

Podcast – Season 2 – Denise Dobie

Season Intro

	Music
Jane	Hello, I'm Jane Day, Centenary Development Enabler for Baptists Together
Helen	And I'm Helen Cameron, Research Fellow at the Centre for Baptist Studies at Regent's Park College Oxford. Together we are the co-leaders of Project Violet.
Jane	Welcome to Season 2 of the Project Violet podcast. Project Violet is a research project investigating women's experiences in ministry whilst developing women ministers. We are trying to understand better the theological, missional and structural obstacles women ministers face and identify ways forward.
Helen	In this second season, we will introduce you to some of the women who have taken part in the project and the research they have done.
Jane	We hope that listening to these episodes will help you engage with the findings of the project which can be found on the Project Violet website.

Interview – Denise Dobie

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Helen and Denise	<p>Helen Cameron Today I'm welcoming Denise Dobie onto the Project Violet podcast. Welcome, Denise.</p> <p>Denise Dobie Hi.</p> <p>Helen Cameron Could you start by telling us what your current ministry role is?</p> <p>Denise Dobie So at the moment, I am the minister at the delightfully named Darkhouse Baptist Church in Darkhouse Lane in the Black Country, and I'm in my final year of NAMS, newly accredited ministry studies.</p> <p>Helen Cameron Okay. And I understand you've got a second string to your bow. Is there something else going on for you?</p> <p>Denise Dobie Well, yes. For the last six years, I have been bi-vocational in ministry. So I have until very recently been working as a GP, for 27 years, in the Black Country.</p>

Helen Cameron

Thank you. It would be really interesting to hear how you came into Baptist ministry. Would you like to tell us a bit about that?

Denise Dobie

So I grew up in the Methodist Church, actually. And I think that's when I first felt a call upon my life, in my late teens, and I was involved in church missions with Rob Foster but didn't really know what shape that calling would be. But I'd seen women in ministry role model to me growing up, but then I spent 10 years in Scotland, and that was a very different story there. And I didn't know if I would be fulfilling that calling as a medical missionary, or some other way or ordained ministry. So I studied medicine. And as I've just said, I've worked as an inner-city GP, for the last 27 years or so. But that calling never went away. And although I very much felt that I was serving God and medicine was my vocation – and I was also serving God through my local church in the diaconate and coordinating children's work and safeguarding – that call was nagging, nagging, nagging. But it wasn't really until my late 30s, early 40s, that I started paying more attention to the shape of that call and thinking it was more than volunteering in church and that God had a stronger call. And funnily enough, it was my sister-in-law, who challenged me – who didn't actually believe in women in ministry at the time – and said that she thought God was calling me to more than serving on the church leadership team and children's work. And then I broke the news that I thought God was calling me to ordained ministry. I was too scared to tell anybody about it for a while and I sought spiritual direction. And eventually, at the age of 48, I went off to study theology and enter ministerial formation. And here I am today.

Helen Cameron

Thank you. Thank you for sharing that journey. I know you joined the final group of Project Violet co-researchers. Would you just like to talk to us about the issue that you investigated and why it was important to you?

Denise Dobie

So my chosen topic was about ministering through the menopause. I think it was important to me because as a GP, I saw and consulted with and listened to many women who are going through the menopause and facing many challenges in all areas of their life, particularly in their working life – and working together with them, weighing up all the confusing evidence for different treatments and management and what would work for them, to enable them to be able to reach their full potential and manage the challenges and flourish at that stage of life. And navigating workplace policies and all of that thing and I got to reading around what was available. With the rise of Davina McCall and her program on the menopause, it has become a topic that we talk about a lot more. And so over my time in medicine, there's been varying [advice] – HRT has been in favour and out of favour, and all of that, so weighing that up. And so really journeying alongside women at that point and helping them not to be lost to the workforce, because we lose so many really able women, sometimes without support. And then in church life, this became something that women in ministry were talking about, too. And I was approached by another woman minister, who said would I, with my GP hat, my bi-vocational hat, be willing to co-facilitate some Facebook drop-in sessions, really just talk about the issues

that women in ministry face as they minister through this stage of life. And then I have a vested interest because I am a menopausal woman ministering through the menopause. So it's important to me on all of those counts, really. And I really wanted to explore both the challenges of ministering through menopause and also the gifts that ministering at this stage of life brings because God knows us. And he calls us, knowing us and knowing what stage of life we're at. So there must be something in that. So I want you to balance that, really, and look at all of that to acknowledge the challenges. And also to look at the awareness there was in church world about that, and how we can support women to flourish in their ministry at this stage of life.

Helen Cameron

That's great. So how did you actually go about your research?

Denise Dobie

So on the basis of having had a couple of zoom calls, I saw that there was an appetite for women to talk about that and a forum. So I just sent out invites and did a couple of focus groups. We've facilitated a couple of focus groups looking at the questions of ministering through the menopause, women's own experiences, whether it's the perimenopause or menopause or postmenopausal – looking at the challenges they face, but also exploring the gifts that they might have discovered as well, thinking about what support they did receive or would like to receive. So we had some free chat and discussion. And it was a really rich collection of data to analyse from the two focus groups. But I also wanted to look at the awareness of menopause within regional ministry, because that is where most women would turn to for support, really. So as well as the focus groups and analysing the data from that and looking at the themes that arose from that, I also sent out a survey to all the regional ministers, looking at the similar questions about the challenges what how aware they were of the challenges that women face ministering through the menopause, the gifts that ministering this stage might bring the support that they are aware of where they might signpost to and support and the need for further training. So those were the two big sort of datasets that we had, and then analysing those themes and bringing that together.

Helen Cameron

Okay, that's really great. So having done this piece of research, why do you want people to read your report?

Denise Dobie

I was thinking about this and I want women to read it, because I want them to know they're not alone. I think forewarned is forearmed, but also to acknowledge that, yes, there are challenges but there are accommodations that can be made and support that is out there. And so I want women to read it, to have a sense of what's there. And, and to read other women's experiences, because I think that's really important. I want men to read it. Because I think it's really important that we have awareness of how we all work together, and how we can flourish together and how we can encourage one another to reach our full potential and our full calling. And how we can support one another and just to raise understanding, as well as awareness about working better together. And I want all of us to read it because I want us to read about the requests for

	<p>change, because there's such potential that we don't lose women at this stage of ministry – that we support, and that we acknowledge the challenge and put accommodations and support in place for those things, but also that we celebrate the gifts and we do that together. So yes, I think everyone should read it.</p> <p>Helen Cameron Thank you for that encouragement. Now you've been working in the fourth group of co researchers, which has included Susan Myatt, and Susan has elected to make a film rather than the podcast episode. Would you just like to say something to encourage people to go and watch Susan's film.</p> <p>Denise Dobie I think it's really important that we watch Susan's film rather than just listen to an audio because this is Susan communicating to us in her first language. And there's a richness and it's so important to receive what Susan has prepared and wants to say to us in her language which is British Sign Language. British Sign Language is a rich language. It's not just signs that support English. When I've seen Susan preach. I don't look at the interpreter of fact, the interpreter is often out of sight and you, and you watch you get so much from what Susan is saying and I think it will help you understand so much more about what Susan wants to communicate when you watch what she is saying. So please watch it.</p> <p>Helen Cameron Thank you. Thank you for that. And thank you for coming on to the podcast, Denise.</p>
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Season Outro

Helen	Thank you for listening to this episode of the Project Violet podcast. We invite you to go to the website and download the reports if you have not yet done so. www.projectviolet.org.uk
Jane	And don't forget to tell others about the Project Violet podcast. You can follow us on Facebook and X formerly Twitter.
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