

# this intentional style of development should not stop with women



MagnifyYou was a two-year development programme for a group of ordained women leaders - and resulted in several participants sensing the call to ministries they hadn't previously considered.

It was conceived by Beth Powney, the then Regional Minister Team Leader (RMTL) of the Eastern Baptist Association, and delivered alongside Jane Day (Centenary Development Enabler).

This article draws on Beth's MagnifyYou research paper, which formed part of the Project Violet findings. Beth's paper was titled: *What is the difference that MagnifyYou has made to the women who took part and why was it needed?*

## Why did MagnifyYou come about?

In 2019 I was the only female Regional Minister Team Leader of a group of 13 and this ratio had always been the case. Both Jane Day (Centenary Enablement Developer) and I agreed this needed to change. Linked with that was the knowledge I had gleaned about the intentional discipleship that the Church of England had taken with their women priests prior to the Anglican Synod agreement to have women Bishops.

I wondered, if a group of Associations worked together, could we do something to intentionally disciple and inspire ordained women leaders for the future?

*Beth received support for the idea from Phil Barnard, RMTL for the London Baptists, and Geoff Colmer, RMTL for the Central Baptist Association, and asked them to consider three or four women who they would like to send on this 'programme'.*

*Fifteen women gathered together on 11 March 2020 at the London Baptists office, where the women were invited to share what they felt their needs for development were.*

*From this discussion the following areas were identified for input and future consideration:*

- *Courage*
- *Leading as a woman*
- *Imposter syndrome & inner critic*
- *Facing criticism*
- *How to survive in ministry*

*Jane and Beth worked on a structure for the 'programme'; it would meet alternate months, and be based around worship, sharing, support and coaching. The core of each day was hearing the story and receiving the wisdom from significant women leaders in the Baptist family (Lynn Green, Kate Coleman, Rosa Hunt) and from another denomination.*

*From this MagnifyYou was born, 13 ordained women ministers meeting from September 2020 until July 2022.*

## What difference has this made to the ordained women ministers who have participated?

There have been what may be referred to as hard outcomes and soft outcomes.

The hard outcomes include significant role changes or taking on new responsibilities.

In this group, two women have commenced study for a PhD; five have taken on Regional Minister roles, two others have applied for regional roles; one has become a Moderator to a Board of Association Trustees; another has represented Baptists Together, nationally; while others have shadowed senior colleagues or observed national meetings.

The interviews with the participants sought to uncover the more soft outcomes, which are perhaps more fundamental to who we are and how we function as a person and therefore in our ministry. I believe it is these outcomes which will move people towards lasting change.

Following the interviews, I believe there are four main themes which have emerged:

### ***Intentionality***

I didn't ever consider advertising this development programme, as I had in my mind the Anglican model, where women priests were asked to join and this instinctively felt like the right way forward – to invite ordained women ministers to join.

Without exception they each said that if they had seen it advertised, they would not have applied. The impact of the invitation was expressed with these words: *A confidence boost; privileged (used more than once); surprised;*

*'I didn't think of myself that way'; encouraging (used more than once); empowering; affirming.*

In devising the programme, we listened to their needs, rather than present the women with what we thought.

One participant summarised MagnifyYou in these terms: 'Intentional connection; intentional investment'. The intentionality mattered a great deal and was a key part: I believe this should make us question some of our patterns of development for our ministers as Baptists, especially those in the minority or whose voices are easily silenced.

### ***Safe space, connection with other women, and a right to be at the table***

Most of MagnifyYou had to take place over Zoom, due to lockdown restrictions. We had a significant onsite meeting in July 2021 and following that I received an email of thanks, part of which said the following in relation to having an imposter syndrome: 'I feel a sense of liberation from it. I really feel I have a place now at the table.'

It has to be recognised that for the majority of our time, ordained women ministers function and sit in a male space. MagnifyYou enabled these women to inhabit a different space and many

described the gift as a 'safe space'.

### ***Change of mindset and increased confidence***

MagnifyYou had an impact on the way the women think about themselves and how their confidence has been boosted. The increase in confidence certainly began with just the simple process of invitation to be part of something developmental, immediately giving the message that they felt valued.

There were two other common factors: the vulnerability and honesty of our speakers linked with the quality of what they shared with the group. Again and again the women reported to me the thought process of: "If they could do what they have done, why shouldn't I?"

### ***Value of story and thinking beyond my immediate ministry***

It's worth noting something of the ministry of Jesus here. He took ordinary men (and some women) and gave them his time and access to him. In that time they listened to his stories, absorbed his parables, witnessed his miracles and questioned him. They became the disciples who changed the world for him and us.



In trying to answer the question of why this has been successful, perhaps we actually have to say: "Of course it would be, we're following in the footsteps of the master."

### Further thoughts

This intentional style of development should not stop with women. There have been conversations with our black and Asian leaders about how something like this could be run to equip our Black and Brown ministers, and I pray this will bear fruit. Male leaders also need safe spaces where they can develop, grow their gifts and let the protective walls come down.

I think MagnifyYou speaks more widely to how the Baptist denomination does leadership

and personhood development. Are we prepared to be more intentional for the future or will we continue with hoping our ministers catch good leadership?



**Beth Powney is the former Regional Minister, Team Leader of the Eastern Baptist Association (2017-2023)**

### Questions for reflection

What opportunities are there in your church, association and community to release and empower women (and others) who haven't always fitted at the table?

How can we provide opportunities and spaces for intentional discipleship where they can flourish and become all that God created them to be?

### Further reading

'Each one has been changed by the process' - Claire Nicholls reports on MagnifyYou [baptist.org.uk/magnify](http://baptist.org.uk/magnify)

**Beth's research paper and accompanying podcast on MagnifyYou can be found on the Project Violet website: [projectviolet.org.uk](http://projectviolet.org.uk)**

Project Violet is a major study into women's experience of ministry, which has sought to understand more fully the theological, missional, and structural obstacles women ministers face in the Baptist community in England and Wales. It has led to 57 requests for change.

Beth's research paper led specifically to **Request for Change R04:**

***Intentional leadership development for Ministers***

*Each Association, either alone or in cooperation with others, develop a programme or*

*programmes of intentional leadership development drawing on the learning from MagnifyYou as evaluated in the research.*

*Associations who have developed such programmes are invited to share their learning. During Project Violet, the distinctive needs of women and millennial leaders have been highlighted but we recognise the work being done with Black and Brown leaders.*

The MagnifyYou research paper was also cited in the following requests for change:

**R28** - *which relates to monitoring data throughout the vocational pathway to ensure equality of access and opportunity*

**R41** - *Role models: that under-represented groups/individuals be given a platform for leadership*

*in local churches, Associations and college gatherings*

**R54** - *The post of the Centenary Development Enabler role is made permanent to oversee the implementation of Project Violet (PV) and what happens beyond*

**R55** - *Improving the accompaniment of women ministers*

**R56** - *Use resources that reflect the diversity of Baptist life*

The deadline to provide an initial response to the Requests for Change and an action commitment is 30 September.

All the commitments to action will be presented to Baptist Council on 23 October 2024.

**For more:**  
[baptist.org.uk/pvresponse](http://baptist.org.uk/pvresponse)