



A baptism that provoked many questions

Bread of Life, a micro-bakery, coffee shop and community hub led by Baptist minister John Western, conducted its first baptism this year

“If you go to a coffee shop,” notes John Western, “you probably don’t expect to see a baptism there.” Yet that unlikely combination is precisely what happened one Thursday afternoon in Darnley Road, Strood, Kent earlier this year.

John, an accredited Baptist minister and passionate baker, leads the Bread of Life project, a micro-bakery, coffee shop and community hub. Bread of Life launched in 2022 and its overall vision is “to see church emerge among people who, sadly, would be very unlikely to go to one of our regular churches,” he explains.

It is run by volunteers, and one of them, Lauren, became the first person to be baptised in late January. Lauren had found faith the previous year. Although connected with two churches, she had requested her baptism at Bread of Life.

“I think she was perhaps a little nervous about choosing one over the other, but we were certainly one of the influences in her finding faith,” says John. “Lots of conversations went on as we were washing up or just doing the practical stuff together, which is very much the way things happen at Bread of Life”.



Baking course

The Baptism



John set up a paddling pool and led a short service before baptising Lauren. Though Bread of Life has provision for 24 covers, around 40 people attended the baptism. (“Standing room only,” according to John.) They heard Lauren share her testimony, and the event has become quite a talking point.

“A good number of the regulars from the coffee shop who are not yet people of faith came along and heard what God had been doing in her life,” John says.

“Lauren is very down to earth and told her story in a very relatable way. Her testimony centred around in coming to Christ, how she’d really found peace, a peace she hadn’t known in her previous life.

“There was a lot of joy. And so, after the baptism, I had people asking lots of questions about the baptism and what it means to be baptised.

“They’re not at the point where it would be appropriate to say, ‘Oh, you can jump in the pool now!’ But it was just really encouraging. People who had never witnessed a baptism before were clearly thinking about it.”

Those present included one man who had confessed to John how he was anti church and religion due to a bad experience many years ago. He had noticed a change in Lauren, but 'didn't have a clue what was going on'. It was only in attending her baptism that he began to understand it. "I was so encouraged by that conversation," says John, "it was one of the advantages of having a baptism in a more public way."

As well as the coffee shop, bakery and breadmaking courses, Bread of Life has hosted special events, including baking experiences for Cubs, Beavers and Squirrels. A Thursday afternoon group has started after a customer came with many questions after starting to read the Bible. John has also had the privilege of conducting two funerals for customers.

He adds: "Church is emerging in ways that I'm not expecting. Yes, it's unconventional, but that's really exciting."

"Running the coffee shop forces me to rely on the Holy Spirit; to pray each morning, give me what's needed for the people who will come today. It's just that intentionality – and isn't that how we should all be living, day by day, before Jesus?"

Find out more about Bread of Life at breadoflifestrood.co.uk

John Western is the project manager and chief baker at Bread of Life. John has a background as a scientist and small business manager. He has more than 20 years experience as an accredited Baptist minister. He is a passionate baker, who trained at the School of Artisan Food.



Neuro café – one of the groups that use Bread of Life's premises for a support group for people with neurological conditions