



Candidate Information

Further to our call for nominations for the position of Baptists Together President in 2024-25, and following the stipulations of our constitution, we have received four nominations and these are now offered for election. We are pleased to share with you here the information they have provided and ask you to prayerfully consider which candidate you believe should serve as Baptists Together President. The question for discernment is *who is God calling to be the President of our Union in the coming season?*

MARK ELDER

Minister at Tarporley Chapel (Baptist and Methodist LEP)

My name's Mark - Mark Elder and I'm a Baptist Minister in Cheshire. A little bit about me for those of you who don't know me: I'm a follower of Jesus, love being a child of God, was converted as a 19-year-old and continue to be captivated by Jesus. I am totally indebted to him.

I am married to Zoe and have 2 married sons and 2 beautiful grandchildren.

I'm a northerner from the industrial Lancashire town of Rochdale, but have studied and served God in various parts of the country. I've been in full-time ministry for 37 years, the last 26 years as a Baptist Minister in four churches. Last year I moved to the rural Cheshire village of Tarporley, having previously been Team Leader at St. Peter's, Worcester and Heaton in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and Associate at Poynton. I'm now sole Pastor of a smaller Baptist and Methodist chapel. I love it, I'm learning stacks of new things and God is being so kind to us. We're so chuffed to see real and genuine growth. Being a Minister in a Baptist Church is not easy, particularly in today's post-pandemic world, so any gains are good news. I should say one more thing about my world: I guess many of you are familiar with Fresh Streams - best way to describe us is as a national Word and Spirit network, drawing mainly from our Baptist family. I'm part of its national leadership team with a specific responsibility for theology. I figured many years ago that encountering and experiencing God on the one hand, and thinking about God and learning on the other, should go side by side. I guess one of the marks of my ministry has been to bring theology and experience together.

My vision for all the churches I've served in has been the same: to be part of a warm-hearted, mission-minded, kind, Jesus-centred, Bible loving community, that loves God and loves people. Isn't that the main thing? Loving God and loving people.

Matthew's gospel tells us that one day a Pharisee, trying to catch Jesus out, came to him and asked him what the greatest commandment was. What matters most? What does everything else hang on? Jesus said, 'love God with everything you can muster and love others like you love yourself.' That's the main thing. Stick to that and you won't go far wrong. What does that look like for us in our Baptist churches across the nation? I venture to suggest that it looks like our churches being kind and welcoming places, not stuffy or judgemental; a space for roomy discipleship; for generous orthodoxy; for joyful acceptance of the other, for reliance upon the Spirit, and the elevation of the beautiful grace of God. So, if I become your President the greatest commandment will be my theme: 'Loving God - Loving People.'

Right now I wonder in our Baptist world if we're in danger of forgetting the main thing, particularly when it comes to the battle lines being drawn around human sexuality, which I find sad. We don't just have an elephant in the room at the moment, we have a herd of them. Other denominations in the UK are also facing this. I know this isn't easy. I understand that people have strong convictions on both the traditional and affirming side of the conversation. I know, I've listened; I do too. In recent months, with my colleagues in Fresh Streams, we've hosted conversations on this matter across various associations and that will, no doubt, continue. Those conversations have been honest, gritty, engaging, biblical, open and gracious, and they've given me hope for a better way. A way that keeps us together. A way that keeps us round the table in conversation. Certainly, my heart is to say to those who see this as a fork in the road moment, it isn't; it needn't be. It's not easy but it would be a travesty if, under our watch, we allow this to separate us.

Here's what I hope for; here's what gets me out of bed in the morning: I reckon, by the grace of God, if we truly make the main thing the main thing, trusting in our gracious God with all our differences - and isn't that the Baptist way; committed to prayer, united under the Lordship of Christ, we can humbly continue to play our part, bringing our distinctive Baptist gene to the mix, in partnership with all of our sisters and brothers in Christ, in calling our nation back to God. How? By loving God and loving people, as Jesus told us we should.



In Baptists Together we have about 2,000 churches and missional expressions, and well over 100,000 believers. Nothing thrills me more than hearing stories of transformation, hope and innovation from across our movement. But imagine if, empowered with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, all our Baptist family set their sail to be people of transformation and love in all our churches, colleges and missional expressions, making the main thing the main thing; Loving God and loving people. What a difference we could make and what a movement we could be. Jesus only had 12. That is my prayer and that is my vision for our movement.

May God bless you in your process of discernment.

'Loving God - Loving People'

STEPHEN FINAMORE

I am very grateful to have been asked to be a candidate for the presidency of the Baptist Union of Great Britain. I have lots of reasons to be very thankful to God for our family of churches. It's something for which I have a great deal of love and affection. It's because of these feelings that I have tried to serve our networks in whatever ways I can.

It all started in the late 1970s when I was a fairly new Christian, feeling dissatisfied with the versions of church that I had found up to that point. A friend invited me to come to her Baptist church in south London. Astonishingly, it felt like coming back to a home I never knew that I had. Somehow, even though I was new, I had a deep sense of belonging. I was introduced to a way of being church that seemed to fit with all that I was learning about God. It was a moving experience and I felt very honoured when the congregation asked me to be their church secretary. It was at that church that I met and married Rebecca. There are lots of reasons that it holds a special place in my heart.

During those years I trained and qualified as a lawyer, but I wasn't an especially engaged or able one, and when I was offered an opportunity to become involved in a new community development project in the area, I leapt at the chance. It proved to be another life-changing experience.

Becca had, for a long time, wanted to work overseas and we were fortunate to be invited to work with Tearfund in the mountain villages of northern Peru. These proved very significant years for us and led me into a relationship with Tearfund that lasted a long time. When we returned from overseas, I was asked to join one of the national committees and I ended up becoming chair of the Latin America Committee and serving as a trustee for ten years.

It was while we were in Peru that I felt strongly that I should offer myself for Baptist ministry. I was grateful to be commended by the London Baptist Association and to be accepted at Regent's Park College. My studies led to an even greater love for the Scriptures, and I was delighted when the BU offered me the financial support needed to do a research degree once I'd finished my undergraduate course. During those years I had placements as a student minister in a couple of local churches and they were very generous in their encouragement. I wrote a thesis on the book of Revelation and was awarded a doctorate in 1997.

In 1996 I was called to serve as pastor of a church in north-west Bristol. The congregation was kind and supportive and I spent ten happy years in local ministry. This was where our daughters Debbie and Jen grew up and the congregation remains a very significant part of our lives. Then, in 2006, I was invited to become principal at Bristol Baptist College. I suggested that we develop our programmes around themes of mission and discipleship, and I've spent the last 17 years trying to do that. I have been ably supported by some wonderful colleagues, and I've had lots of joy, and some tears, working with many cohorts of students, lots of whom are now in ministry all around the country. For some or all of this period, I was a trustee of both BUGB and of our local regional association. I've now reached the point where I need to step aside for someone with fresh vision and lots of enthusiasm to take on the role of principal. Becca and I will be retiring to Somerset, but I hope that there may still be ways that I can be of use to our churches.

If I am invited to be President, I think that my theme will be the place of the Scriptures in our life as Baptists. At ordination services, the college presents its students with a new Bible. It's a kind of symbol of their ministry and calling, though the Word, of course, belongs to all the people of God. I would want us to think together about ways we keep the Scriptures central to our worship, teaching, mission, and processes of discernment. However, to be honest, a personal motive for accepting the idea of being nominated as President is that it would give me an opportunity to express my appreciation to the Baptist family and to thank them for being who they are. This has been a great place of belonging for me. It's been true wherever I've found myself among our churches, associations, and colleges. I am very grateful to have found a home among God's Baptist people and, if asked, would feel very privileged to be President for a year. If someone else is chosen, they'll have my full support, and I'll look out for other opportunities to stay active within our family.



JOHN FROUD

**Zephaniah Trust
Shipley Baptist Church
Yorkshire Association**



Although most of my life has been lived in Yorkshire, I was born seventy years ago in Macclesfield where my dad, George Froud, was pastor of the Bethel Baptist Church in the Old Baptist Union (qv). His calling led us as family to West Yorkshire, then South Bank, Middlesbrough before finishing in Derby where ill health forced his retirement. Unlike some other PKs I have never resented his calling or his early death (he was 55), understanding the giving of everything to his and my Lord. I am always grateful for his example and that of his friends who meant so much to me too.

I have belonged to the Shipley Baptist Church, Bradford in the Yorkshire Association since 1983. I am a deacon and a worship leader there and have done two stints as Church Secretary. We have seen major growth and then a falling away in those years. Now we are welcoming another period of growth, although we are still not a large church, like most of the denomination.

I believe in the principles of association and union, but fear that our structures can become less relational in the quest for better organization. I write knowing that whichever way I wrote "organization" I would be written off by some. We should be able to accommodate and bear with those who have a different perspective to our own.

Teaching was my first job and there I learned many of the skills that would be useful to me later. The Zephaniah Music Trust (reg charity 1036478) was set up in 1994 to facilitate my move from teaching to working in schools and other places, like small churches, where a realistic fee is not possible. Accredited ministry I saw then as being church-centred and too restrictive. Perhaps as we learn to value Pioneer Ministries it would not be so now. As a singer-songwriter I minister in three areas: schools, concerts and worship leading. Geographically: anywhere, but mostly around Bradford, West Yorkshire.

I love meeting people; finding things, perhaps people and experiences we have in common, even if we disagree on football or politics or theology or ecclesiology; I love networking, introducing people across boundaries; I love looking at ways of finding non-binary approaches to disagreements.

There is more to learn about John Froud at:

www.zephaniah.org.uk

www.youtube.com/@johnfroud3304/videos

BRYAN SCOTT

My name's Bryan Scott and I'm a Baptist Minister in Birmingham, married with two children.

The Baptist Union needs someone who is going to invigorate, rejuvenate and revitalize the Union as we go through a time of change.

If I was successful, my theme for the year would be in the light of our God given calling to 'act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God' (Micah 6:8).

Some of the issues I see the church dealing with over the next 12 months include:

- The NHS is overwhelmed
- Strikes are widespread
- Economic situation is difficult right now
- Food banks are growing too fast! Homeless being housed too slow!
- War in Ukraine seems no nearer to resolution
- Less than 50% of the country are Christians
- Sexuality & Gender

Bryan Scott

Originally from Handsworth in Birmingham, Bryan studied Theology at Bristol Baptist College.

Bryan loves God, community and football in that order. (And his family) 😊

He is known for his loud laugh and love of people. He leads Cannon St Memorial Baptist Church, a community church focused on helping communities experience the love of Jesus and discipleship.

Speaking about his role at Cannon St Pastor Scott says he has three priorities:

1. Growing the Church to "build joyful Christian communities"
2. Being an "ever-stronger voice for justice, especially for the poorest"
3. Putting children and young people at the "very heart of all that we do".

As Baptists we have always been challenged to be people of courage to bring about transformation. To step out the box of our comfort zone.

We do this by:

- Being open to sharing our faith and increasing our spiritual influence.
- Be in the centre of what God is doing in the world.

About Me

I am an experienced, committed and dynamic Christian.

I have a strong Christian faith with a passion for serving God and his people.

I believe that my strongest gift is pastoral, having the ability to empathize and help people going through difficult circumstances.

I am very committed to working as part of a team and I have good administration, communication and organizational skills gained through 24 years in the armed forces.

I believe God's calling is not about achievement; it's about faithfulness and my job is to respond to him. His job is to produce fruit in his way, in his timing and for his glory!

As senior pastor at present I preach, teach, and disciple new Christians. I co-ordinate and integrate all aspects of work at Cannon St over seeing bible studies, pastoral care and home groups in the process I do all this whilst leading a paid staff team of three and 12 elected Deacons.



When we respond to God's calling the safety we give up is replaced with the great joy of seeing God work in and through us. I believe that I have a pastor's heart that is open to learning as we experience cultural shifts in our society today. At a time such as this the Baptist Union needs someone who is going to invigorate, rejuvenate and revitalize the union as we go through a time of change. I am directed by the way, inspired by the truth and empowered by the life. When we discover the unspeakable privilege of representing him, of being His ambassadors to those around us I am truly honoured. Paul describes this privilege in 1 Peter 2:9 'You are a chosen people - a royal priesthood'.

Baptist Union of Great Britain, Baptist House, PO Box 44, 129 Broadway, Didcot OX11 8RT
Tel: 01235 517700 Email: faithandsociety@baptist.org.uk Website: www.baptist.org.uk
Registered CIO with Charity Number 1181392

January 2023