

## Podcast – Season 2 – Alex Elish and Carmel Murphy Elliot

### Season Intro

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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 – Alex Elish and Carmel Murphy Elliot

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Helen, Carmel and Alex	<p><b>Helen Cameron</b> Today I'm joined by Alex Elish and Carmel Murphy Elliot. Welcome to the Project Violet podcast. Let me start with you Carmel. Can you explain what your current ministry role is?</p> <p><b>Carmel Murphy Elliot</b> Yeah, sure. So, I'm freelance. So I wear a number of hats. And I work for an organization called Urban Life, which accompanies those involved in mission and ministry in marginal contexts, through formal and informal education. And then more recently, I've joined the Urban Expression team. So I'm a regional coordinator for the North of England for one day a week. And I'm also part of a little organization called All the Small Things that supports people who are doing grassroots-kind of community organizing and community development.</p> <p><b>Helen Cameron</b> Thank you. Alex, what's your role at the moment?</p> <p><b>Alex Elish</b> So similar to Carmel, I'm part of the Urban Expression coordinators team, which I've been part of for about 14 years or so which I think is actually the same time as Carmel. And I'm also a Baptist minister in a small Baptist Church in Peckham, in southeast London.</p>

**Helen Cameron**

Thank you. We're asking people to reflect back to how they entered ministry. Carmel would you like to just talk about how you came to be a Baptist minister?

**Carmel Murphy Elliot**

Yeah, sure. So I was a church-based youth and community worker. And within that role I was given lots of opportunity and actively supported and encouraged to explore what church might look like for those who weren't that interested in coming on a Sunday. So worked alongside the young people to explore spirituality to explore kind of, at that time, alternative worship was a big thing. And it was fantastically enjoyable. And in the midst of that I discovered God outside of the walls of church in a very different way. That kind of gave me this call to wider ministry. And so I went to train for Baptist ministry, but always with that kind of call to the edges and the kind of beyond the, what we already know, as church.

**Helen Cameron**

Perhaps I can ask the same question of you, Alex.

**Alex Elish**

Yeah, I, I ended up studying theology at university, which was a bit of a surprise to me. But I was certain that I did not want to be in ministry, although I was a Christian. I wasn't going to be involved in church ministry at all, because I wanted to do something useful with my life. So I started to work for a charity that was working with homeless people, a Christian charity in Edinburgh. And a lot of the time we were going to churches to say, could you support our work? Could you volunteer with us? And could you come alongside of the work we do? And there was a growing realization that we were sort of acting as the middleman. And the more I read the gospels, and the more I read, what Jesus was like then it became obvious to me that we should be doing those things as followers of Jesus a bit like Carmel was saying, being on the edge or being on the margin being with people who would never walk into church. There was a growing thing that I felt like God was saying, you can't actually work outside of it and criticize it. If you want to do something different then you might need to actually do something about it. So yes, surprisingly, and training for ministry, in a very roundabout way, at IBTS, in Prague, and a placement in Kent, and all sorts of other wonderful experiences. But yeah, it's surprising. It's surprising for me to find myself in Baptist ministry.

**Helen Cameron**

Thank you for sharing those two stories. That's, that's really interesting. Now, you took part in the second group of co researchers in Project Violet, and you chose to work together. Would you like to just talk about the issue or question that you were interested in and why it was important to you? I'll let you decide which one which one of you starts.

**Carmel Murphy Elliot**

So we looked at women's experiences in pioneering contexts, which is no surprise, given the stories we've just shared, but particularly within urban expression, which is where we both have experience. And I guess we felt like there'd be such rich insights from the women that we've been working with for

a number of years. But I think there was also something about how pioneer voices don't often get centred. And there was also this sense of we knew that we wanted these voices to be present and heard within this research. And so it felt like we could do something together around that within Urban expression.

**Alex Elish**

Yeah, I think it was definitely we saw, I don't know, like you had, I saw the shout-out for people to share their experiences. And I thought, oh, that sounds like I should probably do that, but I don't know, I just don't have time or the faith or whatever. And then I thought of a second requirement like, oh, maybe we should do something. And I think we're both on the initial kind of exploratory call, I thought: Oh, well, maybe we could do something together. Because I've just felt like not necessarily wanting to like highlight our voices but to highlight other people's voices and how they ended up in urban expression. And I think we then placed the emphasis not just on women pioneers, but actually the flourishing of women ministers. And I think that emphasis really opened it up for us and made it less of like, another thing to have on the to do list, but actually just opening out what might be possible and highlighting different ways of being in ministry. So that brought it to life, definitely, for me. And actually also the process of how it was going to happen in Project Violet. So meeting with the other co-researchers and meeting with the three theological reflectors – that whole process just was so interesting to me, and much more attractive than, like writing up a report and sending it off and then, you know, it appearing somewhere or whatever. So the interactive and discussion way of doing the research. It was just so brilliant to be part of.

**Helen Cameron**

Thank you. So you decided to work together, you've explained your topic. Can you just tell us a little bit about how you went about doing your research?

**Carmel Murphy Elliot**

Yeah, so we had three conversations with two groups of women or ordained Baptist ministers with an involvement in urban expression. And we asked them to tell us about stories where they felt they had really flourished in leadership and ministry, and also stories where they had really struggled or felt restricted in ministry. And then we invited them to reflect a little bit on their training and how that had hindered or helped their mission and ministry. Yeah, and then we reflected on those conversations. And identified what came out across the two groups we spoke to.

**Alex Elish**

Yeah, we had a grand plan of, you know, we set the questions out, and we sent those to the participants beforehand, to help guide our conversation. And then I think after the first one, Carmel, we were just like, Oh, my goodness, that conversation did not go how we expected. Loads more stuff had come to the fore. And most of that was really helpful, but a lot of it was very, very painful. So we then realized, okay, we need to refine our process a little bit for the next conversation. And, and it almost felt like at some point, it was a very sacred space that we created, I think. And yeah, there was a lot of reflecting on challenge and reflecting on struggle that people have been through. But also a lot of joy has come with that, you know, talking about people noticing their

	<p>flourishing and the liberation that they're found. So those conversations were so important, and they didn't follow the path that we imagined. But yeah, it was a really beautiful process with our research participants.</p> <p><b>Helen Cameron</b> Thank you, and the conversational and collaborative nature of that is just really coming through in the way in which you enabled women to speak about their experiences. So you've produced a report. Why do you want people to read your report about your research?</p> <p><b>Carmel Murphy Elliot</b> I think it shares experiences of women's struggle in ministry, as you'd expect, and I think it's really important that we hear and understand some of those. But I think the thing particularly that Alex has been mentioning is also this flourishing. And for me that's incredibly hopeful and helpful, because it doesn't just stop at this naming the struggle. It also starts to look at how women have and can and are flourishing within ministry and therefore it gives us some pointers towards what we might need to see more widely in order for women to thrive in these places. So it feels quite hopeful to me in that it's not just about, yes, it's hard, and we want to hear that. But also there are other things happening that are encouraging and life giving and beautiful.</p> <p><b>Alex Elish</b> Yeah, absolutely. I agree with all of that. And then I guess just two things out of that. We have got some fantastic artwork in our report. So I would love people to even if they don't read what we've written, to look at the artwork that has been created, because I think that really encapsulates the journey that many women have been on. And also because I think we've really tried to listen to people stories. And so read a little bit of other women's experiences and what that's been like, I think that'll be really helpful for reflection and ongoing action. And, yeah, how we how we can do better to support women in ministry, particularly in like nontraditional context.</p> <p><b>Helen Cameron</b> That's great. Thank you so much for talking today. And I encourage people to go to the website and download your report. Thank you very much.</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. <a href="http://www.projectviolet.org.uk">www.projectviolet.org.uk</a>
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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