

## A baptism in a JCB – A further reflection

In 2018 army chaplain Gary Birch conducted a baptism that went viral, with the short video clocking up more than one million views on social media. He explains what happened, and offers further reflections



***WE DO WHAT WE FEEL CALLED TO DO AT THAT TIME AND PLACE,  
AND LEAVE THEM IN GOD'S HANDS.***

It was 2018 on exercise in Canada when three young service personnel approached a colleague and me about baptism. We'd been holding short prayer and communion services during the month-long exercise and they had been coming to most of them, as well as chatting about their faith and beliefs during those weeks.

Having been in Baptist church ministry for 12 years before entering Army chaplaincy full time, my immediate instinct was to run a 10-week course and schedule an Easter Sunday service with all their friends and family in attendance... but of course that wasn't practical or remotely possible. If my time as a chaplain has taught me anything, it is to be flexible and realistic

about supporting people's spirituality, and not to hold on too closely to traditions and ways of doing things that in all honesty aren't even necessarily biblical.

So in all good conscience, with some of their friends and slightly confused comrades watching, a video rolling to be able to share with family back home (and a million others on social media as it turned out), we baptised them in the bucket of a JCB because that's what we had at the time.

Where they are now, I don't know, and that's another distinct difference in chaplaincy to church ministry – most of the time we can't follow up with a discipleship course because we and they move around so much.

Sometimes we have the blessing of bumping into people we've introduced to Jesus, baptised, confirmed, married etc, and even occasionally stay in touch with some of them, but lots of the time we do what we feel called to do at that time and place, and leave them in God's hands.

My colleagues and I continue to baptise service personnel in rivers, oceans or wherever we can find water. There is a spiritual hunger in many of our troops that we as military chaplains are privileged to help them explore.

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