2 I borrow these three things from Mark Medley and his chapter in *Tradition and the Baptist Academy* (Paternoster, 2011).
- 3 Part of the story of the last thirty years is the summons to be heard by women, persons of colour, those with a disability, and those who are LGBT.
- 4 [bmscatalystlive.com/portfolio-item/glen-marshall-reading-2014](https://bmscatalystlive.com/portfolio-item/glen-marshall-reading-2014)
- 5 As the hymn 'Brother, sister let me serve you' puts it.



# Uncovering Our Baptist Story

**The Baptist Historical Society helps British Baptists understand their heritage and history. In autumn 2020 it held a collection of zoom webinars, each exploring a different aspect of our identity.**

**Each session began with a short address from a historian, and included responses and discussion as to how the theme relates to Baptists today.**

## 1 A story of dissent

Baptist origins in this country are rooted in disagreeing with people, explained Ruth Gouldbourne, minister at Grove Lane Baptist Church in Cheadle Hulme, in introducing the opening webinar. Baptists became Baptists first by dissenting from the national church; and then from other separatists over issues to do with the nature of the congregation and nature of baptism.



Now that we are no longer marginalised in the same way, what does it mean to be a dissenter now? Dissent can be seen as a negative position: disagreeing and withdrawing because we can no longer be in fellowship. There are times when our story has been exactly that.

But dissenting as an act of liberty, of refusal to acknowledge any authority than that of Christ as absolute, and so offering the same freedom of conscience for others, is the positive story of dissent that has shaped us, and that we as Baptists have offered at our best.



## 2 A story of fellowship and connection

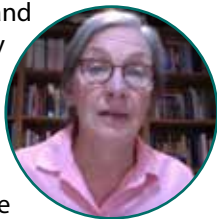
This webinar, introduced by Baptist Historical Society secretary and regional minister Stephen Copson, explored how Baptists have organised themselves over four centuries to collaborate. They have done so for several reasons: for mutual support; to explore and learn from each other; to seek advice and to weigh disputes. They have joined together under Christ the head, and as such have sought to extend care and concern for others. Association has been nurtured by placing trust in representatives.



Stephen spoke of this kind of collaboration in terms of being an 'ecclesial body': one where churches commit to working together and to listen to each other, and where they recognise there is a 'community of difference'. He explained that commitment in union is to take the risk of listening for God by making room for different insights. Baptist Associations and Unions should be a vehicle for this to be expressed, he continued: they bring together breadth of experience, and 'the expectations of congregations that differ in style, leadership and outlook'.

### 3 A story of communal discernment

The third webinar was led by *Baptist Quarterly* co-editor Karen Smith and explored how Baptists discern the way of Christ together as a local church, and in wider networks. Doing so rests on important theological themes: the emphasis on freedom of conscience; and the importance of sharing together with other believers.



Church meetings are a way of discerning the mind of Christ – they're not a democracy, nor seek a majority. They're an obvious expression of communion in Christ – hence they include all members, with everyone free to share their views. There's an understanding that the Spirit moves among the whole body of believers.

One of the challenges modern churches face is the pressure to organise the church around a business model. While it is recognised that legal responsibilities remain with trustees, this should never outweigh the covenantal and spiritual importance of ministry – and collectively seeking the mind of Christ.



### 4 Theology that leads to mission

The final webinar had a theme of mission, and the good (and bad) theology that underpins it. Peter Morden of South Parade Baptist Church, Leeds, explained how Particular Baptists in the 18th century had moved from a theology which pushed human responsibility to one side (High Calvinism) to one inherently more evangelical. The move was led by the likes of Andrew Fuller, William Carey and Hannah Marshman and based on their reading of the scriptures. The examples of Jesus and the apostles pointed to outward looking, evangelistic preaching and effort, as well as social action. The key fruit was the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society in 1792, but there was significant growth at home, too.



The foundational point is that theology matters – a bad theology leads to no mission; a biblical renewal of theology leads to vigorous mission. We need to look at the theology that underpins our approach.



Find all the webinars here: [baptisthistory.org.uk/videos](https://baptisthistory.org.uk/videos)

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Christ



The Body

1 Corinthians 12.27

# The Body Life

A Baptist church meeting can be special, beautiful even,  
but we need to understand why ————— By Ruth Moriarty

This article is part of a broader qualitative study of four local Baptist churches on the Church Meeting for Ruth's doctorate at the University of Chester. The voices included in her research are all pseudonyms and each church has been given the name of a notable female minister to celebrate the centenary of women ministers ordained in the Baptist Union.

**A** Baptist Church Meeting should be understood to be a place of discernment through the 'body life' of the members, where listening to others is valued and space for the prophetic lone voice is assured. Nell at Hedger Baptist stated: "It's this body life which is supposed to be the Baptist thing."

The phrase 'body life' here reflects a Baptist belief that all Christians, and therefore members, are understood to be part of body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27) and the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:5). Each person attending a Baptist church is encouraged to become a member as a reflection of this theological principle. Members can then together discern the mind of Christ as his body. As Stanley Grenz states: 'the active role of all [is] in the corporate search for the will of Christ for the church.'<sup>1</sup> Full attendance and full participation of the members of the body of Christ is vital to hear the fullness of God's Spirit speaking.

Integral to a Church Meeting is an intention to listen to the full body of members as Matthew, minister at Jarman Baptist stated:

"I've tried to talk about the essence of a Church Meeting as being about the responsibility to listen rather than the right to speak." Attentive listening to all voices enables the prophetic to be heard. Nell said: "Often it's the lone voice that is right. The voice in the wilderness that is right, not the majority." A Church Meeting that enables listening to all members and space for the prophetic to be heard is part of the particular practice of a discernment at a Baptist Church Meeting; it's a practice different to any other regular type of club meeting where democratic methods are used for processing agenda items.



Using small groups offers a better  
and broader sense of the  
mind of Christ

A critical issue in this discrepancy over the role of the Church Meeting is identified as the influence and tradition of people from other denominations now part of Baptist churches. Regarding regular attendees at her church Nell states: "A lot don't come from a Baptist tradition." Here a pattern of church attendance is noted where denominational preferences have waned, no longer do those raised in the Baptist church always seek to attend a Baptist church. Further, as Desmond identified, Hedger Baptist Church's congregation is "a mixture of folks, we've got Catholic, Anglican, strong Methodists, Pentecostal." The consequence of this mixture of Christian attendees at church is that 'certain people are more willing to come and receive than to contribute to the direction' of the church and in particular fail to engage with congregational governance at the Church Meeting.



A Baptist Church Meeting is different to any other regular type of club meeting where democratic methods are used for processing agenda items... Often it's the lone voice that is right. The voice in the wilderness, not the majority.

Stephen at Gates Baptist explains the issue further: "They don't know too much about it and we're not doing an awful lot to help them to understand it, [therefore] it becomes a democracy." Where a Baptist church fails to offer a clear explanation of discernment practice and the value



Daniel, as a black man from Cameroon, showed me, a white woman from east London, the power of ensuring all voices are heard in discernment at the Church Meeting,

of the Church Meeting in a Baptist setting, new attendees of the church are unable to engage in a 'body life'. Too often the assumption expressed in this project was that new attendees would appreciate the importance of the Church Meeting by osmosis. New attendees therefore either never become members, become members but do not speak, or become members and understand the tools of democracy such as voting as to be of the highest importance.

Where can a liberative 'body life' model of a Church Meeting be found? A Church Meeting can be a place where discerning the mind of Christ is a liberating experience when all members are valued equally in Christ and heard through contributions that are deliberately sought. Daniel is a middle-aged engineer and deacon at Gates Baptist Church. He reflected on the use of small groups for discussing pastoral care: "It was beautiful – so many contributions. So when we break people up in groups like that and get almost everyone's view and then we pray together, that is when we discern the mind of Christ together." The use of small groups with a good facilitator and feedback process is beneficial as it opens the discernment process beyond powerful members and draws out those who are unsure of speaking in front of

a large audience. Using small groups offers a better and broader sense of the mind of Christ.

I was struck by Daniel's choice of language; 'beautiful' was not a common adjective used to describe the Church Meeting in the project. Through the use of small groups, members were heard into speech as Nelle Morton states: 'Hearing in this sense can break through political and social structures to be heard by the disinherited.'<sup>2</sup> Daniel, as a black man from Cameroon, showed me, a white woman from east London, the power of ensuring all voices are heard in discernment at the Church Meeting. Our body life as Baptists ought to be shared widely for it is liberating to hear all discerning what the Spirit says - and it is beautiful.

1 Stanley Grenz (2002). *The Baptist Congregation* (page 57). Vancouver, Canada: Regent College Publishing

2 Nelle Morton (1985). *The Journey is Home* (page 128). Boston, USA: Beacon Press.

NB This article formed part of a Baptist Historical Society webinar available on YouTube <https://youtu.be/jsqMgOYPw08>

Ruth Moriarty is a Baptist minister at Christ Church New Southgate & Friern Barnet in north London, DProf student at the University of Chester and editor of Baptists Together publication *Becoming a Mother in Ministry*.



## The Church Meeting and the era of Covid 19

Lockdown life for the Church Meeting has been challenging. Many churches have encountered the digital divide, where members have no access to computers or WIFI at home which has meant streaming platforms (like Zoom) have been impossible to use for services or a Church Meeting. For these churches, communal discernment is limited to in-person Church Meetings which in itself limits attendees to low-risk members.

Here the matter of what we discuss and discern at a Church Meeting is usefully refined, where only the most critical items are considered. This kind of agenda control can be helpful too across church life.

Meanwhile for churches that have a significant number of members who are able to regularly access streaming platforms, the format itself enforces listening to each other.

By only being able to listen to one speaker at a time, each member is heard into speech. Connecting digitally enables a younger and broader demographic in these churches to attend as, for example, parents can attend without need for a babysitter. Making good use of breakout rooms can attract a broader range of voices to participate which is beneficial to hearing the Spirit speak.





Image: Blackhorse Road Baptist Church | shutterstock.com

"I've been trying to implement the fundamentals of my research," explains **Malcolm Patten**. "How do you have a genuinely multicultural congregation? How do you empower people? How do you go about putting people in positions of influence to reflect the diversity of the congregation?"

Malcolm is the senior minister of Blackhorse Road Baptist Church in Walthamstow, east London. His doctoral thesis was based on qualitative research into a multicultural church. He is the author of *Multiethnic Church*, a Baptists Together course for small groups to help develop healthy, integrated churches, as well as the book *Leading a Multicultural Church*.

He says a core element of Baptist identity is the priesthood of all believers, which he prefers to describe as the *participation of all believers*: this re-wording has made it easier for his congregation to grasp, and helped move the church through a period of change.

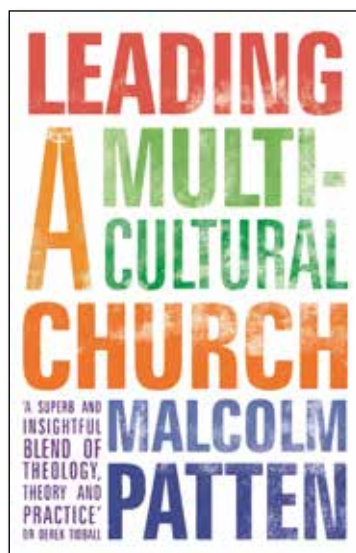
When he arrived at Blackhorse Road in 2009 there was just one person from a minority ethnic background in a position of leadership. That ratio for trustees is now 50/50, and the church is working to increase the number of people from minority ethnic backgrounds across the other teams: trustees/deacons, worship leaders, junior church leaders. They vary with some under and others over the ratio.

"We've tried to bring diversity to all the teams," he says. "It's been a slow process. We recognise that being a historically white-led church we've had to go the extra mile, work extra hard to bring diversity to the ranks.

"You have to encourage people, build their confidence that they will be heard and taken seriously."

When people are on leadership teams, there has to be a recognition they approach things in different ways.

Malcolm cites the work of Dutch social psychologist, Geert Hofstede who talks about how there is a different 'power distance' between people and their leaders. Some cultures will have a large gap and more of a natural deference to their leader.



He mentions Theo, a Congolese man in his congregation who is now an elder and trustee. If Theo disagrees with an idea, he wouldn't directly say this (indeed, he would actually tell Malcolm that he supported the idea). However, he would voice his concern in the form of a story.

"He won't disagree directly, so I need to give him space, to be able to understand what he's saying. This requires deep listening. By contrast, a white person might simply say they disagreed straight away. It requires work and adjustment on all our parts.

"The result of this adjustment and listening has been an enriched, deeper understanding of the church and its congregation's needs and thinking", Malcolm says.

"Deep listening takes time. You can't make decisions quickly. But you can reach more widely and deeply. You have their views of different cultures better represented. And the greater the diversity and perspectives, you're more likely to get a better answer.

"You are also working with people who are used to working cross-culturally. One example at our church is that we have had a number of Iranians join us. Theo knows what it's like to go through a claim for asylum, and he can empathise with that in a way I cannot.

"So for us it has required attention, time and deep listening – but it's brought greater richness, depth and insight."



Download Malcolm's *Multiethnic Church* course from [baptist.org.uk/multiethnic](http://baptist.org.uk/multiethnic)



## "FINDING WAYS OF BEING GOD'S GATHERED PEOPLE - WITHOUT RELYING ON OUR PREMISES"

Luciana Damascena and Hazel Sherman on life at West Worthing Baptist Church



Photo: West Worthing Baptist Church

**H**ere at West Worthing Baptist Church, like in all of your churches, we are trying to discover what lessons Covid teaches us about being a gathered people, and even about what gathering will or should look like in the future.

We found a new proximity to our people during lockdown, as we phoned around regularly and had longer conversations with those who didn't have much else to do or places to be. We discovered that some of our people who didn't 'do' internet actually can be taught to interact with others online. We discovered that we had a greater reliance on structured gatherings in the building in order to do the missional work of the church than we thought. We have brought our two distinct services into a blended one for the time being and discovered that our people can adapt more than we gave them credit for, and we have stopped most of our outreach programmes, which we never thought we could be church without.

It used to be that we relied on all the things our building allowed us to do. We shared the gospel, because we had a building that helped us do it: our coffee bar, the groups that came into the premises, our luncheon club, toddlers group and all the other programmes which brought in people for us to meet and care for. Now we are asking ourselves how to continue to be open and welcoming to the local community when we cannot rely on the premises to do so for us. We are wondering, how do we welcome visitors and neighbours, some of whom are not interested in faith, and help fill their need for a safe space for conversation and friendship when so many are lonely and anxious, without offering them a seat and a cup of tea?

We haven't yet arrived at a conclusion, but we do know that the first step is to recognise how much the building did the work for us. After reaching this realisation, we hope that now we can embark on a journey of discovering

new, and perhaps simpler, ways of being here for people. After all, our members have discovered that they were not as averse to change and adaptation as they thought they were, now that the majority is happy with a new way of worshipping and fellowship, brought on them quite suddenly. I wonder if they can adapt to a new way of Sunday worship; if they can learn to Zoom and discover ways to connect previously thought inconceivable to most; if they can obtain new skills and get accustomed to phoning around to and calling at the door of people they never did before, surely this is good news. Surely, together, we can find ways of being God's gathered people, who bring others along, without relying on all the ways the building has helped us achieve this.

And now we are asking what this all means, like I'm sure you are, too. We have questions such as, how can we make living as church more meaningful going forward? Certainly, most churches reading this will find they are exactly the same. And isn't it wonderful, in a strange sort of way, that in this wide breadth of styles, sizes, and demographics that make up this Baptist family of churches, we are now all asking the same questions at the same time?

We gladly take this opportunity to be featured to say we are praying for all of you and your churches, and we trust you are praying for us, too.

**Luciana Damascena and Hazel Sherman** lead West Worthing Baptist Church in Sussex.

[This reflection originally appeared in a South Eastern Baptist Association newsletter and has been adapted for \*Baptists Together\* magazine](#)

## “WHEREVER GOD’S PEOPLE MEET HE IS PRESENT THERE WITH THEM”

Cathy Buntin on life at Laird Street Baptist Church



**‘The building at Laird Street Baptist Church in Birkenhead has remained closed. I’ve been challenged to embrace the changes we find ourselves in’, writes minister Cathy Buntin**

Laird Street Baptist Church is not presently open. We’ve been joining with the weekly service and reflections with the NWBA and our Regional Minister Phil Jump has been amazing and preaching into the situation that we find ourselves in. It has been difficult to do our online service as it would exclude the majority. So we set up a WhatsApp group and, apart from six members, we all engage daily with this. This has been a great blessing as we have shared devotions, music and specifically prayer requests. The list is growing every day for those who need our prayers. We also have a weekly prayer meeting via Zoom with the Anglicans and this has been a great source of strength and encouragement.

I have been challenged to embrace the changes we find ourselves in, and seeking God as to how we can reach our community and do church. I feel these times are an awakening for the body of Christ as a whole and the question I think we should be asking is not when can we open and get back to normal, but what is God saying and asking of us in these unprecedented times we are facing. I think we are highly privileged to be serving our Lord in these days and feel God is saying, just like Esther, we are here for such a time as this.

There have been great opportunities for serving the Lord. We engaged with our local Anglican church who put together a gospel leaflet with the theme of Hope and a message to our community. Our fellowship engaged in this by addressing envelopes and stamping them and posting them.

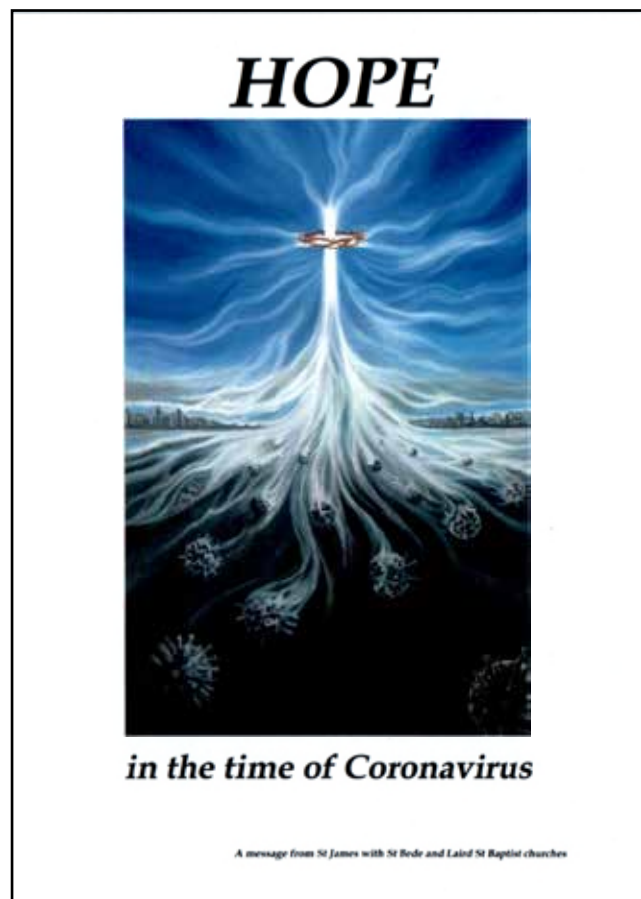
Following on from this I did an online Alpha Course via Zoom run by the local Anglican church. I then had a call from a bloke who had just moved to the area, and when the leaflet dropped through his door he was on the point of taking his life: when he saw the picture of the cross and the word Hope he read it and phoned me. I was able to pray with him and support him. Even as we the church are not visibly seen in our community God is still actively present through his Holy Spirit. How amazing is our God.

I am planning to do a prayer labyrinth in the church car park with a cross and an invitation for the community to place prayers on the cross, and engage the church in praying for the needs that appear.

Walking through the streets a couple of months ago I passed about four churches that were closed and I prayed in my spirit: “God, how sad it is to see your church buildings closed.”

The Holy Spirit just spoke to me straight away and God said: “Cathy, my church buildings may be closed but my church is very much alive.” I laugh at the enemy’s tactics as he closed every church globally and God opened a church in every home. The church is not a building but the people and wherever God’s people meet he is present there with them.

**Cathy Buntin** is the minister of Laird Street Baptist Church, Birkenhead



## “NOT HAVING PREMISES IS ACTUALLY LIFTING A BURDEN”

Ange Whiles on life at church4u in Pickering



Photo: church4U

**church4u in Pickering (YBA) decided not to renew the lease on its building during the pandemic - and the reason goes to the heart of who the church is.**

Like many churches across the country, church4u has had to adapt its usual activities during the pandemic. Pre-Covid the community-focused church in Pickering, Yorkshire, would host a weekly Bible discussion/reflection, a monthly Sunday breakfast gathering, regular board games nights, and could see potential for a listening/prayer space further down the line. Over the years it has held a variety of events, including film nights and quiz evenings, from its rented premises.

In the autumn it opted not to renew the lease on this building. While Covid has played its part – even when restrictions began to be lifted it couldn’t hold socially distanced events there – the decision wasn’t entirely unexpected, says church co-leader Ange Whiles.

And the reason goes to the heart of who the church is.

“It’s church without walls; we want to be out there,” says Ange. “Everything we do is relational, relating to our neighbours. As a group of Christians we enjoy being together and want to find ways to share our faith in Jesus. The building isn’t essential to who we are.”

Ange explains that church4u is an expression of church that tries to operate without jargon and is not tied to a particular way of doing things. Tuesday evenings are the time when its activities most closely resemble that of a traditional church service, when those involved gather for Bible study, prayer and communion. It has a core leadership team of six, with a very light structure. church4u began life within the Methodist Church in 2002, and eventually emerged from there to join the Baptist Union in 2010. (“There has been an understanding of who we are

and what we are trying to do. We’ve found a supportive home,” says Ange.) Over the years the team has patiently built strong relationships through its presence and activities, and these can continue without fixed premises.

“We’ve not had such big changes because of Covid. Yes, we’ve not been able to use the building, but we have maintained a presence, and are doing what we can, in different ways.

“We were wondering about whether to renew even before the pandemic. And with the finances being shared among a small group of people, it means that not having the premises is actually lifting a burden.”

The main loss is visibility - the building was right in the middle of the market, but even when clearing the building for the final time, Ange she didn’t sense an emotional attachment.

“I was surprised because we have done a lot there, but it shows we have made the right decision.

“We have worked out that we can find venues for all our activities (when allowed). Indeed, we can do much more in local cafés, and begin to develop relationships with the cafés and their owners.

“So, it’s an interesting continuation - and we’re looking forward to where and how God will lead us during the next part of our journey!”

She adds: “We’re a tight knit group who’ve been through a lot. We’ve had to be very dependent on God - and God does move you on.”

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**Ange Whiles** is co-leader of church4u in Pickering

## A NEW SONG?

Shona Shaw



**‘There are many reasons why the current absence of congregational singing is strongly felt. But while I miss it too, I am mindful that worship is more than the songs we can sing,’ writes Shona Shaw**

**N**ot being able to gather with others and sing together on a Sunday morning has felt like a bereavement for many. I am conscious that there are real bereavements and much greater losses being suffered in our wider life at this time. However, the loss of congregational singing from our weekly rhythm of worship is indicative for me of its important place in our Baptist life together.

Of course if you go further back in our history, there was a time when congregational singing was viewed with suspicion. The question of a congregation singing words other than scripture, and set to secular tunes was viewed, by our predecessors, with distrust. While 18th century Baptists recognised the evangelical potential of congregational hymn singing they feared that allowing ‘worldly tunes’ might lead to ‘worldly’ thoughts and ideas infiltrating the sanctity of the church’s worship.

They were right of course: the songs we sing together do form and shape our feelings, our thoughts and our behaviour. Eighteenth century Baptists recognised this in the unique power of words and music to heighten our emotional engagement in worship. Throughout our history every congregation has had their unofficial anthems which are guaranteed to elicit full throated singing. Over time these hymns and songs have become loved by a congregation because they resonate with their shared testimony. Rather than being credal in our confession as Baptists, we proclaim our faith in song.

This unease over the extent to which ‘the world shapes us, we shape the world’, in sung worship has never really left us. For Baptist churches that have switched to on-line services during the pandemic, the choice of songs used in their worship has no doubt ignited the debate once more. There will be unease for some engaging with a slick and secularised social media platform, promoting an industry and culture of which Sunday worship is usually oblivious.

These troubles are not new, and I have no intention of swinging into a debate at this point. What I would like to reflect upon is what we are missing in the absence of congregational singing and what our response might be given the pandemic has put a temporary pause on this aspect of our congregational life.

When we sing, we are engaged in physical activity. That may sound obvious but it is probably the most exercise you will participate in at church on a Sunday morning, unless you are running the children’s work. It is an activity that involves your whole body, not just your mind. As such you breathe more deeply, your body resonates with sound and your breathing is attuned to the rest of the congregation as it ‘synchs’ with the song. You are making something with other people, using your body. And these are not just any people, these are the people you know and with whom you share your life. As we sing together we are aware of the clay jar: the imperfections, the struggles and the triumphs of our ordinary life that resound with worship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

There is something precious in our contextual and ordinary offering of worship. We can see this element reflected in the different renditions of ‘The Blessing’<sup>1</sup> that appeared at the beginning of lockdown last year. For many, not just Baptist churches, this was an opportunity to bless a wider community beyond the church. But significantly, in doing so, it allowed distinctive voices and contexts to be heard and seen. The Blessing illustrates that we continue to have an opportunity to be heard and seen, singing our story whether our buildings remain closed or not.



Photo: Jantane | lightstock.com

<sup>1</sup> The Blessing, Kari Jobe, Elevation Worship, Cody Carnes, 2020.

There is nothing passive about congregational singing: it takes our will to decide to go to church and physically join in. Even if the words of a song irritate us or the musical style is not to our personal taste, we are invited and choose to make a joyful noise as one body.

The physicality of singing with others enables us to form together in sound, and this detracts attention from ourselves to focus on the One who 'Opens our lips' as the Anglican liturgy reminds us. There is something spiritually grounding in our physical gathering and singing. We have an audible sense that the body of Christ is present as we encounter one another in song. Congregational singing allows us to experience a unity in performance that can be elusive or fleeting in the rest of our congregational life together.

Our decision to participate in gathered worship during the pandemic may depend upon the complexities of risk assessments and protocols, advance booking or logging on-line and hoping our internet connection is having a good day. For many of us the immediacy of feedback that we receive from a weekly service is temporarily paused; it is not so apparent if we have 'attended church'. The body in song is dispersed and silent as we 'watch' or at best sing along, but our sung worship is not so dependent on us making a joyful noise: we cannot hear or see one another in the usual way.

While I miss singing with my fellow members, I am mindful that worship is more than the songs we can sing. Gale Richards in her contribution

**Currently, choosing to worship publicly with others is not about turning up in a building and opening our mouths to sing together. What does worship look like for the members of your congregation?**

to Listening to God<sup>2</sup> spoke of the decentering of music during the pandemic and the re-emphasis on testimony and offering our whole lives in worship. The importance of testimony and shared story has not disappeared from our lives together, but these elements have found a diversity of expression that should be encouraged and nurtured. This will take our individual decision to offer our lives in worship but also to pursue this as congregations. Currently, choosing to worship publicly with others is not about turning up in a building and opening our mouths to sing together. What does worship look like for the members of your congregation? I imagine we would see a diversity of practices that have been faithfully improvised for each locality.

Perhaps even more importantly, Richards observes we are being invited to embrace lament. Lament gives voice to feelings and thoughts that we are unused to expressing corporately. There is an opportunity for song-writers to explore this genre and in doing so broaden the expression of our shared testimony.

2 [www.baptist.org.uk/listening/gr](http://www.baptist.org.uk/listening/gr)

And to lament I would add silence. Silence is just as much a part of our worship: rather than being a negative experience, we can allow our voices to fall silent in order to hear what God might be saying. Do we need to give space for God's Spirit to sing over us his songs of comfort but also challenge? Who can forget the warning from Amos, that our worship gatherings can become echo-chambers for our own entertainment:

*'Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!'* Amos 5: 23-24

Particularly as we continue to stream services and have restricted numbers in our buildings, the temptation to hold onto the aspects of our worship that reassure and are familiar is real. During the pandemic we have been reminded of the opportunity we have to sing our story for a wider world. But, for our songs to come from a place of lived and shared faith, this will take time and genuine engagement from the whole body.

Then we will have something to sing about:

*'Let the amen  
Sound from God's people again:  
Gladly for aye we adore him'*<sup>3</sup>

**Shona Shaw** is a Baptist minister in North Leeds, and has written on congregational singing in *Gathering Disciples* (2017)

3 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty the King of Creation, Joachim Neander, 1680

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## “WE HAVE STOPPED MEETING ON SUNDAY – AND NOW HAVE OUR MAIN GATHERING ON THURSDAYS”

Nick Graves from Old Lodge Lane Church in Purley, south London



**P**re-lockdown Sunday mornings typically served a small, faithful, more elderly congregation. Nick had been questioning whether the Sunday service was right for the church’s context for some time. “It seemed to be historically related, which is not necessarily a bad thing, but I’d just become really uncomfortable with that model, led from the front, often by a middle class person. There was also the time – people are involved with sport or wanting a lie-in on a Sunday morning. For the community in which we’ve been placed, it didn’t seem the best way of helping people discover and deepen a relationship with God.” Indeed, Old Lodge Lane had experienced another way. Five years ago the church began to host an alternative fortnightly gathering called Thursday Tea. It was based around a community meal and the three values of Eat Pray Love – and though it looked different to a traditional Sunday, “theologically, it’s what gathered church is meant to be,” says Nick. It was also more in keeping with the way children are currently educated - ‘less about front-led teaching, and much more experiential’.

At its height Thursday Tea was welcoming around 90 people, and the church’s increased community contacts led to involvement in a pilot scheme called ‘the one stop food shop’ alongside Croydon Council and the food charity FareShare. (This was due to launch in June, but when lockdown

happened the church adapted, arranging for food deliveries to the most vulnerable in its community.)

“It means that when you compare the two models – Thursday and Sunday – it’s very easy to see that one was thriving, and one wasn’t,” says Nick.

The direction in which the church was travelling developed further following lockdown. It opted not to have online service as a large part of the congregation don’t use the internet, instead encouraging people to deepen their own relationship with God using some of the skills in a course it had done. “People actually really got a hold of that,” says Nick. “When not being spoon-fed from the front, they were capable of studying scripture themselves; learning the art of silence, contemporary spirituality; all without the need for the traditional Sunday format.” It meant that once restrictions lifted “it became clear that Sunday wasn’t actually missed.”

The church nevertheless recognised the importance of gathering together, so opted to reinstate something on Thursdays.

It’s different to Thursday Tea (no food can be involved given current restrictions), but still an alternative-style gathering, starting at 7pm and lasting no more than an hour. Because there isn’t the pressure to include everything that would be expected on a Sunday – worship, prayer, sermon, communion – Nick says there is freedom to

experiment and draw more on some of the ideas and traditions of the diverse community in which they serve.

So far they have been majoring on prayer, and exploring different ways of thinking about and doing worship. A podcast is recorded so people can access in the teaching at their own time and pace. It’s helped to draw in a number of those on the fringes, such as those who volunteer with the food distribution.

“It’s been an amazing time,” says Nick. “It’s very diverse ethnically and age wise. There’s a real sense of God’s presence in a way we have not experienced.

“It’s wilder. We are journeying without a map: we’ve no idea what it might look like in the long term, but we are ok with that.”

Nick stresses the congregation are on-board with the decision “One person has been unhappy, but hasn’t left in a huff! We have spent two to three years talking and praying about it. It’s not been a decision sprung on people.

“We came to the conclusion that what we had done for 60 years in terms of getting people to come on a Sunday was no longer the right approach, yet we’ve seen people will come on a Thursday. In many ways it’s quite a pragmatic decision, and the current crisis has allowed us to make the leap.”

He adds: “Our association with Sunday brings so much tradition and history. Removing ourselves from those expectations is both freeing and scary as there is a security in the trusted material, but we should not be afraid of changes.

“If it grows wild, it’s not a bad thing. Who know where this is going? What we came to realise was that God wanted us to move away.”

Old Lodge Lane’s fortnightly gathering - Thursday Tea



Photo: Old Lodge Lane Church

Nick Graves is minister of Old Lodge Lane Church in Purley, south London

# Justice issues discussed at Baptist Union Council

Justice issues were at the heart of the October Baptist Union Council, which saw Council members approve six new measures that seek to embed justice concerns at the heart of our movement, as well as issuing a wider call.

Over the course of several discussions at the gathering, a number of threads emerged. These were:

- » There is much pain – in the room, in the movement, and in our communities.
- » Now is the time for action; there are wider calls for justice in society, and people are exhausted by talk without change – the time is now.
- » How do we reflect theologically on the range of justice issues facing us?
- » How do we raise awareness in both churches and ministerial training so we can become people of justice in our communities?
- » We need to be proactively investing in structural change; for this we need both research and effective measurement of progress.
- » Careful listening is essential to building diversity.
- » How do we address the disconnect in many churches that justice is not mission?
- » Justice is about walking with, not doing to.

Council members voted to approve the following measures:

- » Council calls for a *day of prayer* focused on justice issues in which lament plays a significant role.
- » Council commits to an *ongoing culture of listening*, including the development of a listening programme.
- » Council asks Core Leadership Team (CLT) / Trustees to resource *research across Baptists Together* to enable ongoing listening, discussion, and to further our justice work.
- » Council asks CLT / Trustees to *provide the resources* needed to create/distribute resources to help churches discern their own responses to justice issues.
- » Council agrees to look at '*bench strength*' in more detail at the March 2021 Council (succession planning and encouraging a diversity of leaders to develop).
- » Council commits to having an *annual diversity audit* of Council, using the diversity figures given in the Futures Report<sup>1</sup> as a baseline for measuring.

In agreeing to these measures, Council felt that it would be helpful to offer an additional call. While lamenting that Council hadn't reached the diversity figures as encouraged in the Futures report, there is a recognition there needs to be a greater diversity in leadership across the movement as a whole, and that everyone should be encouraged to reflect on this issue.

The call is as follows:

**Council, in the light of the racial injustice seen so painfully and clearly over recent months, and lamenting our own lack of diversity, calls all of the churches, Colleges, Associations and Specialist Teams in our Baptist movement to join us in actively and immediately working for more diverse leadership.**

**Baptist Union Council seeks to discern the broad strategic direction of our Union, and these recommendations will be taken to the Core Leadership Team to implement.**

<sup>1</sup> In 2012 the Futures Report explored how our Union would seek to work together in the future



## Seeking and doing justice is an essential part of who we are as Baptists, and what God calls us to do. By Simon Oxley

Sign the petition. Email your MP. Buy fair trade. Give to a campaigning charity. Such requests come thick and fast to us as churches and individuals alongside other mission opportunities. We respond to issues of justice in many different ways. So do lots of other people – people who are well meaning, who have a sense of fair play, who feel for the suffering of others. Thank God that a better part of our humanity is the ability to recognise injustice and the compassion to act.

However, we should stop and ask ourselves if our concern for justice as Baptists is simply about being caring people. I want to suggest that it is more than that. Justice is part of the essence of following Jesus Christ. It is a mark of our identity as Baptists. Whole books have been written about this but here are some brief suggestions as to why this is so.

As Baptists, we are not collections of individuals who have a personal relationship with Christ but communities of such people who are to discern the mind of Christ and then act on it. We do not separate ourselves from society in the way of some closed religious communities but engage in God's love with our locality and the wider world. Our life together, therefore, is a witness to the justice and peace that lie at the heart of God's relationship with us. The way in which we deal with one another in church is a sign of the reality of our values. When we see injustice, exploitation, abuse and prejudice on our doorsteps or the other side of the world we respond because we discern that this is not

what God wants for people. We act out of love; the love that we have experienced and that we know God has for humanity and the whole created order.

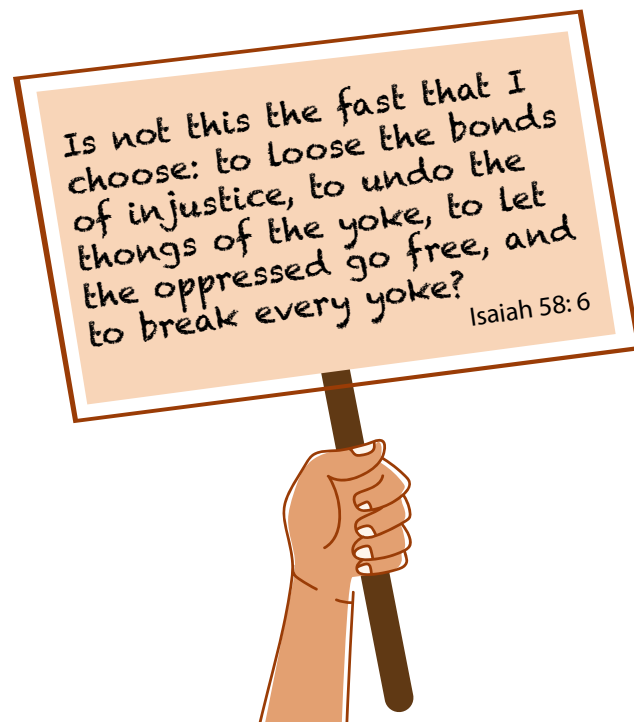
As Baptists, we turn to scripture for inspiration and challenge. From the early pages of the Bible, we read that humans are made in God's image (Gen 1:27). If we believe that, we cannot accept the exploitation, enslavement or abuse of other people. We also read that God sees creation as good (Gen 1:31). We may think of environmental justice and climate justice as being modern concerns but our response to the degradation of the created order is rooted in our relationship to God.

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Genesis 1:31

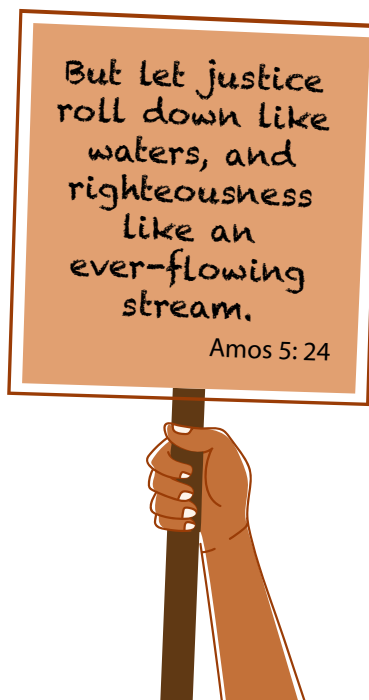
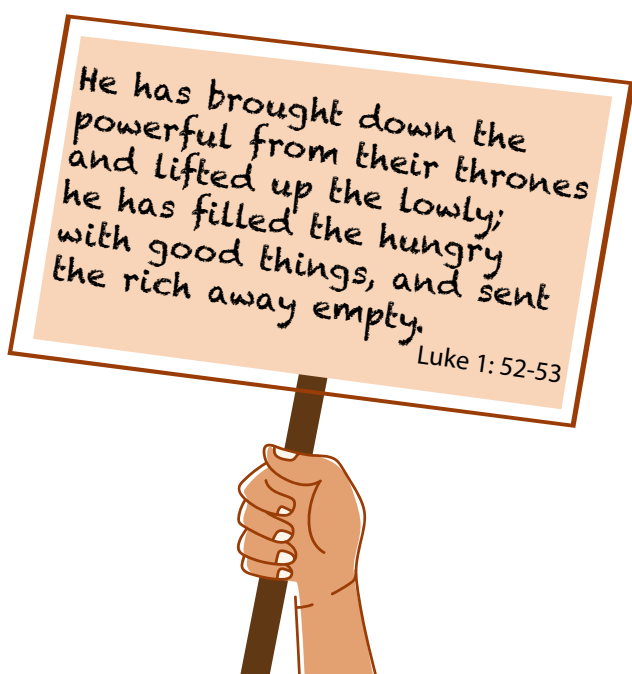


The prophets challenge us with their speaking out, sometimes at great cost, on issues relating to the life of the nation and the practice of religion. Amos, for example, has an excoriating condemnation of those in the political/religious establishment who enjoy the best things in life whilst making the poor poorer and manipulating markets in their own favour (Amos 6 and 8). We are inheritors of that tradition of speaking truth to power. Baptists have wanted to keep a separation between church and state so as to do that with integrity. Amos also makes us look at our own practice. God, he says, will not accept the offerings and songs of worshippers when their ways are unjust. Instead 'let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream' (Amos 5:24). Isaiah suggests that true worship is expressed in loosing the bonds of injustice and letting the oppressed go free (Isaiah 58:6). Praise and worship are a significant dimension of being Baptist but we know we are not judged on the quality of our worship services but on the integrity of the whole of our lives together.



Leading up to Christmas, we will have read the passage that has become known as the Magnificat. Mary's song of praise sets out God's radical agenda in the baby she is carrying – lifting up the lowly and filling the hungry with good things (Luke 1:52-53). God not only judges but does justice. Jesus proclaims what the gospels call the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven: what life is like when things are done God's way. Doing justice is part of our identity, our beliefs and our behaviour.

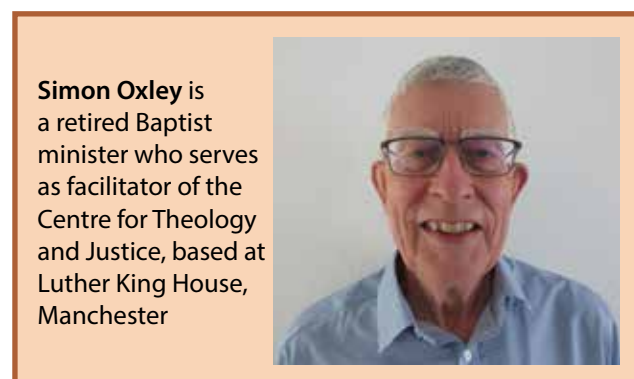
As Baptists, we have a story to tell about justice. Here are two examples. Just over 400 years ago, Thomas Helwys challenged King James 1 in arguing for freedom of religion. It would have been radical enough to claim that Baptists should be free to worship and practise their faith. However, Helwys made that claim universal, naming heretics, Muslims and Jews. Not justice for us but justice for all in matters of faith.



More recently, after a lot of heart searching, the Baptist Union Council apologised for our part in the transatlantic slave trade<sup>1</sup>. Doing justice requires taking steps to restore right relationships. It was achieved through listening to one another – something inherent to our Baptist way of being church.

In pursuing justice, we may be accused of jumping on 'worldly' bandwagons. However, racial justice, gender justice, disability justice, climate justice, economic justice and all the other issues represent real experiences of exploitation and suffering to which Baptists feel called to pay attention. Not because other people are doing it but because of who we are as followers of Jesus Christ.

Each time we pray the Lord's Prayer we express a longing for God's kingdom to come on earth; for fullness of life for all. Seeking and doing justice is an essential part of who we are and what God calls us to do.



<sup>1</sup> [www.baptist.org.uk/apology](http://www.baptist.org.uk/apology)



**George Floyd's death has effected a global exposure of just how black people feel about the discrimination they habitually experience in a way that I've not witnessed before, writes Justice Enabler Wale Hudson-Roberts.**

**To better understand this, we have created a new blog to share the perspectives of both black and white Baptists on racial justice.**

In his poem *A Dream Deferred*, the poet Langston Hughes asks what happens to a dream that finds itself deferred – in his case, a dream deferred because of racism:

*What happens to a dream deferred?  
Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over  
Like a syrupy sweet?  
Maybe it just sags  
Like a heavy load.  
Or does it explode?*

On Monday 25 May, the life was choked out of George Floyd by a white police officer's knee, defiantly asphyxiating his beautiful black body - in the full gaze of a watching public. It took the police officer just eight minutes and 46 seconds to complete this brutal killing, but it certainly did not defer George's dream. Instead, it launched his dream with explosive power.

Thanks to mobile technologies, unimaginable only a generation ago, live images rapidly circled the globe, and the whole world witnessed the 'lynching' of yet another unarmed black man by a law enforcement officer.

In this distressing footage - as one African American philosopher and cultural critic, Cornel West, put it - the world glimpsed a reality that is far from exceptional for black communities in America. The terrifying truth is that, for black Americans, this does not amount to a significant deviation from 'normal'.

Black bodies have repeatedly had the life strangled out of them, from the day they first arrived in a so-called 'New World' - whether extracted by hard-labour under chattel slavery, whether reinforced by segregation under the Jim Crow legislation of the 1930s (which denied black people equal rights in the southern states of America) or by public lynching. These are realities that must never be forgotten.

None of this can be side-lined as an exclusively American problem. The UK has its own terrifying histories of racist brutality. Sadly, it has taken the inexcusable death of George Floyd to alert white people everywhere, forcing them to dig deep into their collective psyche, and to begin to root out some of the endemic discrimination that still lurks only a smidgen below the surface. On an unprecedented scale, protests expressing the anger and longing for change, have finally catapulted race onto the public agenda across a broad spectrum of British society.

George Floyd's death has effected a global exposure of just how black people feel about the discrimination they habitually experience. For the first time in my life, white people have had little choice but to listen. The truth that 'Black Lives Matter!' is self-evidently a matter of justice – and it will never go away unaddressed.

At the heart of this new series of blogs is a space to listen. Writers from many different perspectives present their stories. Some re-visit their own part in creating and maintaining

discrimination. Others recount their experience of being on the receiving end of the very same discrimination. These are all stories that need to be heard.

This blog encourages followers of Christ to grapple with fundamental issues of truth: what it is like living as a person of colour in the UK in 2020, and what it is like from a white perspective to begin, under the Rule of Christ, to address the distortions created by unchallenged privilege and power.

It is unlikely that these blogs will make easy reading, but this is a matter of justice that is deliberately designed to challenge our intuitive preference for ease. Our hope, in the Racial Justice Hub, is that these blogs and the stories they tell will kindle and sustain new and continuing commitments to justice, both in our churches and in society more widely.

In the spirit of the poem I quoted in my opening paragraph - we want to ensure that this dream is never deferred again.

**Wale Hudson-Roberts** is the Justice Enabler of the Baptist Union of Great Britain.



The Baptists Together Racial Justice Blog launched in Black History Month 2020, and can be accessed here: [baptist.org.uk/rjblogs](https://baptist.org.uk/rjblogs)

# RACE WILL NEVER DO OUR BODIES JUSTICE

## —THE ORIGIN OF RACE IS NOT DIVINE, BUT HUMAN—

Photo: Nate Neelson and Joel Filipe | unsplash.com

**The origin of race is not divine - but human. Yet we live these racialised identities, not the baptismal one offered through Christ, writes American minister Starlette Thomas in a reflection from our new Racial Justice blog.**

Where does race come from? It is not innate, not natural, not as up close and personal as we make it. And this is a part of the problem. It is the fact that the Church identifies its members' bodies and consequently, the Body of Christ, with the sociopolitical construct of race.

What do I mean by 'sociopolitical construct'? We made it up. The origin of race is not divine - but human. Race was not 'in the beginning'. Brian Bantum says in *The Death of Race: Building a New Christianity in a Racial World*, race is 'a word made flesh'. He says, 'Race is a tragic incarnation...'

We have chosen an idea about identity over the imago Dei. It is the way that we have agreed to relate. Charles W Mills calls it 'the racial contract'. He writes, 'The peculiar contract... is not a contract between everybody ('we the people'), but between just the people who count, the people who really are people ('we the white people')'. These socially coloured white people have agreed to dominate other cultures and we accept it. Nod our heads in agreement every time we refer to ourselves as coloured people - because white is a colour too.

Never mind the words of the once scale-eyed Apostle Paul who wrote to the Galatians: 'As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for *all* of you are *one* in

Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:27-28 NRSV). *One*. And there's no need to feign deafness because Paul says it again to the Colossians: 'Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourself with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of the creator. In that renewal, there is no longer Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all (Colossians 3:9-11)'

*All*. No wiggle room and no way we are getting out of this truth.

This has already been debated and resolved at the Council of Jerusalem with Peter and Paul, Simeon and James (cf. Acts 15:1-21). These differences were settled in Christ and through our baptismal identity. We belong to him. We begin again. New creatures, erasing all that we were back then. All these divisions are brought together in him; he consumes them all when we go down in the waters with him.

Hatchets and our hatreds buried.

The same can be said of the sociopolitical construct of race. Here are no longer beige (ie bi-cultural) or brown people. There are no longer black or red people, yellow or white people. Paul said to the Corinthians, 'Not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for human beings...' (1 Cor 15:39, NRSV). Amen. Amen?

But I cannot get an 'Amen' in most churches. Why? Perhaps, it is because the Church has coloured in God's face and Jesus's face, coloured in sacred space. Black Church. White Church. We live in black and white. We live these racialised identities - not the baptismal one offered through Christ. Born again, we are not. Instead, we offer more of

the same differences. Segregated on Sundays even; there is no such thing as race relations. Because race makes us strangers to ourselves first and then to our neighbour for no other reason than our physical appearance. We let the eyes have it and they determine which bodies count. And the body count for crimes committed in the name of race, sacrificed to this idol of aesthetic supremacy are unknown as the bodies keep piling up in the middle of city streets and in their homes.

In North America, the names include George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and Elijah McCain. They are the most recent but this has been happening for a long time. See Ida B Wells' *The Red Record*, published in 1895, where Frederick Douglass writes in the preface:

*'If the American conscience were only half alive, if the American church and clergy were only half Christianized, if American moral sensibility were not hardened by persistent infliction of outrage and crime against colored people, a scream of horror, shame and indignation would rise to Heaven wherever your pamphlet shall be read.'*

But I haven't heard much. Because race won't allow it. Race will never do our bodies justice.

**Starlette Thomas** presently serves

160 churches as the Minister to Empower Congregations with the District of Columbia Baptist Convention, USA. She regularly blogs on the intersections of race, faith and community-building at [racelessgospel.com](http://racelessgospel.com)





## “YOU’VE GOT TO *DO SOMETHING* ABOUT THE INJUSTICE”

**Justice issues have been an unexpected part of the year of our current Baptist Union president Yinka Oyekan. We invited him to speak about the actions and advocacy he has been involved with since the death of George Floyd, and what he has learnt about faith and justice in this time.**

My presidency has come at a very fascinating time. After George Floyd died my eyes were opened to a number of issues I wasn't aware of as a black person with a mixed race heritage (it might not be obvious, but I am actually mixed race.) I'm not politically motivated, and I had to very quickly become aware of the political issues.

Black people face racism at every level: the judiciary, police, workplace. For instance, in every police force in England and Wales, black people are more likely to be stopped and searched than any other racial group. Why? Simply because they're black. The police are actually more likely to find drugs on white people than black people.

I think there are many things that cause injustices in society, and people are struggling with many things. But at this point in time I believe that racial injustice is something being highlighted by God, and we as Baptists should take notice of it. And not just take notice, we should do something in response to it. We should actively engage with it. Otherwise there will be another generation God will use to deal with this injustice.

What did I do about it? I did something I found incredibly difficult. I had a huge moral dilemma in lockdown. I organised a march outside Parliament.

A demonstration saying that black lives do actually matter. Of course, as a black minister, I'm not really interested in the political wing of the Black Lives Matter movement. But I am interested in the godly affirmation that black lives do actually matter.

It was a huge dilemma. Do I go out and possibly spread more coronavirus? How just can that be? Or, do I acknowledge that for centuries black people and people of colour's lives and dreams have been oppressed, killed and shot; and it's been going on for hundreds of years? Which is the greater evil? How should I respond?

In the end I felt there was a window in which God was doing something prophetic, and we needed to stand up and be counted as ministers with our kids - who were going out on the streets, protesting at the injustice and the way they've been treated, simply because of the pigmentation of their skin.

It put a huge strain on me personally, trying to learn more about the issues as well as answering my colleagues who were asking me about it. I was in the same boat as everyone else trying to understand what was going on. There are other people trying for years to highlight these issues. I thought it was a God moment, and God wanted me to highlight the problem.

If we look across our movement, I know CLT (the Core Leadership Team) are doing their best to face into what they can do about the systemic lack of black people in positions and offices across our movement. And this can't be about tokenism: if you just promote people who don't have the anointing or ability or gifting, it creates a bigger mess. But what should we be doing to encourage the black folk in our churches? Is there space for them in leadership? Can we train them and equip them? These are the kind of questions that are being asked across the Baptist movement. It's a healthy reflection that's going on, and I've got full confidence in the leadership team to get us there.

I've been learning that you can't ignore it. You can't turn a blind eye to injustice. You can't defer it or leave it to somebody else. You've got to do something, at least in your context. You are responsible.

I've also learnt if we as a Baptist movement want to see a change, we have to find our prophetic voice. We can't just go along with all the other denominations. We've got to speak up about what we believe, what we affirm, and what we want to see. There's a place for unity, that's true, but there's also a place for a distinct Baptist voice. I believe we need to have the courage to have our own voice in all of these kinds of issues.

I've learnt there's an awful lot of racism out there that I hadn't realised existed in the church. I've lost a handful of friends, but I think the issue of justice is much greater than any personal loss or sacrifice.

I think the issue of justice is at the core and heart of who Christ is. Any follower of Jesus Christ will grapple with the issue of injustice in an honourable way, and will do their best to bring the love and alleviation of the suffering where and if they can.

**Yinka Oyekan** is the 2020-2021 President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain

This is a shortened transcript of a video interview Yinka contributed to this edition of Baptists Together magazine. In the interview Yinka talks about his understanding of justice, the relationship between justice and mission, and how his church – The Gate, Reading – has become involved in social action projects which address local injustices.

For the full video, visit: [baptist.org.uk/yinka](http://baptist.org.uk/yinka)

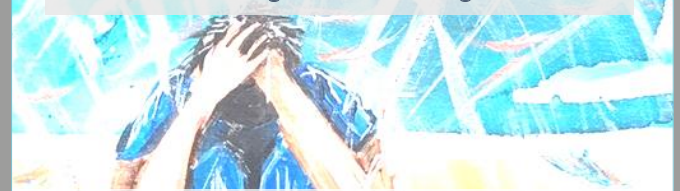


**“Every piece speaks to the spirit.”**  
Yinka Oyekan.

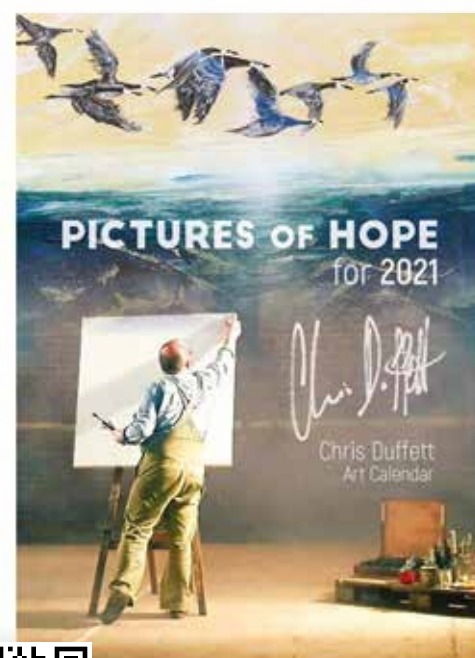
Chris Duffett is an evangelist, prophetic artist and a Bi-vocational Baptist Minister. He paints commissions for churches and individuals. You may recognise some of his art work from various publications, all of which are available as limited edition fine art prints.



**“Your prayer filled painting spoke deeply to us both. I said to our family that they really could not have given us a better gift.”**



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Act justly  
Love mercy  
Walk humbly

## BAPTIST JUSTICE GROUPS

Justice concerns belong at the heart of our faith.

To ensure that the life and structures of our Union reflect our commitment to these issues, a number of groups help us carry forward our commitments in these areas.

### Racial Justice Group

Racial justice issues have been recognised as a key concern for our Union for many years, with the Racial Justice Working Group being set up at the March 1995 Council in response to the growing diversity of our country and churches. Since then it has worked towards seeing, in our Union, the realisation of the vision expressed in Revelation 7:9 – *'After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no-one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.'*

To enable our Union to become fully multicultural, our Racial Justice Group (RJG) has developed or commissioned some helpful resources and initiatives for churches. These include *Pentecost People*, a video-based resource to help churches experience multicultural worship and prayer; *Lest we Forget*, a series of five study reflections for small groups to provide further reflection and interpretation on The Baptist Union's *Apology* for slavery, and *The Journey* that has followed (the *Apology* itself was facilitated by the RJG), and the Sam Sharpe Project. Other significant initiatives include *Wonderful Youth*, a culturally diverse youth resource, and *Inspiring Leadership*, a gap programme which seeks to encourage mainly Baptist young people of colour, between the ages of 18-23, to develop their leadership potential in Jamaica with the support of our Union's long-standing partner, the Jamaica Baptist Union (JBU), and *Journeying to Justice* (edited by Anthony Reddie), the first comprehensive appraisal of the journey towards equity

and reconciliation among British and Jamaican Baptists. Recent developments include the Racial Justice blogs and a series of webinars exploring issues of racial justice following the murder of George Floyd. The RJG, whose past moderators include Pat White and Gale Richards, has also spearheaded the development of Just Aware.

For more, visit [baptist.org.uk/racialjustice](http://baptist.org.uk/racialjustice)

### Just Aware

It has become increasingly clear that much can be gained by bringing together previously separate Baptist initiatives concerned with race, gender, and disability around a single focus on justice. One outcome of this convergence is the development of a new resource, Just Aware which can be used across our communities to help groups of Baptists explore and enlarge their understanding of and commitment to justice as a fundamental core value.



Just Aware is designed to help small groups within our Baptists Together community to deepen their commitment to issues of justice in their local context – facilitators can be available to lead sessions with groups of deacons, regional teams or any other group that thinks that Just Aware might be able to enrich their work of mission as Christian disciples.

## Gender Justice Group

Baptists have been accrediting women in ministry for 100 years. However, despite ordaining women for longer than other denominations, significant challenges still exist for present day Baptist women and we are lagging in equality within some of our practices and structures. In 2020 we are still hearing painful stories, the silencing of women's voices, misogyny, sexism and outright rejection because of gender. This is not acceptable and is a deep cause for lament.

In 2019, Jane Day was invited to offer sustained input over three years to make progress and to overcome barriers towards greater equality in ministry in Baptist life. To date there has been much progress in equipping and enabling. There has also been an intentional offering of one-to-one and group coaching, as well as creative opportunities for women to serve at a regional and national level. The area of most concern is the lack of opportunities for women's stories to be heard. The Gender Justice Group is exploring opportunities for a deeper listening of their narrative, alongside a focussed piece of theological research.

For more, visit [baptist.org.uk/genderjustice](http://baptist.org.uk/genderjustice)

## The Baptist Union Environment Network

The Baptist Union Environment Network (BUEN) is a new Baptist network that connects people with a passion for the environment and climate change. BUEN - Spanish for 'good' - aims to inspire and enable the Baptists Together network of churches, associations and colleges to:



- » recognise the goodness of God's creation
- » share in God's mission to care for it and respond to the climate and environmental crisis in practical ways at local, regional and national levels
- » work for justice for creation and people impacted by environmental change

BUEN is building a network of environmental partners across our regional association life who can journey alongside churches to enable them to declare with God in worship, life and action that 'creation is good' (Genesis 1:25). In each association, it is looking for at least two environmental partners, one of whom comes from the millennial generation.

It is encouraging churches, associations, and national bodies to take steps towards being carbon neutral by 2035.

For more visit [baptist.org.uk/buen](http://baptist.org.uk/buen), or contact [BUEnvNet@outlook.com](mailto:BUEnvNet@outlook.com)

## The Joint Public Issues Team

The Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) is a collaboration between colleagues in the Baptist Union, the Church of Scotland, Methodist and United Reformed Churches working together on justice and political issues. It combines the expertise from these denominations and helps churches increase their effectiveness by:



- » working together on justice and political issues
- » providing resources and support for people in local churches
- » responding to government consultations

The team has mobilised on a number of public policy issues – here is a snapshot of activity in recent months:

- » 'Stay Alert to Justice' Messaging – highlighting the injustices faced by those most adversely affected by the pandemic – particularly those in poverty, those with no recourse for public funds and the BAME community.
- » Daily calls to prayer for numerous communities around the world experiencing suffering/injustice. #stayandpray.
- » Promoting a re-shaping of the economy to enable the wellbeing of all people and the planet.
- » Ongoing scrutiny of Universal Credit and exploration of alternatives.
- » Reset the Debt - a campaign to address the growing household debt crisis caused by Covid-19.

Find out more and get involved at [jointpublicissues.org.uk](http://jointpublicissues.org.uk)

## Disability Justice Group

The Disability Justice Group exists to encourage our churches and members to value people of all abilities equally. We believe there is not only a justice issue here but also a mission opportunity. There are people with physical and intellectual disabilities in our neighbourhoods who are often overlooked or excluded. For us to be truly church we want to extend Jesus' welcome to them.

The Group is organised nationally and regionally. There is a national theology group that provides resources for local churches and promotes inclusion nationally and into colleges. Regional representatives link between the national and the local with the goal of at least one representative for each region. So far we have London, Eastern, South West, South East, North West covered.

For more, visit [baptist.org.uk/disabilityjustice](http://baptist.org.uk/disabilityjustice)



# #missionaladventure

**There are many examples of churches being creative and fruitful in mission from across the Baptist family. These are being collated in the form of stories and podcast conversations in a dedicated section of the Baptists Together website [missionaladventure.net](https://missionaladventure.net)**

## **'Multi-congregations, but mission in ministry the priority for all'**

A number of Baptist churches are exploring a multi-congregational model - a church that has a single constitution but two or more distinct congregations. They seek to grow by planting new congregations 'from within' churches that already exist.

**Derby Urban Church** is one. Suzie Abramian of the Missional Adventure project talks to its minister Graham Watkins.

Derby Urban Church (DUC) is a new multi-congregational Baptist church, recently started by **Osmaston Road Baptist Church**, Derby. Part of the journey of 'Ozzy Road', has been shared before (see [baptist.org.uk/osmastonroad](https://baptist.org.uk/osmastonroad)) but as of 1 August 2020, it legally became a congregation of DUC as one congregation amongst many others.

Minister, Graham Watkins says that, "Derby Urban Church itself creates one organisational structure so that each congregation and ministry can get on with doing the ministry they were called to whilst sharing their resources."

Despite its new name on all the papers, the journey and preparation for this has been in process for some time and the practice of multi-congregations has already been happening out of Ozzy Road for a while, some forming so organically it was almost hard to

see that multi-congregations were emerging until viewed in hindsight.

The social outreach from Ozzy Road is well-known in the area and particularly connects with those who are most vulnerable in the most deprived parts of the city. Their ministries include working in local schools and with the homeless, those with drug addictions, in debt and poverty. It is worth noticing how many of those ministries operate in partnership with other organisations such as Derby City Mission and Youth with a Mission (YWAM), and it is perhaps this openness to partnering with others that stands out when Graham explains their journey to multi-congregations.

Interestingly, Graham notes how they avoided starting with the structure or model of a multi-congregational church itself, instead focusing on the relationships.





He explains how mission in ministry is the priority of their church from which all else follows. It therefore makes sense that when a new missional group forms from the church but doesn't connect with what happens on a Sunday morning it is given encouragement to gather and develop at another time throughout the week. Such as the 'Friends United in Jesus' congregation which formed out of an Alpha group and now meets on Thursday afternoons because it needs to accommodate those in the group connected with the food projects following after. This group is now one of the new congregations officially recognised within the new Derby Urban Church.



As well as forming new congregations for DUC from other existing Baptist churches or from ministries that those churches were already running, there are also non-Baptist congregations which are connecting in. These churches are largely based on cultural identity which is a key issue in a city with such a high population of people from India, Pakistan and Eastern Europe.

Instead of allowing these other churches to just hire their buildings for their own services, Graham notes how important it was from the outset to work and partner with them.

This has led not only to building relationships with these other churches who might consider joining DUC in the future but also to the creation of several other social enterprises and ministries as they share their resources together, notably a Roma Bible College for young leaders from a Roma background in the UK. This ministry is led by someone from the Roma Church which meets at Ozzy Road and, along with other social enterprises, came out of a mission trip from the wider church to the Slovakian Roma village of Pavlovce.

With such a vast network of congregations already established and aiming to grow further it could lead one to ask what does whole church gathering and leadership look like within this context? Graham explains how the intention for each congregation, depending on its size and ministries, will be to have its own leadership team, and Pentecost, Lent and Harvest have been earmarked as times to have a whole celebratory church meeting in order to share the testimonies of praise, and also concerns for prayer from each congregation.



Photo: Derby Urban Church

Graham Watkins is the minister of Derby Urban Church

Considering that Derby Urban Church is, officially speaking, in its infancy, there is still much that can be taken to encourage others considering a similar missional adventure. Graham stresses the importance of knowing your church's identity before embarking on a journey like this, even if you think you know it! He reflects that they have learnt to concentrate on relationship and Kingdom ministry and found that the rest will follow, going as far as to say, "If you were to do this for any other reason than mission in ministry then eventually I think it would just fall apart."

Although structures for this have obviously had to come, it is interesting to see how there has been the willingness to allow them to be reshaped along the way, even to the point of changing entirely, because the start and heart of this has always been to be led by God for mission and Kingdom.

This story is part of the #missionaladventure web portal on the Baptists Together website, the place for you to discover a world of missional opportunities for you and your church.



# Making Our Churches Safe Spaces For All

## An Introduction to Creating Sanctuary

David Kerrigan

In 2014, a young 14-year old girl in Manchester, Lizzie Lowe, was grappling with her sexuality and told her friends that she might be gay. She was a gifted musician and played the flute in the worship group in the church where she had grown up through Sunday School. But she was worried she couldn't tell her Christian family, or her church for fear they wouldn't accept her as a gay Christian.

Tragically, on Wednesday 10 September 2014, Lizzie hanged herself. Her parents, and her church, were distraught.

In reality her parents, Hilary and Kevin, said that her sexuality would have made no difference to them. Her church too thought of themselves as open and welcoming but accepted that sexuality was not discussed for fear of 'stirring up a hornet's nest'.

We started this work because lives are being lost and harmed in Baptist churches too. Many of the stories in *Creating Sanctuary* are Baptist stories and we need these to be heard because they are our family. You'll hear how awareness of being gay started as young as four years old for one person, ten years old for another.

None of us can afford to say  
it couldn't  
happen here

Over the last year I have been working with a group of Christian leaders – mostly Baptists, mostly members of the LGBT+ Christian community – to develop *Creating Sanctuary*. Kevin and Hilary Lowe and their Vicar, Nick, also feature in this resource.

None of us wants to have to see  
a repeat of  
Lizzie's Story

With this background, our aim wasn't to create a theological resource where the debates about human sexuality and the Bible could simply be rehearsed one more time. Not because theological work isn't important but because there is no shortage of places where that debate is taking place. Rather, we wanted to develop a resource to help churches – all churches – to think pastorally about those who are or might be gay in their congregations, now or in the future.

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## Imagine the importance of church being a safe place for such young lives

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**Creating Sanctuary** isn't designed to ask participants to change their minds about same sex relationships. Instead it focuses in session 1 and 2 on how we treat one another, and we give the opportunity to watch or listen to stories from the LGBT+ Christian community. Space is given in session 3 for participants to share experiences they have of relationships or contacts with members of the LGBT+ community and then for people to discuss what they've heard.

In session 4, there is a video-led discussion showing how some familiar Bible passages can help us to think afresh. The tone is gentle, and time is given afterwards to talk about what was shared. In session 5 we ask participants to share ways in which they think a church community can be 'a safer space' and finally, in session 6 we have the opportunity to listen to the story of other churches who have already started talking about these things, though it is made clear that for churches to be, and choose to remain, non-affirming, is entirely within the parameters of this resource. The focus is on creating safer Baptist churches.

And because of this focus, it's important to say that this resource has been externally quality assured and validated through our partnerships with Chester University, NHS England, Public Health England and national safeguarding leaders, all of whom have praised the nature of the resource, especially its facilitator guidance and approach to opening up conversations.

I am very aware of how difficult this issue can be for all who feel a weight of responsibility – to be faithful followers of Christ, faithful to the scriptures and who want to avoid anything divisive in the life of the church. But faithfulness also demands of us that the vulnerable are protected and as you will know, there is a real focus at the moment on our churches' collective ability to safeguard and protect.

There was a time when my upbringing would have made me less than sympathetic to LGBT issues, but over the years my heart has been transformed by the grace of God revealed in the extraordinary welcome he extends to all, and by getting to know so many LGBT Christians whose faith and devotion inspires me.

None of us wants to have to see a repeat of Lizzie's story. None of us can afford to say, 'it couldn't happen here'. Silence can demand an unimaginable cost.

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## I am very aware of how difficult this issue can be for all who feel a weight of responsibility

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**C**reating Sanctuary features in a newly created section of the Baptists Together website that focuses on listening, and listening well. The section is rooted in Jesus's example of washing his disciples' feet (John 13: 13-14): to love one another as Christ has loved us compels us to be fully present, and this requires being able to listen to one another. The new section on the website is a space that can enable such a listening process to happen. It features listening resources, insights into missional listening, and perspectives on areas of our shared life where there is pain and disagreement. We are acutely aware that human sexuality is one such area.

*Creating Sanctuary* is a new resource that aims to foster a process of listening well, hence its inclusion here. However, it is by no means the only resource, nor perspective, and our new listening area seeks to reflect that.

For more information visit:  
[creatingsanctuary.org.uk](http://creatingsanctuary.org.uk)  
and  
[baptist.org.uk/listen](http://baptist.org.uk/listen)

**David Kerrigan** is a core team member of the Creating Sanctuary team, and is the former General Director of BMS World Mission. He has been involved in cross-cultural mission work in many countries for 35 years and now, in retirement, remains involved in several important initiatives, like this one.





# Listen to the child

**What might we hear from our young voices if we listen theologically to what they are saying? I invite us to consider seriously our Baptist principle of a priesthood of all believers and listen to those often thought to not have a theological voice of their own, writes Sian Hancock**

'Same storm, different boat'<sup>1</sup> has become a mantra during this pandemic in my trauma-informed work. There has been no escaping the national lockdown, the risk of Covid-19 and the subsequent stress of all that we've known - the rhythms of life that upheld society - being turned upside down. The extent of impact this Covid storm has had upon us individually and communally as households, churches and neighbourhoods will depend upon:

- » the 'boat' we're in - is yours an ocean liner, a houseboat, a sailing boat or maybe a kayak?
- » The size of the waves experienced - were you furloughed or did you have to continue working? Have you had to homeschool children? Perhaps you had symptoms or needed to shield. How aware were you of your own emotional reaction and that of those you love and care for?
- » Accessibility to the lifeboats/lighthouse or an ability to swim - what has kept you afloat?
- » The anchor that grounds us - what has been important to you throughout this turbulence and how has it sustained you?

The storm continues to blow and it may be that our boat has changed for better or worse but we're all having to dig deep within ourselves to be resilient in the face of such challenge and change. And this is true across the generations from the youngest to the eldest. During times of adversity we learn a lot about ourselves and the most fundamental question is that of our identity - who am I and what does it mean to be me?

I recall the story of the disciples caught in a storm on Lake Galilee and in their fear waking Jesus who, having rebuked the storm and restored calm, caused them to ask, 'who then is this...?' (Luke 8:23-25)<sup>2</sup>. The paradox that God is everywhere, but God is also hidden and absent, is also true of children<sup>3</sup>. They are on the streets, in the schools, at the parks and sometimes among the gathered Church. Yet at times, they are hidden in the shadows and the wastelands of a neighbourhood; some are closeted away from a perceived dangerous and hostile world. They find alternatives to education and traditional groupings, expressing themselves in more creative, and sometimes unorthodox ways; others have no choice but to go where they are sent or segregated by well-meaning parents.

<sup>1</sup> Dr Karen Treismann, *Safe Hands and Thinking Minds Psychological Services*.

<sup>2</sup> Holy Bible NRSVA translation. [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)  
<sup>3</sup> Root, A 2009. 'God's Hiddenness, Absence and Doubt: The Theology of the Cross as Theological Direction for Youth Ministry'. *Journal of Youth and Theology* 8 Issue 1: page 62

Children choose their playgrounds, hideouts and leisure activities. In Victorian times we are told that children 'should be seen and not heard', present yet silenced as if they have nothing of substance or value worth listening to. This probably contributed to the popular idiom that a child 'needs a good talking to' but I want to subvert that and suggest that our children - in our homes, schools, neighbourhoods and churches - need a good listening to. I invite us to consider seriously our Baptist principle of a priesthood of all believers and to listen to the voice of children present yet still often thought to not have a theological voice of their own. What might we hear from these young voices if we listen theologically to what they are saying?

Listening is a spiritual discipline that involves patience. A setting aside of self to be present to the other. It requires observing the non-verbal/unspoken as well as the spoken word. The listening may reflect back what has been heard for clarification and confirmation. Listening is an intentional act and a gift that shows respect for the individual. Listening to a group within the Christian church that has rarely had the expectation of a theological voice is in itself a theological endeavour.

By giving space to hear a young person share their story or voice their thoughts, we are able to see the world from their perspective. This narrative model of personhood is how a sense of self is constructed through the storying of one's experiences.<sup>4</sup> Children are meaning-makers, using their senses to construct understanding of the world they find themselves in. They watch and mimic those around them. They explore and experiment, problem-solve and use repetition to master and refine their skills. Giving talking space to tell one's own story affirms and nurtures their sense of significance. But as we listen it may take us to a new place, like the voice from the wilderness calling. It may challenge and unsettle the status quo, like the turning over of the tables in the temple. It may speak truth to power, like the parables seeking to redirect our attention back to God and God's kingdom.

The essence of the African proverb, 'we are all persons because of other persons' is often reflected in iconology where the Christ child gazes into the eyes of the mother, Mary. It reminds us of the Triune God, three in one. In sociological terms, psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner offers a system whereby the child is in the centre of outerlying concentric circles that move from the micro world of the child and their household, through their widening social network as they encounter school, clubs and groups including church, out into the influence

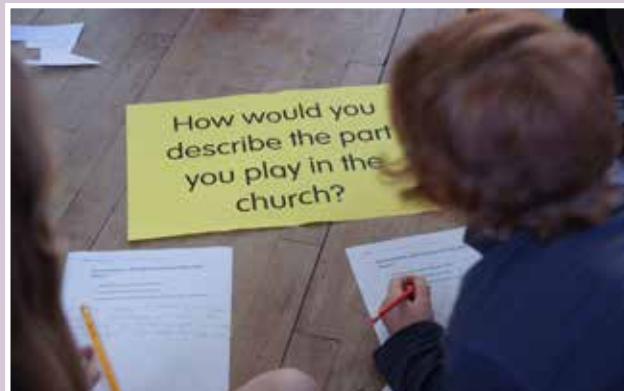
4 Savage, S 2004. 'Sculpting the Self' in *Ambiguous Evangelism*. Mayo, B; Savage, S; & Collins, S London: SPCK

of the indirect environment through local services and legislative policies; to the macrosystem of social and cultural values all surrounded by an outer circle representing the changes that occur with the dimension of time.<sup>5</sup> We are social beings created for relationship by a God who seeks relationship with us.

Conversation builds relationship and understanding. At its best it fosters trust and a mutual blessing of respect.

In ancient times clay jars were common vessels to be found within households. They varied in size and purpose but were valuable carriers and containers for everyday items. The ancient world had a container model of understanding identity, the container being the body holding earthly, physical and spiritual matter. Children have often been seen to be empty vessels waiting to be filled by the all-knowing adult, but Paul writes of treasure that comes from God within clay jars (2 Cor 4:7). Perhaps these vessels aren't empty but already carry what is needed to enter the kingdom of God, treasure that comes from God, 'unless you become like a child...' (Matt 18:3). Are there insights to our sense of becoming in God which can only be glimpsed and understood through the journey of childhood spirituality? The mystery of childhood should not deter us from 'searching for what it tells us about the children we were, the children we are to nurture, and the children we must become.'<sup>6</sup> How will we understand this unless we listen?

The storm continues - some days it seems like a cacophony that stirs and unsettles. Consider a child in your church and ask yourself what kind of boat they might be in? What type of waves of emotion are they encountering in these uncertain times? Ask them what's keeping them afloat or what do they need to help them. Invite them to tell you about their anchor holding them steady or at least grounded... 'if you have ears to hear, listen!'



**Sian Hancock** is part of the Baptists Together CYF Round Table.

She edited *Re-thinking Children's Work in Churches* (2019) alongside Carolyn Edwards and Sally Nash



5 Bronfenbrenner, U 1979. *Ecological Systems Theory*. [www.psychologynoteshq.com/bronfenbrenner-ecological-theory](http://www.psychologynoteshq.com/bronfenbrenner-ecological-theory)

6 Pridmore, J 2017. *Playing with Icons*. Denver: The Center for the Theology of Childhood of the Godly Play Foundation.

# WHAT IS OUR IDENTITY IN A CHANGING CHURCH?

**Why Continuing Ministerial Development aims to address not just what we do as ministers, but how we are. By Tim Fergusson and Sue Clements-Jewery**

## A changing identity



Eighteen months ago, I (Tim) left pastoral ministry to take up a post in the Ministries Team at the Baptist Union. The job, to support ministerial development, was

one I was keen to land. So I began my new role with a sense of anticipation and excitement about the season ahead.

And yet, there was a huge amount about pastoral ministry that I regretted leaving behind. The energising nature of the new role was a joy, but at the same time I missed much of what I did or, rather, what I was. Being a church minister is a vocation and it is inevitable that I gained from it a sense of identity. In the move, I had stepped away from my role as preacher, pastor and person-about-the-community. I was left wondering where my identity would now be found.

If this sense of uncertain identity arose in me out of an anticipated transition that I had willingly chosen, how much greater our perplexity when what defines us is taken away without our agreement. How are we affected when faced with the loss of our role? How do we manage a sudden change in how we are known and what we are known for?

An unexpected and unwanted change in our identity can happen for a range of reasons, but 2020 was unusual in bringing this change to so many ministers. Those of us who felt competent and secure in our preaching literally no longer had a platform. Those of us who thrived on pastoral visiting were prohibited from entering people's homes. Those of us who focussed on being present in a community discovered it had retreated behind doors. So what is our identity in a changing church? Have we suddenly found our skills to be little valued? Do we fear that the way of church we are familiar with, will vanish altogether and if so, what will that do to our sense of purpose?

For a happy few, the opposite applies and we have been propelled into the limelight because of our digital proficiency or freedom from institutional structures. But the shock of success can bring its own challenge to our self-perception.

Continuing Ministerial Development, or CMD, aims to address not just what we do as ministers but how we are. It is concerned not just with the skills we require to cope with a change of season, but also with what this change is doing to us. The third of the five CMD habits is **accountability** to someone beyond our ministry setting. One way we can exercise this accountability and find help for addressing questions of role and identity, is through pastoral supervision.

Photo: Christian Bisbo Johnsen | unsplash.com



## How pastoral supervision can contribute to CMD



Sue Clements-Jewery is a member of Oakes Baptist Church in Huddersfield. She is married to Philip, a Baptist minister, and was formerly chair of the

Yorkshire Baptist Association Ministry Group. She is now a senior accredited pastoral supervisor and chair of APSE, the Association for Pastoral Supervision and Education, and here she explains more:

Pastoral supervision has been defined as 'a relationship between two or more disciples who meet to consider the ministry of one or more of them in an intentional and disciplined way'.<sup>1</sup>

Supervision takes place in a regular, safe, confidential space where trust is built between the person being supervised (the supervisee) and a supervisor external to the minister's context. The supervisor is trained to facilitate exploration and reflection. The emphasis is on the ministry and vocation of the supervisee. The aim is to support them and enable them to become the best they can be as those called by God. Supervision is always work-focussed but is not a quick fix and is most effective when there is commitment to work with a supervisor for a period of time.

Pastoral supervision has three strands – normative, formative and restorative – which are woven together in different proportions according to need. These are best illustrated by images of a compass, a growing plant and a re-chargeable electric bike.



**1 NORMATIVE** asks the questions, "What is good practice?" "How do I get my bearings in a changing landscape?"

Commitment to best practice comes through considering standards and ethics. It explores issues such as safeguarding, risk management, boundaries, practice dilemmas, the implications of the changing context of ministry.



**2 FORMATIVE** asks the question, "How do I grow from here?"

The emphasis here is on professional development and growth: Like a plant that has outgrown its pot we can all get stuck in familiar ways of operating. This is an opportunity to explore personal and professional needs along with the resources and training needed for current and future challenges. The formative strand enables ministers to get out of their comfort zones, grow and flourish.



**3 RESTORATIVE** asks the question, "How do I sustain my ministry and be in it for the long haul?"

This strand looks at the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual impact of the calling on ministers. An electric bike can be ridden some distance but when its battery runs down the bike has to be off the road until it is fully charged. The restorative strand involves a commitment to wellbeing, developing self-understanding and self-care through the discharging and re-charging of batteries. It enables the renewal of vision.

During the lockdown, pastoral supervisors have reported an increased demand for supervision sessions from ministers right across the denominational spectrum, who find themselves in unfamiliar territory without the usual landmarks. Supervision sessions became available online very quickly. "Who am I now?" "I've lost my bearings, help!" "Who am I called to be?" and "How do I keep going?" are questions and concerns I have heard regularly over the past few months. Working with the three strands encourages ministers to grow and flourish.

To find out more about pastoral supervision and how to access it, please go to: [pastoralsupervision.org.uk](http://pastoralsupervision.org.uk)



<sup>1</sup> The Methodist Church (2017). *Responsible Grace: Supervising in the Methodist Church*. London: Methodist Publishing. Section 1.3.

Sue and Tim will be in conversation about pastoral supervision in a webinar on Wednesday 3 February at 1 pm. The webinar can be accessed via the CMD page of the Baptists Together website, [www.baptist.org.uk/cmd](http://www.baptist.org.uk/cmd)





# Baptist Identity and the Ministry of Incarnation

A perspective from Luke Shaw,  
past president of the Jamaica Baptist Union

***“It is not easy to identify the marks of a Baptist community. Whereas certain Christian traditions gain coherence from a shared pattern of worship, or a clear ecclesial structure, or lengthy creedal statements, it is difficult to recognise any such unifying factor for Baptists.”<sup>1</sup>***

An important distinctive of Baptists universally is that we are united in Christ worldwide despite our diversity and autonomy.

The Jamaica Baptist Union (JBU), comprised of 338 churches and near 40,000 members, traces its beginning to George Liele, a ‘free black slave’ from Atlanta, Georgia who came to Jamaica in 1783. Beginning in Kingston, his work spread across the island. The Baptist Missionary Society (UK) was invited to support the work, and in 1814 George Rowe came. The expansion of Baptist witness saw both local and British Baptists fighting towards the emancipation of slaves. Such witness continued in the post-emancipation era, as Baptists helped to establish ‘Free Villages’ for the newly emancipated, buying large parcels of lands, of which smaller holdings were sold to families. Each village included a school and a Baptist church. The Baptists even established, in 1843, the ‘Calabar Theological College’ to train native ministers for local ministry and as missionaries to Africa and the Caribbean. Baptist work to the Cameroons, West Africa, was started by the Baptists of Jamaica in 1846. In 1849 the Jamaica Baptist Union was established, having seven years before declared their independence from the Baptist Missionary Society. Since then the identity embraced by Baptists of Jamaica has affirmed common doctrinal principles outlined in the New Testament, and bears such evidence in our history that three of our national heroes: Sam Sharpe, Paul Bogle and George William Gordon were Baptist deacons.

While some basic beliefs and principles which shape our identity are articulated on the JBU website<sup>2</sup>, we join Baptists in sharing two basic things with peoples of the world:

- » Common humanity
- » Shared environment

We believe that while being different with different roles, human beings are equally created to lovingly and responsibly serve each other and our shared environment. The biblical basis for such belief facilitates and defines Baptist distinctives, and enables our affirmation of common truths with others. Historically, Baptists have sought to be faithful to the truth of the Gospel while patterning early Church principles articulated in the New Testament.



Baptists were instrumental in establishing ‘Free Villages’ for the newly emancipated people, including a school and Baptist church.

<sup>1</sup> Baptist Union Paper presented to BUGB Council in November 2009 exploring issues of Baptist identity and theological authority - *Knowing What we Believe* [baptist.org.uk/knowingwhatwebelieve](http://baptist.org.uk/knowingwhatwebelieve)

<sup>2</sup> See our beliefs at [jbu.church/about-us](http://jbu.church/about-us)



There are points of convergence and divergence between Baptists and other Christians. Some points of convergence include belief in the Trinity; the Bible as God's authoritative word; humans created equally in God's image with the capacity to approach God; sin and salvation through the cross of Christ as a holistic reality; the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper; the Church as Christ's body; and God as the beginning and end of all things who, through the return of Jesus Christ, will assess all of life and history holding each person accountable. The praxis of such identity, shaped by our doctrines and history, results in an incarnational ministry and mission. Our Christian family, united in Christ Jesus, is called to be Christ's transforming presence in the world. Marked by equality and mutual service among pastor and people, and using the stated historical and doctrinal principles, the JBU and its local churches have sought to contextualise the incarnation of Christ. Our understanding of the redeeming, holistic, liberating, enabling and empowering nature of salvation for all who repent, challenges colonial expressions of Christianity which pursued only the souls of our African ancestors while dehumanizing them through forced and brutal slavery. Pulpit ministry augmented by practical ministry in meeting needs continues to be paramount for us. The presence of Christ in our worship, work and witness must be experienced as a holistic reality.

The holistic ministry and mission embraced through our Union and congregations, based on Luke 4:18 involves:

- » The continuing struggle for social justice
- » Proclamation and incarnation - Christ's love in action
- » Liberation and empowerment - social action
- » Education and training
- » Engaging theological and faith issues
- » Ecumenical and fraternal relations - (Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB), Baptist World Alliance (BWA), Jamaica Council of Churches, Caribbean Baptist Fellowship, Caribbean Conference of Churches, World Council of Churches)
- » Mission and evangelism participation - local and global (Jamaica Baptist Union Mission Agency)
- » Emphasis on discipleship
- » Production of pioneering Environmental Stewardship Manual and Manual for Persons with Disabilities in the Caribbean

For our Baptist family, our theological understanding guides the framing of our policies and practices, as reflected in how terminologies such as Union, Family Budget, Assembly, Associations, Local Church and Mission Agency are understood and effected among constituents. Our ecumenical and fraternal relationships include dialogue on matters of justice, peace, education, social intervention and mission cooperation as well as financial contributions where needed. Dialogue has taken place with BUGB regarding an apology for slavery and reparation. Covid-19 has challenged the church in many ways to examine how we continue to be the incarnation of Christ in an ever changing world while being faithful to the unchanging Word of God.



Photo: Luke Shaw

British Baptist Lois Delong took part in the Inspiring Leadership programme in Jamaica in 2018

As a Caribbean pastor in the Jamaican context, I serve the Linstead/Buxton Town Circuit of churches. The larger congregation - Linstead - has over 700 members drawn from rural and urban communities. Buxton Town, a rural congregation, has 70 members. Like other JBU congregations, our ministries include:

- » Free general counselling, advocacy and legal services
- » Weekly feeding ministry and distribution of care packages
- » Education and welfare support, including free literacy classes, back to school assistance, educational grants and scholarships, disaster assistance and health fairs
- » Local, regional and global mission partnerships (spiritual, financial and personnel involvement)
- » Financial contributions to local and global ecumenical and fraternal bodies including BWA
- » Participation in local and foreign evangelism and missions

Our congregations were blessed to host Lois Delong as a part of a JBU/BUGB Inspiring Leadership Programme 1 June – 31 July 2018.



That mutually enriching experience underscored the distinctive that Baptists universally are united in Christ worldwide amidst our diversity and autonomy. This ought to characterise our global Baptist family as we strive to be God's people in the world, for we are one in Christ and we live for Christ.

Luke N Shaw has been an ordained JBU pastor for 26 years, missionary pastor to First Isthmian Baptist Church, Colon Panama for five years and a past president of the JBU. He is married to Claudette with two adult children.



# PRAYERS FOR OUR TIME

## A Prayer As I Put On My Mask

Creator,  
as I prepare to go into the world,  
help me to see the sacrament  
in the wearing of this cloth -  
let it be 'an outward sign  
of an inward grace' -  
a tangible and visible way of living love  
for my neighbours, as I love myself.

Christ,  
since my lips will be covered,  
uncover my heart,  
that people would see my smile  
in the crinkles around my eyes.  
Since my voice may be muffled,  
help me to speak clearly,  
not only with my words,  
but with my actions.

Holy Spirit,  
As the elastic touches my ears,  
remind me to listen carefully -  
and full of care -  
to all those I meet.  
May this simple piece of cloth  
be shield and banner,  
and each breath that it holds,  
be filled with your love.  
In your Name and  
in that love,  
I pray.  
May it be so.  
May it be so.

Written by **Richard Bott**  
Moderator of the United Church of  
Canada and shared under a Creative  
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licence.

## Permanent Present Tense

Save us, Lord, from living in a  
permanent present tense;  
With our constant rushing from one  
deadline to the next,  
Not living for each moment so much as  
just about surviving it.

Forgive us for when we dismiss too  
quickly what has gone before;  
For when our preoccupation with the  
now,  
And our eagerness for what is next,  
Blind us to the significance of what you  
have already done.

You are helping us to see...  
The past is a gift:  
A great and precious library of case  
studies to be explored, learned from  
and built on.

And you, you are the knowledgeable  
librarian, showing us where to look and  
helping us to understand,  
Training us in this art of Holy  
Remembering.  
For what we learned yesterday is the  
compass to navigate tomorrow  
And it is in celebrating the past that we  
awaken the future

Written by **Amanda Pink**  
Baptist Minister and Team Chaplain at  
Milton Keynes University Hospital  
Taken from *Gathering up the Crumbs*

## Loving God

When we are weary, give us fresh  
energy;  
When we are sleepy, give us rest;  
When we are frustrated, give us  
calmness;  
When we are sad, give us comfort;  
When we are disappointed, give us  
hope;  
When we are happy, rejoice with us;  
When we are hopeful, give us the  
courage to share;  
In everything, turn us back to focus on  
you,  
The One who has given us all things  
through Jesus Christ, your Son, our  
Saviour.

Written by **Stephen Smith**  
Minister of Greenfield Church, Urmston,  
Manchester

## A Blessing

May you see opportunities to bring  
hope, healing and peace where others  
do not.  
May you have the courage to speak up  
for those that get overlooked.  
May you be aware of God's spirit at  
work in the words you speak, the safe  
spaces you create and the relationships  
that you build.  
You are loved by God, may those that  
you encounter know that they are loved  
too.

Written by **Clare Hooper**  
Regional Minister with the Southern  
Counties Baptist Association  
Taken from *Gathering up the Crumbs*



Photo: Milada Vigerova | unsplash.com

**Prayers taken from Reset The Debt, a campaign by Baptists Together, the Church of Scotland, Church Action on Poverty, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church that calls for support for those pushed into debt by Covid-19.**

**Forgive us our debts**

Forgive us our debts, we pray  
As we forgive our debtors.

We all have debts, Lord  
We owe so much to so many:  
For love and nurture  
Education and encouragement  
Shelter and hospitality.

And from you,  
The health that has sustained us  
The bounty of the earth  
The love that frees us.

As we acknowledge what we have  
received,  
Let us also be ready to give  
And to forgive.

We pray for those who are burdened by  
unavoidable debts  
And pray that we who know our  
indebtedness  
May act so that all can experience  
release and freedom.  
For your promise is life in all its fullness.

We pray in the name of Jesus  
**Amen**

**Proclaim Jubilee**

Jesus said:  
"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to  
the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's  
favour." (Luke 4:18-19)

So as God's people, in this year of  
challenge,  
let us reaffirm our hope and our task.

God's kingdom is coming  
**Proclaim Jubilee**

For those swept into poverty  
**Proclaim Jubilee**

For those weighed down by debt  
**Proclaim Jubilee**

For those living in fear of eviction from  
their homes  
**Proclaim Jubilee**

For those enslaved by financial worries  
or poor mental health  
**Proclaim Jubilee**

For those who are blind to the situation  
of their neighbours  
**Proclaim Jubilee**

For those held captive by narrow vision  
**Proclaim Jubilee**

For all who need to hear good news  
**Proclaim Jubilee**

May our proclamations and our prayers  
be accompanied by advocacy and  
action,  
and God's kingdom come.  
**Amen**

**Prayers for the World**

God, thank you for the abundance and  
generosity of your creation.  
God of plenty,  
**hear us.**

Thank you for all that makes us feel  
safe and secure – having a place to call  
home, enough income to meet our  
needs, the love and support of friends,  
family and wider networks.  
God of kindness,  
**hear us.**

We remember today the plight of those  
known to us and those around the  
world who struggle for survival today.  
God of compassion,  
**hear us.**

We pray for those who are trapped by  
debt, fear and uncertainty.  
God of rescue,  
**hear us.**

We pray today that government,  
communities and families will come  
together to support those in need.  
God of unity,  
**hear us.**

Turn the ears and the hearts of the  
powerful to the needs of the powerless.  
God of justice,  
**hear us.**

We recommit ourselves to supporting  
and speaking up for the voiceless and  
the vulnerable.  
God of action,  
**hear us.**

And if a country's greatness is measured  
by how it treats its weakest members,  
may our country be truly great.  
We pray these things in resonance with  
Jesus, who prays for us,  
**Amen.**

Reset the Debt calls for help  
for people swept into debt by  
Covid-19, and enables churches  
to support this call

For more on the  
Reset the Debt campaign, visit  
[resetthedebt.uk](https://resetthedebt.uk)



**A Blessing**

God leads us from despair to hope,  
from fear to trust,  
from debt into freedom,  
and from death into new life.

May we follow where God leads  
and know God within us and among  
us today and for evermore.  
**Amen**



## Baptist Union Council 2020

Justice issues were at the heart of the first ever Baptist Union Council to take place solely using video conferencing technology. More than 80 participants gathered on Zoom across two days (21-22 October) for the autumn's gathering, which was also the first Council to be interpreted in British Sign Language. The online technology enabled the use of chat boxes, breakout rooms and digital voting for feedback, discussion and decisions. Council had last met in November 2019 after the March gathering was cancelled amid growing coronavirus restrictions.

Council members approved six new measures relating to justice, as well as issuing a wider call (see page 23).

### Virtual church members' meetings

Council members were invited to discern whether virtual, online church members' meetings are an acceptable reflection of our Baptist ecclesiology - and therefore whether it would be appropriate to hold them beyond the restrictions of the pandemic.

The current advice to our churches has been to reflect that of the Charity Commission: meetings can take place virtually, with the understanding that decisions taken using electronic means would be subject to challenge unless ratified at a later meeting of members in person.

Additionally, in response to the pandemic, new legislation has been passed which has temporarily allowed corporate charities (which includes church CIOs) to hold members' meetings virtually. This legislation expires on 30 December.

It has been a long-established Baptist principle and central to Baptist ecclesiology that church members' meetings should allow for members to gather together in person, to pray and discern the mind of Christ, which requires their full participation.

With this in mind, the Legal and Operations Team sought advice from Council on whether online church members' meetings are a Baptist way of gathering.

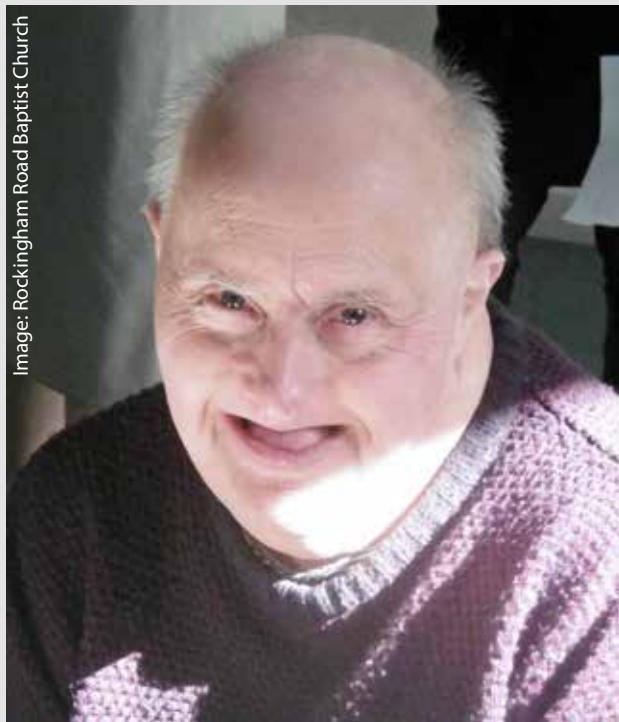
While some concern was expressed at what is lost in an online-only meeting, the overwhelming consensus among Council members was that churches should be free to discern for themselves, as online life has become increasingly normalised, and many churches have actually experienced higher attendance than normal for an online meeting. One member explained that we expect the Holy Spirit to be present in our online services; it should be no different for online meetings.

The Legal and Operations Team has updated its guidance about church meetings and the template clauses can be found at [baptist.org.uk/legalandops](http://baptist.org.uk/legalandops). This allows church leadership teams to consider whether to suggest such an amendment to their constitution to the members (any decision to amend would require the approval of church members in a special church members' meeting.)

### Property Ultimate Trusts

Council agreed to the appointment of a working group to explore fairer ways to distribute Ultimate Trust monies that come to the Baptist Union from closed churches. Ultimate Trusts are usually set out in the foundation deeds of a church and state how funds from the church are to be used following closure.

Access the full report at [baptist.org.uk/council](http://baptist.org.uk/council)



### 'He reflected God's love to all he met'

Rockingham Road Baptist Church in Kettering has paid tribute to long serving member Robin Smith.

Robyn, the country's oldest person with Down Syndrome, died on 27 September aged 78. He had been part of the church for 34 years.

Minister Laura Staves, who had the joy of baptising Robin in 2017, described him as "an invaluable member of RRBC and a great blessing to us all".

"Robin reflected God's love to all he met and church was important to him," Laura said.

"His faith was genuine and lived out, even though he could not have expressed it easily in theological terms.

"The way he interacted with people, his contentment and concern for others (frequently asking me to pray in a service for one of his friends who was ill) showed what was important in faith.

"It took time to communicate with him since his speech was not always clear - particularly for a hard of hearing minister, but reminded me of the need to take time, properly listening to people, and to not spend life rushing on to the next job."

She said the two things the church folk immediately think of when remembering Robin is his 'wonderful beaming smile' and his guitar playing. In recent years he had played every Sunday on a guitar (a small Ukulele), and his rhythm was 'superb'.

## Research into Baptist churches in lockdown

A small scale research project to try to capture some of the ways our churches have responded to lockdown took place in 2020.

The research was commissioned by the Communications Team from the Faith and Society Specialist Team. It aimed to discover stories of support, innovation and hope as well as get some feedback on what's helped and hindered churches in lockdown so Regional and Specialist Teams can continue to offer support, going forward.

### Local church highlights

Nearly 90 per cent of participants recorded that their church had connected with people digitally. Many had used online platforms such as Zoom or Facebook Live to hold services, as well as bible studies and social times. 70 per cent had held prayer meetings online.

Phone calls and emails were other methods used to communicate with the congregation, while practical support was one of the main ways people connected with the local community.

For many it was too soon to think about what their church, in the light of lockdown, might stop doing, although a number of people named specific activities that they thought their church would review before starting again. In contrast, when asked what your church might start doing after lockdown, the most popular answer by far was 'doing things online', with many talking of a 'hybrid' or 'blended' approach to services and meetings, meaning that, in the future, they think some will be 'in person' and some will be online.



The final question in this section asked if lockdown had given rise to any thoughts about what it means to 'be church' rather than 'do church'. There were lots of different responses to this. Here are a few examples around the top three themes:

- » The use of technology had helped people to connect more in the week, deepening relationships and reminding them that church is the people and not the building.
- » An increase in participation both in services and the life of the church more generally had been observed in some places, reminding people that we are a priesthood of all believers.
- » Opportunity had arisen for some to connect with their local community during lockdown, reminding them that we are a missional people and that continuing to invest in these new relationships will be an important part of being church, going forward.

To find out more, visit [baptist.org.uk/lockdownsurvey](https://baptist.org.uk/lockdownsurvey)

## 'Remarkable response from the British church'



church response to Covid-19. In the six-week period after the onset of lockdown the founders built a network of over 1,100 churches with denominational partners including the Church of England, Salvation Army, Baptists Together, Assemblies of God, Vineyard, and the Methodist Church.

Its report, *The Church in Lockdown*, highlights a number of areas where churches have been active in responding to the emergency needs felt across the country.

The report found that 90 per cent of surveyed churches supported the vulnerable in some way, with 58 per cent providing emergency food, 57 per cent providing befriending services to the elderly and isolated, and almost half of the surveyed churches starting a new community engagement initiative during the pandemic.

The report cites the example of West End Baptist Church in Wiltshire, which sought to address digital poverty

by refurbishing and distributing laptops through local schools, so that disadvantaged pupils could continue to engage with the curriculum.

Tim Pilkington, Director of YourNeighbour said, "During lockdown we have seen a remarkable response from the British Church; the buildings were closed but the Church was open. The Church responded quickly and creatively.

"As well as churches providing what we estimate to be more than five million meals per month to those in need, they have also played a vital role in providing emotional and spiritual needs through pastoral and bereavement support, domestic violence interventions and mentoring, among others.

"Church-based programmes are well-positioned to help communities during the long-term recovery from Covid-19", added Tim.

To find out more about YourNeighbour and *The Church in Lockdown* report go to [yourneighbour.org](https://yourneighbour.org)

The majority of churches in Britain have supported vulnerable people in some way in recent months, according to a report from YourNeighbour.

YourNeighbour has been a UK-wide



# Events

For more, visit [www.baptist.org.uk/events](http://www.baptist.org.uk/events)



## Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 18-25 January

Theme for 2021: 'Abiding in Christ'.  
Materials have been prepared by the Monastic Community of Grandchamp in Switzerland, based on John 15:1-17.  
[ctbi.org.uk/weekofprayer](http://ctbi.org.uk/weekofprayer)



## BMS World Mission Day of Prayer 31 January

A day to pray for the work of mission, with BMS staff in the UK and around the world.  
[bmsworldmission.org](http://bmsworldmission.org)



## Church Action on Poverty Sunday 21 February

A day to focus on working together to close the gap between rich and poor.  
[church-poverty.org.uk/sunday](http://church-poverty.org.uk/sunday)



## Fairtrade fortnight 22 February – 7 March

Events and promotions to ensure the message of Fairtrade is getting a voice.  
[fairtrade.org.uk](http://fairtrade.org.uk)



## World Day of Prayer 5 March

Theme: 'Build on a strong foundation' written by women from Vanuatu.  
[wwdp.org.uk](http://wwdp.org.uk)



## Lent 17 February – 29 March



## Baptist Union Council 23-24 March

[baptist.org.uk/council](http://baptist.org.uk/council)



## Easter Sunday 4 April



## Spring Harvest 5-9 April (Skegness); 6-10 April (Minehead) and 10-15 April (Minehead)

High quality Bible teaching and spirit-led worship, around the theme Unrivalled.  
[springharvest.org](http://springharvest.org)



## Christian Aid Week 9-15 May

Support and pray for the work of Christian Aid.  
[caweek.org](http://caweek.org)



## Baptist Assembly 14-16 May

[baptistassembly.org.uk](http://baptistassembly.org.uk)



## Christian Resources Exhibition 23-24 June

Westpoint, Exeter  
[creonline.co.uk](http://creonline.co.uk)

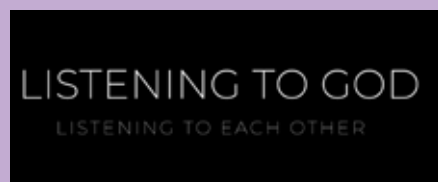
# Resources

For more, visit [www.baptist.org.uk/resources](http://www.baptist.org.uk/resources)

## Listening to God

Listening to God is a series of short films where people from all corners of the Baptist family share how they have heard God speaking during 2020. These films are reflections suitable for personal and group study and consider who God is, his mission, his Church and his future for us as Baptists, which you and your group may like to reflect on as well.

Listening to God is a joint project with the Mission Forum and The Fuelcast, and the films were shared throughout autumn 2020. Access the videos at [baptist.org.uk/listening](http://baptist.org.uk/listening)



## Baptists Together App

Access news, events and a variety of resources on our recently released App. Keep up-to-date with the latest articles and news. Download our App free of charge to your device from [baptist.org.uk/hubb](http://baptist.org.uk/hubb)

## Coronavirus Guidance

We are continually updating our guidelines for churches to reflect the latest guidance and ensure that everyone is kept safe.

Please see the Essential Guidance area of our website for more information.  
[baptist.org.uk/corona](http://baptist.org.uk/corona)

## Faith, Wellbeing and Mental Health

There is so much uncertainty as we face Coronavirus. It's now more important than ever to look after our mental health as a priority. With this in mind, we have created a new area of our website to support church congregations.

The area has ideas about being a mental health friendly church, information about organisations offering support in the arena of mental and emotional health, as well as links to resources, prayers, webinars and reflections.

Visit [baptist.org.uk/wellbeing](http://baptist.org.uk/wellbeing)



# Websites for Baptist Churches and Ministries

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