



2014 – 2019

'Rising to new heights' - A story of accompanying women of colour as they emerge survive and thrive as ministers in the Baptist Union of Great Britain.

The first woman to be recognised as pastor by the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) was Edith Gates in 1918. It was then almost 80 years before Kate Coleman became the first woman of colour to be accredited by BUGB as a minister, in 1996.

The BME Women Ministers' Network was launched through the BUGB in November 2014 to help increase the number of women of colour emerging and thriving as ministers.

It was designed to serve women of colour who are either ordained or non-ordained in ministerial qualifying offices, training for ministry, or exploring a call to ministry.

From 2014 to 2019 the Network provided:

- A safe space for women ministers of colour to share their experiences;
- Opportunities for peer to peer mentoring; and
- Access to opportunities and resources for identifying, nurturing and advocating for leadership potential in women and girls of all backgrounds.

There were opportunities to connect throughout the year:

- Virtually through social media; and
- In person at specially convened Network gatherings, and other gatherings such as Baptist Assembly, the Sam Sharpe Lecture, Gender Justice Hub conferences etc.

Network gatherings were co-facilitated initially by Gale Richards and Leoner Gardner-Howard, and then in November 2015, Carol Moore came on board as a third co-facilitator. There were also a number of guest speakers at specially convened Network gatherings including Lynn Green as BUGB General Secretary, Canon Eve Pitts one of the first women of colour to be ordained as a priest by the Church of England, and Professor Anthony Reddie a leading Black Liberation theologian.

Reflections on the Network from the facilitators

The Network engaged with about 25 women of colour in ministry roles, which encompasses a significant proportion of those known to be in our Union. We have journeyed predominately with women at the stages of - exploring a call to ministry, training for ministry, attending Residential Selection Conference, or as newly accredited ministers.

We have been struck by the notable benefits for women of colour from the moment they contemplate training for Baptist ministry, or being accredited by the BUGB, having a good understanding of the following:

- The diversity of theological positions held in the churches that make up the Baptist Union;
- The theological debates that inform the case for and against ordaining women as ministers;
- The kind of leadership skills and character that are specifically needed to be an effective minister in a *congregationally led* church that is part of a union of Baptist churches with diverse theological positions;
- The range and suitability of available paths to accredited and non-accredited Baptist ministry, and funding streams available for them;
- The importance of having trusted critical friends to journey with and listen to;
- The importance of having a personal plan to ensure ongoing well-being;
- Drawing from their ethnic/gender sources of identity as they minister;
- Any available data and related personal testimonies on:
 - The number of women, and women of colour who start and complete training for Baptist ministry in comparison to their male counterparts;
 - The time spent on the BU Settlement list for women, and women of colour, in comparison to their male counterparts;
 - The number of women, and women of colour in unpaid or part-time ministry placements and substantive roles in BUGB churches in comparison to their male counterparts;

We also note that one of the key elements of the story of the Network has been working in partnership.

Partnerships working has included:

- The 2017 trip to South Africa in partnership with the Methodist Church in Britain in 2017 to speak at key events on the issue of growing Women in leadership;
- The 2018 Joint Conference with the BUGB Gender Justice hub on 'Women in ministry - surviving and thriving' to mark the BUGB 100- year anniversary of ordaining women;
- The 2019 Baptists Together magazine and corresponding centenary booklet marking the centenary of women ministers in the BUGB; and
- The 2020 Gathering up the Crumbs liturgical resource compiled by BUGB women ministers.

The 2017 South Africa trip opened our eyes as to the breadth of diversity within the Network of women ministers of colour, in relation to cultural heritage, church tradition, theology and spirituality. A breadth of diversity which can be both a strength and a stumbling block depending on how it is handled. The trip also opened our eyes to the importance of women ministers working at grassroots level teaching a theology of womanhood that challenges gender-based oppression and violence, to open the door to more women leaders emerging. We also saw the importance of having men championing women as we heard the story of Methodists in South Africa calling their first ever woman bishop, a black woman.

The 2018 Joint Conference with the BUGB Gender Justice hub birthed a powerful statement on how more women might emerge, survive and thrive in ministry. We were able to contribute to this and to

a later more detailed discussion with Regional Association Team leaders, on how some of the suggested actions might be specifically related to the experiences of women of colour.

We were able to help ensure that the Baptists Together magazine on women in ministry issued in 2019, and the corresponding centenary booklet issued at Baptist Assembly 2019, and Gathering up the Crumbs liturgical resource to be issued at Baptist Assembly 2020, rightly contain stories from women of a range of backgrounds of women ministers in BUGB. Additionally, that there was appropriate representation on the selection and interview panel for the recruitment of the BUGB Centenary Enabler role in 2019.

Five years on it is clear to us that some important networking has taken place between women ministers of colour in BUGB. Purposeful ongoing relationships of support have been established between a number of women ministers of colour, that have been crucial to them emerging, surviving and in some instances thriving. The Network has served as an important mechanism for the voice of women ministers of colour being considered and heard.

We hope that as the BME Women Ministers' Network as we know it comes to a natural end, the National Gender Justice Hub, and Racial Justice Hub will appoint appropriate women of colour, as available accompaniers across the regions. These women might make themselves available individually to respond to requests from women of colour contemplating ministry or in ministry, to accompany them. Additionally, as accompaniers they might be willing to gather collectively as required, to help ensure the voice of women ministers of colour continues to be considered and heard. We hope the story and journey of the Network will be captured, told and retold for many years to come, and serve as a source of inspiration.

Finally, we pray the long overdue data on the numbers and experiences of women ministers including women ministers of colour will be captured in a coordinated way and disseminated.

Rev'd Gale Richards (Co-ordinator and Co-facilitator)
Leoner Gardner-Howard (Co-facilitator)
Carol Moore (Co-facilitator)

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