

BAPTISTS

# TOGETHER

## GATHERING

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Matthew 18:20

'For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.'

## GROWING

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2 Peter 3:18

'But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.'

## GOING

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Matthew 28:19

'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'



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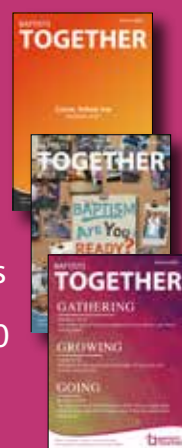
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# GATHERING, GROWING, GOING

**T**he previous *Baptists Together* magazine focused on baptism, and during the creating of that edition our annual returns revealed the number of baptisms across our churches to be at the highest level in a decade. April also saw the publication of Bible Society's 'Quiet Revival' research, which suggested a national increase in church going.

While not the case for every church, these are encouraging trends: more baptisms, more people turning up at our churches, more interest in Christianity generally.

As the Editorial Group met to plan this latest edition in the wake of these findings, we were drawn to questions around church. What are we inviting people into? At a time when we are told more people (and particularly young people) are searching for meaning and direction in a fractured world, what are we offering?

This edition therefore seeks to explore responses to those ponderings, perhaps encapsulated in the question 'Why gather?' It is an almost back-to-basics look at why we do what we do.

Naturally this is a journey that takes in the early church in the book of Acts, as well as the early Baptists. There's a perspective too from a psychologist, who explains how nurturing positive character traits in congregations has ripple effects throughout wider communities.

Elsewhere we dip into the 'Quiet Revival' research, to remind us what it said, and what people have said about it. With the report's key finding focusing on Gen Z, we've also spoken to Baptist leaders in that age group to share their reflections on what younger people are looking for and how, as churches, we can respond and prepare.

Our collection of local church stories shows the different understandings and practices of gathering. And while they naturally vary, noticeably all have a similar DNA - the idea of gathering, growing in faith - and then going.

In their gathering, our churches are compelled by love to both welcome in those who are searching, and go outside in mission. It was ever thus. 'In that gathering', writes historian and theologian Ruth Gouldbourne of the earliest Baptists, 'the presence of the Lord was encountered and so faith was shaped and nurtured, discipleship was explored, and witness to the truth of God's action in the world was expressed.'

May you grow in faith, depth and understanding in your gathering – and may you help others discover Jesus through it.

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WE

# NEEDED EACH OTHER

When thinking about growing and maturing in the faith there is often a tendency to think merely in terms of personal spiritual development, writes Karen E Smith.

But spiritual growth takes place primarily as, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we live and share together in community - something we see clearly in the book of Acts.

Jesus Christ is Lord! How wonderful it is to hear this early confession of faith spoken by those who profess their allegiance to Christ through the waters of baptism.

Such a confession marks a decisive moment of personal encounter with God. It is a public declaration of an individual's intent to surrender heart and life to God. In Baptist life, total immersion symbolises an individual's desire to die to the old self and rise to newness of life in Christ. One new Christian movingly described her experience of baptism by saying that when she came out of the water, her first thought was "a new me now . . . bye-bye Jane, new Jane". It was for her a moment of new beginning.

Yet for her, as for all Christians, baptism was only a step along the pilgrimage of faith.

## 'BAPTISED INTO' THE BODY OF CHRIST

Understandably, in describing this new life in Christ, our focus is often on an individual's personal experience of God's grace. Yet, strictly speaking, baptism is not simply an individual choice. It is a faithful response to the gracious call of God, which takes place in the context of community. Importantly, the act of baptism marks not only a response to God's call to relationship – the divine initiative to be drawn into the very life of the triune God – but also draws us into new relationship with others. We are<sup>1</sup> 'baptised into' the body of Christ.

**“LUKE IS OFFERING INSIGHT INTO THE WAY GOD WORKS CREATIVELY AND REDEMPTIVELY WITHIN COMMUNITY TO SHAPE AND FORM PEOPLE INTO THE LIKENESS OF CHRIST”**

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of baptism see, Paul S Fiddes, 'Believers' Baptism: An Act of Inclusion or Exclusion?' chapter 7 in *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2003), 125-156.



As the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth:

*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*  
I Corinthians 12:12-13)

Using the analogy of parts of a physical body, Paul goes on to suggest that it is not possible for one part to say to another ‘I have no need of you’ because the body does not consist of one member, but of many (I Corinthians 12:14). This Scriptural understanding of living in relationship with God and others has many dimensions, but not least is the idea that those who are ‘in Christ’ (that is, bound together by the love of Christ), have a particular responsibility to and for one another. They are to put away childish ways and live in love. (I Corinthians 13:11). The acknowledgement by believers in fellowship of their bond in Christ and their need to care for one another was expressed in one early Baptist covenant in this way:

*We do promise to bear one another's Burdens, to cleave to one another and to have a Fellow-feeling with one another, in all Conditions both outward and inward...<sup>2</sup>*

Although early Baptists emphasised their desire to support one another in their life together, there is no doubt they also faced conflict from within as well as from outside their community. Most Christian communities face tensions and difficulties in relationship and, at times, parts of the body may even want to disown other parts!

Yet, while Baptists at times have differed among themselves over various issues, there is an unwavering acceptance in their Scriptural view that believers are always called to be in relationship with God and others. As John Fawcett (1740-1817), the 18th-century Baptist pastor and hymn writer put it, there is “the tie that binds”; it is, of course, the love and fellowship known in Christ.

Today, when thinking about growing and maturing in the faith – spiritual formation – there is often a tendency to think merely in terms of personal spiritual development. There is no end to books and articles that seem to emphasise an individual path to Christian formation. Christians are often urged to adopt spiritual disciplines including pursuing particular forms of personal devotion.

However, while these may be useful for individual discipleship, spiritual formation is not something a person may achieve. Formation does not come about by individuals seeking to make choices to be better people. Rather, spiritual growth is God’s work within us and it takes place primarily as, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we live and share together in community.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY IN ACTS

Exploring the Acts of the Apostles as a guide for spiritual formation, it is striking to see that Luke emphasises again and again the importance of community. A master story-teller, Luke introduces the reader to various scenes of spiritual formation among believers in their life together.

The stories, however, are not told by Luke simply to help us see patterns of organisation, models of worship or service, or plans for evangelism. Nor is he attempting to provide an historical narrative as such. Rather, Luke is offering insight into the way God works creatively and redemptively within community to shape and form people into the likeness of Christ. Spiritual formation – this process of growing-up into Christ-likeness – takes place under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in relationship with other believers. As Luke portrays it, in the to and fro of community life, and as believers seek the mind of Christ together, they begin to develop character traits such as, courage, obedience, patience, single-mindedness, which are needed by those who have resolved to ‘take up the cross and follow Christ’.

## WAITING WITH OTHERS ON GOD

Contemporary readers of Acts, in considering these traits and others that Luke suggests are important for spiritual formation, will recognise they are counter-cultural to much of present-day life in society. In fact, spiritual formation in this way may seem well-nigh impossible to pursue within church life today.

Consider, for instance, Luke’s emphasis all through Acts, on waiting as a key element of spiritual formation. This emphasis might seem puzzling, especially since the stories of Acts are often read and interpreted with an eye to positive action in terms of evangelism and congregational growth. Yet, a closer look at Scripture reveals that while stepping out to tell others about God’s love is certainly considered to be important, Luke does not begin with the story of Pentecost,

2 ‘The Solemn Covenant of the Church of Christ, meeting in White-street, June 5, 1696’ appended to Benjamin Keach, *The Glory of a True Church and its Discipline display’d* (London, 1697), 73.

but with a picture of the disciples gathered together waiting and praying.

Numerous other stories in Acts follow this pattern as Luke emphasises those who want to truly follow Jesus must learn to wait with others for God to take the initiative. In this sense, waiting is not a matter of 'doing nothing', but believers are actively waiting on, and with, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. For Luke, it seems, waiting moments are opportunities to remember that those who claim Jesus Christ is Lord, must relinquish control and in trust, surrender to God.

The believers, as Luke describes them, were seeking to live responsively day-by-day, guided and inspired by the Holy Spirit. They certainly did not try to force or manipulate the work of the Spirit. They did not plan elaborate programmes or spend time thinking about big budgets. Yet, they increased in number as they gave themselves to practising the virtue of patience or, as Alan Kreider put it, sought to create a 'habitus' (which includes attitudes, skills and dispositions) of patient ferment.<sup>3</sup> According to Kreider, there were many different ways that early Christian communities created this habitus, including meeting frequently with other believers, eating and sharing together, and watching over one another. The point, of course, is that it was within this type of community that Christians were focused on being, or perhaps becoming, those who were fashioned more and more into the likeness of Christ.

## THE CHALLENGE OF WALKING TOGETHER TODAY

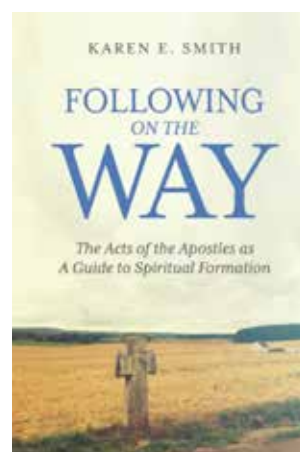
'Walking together' in this type of community might seem idealistic, even far-fetched and impracticable in a contemporary setting. If we are totally honest, even among Christian communities today, an emphasis on consumerism, individual choice and images of success and power have dominated our understanding of life together in Christ. Yet, in reading Acts as a guide for spiritual formation, we are called to consider again what it means to affirm and publicly confess that Christ is Lord, to be baptised into the body of Christ and then within community to be formed together into the likeness of Christ. As Luke reminds us, spiritual formation is always God's work, but it takes place under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and within the life of the fellowship of believers.

The challenge today to those who are bound together in Christ is to discover under the guidance of the Spirit ways in which we, as church communities together, might become places where everyone who professes Jesus as Lord might actually become more like him in thought, word and deed, day by day.



**Karen E Smith is an Honorary Senior Research Fellow of the School of History, Archaeology and Religion, Cardiff University. As a university lecturer and the pastor of a Baptist church in Wales, and now also in retirement, she has focussed on Baptist studies and Christian spiritual formation.**

**The ideas in this article are explored in her book *Following on the Way: The Acts of the Apostles as a Guide to Spiritual Formation* (Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2022), available on Amazon.**



## “THE SCRIPTURAL UNDERSTANDING OF LIVING IN RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND OTHERS HAS MANY DIMENSIONS”

<sup>3</sup> Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 122-3.





# OUR BAPTIST *Roots* OF GATHERING

**Is it enough to say the church is the people, not the building? Not for the earliest Baptists, writes Ruth Gouldbourne**

**T**he church is the people, not the building.

How often have we said – and just what do we mean by it?

What we mean by it is pretty clear; church is not a building we all attend at a set time, but it is the living community of those who do the attending...

But is that enough of a definition? After all, there are other places we attend regularly, with the same people, sharing an intention; pupils regularly attend a school, colleagues regularly congregate (sometimes) in a workplace, fans get together in a stadium...but though they may share some characteristics, they are not churches, neither named for the building, nor in our more nuanced theological meaning.

Is it enough to say the church is the people, not the building? Does that give a full enough meaning to the term church?

For the earliest Baptists, it didn't. They were not those who having had no life of faith or regular attendance in a church building, were then converted and started to do something which meant they could say they were now 'in the church'. They were those who had been attending services, had been connected to, even central to congregations, involved in worship, prayer and seeking to live faithfully. But they concluded that although this was people, it was not church.

For more than a century before recognisably Baptist congregations were visible, there had been ongoing and heated debates about how to identify a true Church of Christ, and what

the difference was between a meeting of people, and a congregation in worship. To put it very briefly and simplistically, for generations through the medieval period, things were relatively clear. 'The Church' was sustained by and located in the authority of the properly ordained priest; the presence of the Spirit was guaranteed by the action of ordination and the activity of the priest in saying the prayers and conducting the actions that made Christ present in the sacraments.

With the change in theology, philosophy and practice that we call the Reformation, the assumptions that sustained this could no longer be taken for granted. Debates about what marked a true church were an important part of the explorations that shaped reformation theology.

***Early Baptist congregations were formed in a time of debate as to what constituted a church***



For Luther, there were seven marks of a true church.<sup>1</sup> Calvin wrote 12 chapters in volume 4 of his 'Institutes' – and so it continues; knowing what a true church was, and on what basis it was constituted, was deeply important as all the previous convictions were questioned. And it mattered because it was a guarantee of a true gospel, and therefore of true salvation. If all the previous markers of salvation were removed, what was a believer to depend on?

It is in the context of this debate that we find Baptists emerging in the 17th century. In England the debate had involved discussion about the continuity of the episcopacy through the reformation – had apostolic succession been maintained in an unbroken continuity? For this was a mark of the continuing authority and validity of the sacraments, and therefore the presence of the true Church and of Christ within it. It had also become entwined with the ongoing discussions about the role of the monarch, and the relationship between the Church and the State. The authenticity of the Church, as the vehicle of salvation through sacraments and the preaching of the gospel, continued in 17th century England to be linked to State sanction and apostolic succession and so episcopal oversight.

But there were those who remained unconvinced, or became unconvinced through reading Scripture and through

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## *To be church therefore entailed being together... The church was them in their gathering, with the Lord among them*

conversation, that these were sufficient, or even necessary, criteria for recognising the true church. And some of these became the people we identify as the earliest Baptists.

We have the accounts therefore of people like Dorothy Hazzard, who, because of her reading of Scripture and the conversations she had with others who were exploring the same ideas, came to the conviction that her presence in the parish service (presided over by her husband) which used a government supplied prayer book, and depended on the sanction of the local bishop, was in fact to share the mark of the beast. She gradually withdrew, and began instead to meet with others of like mind, and to read, pray, discuss, invite a teacher, and eventually be part of a congregation that constituted itself on that basis; the gathering of believers, to meet around Scripture and worship, share bread and wine, and practise baptism.

We have the accounts too of the congregation in Gainsborough and Scrooby led by John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, who withdrew from parish worship, who gathered – eventually in secret, and under great pressure,

which finally led to them fleeing to Amsterdam – to worship, learn, and share ordinances in dependence on the same promise.

This promise in Matthew mattered so much to these believers because they recognised in it the authority to be – or rather to know themselves as – the true church in a way that was not dependent on State sanction or episcopal succession. Rather, they knew themselves as the church because they trusted the promise that in the gathering of the people in the name of Jesus, the Lord was among them – and that made them church.

It was for them the gathering that mattered; not just the meeting up with like-minded people to share ideas, but the gathering 'in the name' – explicitly identifying themselves as those who gathered, not on the basis of law, or of the presence of somebody supposedly part of a long succession leading back to the apostles' validation, but in the conviction that when they gathered in prayer, for worship, on the basis of their faith in the risen Christ, then he was among them and therefore they were church.





To be church therefore entailed being together. The church was not something that existed apart from those who confessed the name of Jesus and committed themselves to one another as fellow disciples. The church was not an institution which provided them with sacraments, salvation and access to the divine. The church was not something out there, over against them. The church was them in their gathering, with the Lord among them.

I suggest that nowadays it is hard to realise just how revolutionary that was – and how much it asked of people in terms of mutuality and shared discipleship. We – heirs of 400 years of history, including enlightenment thinking, and growing individualism – share a world view that is more likely to lead us to expect that the major question for early Baptists was to do with baptism for believers as an individual response and the challenge that posed to contemporary ways of thinking. And indeed, baptism as a mark of individual discipleship was important – but even more important was baptism as a mark of entering the church (it had always been), and since the true church was made up of those who gathered in the name, and in theory had and could express faith, baptism was for believers. This was the direction of their thinking. It was the gathering that determined the practice of baptism, rather than the other way round.

Gathering – not simply because being together was pleasant, but as a theological conviction expressed through a practical action – was at the heart of what eventually shaped Baptist origins. Gathering – because in that gathering the presence of the Lord was encountered and so faith was shaped and nurtured, discipleship was explored, and witness to the truth of God's action in the world was expressed. Gathering was a fundamental aspect of being Baptist.

In a world in which 'gathering' can now be done in so many ways, both physical and digital, in which isolation is a real problem, and in which polarisation leads to mutual exclusion and a refusal to gather, I wonder what changes might be made if taking seriously the conviction that one of the marks of the true church is gathering in the name of Christ?

### QUESTION

'Gathering – not simply because being together was pleasant, but as a theological conviction expressed through a practical action – was at the heart of what eventually shaped Baptist origins.'

**To what extent does this apply to you and your church or faith community?**



**Ruth Gouldbourne is minister of Grove Lane Baptist Church in Cheadle Hulme.**

**She is a Baptist historian and theologian, and in 2021 was presented with a set of essays to honour the contribution she has made to Baptist life: *Re-Membering the Body - The Witness of History, Theology, and the Arts in Honour of Ruth M B Gouldbourne* (Wipf and Stock)**



# THE BOOK OF HEAVEN

**Any church that lives up to its mandate to love is already quietly but measurably changing the world around it, writes Roger Bretherton**

**W**hy do I keep doing this to myself? I ask that question a lot. Particularly when I find myself in church on a Sunday morning. When it comes to going to church, I'm not a pastor, a minister or a church leader, I'm more of a punter. I give the odd sermon every now and then, and once a month I play drums badly in the worship band. It's a well-kept secret that some of the best drummers in the world can be found playing in church on a Sunday morning. I am not one of those. No. I belong to the more common-or-garden variety of D-list drummers who can only play one beat at one volume, but at different speeds. Those who know that no silence is too pregnant, no moment so poignant, that it cannot be improved by the disconsolate clang of a cowbell.

The apostle Paul once wrote that if he spoke in the tongues of men or angels but had no love, he would be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. On a monthly basis I am that clanging cymbal.

But most Sundays I am content to sit in the pew and sing hymns - or at least I would be if our place had pews and sung hymns.

So why do I go? Let me answer that question by telling you about the 'Book of Heaven'. A few years back I noticed that one of the friendliest people I knew in church was doing an exceptionally good job of knowing people's names. It didn't matter how long ago they last showed their face on a Sunday morning, she would sidle up to them and greet them by name. And not just the easy British ones either - the Bobs, the Mildreds, the Ians - the names she grew up with. She remembered the tough ones. Even Kulani and Vishnu and Wan were guaranteed a warm welcome by name in their quarterly Sunday visit.

In the end I couldn't resist, I asked her how she did it. How did she remember so many people she had barely ever met? The answer was simple. Each Sunday after church she wrote them down in a little book she called the 'Book of Heaven'. She'd worked out that the main thing that stopped her speaking to people she didn't recognise on a Sunday morning was not that she didn't know them, but the worry that she should know them. She hated the thought of

introducing herself as if for first time to someone she had already met but had managed to forget.

So she started to keep a list. She worked out that every Sunday she could have three, maybe four, quality connections with people at church. Not just greetings and pleasantries, but something deeper - an update on their health, or a story about work, or a catchup on their kids. And each Sunday was a roll of the dice. Some weeks she chatted to people she did know, other weeks she spoke mainly to visitors. But every week, whoever she spoke to, she wrote their names down. And in the days that followed, whenever she had a quiet moment, she'd flick through the book and let her mind dwell fondly on the people she'd met on Sunday. She might even pray for them.

She had absolutely no idea of the impact this practice had on the people around her. It made her an illuminator, someone who brings other people to life. Psychologists would call this habit *loving-kindness meditation* or *strengths priming*, the intentional holding in mind of the good qualities of others even when they are not present.

It has a powerful effect. Studies of psychotherapists show those

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# THE MOST IMPORTANT THING WE DO FOR THE PEOPLE OF ANY COMMUNITY, WORKPLACE OR CHURCH IS NOT WHAT WE SAY TO THEIR FACES - BUT WHAT WE SAY AND THINK ABOUT THEM BEHIND THEIR BACKS.

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who hold the best qualities of their clients in mind for five minutes before each session report significantly better therapeutic outcomes. Research on loving-kindness practice goes even further. Twenty minutes spent each day cultivating loving feelings and intentions for ourselves and those around us, even the people we find difficult, produces significant physical and psychological benefits over time. Our stress, our psychological wellbeing, our immune and cardiovascular systems will be better off because of it.

And beyond that, being loving spreads. Not only do we benefit ourselves, but evidence suggests that the effect is contagious: the people we meet benefit, and the people they meet benefit, and perhaps even the people who meet those people benefit. Love ripples through social networks. The most important thing we do for the people of any community, workplace or church is not what we say to their faces but what we say and think about them behind their backs. Church, for me, even simple Sunday morning showing up at church, is the best place I've found to practise this principle.

I know this is not everyone's experience. For some people church becomes a coercive

nightmare or a safeguarding disaster. I've been there. I've walked through it myself and alongside others navigating toxic and abusive religious systems. But that's not my whole experience. It is not how church is when it is being what it is supposed to be.

Since we all emerged from lockdown, church has been by far the safest, warmest, most inspiring, hopeful and loving community to which I belong. But more than that. Not only is it a good place to be, a place where people know one another and are known, but it gives me hope. Because if love is contagious, rippling indiscriminately beyond the boundaries of the community, leaping physiologically from body to body, not caring who people are or what they believe, then any church that lives up to its mandate to love is already quietly but measurably changing the world around it.

So why the 'Book of Heaven'? I asked my friend. Why did she call her little notebook of names that?

She named it after something Jesus said. When his disciples thought they were making a big difference, they were getting high on the success of their

mission, Jesus redirects their attention. He tells them not to celebrate their own effectiveness but that their names are written in heaven. It was a good name for her little book, slowly accumulating names over weeks and months and years. For her, names are more important than numbers, because if she remembers a name, it reminds her that God does too.



**Roger Bretherton is a psychologist, academic and Honorary Lecturer at the Centre for Positive Health Sciences, Dublin.**

**He is the author of *The GOD Lab - 8 spiritual experiments you can try at home* (2011, River Publishing & Media Ltd); and co-authored *Being Mindful, Being Christian: a guide to mindful discipleship* (Monarch, 2016).**

**He wrote and presented *The Character Course*, a short course for church small groups which can be downloaded for free at [thecharactercourse.com](http://thecharactercourse.com)**

# a growing interest in CHRISTIANITY ?

Several recent studies have pointed to an increased interest in faith generally and Christianity specifically, even charting a surprising rise in regular churchgoing. Here's a summary of what they're saying – alongside a snapshot of reflection on the findings

**B**ible Society's *Quiet Revival* report and its finding of increased church attendance has provided one of 2025's biggest discussion points for the UK church. It stated 2 million more people are attending services compared with six years ago, after finding around 12 per cent of the population of England and Wales were in church monthly in 2024, compared with 8 per cent in 2018.

The findings were released in April and have been met with joy, surprise, and scepticism. They've featured in both national and Christian press, in conversations on social media, and were even the subject of the investigative Radio 4 programme *More or Less* (2 July). In light of this expected scrutiny, Bible Society produced a page responding to frequently asked questions on the trustworthiness of the data, how it relates to denominational statistics and other surveys, and more.<sup>1</sup>

"These are extraordinary figures – a broad-based, unspectacular

but solid increase in churchgoing in England and Wales," says Mark Woods, a Baptist minister and head of communications at Bible Society. "But they're supported by an extraordinarily large sample size and by the research teams not only of Bible Society but of YouGov, one of the most respected polling organisations in the UK.

"They're also supported by evidence that it's hard to dismiss as 'just' anecdotal – stories of life and growth, of people coming to faith, public figures identifying themselves as Christians, and – no small thing, for those likely to be reading this – the largest number of baptisms reported by Baptist churches in ten years."<sup>2</sup>

There are caveats, of course. Some have questioned whether revival is the appropriate term.<sup>3</sup> Many churches are still struggling and seeing decline rather than growth. The survey measures churchgoing, and some other behaviours like volunteering and Bible reading (though both with encouraging results). It doesn't

ask theological or political questions.

"Nevertheless", continues Mark, "my own view, for what it's worth, is that its findings should be unreservedly welcomed; I think generally speaking people are better off in church than not, and I'm glad so many are finding faith."

## 'A CHANGE IN THE SPIRITUAL CLIMATE?'

Other research published this year makes for encouraging reading in light of Bible Society's findings.

In January, a survey of 10,000 people conducted by OnePoll found that Gen Zs are half as likely to be atheists as their parents or grandparents, and revealed that just 13 per cent of under-25s identified as atheists.

In March, several national newspapers reported that Bible sales increased by 87 per cent between 2019 and 2024.



In April, a Savanta study for the Christian student organisation Fusion surveyed more than 2,000 UK students about their attitude towards the Bible – and found 29 per cent of all students read the Bible every week, while 33 per cent of non-Christian students are interested in reading the Bible with a Christian friend if asked.

More surveys are highlighted on Bible Society's FAQ page<sup>1</sup>.

'If reviewed in isolation one of these studies could arguably be labelled as an outlier,' noted Phil Knox, evangelism and missiology senior specialist at the Evangelical Alliance.<sup>4</sup> 'But together, they serve as a useful indicator there has been a change in the spiritual climate.'

## THE SEARCH FOR MEANING...

The Quiet Revival states the rise in churchgoing is driven by Generation Z: in 2018, just 4 per cent of 18–24 year-olds said they attended church at least monthly. Today this has risen to 16 per cent, with young men increasing from 4 per cent to 21 per cent, and young women from 3 per cent to 12 per cent.

One of the most cited reasons for people turning to churches is the search for meaning. The speaker, writer and broadcaster Justin Brierley published a book and podcast in 2023 called *The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God*. He believes young people are giving the Christian faith a chance due to the 'meaning crisis'.

'The secular philosophy of be whatever you want to be, turbocharged by social media, has left many young people feeling cut adrift...' he wrote in

*The Times* in July.<sup>5</sup> 'Combined with political turmoil, economic uncertainty and global conflict, a lot of distracted and disillusioned people are looking for a better story... That's why a new generation is rediscovering the original biblical story.'

The Quiet Revival highlights this point too. 'With much of the population, in particular young people, struggling with mental health, loneliness and a loss of meaning in life, Church appears to be offering an answer.'

## ... OR RADICALISATION?

But could there be a less savoury element? An article in *The Guardian* reflecting on the Quiet Revival highlighted a similar trend in the US of more young men attending church. It suggested the radicalisation of young men through 'online spaces and podcasts that are overtly misogynistic but masquerade as platforms of Christian values' could be one reason for the increased interest.

'We should also look out for signs of possible online radicalisation and tendencies towards hateful speech in the guise of Jesus's influence,' the piece stated.<sup>6</sup>

## AUSTERITY IMPACT AND SOCIAL ACTION

*The Guardian* article also highlighted the consistent presence of churches amid the austerity years, which have seen community centres, public halls, libraries, theatres and museums decline in numbers.

'Young people looking for community may find that a local church or cathedral is the only place close to them with regular

opening hours and people ready to talk and listen. That these same churches and cathedrals very often organise group charity work is a clear plus.'

This latter point highlighted another aspect of the Quiet Revival findings: the rise in churchgoing is not simply 'a desire for community in a society', even if this is a factor drawing young adults to churches. 'We are not only seeing a rise in church attendance, but also a rise in wider beliefs and practices among churchgoers,' the Quiet Revival states.

For instance, churchgoers are 'far more socially engaged than non-churchgoers... more likely to volunteer, donate to foodbanks and give to charitable causes.'

## 'A CLEAR NEED FOR MORE DISCIPLESHIP AROUND SCRIPTURE'

Perhaps because those who are exploring faith do so without a long-inherited understanding of it, there is a parallel lack of confidence in their knowledge alongside this openness to Christianity.

'Approximately one-third of churchgoers say they lack confidence in navigating or understanding the Bible and speaking about it with others,' The Quiet Revival states.

'This poses a challenge to the Church but also an opportunity to tap into and learn from their energy and enthusiasm while enabling them to go deeper into Scripture... There is a clear need for more discipleship around Scripture.'

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHURCH LEADERS

Bible Society is clear this is a 'snapshot of a moment in time' and 'no one can know how long this moment will last. It could be the start of a longer change that continues to grow for many years or a short-lived burst which quickly dissolves – a blip in the long process of secularisation.'

But it believes its survey, and others cited, represent 'an interesting moment, full of opportunity. If it is to be sustained beyond a moment, Christians must take it seriously and act.'

As a result of its findings, Bible Society lays out three recommendations for church leaders (The Quiet Revival p22-23):

- Prioritise discipleship and growing Bible confidence
- Make space for intentional intergenerational conversation
- Build on interpersonal relationships

Mark encourages careful reading of the Quiet Revival for leadership teams of Baptist churches, encouraging them to work out what it says to their own contexts.

'There are insights in the report about young people and what they're looking for from church; gender; wellbeing; mentoring, and much more besides.

'Most of all, be encouraged,' he continues. 'Not all churches will grow; there's no magic formula. But the Church in England and Wales is now in a different season, and God is doing something quite unexpected.'



Paul Hobson is an editor and writer with the Faith and Society Team

### Footnotes

- 1 [bit.ly/qrfqaqs](http://bit.ly/qrfqaqs)
- 2 [baptist.org.uk/statistics](http://baptist.org.uk/statistics)
- 3 [baptist.org.uk/isitrevival](http://baptist.org.uk/isitrevival)
- 4 [baptist.org.uk/loudrevival](http://baptist.org.uk/loudrevival)
- 5 [bit.ly/genzrevival](http://bit.ly/genzrevival)
- 6 [bit.ly/qrradical](http://bit.ly/qrradical)

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WHY ARE

# GEN Z

TURNING UP AT CHURCHES?

JOEL

KIRA

ISABELLA

And what are they looking for? A conversation and reflections with Isabella Senior, Kira Williams-Geohaghan and Joel Hawksworth

**CHURCH-GOING AND CHRISTIANITY AMONG GEN Z - WHAT ARE YOU SEEING?**

**ISABELLA:** Nationally in my role I have heard lots of stories of exactly what the Quiet Revival talks about - people just turning up to church, especially young men. I have heard people trying to do things with young adults, and it working.

I think it's happening towards the younger bracket of young adults - more Gen Z (aged 14-26) than millennials (born between





1981 and 1996). There is a lot of curiosity – they see content online, or have dreams - and then follow up. They just Google ‘church near me’. It’s been really exciting to see.

But there’s another side – it’s a ‘quiet’ revival, which means not everyone is seeing that. I know for many this is not happening. Or not happening for them yet: I think it’s like a tide, that keeps going. It’s hitting some people first, but then it will keep going, so I’m encouraging people to prepare.

**KIRA:** I’m based in the Heart of England Baptist Association at Cannon Street Memorial Baptist Church in Birmingham. We’re a very diverse area in terms of culture as well as social economic class, situated on one of the main roads of Handsworth, so there’s a variety of people. I run the young adult ministry at my church as well.

Post-Covid we’re seeing so many new faces and so many families come through our church, which is amazing. But it is less so with young adults. I would say there’s more of a quiet revival in different areas of the country. I agree with Isabella: there’s probably a domino effect, slowly coming our way.

My question is therefore: how do we as a church, a Baptist church, prepare for that?

**JOEL:** I’m based in Newcastle upon Tyne, in a coastal town called Whitley Bay, and the quiet revival I think is booming in the north east. It’s closer to the city centre, where we have two universities. In my church, we’ve seen a handful, probably around 10 new young adults.

But I’ve seen it more outside of my church context than I have in any church. The culture is changing. I’ve had loads of conversations with people I wouldn’t have expected to. The moment they know I’m a Christian, they’re asking me all sorts. Some are trying to disprove it, but generally they’re more curious.

And then I’ve seen radical transformations. There’s one guy who gave up cocaine because he knew he needed something better. He asked me what to do. And I was like, “Try Jesus.” So he did. And then he stopped snorting cocaine, which is quite cool.

### WHY DO YOU THINK THERE’S THIS INCREASE IN INTEREST?

**ISABELLA:** There’s a sense we live in a chaotic world, with wars breaking out everywhere, with a lack of safety, including online; the breakdown of the family unit. People feel like they don’t have people there for them, supporting them and guiding them on what it’s like to be a grown up with a career or healthy relationships.

There’s a sense of where do I go for hope? For a sense of belonging? Where do I go for a sense of purpose and meaning in my life? Who do I trust? Where do I find true guidance and truth?

**JOEL:** Truth, love and hope – that’s what people are looking for. The more they look into things like the scientific method, or New Age spirituality, or other religions, they’re not finding anything true. They’re just seeing falsities.

Then they try Christianity out, they think ‘Hang on. It all makes sense.’ All the science, all the history, the culture points towards it. When they hear about this guy called Jesus who just loves them unconditionally, they’re like, ‘Yeah, okay.’

They want love - and alcohol and drugs don’t do that anymore. Well, they never did.

Jesus is the way to do the life. And some are discovering this truth.

**ISABELLA:** I also think Gen Z has something quite specific - they like to go back to ancient truths. The old is interesting and fascinating to them. You see that in fashion - they like going back to 70s fashion! But they have an interest in connecting with older generations, in being mentored by them.

When you look at the makeup of the world and the impact of Christianity, it’s very easy to think, ‘okay, maybe, maybe I’ll give Christianity a go, maybe there’s something there.’ There’s some truth in there we haven’t fully explored, or that worked in the past, and because we abandoned it, we are suffering the consequences of this.

There’s a desire to return to how things were before, and a curiosity of how things were before – and Christianity is in that mix.

**KIRA:** I think people are seeking answers, especially in the world we live in, and it’s so lovely to see people are finding Jesus.

Also in society, there’s a lack of shared spaces, and I think people crave community and

interaction. I think post-Covid some people are still struggling to interact face to face. So having somewhere that has a sense of community and brings people together, where you can just turn up as you are, is attractive.

## WHAT IS GEN Z LOOKING FOR IN CHURCHES, AND HOW CAN CHURCHES PREPARE AND RESPOND?

**JOEL:** Young people want to be mentored, so consider that. Get them speaking to different adults in the church. Getting three of the older dudes, maybe a 30 year old, a 50 year old, and an 80 year old (because they're the coolest ones!). It will give them different perspectives, and it'll just bring them into the culture.

Consider giving young people a role. Involve them in a meaningful way – and they will show up to church. I think the

culture in the Baptist church, from the ones I've seen in the Northern Baptist Association, is giving more opportunities to younger people.

**ISABELLA:** They want to know the Bible better, going deeper than just the basics. I think this younger generation is illiterate when it comes to the Bible. They don't know how to differentiate from one story to the other. They didn't grow up going to Christian schools, they don't have Christian parents, maybe only heard a little during RE at school.

*The Bible* course by Bible Society, and *Practicing the Way* by John Mark Comer, are courses I've heard people mention they are using with their young adults.

**Make sure your church is online, because this is how they search.**

Preparing the people in your church to talk to those young adults is helpful. And I think there's a bit of work to be done in terms of preparing the young adults already in church, to welcome those that are new joining in.

Train everyone to be disciple makers. These people are going to be coming to church, and they need people to disciple them, to walk alongside them, and people of all ages to do that, not just other young adults.

**Isabella Senior is the Baptists Together 18-35s co-ordinator**

**Joel Hawsworth has just completed the Explore internship programme and is based in the Northern Baptist Association**

**Kira Williams-Geohaghan leads the young adult ministry at Cannon Street Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham**

**Isabella, Joel and Kira were delegates at the Baptist World Congress in Brisbane in July 2025. Check out their reels on the Baptists Together social media channels**



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# STORIES

F R O M T H E

# LOCAL CONTEXT



## The power of gathering: a church rooted in mission

Gathering as an intentional space for encounter with God and with one another – and a church that gathers is a church that goes. By Henry C Ohakah

**A**t Mountsorrel Baptist Church (MBC) in Leicestershire, gathering is not just something we do, it is central to who we are. It is where faith is nurtured, relationships are strengthened, and the mission of God's kingdom is lived out. Worship and fellowship do more than sustain believers; they shape them, sending them out to live as disciples of Christ. Here we believe that coming together is not a routine or tradition, it is renewal. It is where Christ meets us, transforms lives, and builds

communities, and not only within the church but far beyond its walls.

My personal journey has shown me the depth of this truth. Born and bred in Nigeria, and being someone with a strong awareness of reverse mission, I have seen firsthand how gathering is dynamic and participatory. Many churches across the Global South live out their faith in ways that are deeply communal, marked by vibrant worship, prayer and shared meals

that make faith an integral part of daily life. This experience has shaped my ministry here in the UK, where I've led churches and encouraged them towards moving away from attendance-driven models and rediscovering gathering as an intentional space for encounter with God and with one another.

One Sunday, while preaching, I paused and asked the congregation a simple but important question: "Why do you come to church? Why do





we gather?" As people shared their thoughts, I listened carefully. But later, as I reflected, a deeper question stirred in my heart - what does it truly mean to be a gathered people? That conviction led me to organise what I called Vision Sunday, a time to share ministry ideas and invite the church into something more than just attendance. I challenged us to move beyond *consumer Christianity* and step into a way of gathering that was active, relational and deeply transformative. One vision that stood out was Breakfast Fellowship, a simple yet meaningful way to connect over hospitality, prayer, and relational evangelism.

The idea was embraced immediately and, together, we planned our first breakfast event. On the day, something remarkable happened. A visitor, not yet a Christian, felt so moved by the warmth and presence of the community that he asked for prayer for his sick father. By the time the morning ended, people didn't just appreciate the vision, they were eager to make Breakfast Fellowship a regular gathering.

A few months later, we held our second Breakfast Fellowship, and the atmosphere was electric. Everyone played a part, from preparing food, praying, serving

and ensuring that no one was left out. The following morning, a member said to me, "Henry, you did not give us enough time to pray through the topics!"

Another person quickly responded, "Henry, if people are asking for more time to pray, that is a good sign!" And during our deacons' meeting the next month, this question resurfaced, prompting one deacon to joke, "It's always good when people ask for more prayer rather than more food!" Moments like these reaffirm what true gathering is. It is a Spirit-led and participatory community where faith is not simply observed but actively lived out.

Gathering is not just an idea for us at MBC. It is something we live out, shaping who we are as a community. Recently, we had the joy of welcoming a couple into membership and celebrating the dedication of their newborn child. The sense of belonging was so real that another visiting couple, attending for only the second time, felt moved to request membership that very morning. They are now beginning their journey of discipleship, growing in faith and stepping fully into the life of the church.

Likewise, not long ago, a man came forward seeking baptism,

embracing a new chapter in his walk with Christ. His baptism is planned for the coming months, but his journey has already begun through prayer, teaching, and meaningful fellowship with others. Moments like these remind us that gathering is never passive. It is an opportunity for transformation, a space where faith grows, lives are shaped, and people step more fully into their calling.

So, what happens after baptism? Gathering is where believers are nurtured, challenged and sent out in mission. The early Church in Acts 2:42-47 did not grow through individual devotion alone but through a shared commitment to prayer, teaching and fellowship. A church that gathers is a church that goes. We do not come together simply to receive but to be equipped for the work of Christ in the world. At a time when church attendance is increasing, we must ensure our gatherings remain mission-focused and are shaping believers into active disciples, transforming hearts, and preparing God's people for service. Gathering should never be passive. It is an intentional act of renewal, strengthening our commitment to both local and global mission.

**Henry C Ohakah is the minister of Mountsorrel Baptist Church in Leicestershire**

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## 'Alternative Gatherings' at Chichester Baptist Church

How members are encouraged to spend one of their Sunday mornings each month in the community.

Interview with minister and team leader Ellen Wild.

**"C**ould a church like ours take seriously the call to go? When the practical reality is that, however well planned our services are, however brilliant the other churches in the city are, 95 per cent of people in Chichester are not just going to wander into our buildings."

That was the dilemma facing Chichester Baptist Church just over a decade ago. While it was serving a large congregation, it recognised it was nevertheless meeting a fraction of the local population. What could it do to reach more people?

"Chichester is a reasonably well-established, evangelical church," notes Ellen, "and was never going to bin our Sunday services and become pioneers overnight. But we are committed to finding ways to engage people with faith - and realised we had to be where people are."

The church explored a gathered/scattered model, encouraging the congregation to 'recycle' one of their Sunday mornings each month and spend it in the community. Called 'Alternative Gatherings', they are based around three areas: a hobby, such as golf or cycling; a need in the community people have a heart for serving, such as a wellbeing cafe; or a particular people group they have a burden for (one current example is Cedar Ministry, which takes place in a nursing home).

Members are encouraged to provide some form of Christian input, often in the form of a short reflection and discussion. For example, participants of the Mud, Sweat and Gears Alternative Gathering stop halfway through the bike ride.

There is a missional element to them - each Alternative

Gathering has a mission statement, and at the outset members are commissioned at the front of church.

"They are Christians on a mission with their hobby, being with other people who share the same interest," explains Ellen.

"Every gathering, even if it's in a very light touch way, has some kind of Christian content that feels appropriate. And this is always clearly expressed in the literature, so people coming along know what to expect."

There are currently around eight Alternative Gatherings throughout the month. At any one Sunday morning, at least one group will be out somewhere in the community, participating in an Alternative Gathering. For the other Sundays of the month they'll be back in the main service, which still takes

place each Sunday morning - out for one, in for three.

A significant percentage of the church is involved, even if it's not right for everybody.

"Some people are bruised or worn out or elderly, or they just need to



be with us, and that's absolutely fine," says Ellen. "But nevertheless, there is a real encouragement that you might consider getting involved in one of our Alternative Gatherings."

More than a decade since they were first launched (and having had a break during the Covid pandemic), Ellen has several reflections:

### **An easy invite – and mission for the long haul**

"It's actually quite a big deal to invite someone to Alpha," says Ellen. "You have to know somebody well and have had quite deep conversations. But we feel our Alternative Gatherings are an easier invite, much more accessible. We've learned people are willing to invite people to those things, because there's not massively high risk."

Ellen says this accessibility has enabled the church to connect with many more non-Christians than it otherwise would have done. "But of course, the journey for those people is longer. In this way we've learned that mission is long haul."

"And while the church doesn't have hugely dynamic stories to tell, there is nevertheless a bunch of good news stories", Ellen continues.

"We have very few: 'They came to play golf, and they got saved on the golf course.' It's much more - they came to play golf, or they brought their kids to our sports event, and then gradually the kids came to the youth work, or an invitation to a Sunday worked, and it's a much longer process."

### **Higher spiritual temperature**

Being involved in an Alternative Gathering in some way has impacted people's discipleship.

"I would say the spiritual temperature is higher, because when you're doing a missional thing, it feels a bigger deal in terms of dependence on God. Our gathered times are special, but coming to church and sitting in a service is easier."

"We've found if you want your church more prayerful and dependent, doing something a bit more scary, like being part of an outreach, makes a difference! The teams will always pray and plan together, and you're more likely to lean on God and remember the mission if you're praying and serving together."

"We want to be proactive and look for intentional conversations – and when you have an amazing conversation with someone, it can give such confidence and courage."

### **Mission at the centre of church life**

While Alternative Gatherings are one aspect of the church, their presence has enabled mission to be at the centre of its life. At least one Alternative Gathering takes place on each Sunday, and this is communicated at the main service.

"When we welcome people onsite and online, we also mention how we have people meeting out and about, and we pray for them. So every Sunday, there's a feeling of being a church that's gathered and scattered. Part of keeping the mission intention is keeping it visible in church life on a Sunday, even for those who aren't committed to one."

### **Recycling church time**

"We call it recycling Sundays," Ellen says. "If you've got a Sunday gathering and a midweek life group that you're encouraging people to, and family time and work, and then you tack on something on a Saturday or Thursday night, it's always going to be an added extra."

"But if you're coming anyway and you're here for two hours anyway, why not use time that you already have to do this? Because of this, I think, the number of people involved is so much higher."

### **Church as gathered and scattered**

"If you've been out for one, but back for three, it doesn't feel like you are disconnected in any way. You're so very much at the heart of the church family. Our gathered times are so precious."

"We sometimes talk about the 'up, in, out' triangle: up to God, into each other and out in mission. The triangle should be equally weighted. But if we're honest, we were operating a good up and good in, but the out more of a struggle."

"But let the 'out' lead a bit more, then are we not being the Church of God more effectively? Where we gather, we worship, we pray, we share communion, but we also deliberately and intentionally go out in mission. That feels more church to be gathered and scattered than it is just to be together."

**Ellen Wild is the Minister and Team Leader of Chichester Baptist Church**





## In a place such as ours, it becomes incredibly important you retain a Christian witness

Interview with Tim Lovejoy, who works part-time for Fulmerston Christian Fellowship, a Baptist church in Thetford.

**T**im Lovejoy has led Fulmerston Christian Fellowship in Thetford, Norfolk, since 2000. He started working for the church when it was at a low ebb, reeling from a split and reduced to a handful of members.

"I had an optimism about the future, and wasn't concerned we were small, because I could see the strengths we had," he says. "With any small church, that's really important - you look at what you have. And our strengths included a small group of dedicated people who had different skills. Three of these people are still here and their dedication and skill is one of the key reasons why we can keep going. So even after we'd had the split, nobody really thought for long about us not carrying on. I certainly had a faith God could take us forward - it wasn't a faith in me; I had faith in the calling."

The church, like any small fellowship, has faced its struggles in the ensuing years. Nevertheless after about 25 years without any baptisms, the church has had three in three years, with one being witnessed by more than 100 people in the sea at Sizewell Hall. Still, Fulmerston remains a small church.

"We are praying for a big enough squad of people, so that we average 20 every week, and this year we are very close to that" explains Tim. "That would be a landmark for us. Some people might say, 'Oh for goodness sake, for 25 years, is that the best you can manage?'" But it would be a step forward for the church. It's not about numbers but about how, with this committed group, we lay down good foundations and really disciple people, so that the church is sustainable in the future and continues to be a presence here."

The impact a small church can have is not to be underestimated. Tim is part of the national Small Church Connexion Team, which exists to support smaller churches across Baptists Together. "You don't have to be big to do significant work," he says. "I think that's the message we're sold sometimes, subconsciously. And I think some small churches can feel that. But the Bible is full of God using the small or unexpected in incredible ways, simply because it's about his power at work. Arguably that is a normal way of working."

Fulmerston is an example. It has been something of a community hub, including hosting toddler groups, a pre-school group, youth clubs, the Meeting Place (a bi-monthly event for older people), an arts and well-being group, a coffee morning, and being a base for the local residents group which has been a vital part of regeneration work on the estate.

Tim shares this reflection on the importance of a church like Fulmerston Christian Fellowship:

"We're on an estate. Thetford has three London overspill housing estates, built in the 50s and 60s and, in terms of statistical levels of deprivation, they are in the top 20 per cent in the country.



"In a place such as ours, it becomes incredibly important you retain a Christian witness, a place that physically represents God's presence in the community that really needs it, a symbol of hope.

"We're right next to the shops. If there's anti-social behaviour, it's going to happen near us, and might include the church. One way we can respond, is when any graffiti appears we get rid of it quickly. By this, we're not adding to any visual message of neglect, but are saying we care very much about how this area looks.

"So we do not want to give up this precious gift of being a presence, a place that brings people together in an area of need, where the Lord needs to be represented now and where he is at work in and amongst the local community."

### Stepping stones to Jesus

Tim is clear on the strengths of smaller churches: close-knit community and personal connections, opportunities to be flexible and creative, and to foster participation. As part of his preparation for this article, he invited his congregation to respond to why they value belonging to the church community. A number

highlighted that sense of community; for one lady it's part of her grieving process following the death of her husband; another mentioned the shared lunches and opportunity to learn about different cultures.

Tim's overall approach, that he increasingly senses is in tune with God's real heart, is that every one he and Fulmerston work with in any way, counts. And that when we meet someone, we never know how God will bless and use that encounter, where it will lead.

He says: "I could tell you hundreds of stories of how God has taken one meeting and used it in the most incredible ways, over time. And hundreds of others, where we were simply able to help in some small way for a time. The key is to always be providing invitations; easy stepping stones which enable people to draw closer to Jesus.

"It's peeling off layers of the onion," he continues. "You want people eventually to realise there's something profound about the gathering, that goes beyond those immediate things. When we have the bring and share lunch, we all bring something to eat. The resulting collection of food is far richer

and greater than the individual contributions as they are. In other words, there's something profound about getting together that's greater than just 'it feels nice' - there's something sacred about it.

"And you want people, by being here, and over time, through our prayers and by God touching their hearts, to discover that. It's about people falling in love with Jesus and by them suddenly realising just how much he loves and cherishes them.

"But you need that genuine welcome, and the practical acts of love and acceptance, because if they are not here and experienced by anyone who comes, there will never be any opportunity for people to discover more, to encounter the living, loving Lord Jesus."

There is a section of the Baptists Together website dedicated to smaller churches, sharing stories, events and different ways smaller churches are being supported: [baptist.org.uk/smallerchurches](http://baptist.org.uk/smallerchurches)

**Tim Lovejoy is the Community, mission and church development advisor at Fulmerston Christian Fellowship**



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## Following Jesus is about the whole of life, not just Sunday

The 'sustainable' rhythm of gathering for Light of Life Baptist Church, near Great Yarmouth. Interview with Elizabeth Stoner.

**I** think our rhythm of gathering has helped us recognise church isn't about a few people up front, it's all of us," says Elizabeth Stoner. "And that following Jesus is about the whole of life, not what happens during the two hours on a Sunday morning."

Elizabeth is the part-time minister of Light of Life, a Baptist church in Ormesby St Margaret, near Great Yarmouth. "Light of Life was founded in the 1980s and has always been forward thinking", she says. This DNA, alongside Covid restrictions on its old chapel, has led the church to evolve its own pattern of meeting.

### Currently, gathering looks like this:

On the first Sunday of the month it meets from 10:30 in the chapel for a breakfast and a social time together. The church's life groups take it in turns to host these 'Nourish' Sundays. This is followed at 11:00 by a 30-minute a time of worship, based on Ignatian spirituality, which always has a set format and could be led by anybody. There is a short reflection in the middle - something interactive or a Lectio Divina. It is particularly accessible for those new to church or exploring faith.

The second Sunday of the month is a podcast. Generally this is a message recorded by

Elizabeth or another member of the congregation. There is an encouragement to sit with others and listen together, discuss and pray afterwards.

The third Sunday is the most traditional, with all the congregation encouraged to gather at the chapel. They sit around tables, and ensure the inclusion of the children and young people. Communion is always served.

The fourth Sunday is sabbath. Some of the life groups take this opportunity to meet up with neighbours for breakfast or lunch, games or a walk, whatever helps them to rest and enjoy creation together.

There is also a particular emphasis on life groups, which meet weekly or fortnightly.

"While having one Sunday of the month devoted to sabbath is unusual", Elizabeth says, "it's a practical response to the realities of leading a small church." The congregation had been without a minister when she joined five years ago, and though it had been 'punching above its weight', it was 'on its knees'. Elizabeth herself is part-time, and having one sabbath Sunday frees her up to intentionally spend more time in the community.

"Having a break from the usual teaching allows us time and space to hear from God in a different way and to practise hospitality," Elizabeth explains. "We learn to rest and be in God's presence, allowing him to take control. And we've found it to be sustainable. What's happened in the past is people have just dropped out because they're too





tired. This not so onerous on the volunteers."

She adds the traditional service on the third Sunday is 'a real celebration', because everyone being together in one place happens less frequently.

Elizabeth admits "it's a different idea of what I grew up to believe church was," and shares how three couples left when the church adopted this rhythm.

But now new people are joining, in part because they love the look of the rhythm.



"It's saying following Jesus is about the whole of life, and that includes doing other stuff," she says.

"We want church to be a springboard, and not a whirlpool - we want Sunday mornings to equip us for the rest of the week, to give us energy to meet with family, friends, neighbours - with people who have no church background.

"It's the church gathered and scattered, and we've found this to be working for us."

**Elizabeth Stoner is the minister of Light of Life Baptist Church**



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## Gathering is life together

What does it look like to gather as the church, when you don't have a building, a stage, or even a Sunday service? That's the context for Ocean Church in Poole, one of the newest members of our Union. Minister John Good explains more.

I've always been suspicious of the idea that church is something you 'go to'.

Not because I'm against gatherings – far from it. But because the more familiar model most of us inherited was: turn up, sit down, sing, pray, listen, chat, leave. And somehow, even when the music is beautiful and the preaching is great, it can still leave you wondering – is this *it*? Is this what Jesus meant when he said "Come, follow me"?

Ocean Church began as an attempt to rediscover gathering, not as an event, but as a way of life. We meet on beaches, rivers, paths and around fire pits. We've baptised people in the sea and cooked bacon sandwiches in the rain. And in all of it, the question we keep circling back to is: what does it *look like* to gather as the church, when you don't have a building, a stage, or even a Sunday service?

For us gathering is less about attendance and more about alignment. We're trying to live out a kind of 'sodal' expression of church – a scattered, mobile movement that complements the more 'modal' expressions people may be used to, like Sunday services. We're not trying to replace the gathered

congregation. We're just asking: what if discipleship happens when church shows up where people already are – on beaches, in back gardens, during school runs, or over shared meals? What if gathering wasn't a break from life, but a deeper dive *into* it?

We meet twice a month all together at Ocean Church, and a lot of preparation goes into food, resources and curating thoughtful gatherings. But those gatherings aren't the main event. They're scaffolding for something deeper: a shared way of life. We believe that's what Jesus meant to leave behind – not just services, but rhythms and relationships that shape us. So we say we're not interested in being an event people attend – we want to be a community that people *belong to*. That means we're trying to build our lives around a few simple but radical habits:

- **Invite someone to dinner each week.**
- **Connect with God outside.**
- **Worship as a household.**

Not all the time. Not perfectly. But often enough that these habits begin to *form us*. Because the church is people – and people are shaped not just by what they say they believe,

but by what they *repeatedly do*. Each time you do a habit, however small, it is a vote cast for the identity you want to step into. Gathering, for us, is about patterning our lives around Jesus- shaped rhythms.

These kinds of gatherings don't always look 'religious'. Sometimes it's paddleboarding in silence. Sometimes it's clearing litter from a riverbank. Sometimes it's a meal where someone says something vulnerable and everyone pauses and you all know – in your bones – that God is here.

This isn't new ground. Theologians have spent decades dismantling the divide between sacred and secular, reminding us that all ground is holy ground if we have the eyes to see it. And yet – that old divide still clings on. We have lost potential members and leaders because of it. Ocean Church is one small attempt to live out what we already say we believe: that God is not confined to buildings, liturgies, or official spaces. He's out here, in the natural and the ordinary.

It's now 20 years since *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*<sup>1</sup>, by

**WE'RE NOT INTERESTED IN BEING AN EVENT PEOPLE ATTEND  
- WE WANT TO BE A COMMUNITY THAT PEOPLE *BELONG TO***



Graham Cray, came out. We have the words. We have the theology. What we need now are structures – calling, money, placements – to help more of this come to life. The balance is still out at the moment. For every sodal expression of church, there must still be dozens of modal ones. We still have a job to reclaim the word ‘gather’ – not as a fixed calendar slot, but as a living network of relationships held together by Jesus.

Faith gets formed in kitchens and on coastlines. And my prayer is that the church could be something you don’t *go to*, but something you *become*.

**John Good is a pioneer minister in Poole, Dorset**

<sup>1</sup> A report from a working group of the Church of England’s Mission and Public Affairs Council (2004)



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## Connecting young adults through faith, fellowship and purpose

**“The intention wasn’t really to create a young adults ministry,” notes Grace Savage of Hill Cliffe Baptist Church in Warrington. “We fell into it accidentally – but it shows there is a need.”**

**G**race is the assistant youth worker at Hill Cliffe Baptist Church in Warrington, and around a year ago she and friend Helena wanted to create more of a community with people in their age group. They set up a games night involving football and rounders, and advertised it among friends - and friends of friends. Around 30 people showed up, more than they’d thought.

Encouraged, she and Helena organised more social events, set up an Instagram page, and an accompanying WhatsApp group grew to 60 members. A young adults’ *Alpha Course* took place in January. Since then there has been a regular pattern of

monthly socials and social action, and twice monthly Bible studies. The strapline for the emerging HC YA (Hill Cliffe Young Adults) is: *Connecting Young Adults through faith, fellowship and purpose.*

Grace says not all have a Christian faith. Around two thirds who came to the initial meet-up did and more have since found faith on the back of the *Alpha Course*. Around 15-20 regularly attend the Bible studies, and some are now part of the Sunday congregation.

“This is great,” Grace says. “And the wider congregation is very supportive.” She adds the church sees value in mentoring: it is exploring introducing mentoring for young adults by older congregation members in the autumn. Currently two young adults are mentoring youth.

Grace believes the way the group has grown and developed has shown the need for community and belonging at what can be an uncertain and unsettling stage in life.

“I remember reading a while ago how 18 to 30 is one of the loneliest age groups,” she explains.

“You can see why: at 18, people either go to university, or they move, or start working, and all their friends are dispersed. Or you come back from university at 21 and everything’s changed.

“I think there is a need for young adults to have community and just some kind of structure, to know there are friends here. So it’s also getting the message out that church doesn’t just happen on Sundays - we can meet throughout the week. And I think that’s important - church can take place in different times and settings.”

The social action involves volunteering at Care UK in Warrington, helping sort donations. There are other volunteering opportunities too, at Broomfields Youth Project, a Christian charity whose office is based at the church. Many of the young adults have had a connection with Broomfields throughout high school or college, and now several are volunteering there. “I felt the social action was extremely important, to be a presence in our community,” adds Grace, who has just completed the Explore internship programme (with North Western and Northern Baptist Associations, and Northern Baptist College).

“It’s important in itself, it gives a purpose and it helps people connect us with the church.”



The socials – games or movie nights; meeting in a pub – also continue to be popular. “It’s an opportunity for others to connect with us, and many of them do, which is awesome. And we often have faith conversations.”

In summing up the impact of what’s happened over the last year, Grace adds, “I think there’s a better sense of community and belonging. People know they have more support, and it’s been really cool to see different friendships develop and people grow closer.”

**Grace Savage is the assistant youth worker at Hill Cliffe Baptist Church, Warrington**



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## Gathering amid the arrivals and departures of an international airport

**'Gathering' might seem a strange theme to reflect on for a place that daily facilitates up to 250,000 people journeying to and from some 220 destinations worldwide, writes Ruth Bottoms As Head of Heathrow Multi Faith Chaplaincy, this is my patch. But as I ponder, a number of snapshots come to mind.**

### **C**haplains gather themselves before God

Our strapline is that the chaplaincy is 'Here to support everyone's journeys'. A city on the move, the chaplaincy team cannot possibly meet everyone. But many of the team consciously take a moment at the start of each session at the airport to gather themselves before God/ the Divine of their faith tradition. They might pause in one of the ten Multi Faith Prayer Rooms and pray that they will be in the right place at the right time to offer a person the right word of support, encouragement and maybe prayer depending on the circumstances. The team has a sense that we don't go out and about on our own.

### **Gathering in regular acts of worship**

You will find people gathering together for regular worship at the airport. The Multi Faith Prayer Rooms are busy in the middle of the day as Muslim passengers and colleagues come together for prayers, particularly on Fridays. Meanwhile at the Chapel you will find Roman Catholics celebrating Mass four times a week. Some companies at the airport support faith-specific staff groups that chaplains may be invited to share in. One of the USA airlines invites me to share in its event held on the annual American Day of Prayer.

### **Gathering in grief and remembrance**

In the midst of the Central Terminal Area is the Chapel of St George and the Garden of Remembering. Here, several times a year the Chaplaincy team will find itself leading a small service/ceremony of remembrance and the dedication of a new plaque in memory of a colleague who has died. Sometimes we will lead a full memorial service in the Chapel where colleagues were unable to get to a funeral. The garden also has plaques commemorating downed flights from years ago. No longer in the headlines, family and friends gather quietly to remember on the anniversary. The garden is where we hold an airport Armistice Day Service when Heathrow's emergency services teams lay wreaths and together we give thanks for and remember past sacrifices.

### **Gathering to work for the common good**

Then there are the meetings I attend where, with people of all faiths and none, we are working together for the common good. An example would be the quarterly meeting of the Working Group on Modern Slavery. Bringing together people from across the airport, this group seeks to ensure that Heathrow's Modern Slavery Statement is not just words, but results in training and action to help everyone at

the airport be alert to this issue and to play a part in preventing people being entrapped.

Are these airport gatherings very different to our Baptist concept of being a gathered church? Personal discipleship, communal worship and fellowship, supporting one another through the tough times, working together to advance the kingdom of God: all present at the airport too.

### **Gathering with loved ones**

My final snapshot is of people being gathered into the arms of loved ones, whether in departures before someone is waved off or in arrivals halls as people connect again. Some of the most moving family reunions are when, as chaplains, we escort a family off a plane who have





received a family entry visa to join someone granted asylum in the UK. Often coming from a refugee camp, not having flown before, speaking little, if any, English we help them navigate their way through border control, baggage collection and then stand back and witness the joy of the embrace, reminded of the uniqueness and preciousness of each human life. Parting from them, I entrust their on-going journey to the all embracing love of God in Christ, who would gather the whole world into the kingdom of God.

**Ruth Bottoms is a Baptist minister and Head of Heathrow Multi Faith Chaplaincy**



Photo | Vladimir Shevtsov | Unsplash



### **Retired BMS mission worker or Baptist minister? Are you or were you married to one?**

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**Psalm 78:4**

## **Could you help future generations see the goodness of the Lord?**

BMS and the Baptist Union of Great Britain have joined together to ask you whether you could help ensure our Kingdom work, which began many generations ago, could continue long into the future. By generously choosing to leave gifts to both organisations in your Will, you will transform more lives at home and across the world, enabling future generations to experience the never-ending love of Jesus.

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By leaving a gift in your Will to the Baptist Union of Great Britain, you will continue this mission, leaving a lasting legacy for God's Kingdom here in the UK.

Margaret's father chose to leave gifts to BMS and the Baptist Union of Great Britain in his Will. This is what she has to say about his decision:

**"It's a very good feeling, if you like, that my dad has been able to make this donation, which is going to help the work of BMS overseas and also for work in this country... spreading the good news of Jesus."**



Margaret, Ramsden Bellhouse Baptist Church

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# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO GATHER IN A DIGITAL SPACE?

TOGETHER

This magazine has carried several pieces in recent editions about exploring faith and discipleship in the digital space.

Gathering digitally represents a reality for many, while others are reflecting on the mission possibilities of sharing God's love online. Here are snippets from some of the articles we have carried, alongside links to the full pieces.



Simon Goddard and Nathan McGuire are helping to shape an online Baptist missional community called transform.church – and want to ask deeper questions about what it means to be a church in the digital sphere.

*What then is the purpose of church? And if we did want to go back to first principles and 'be' a church fit for the 21st century, what might it look like?*

*That's the journey we're on as transform.church – a digital expression of Christian community with the purpose of equipping, empowering and releasing a generation of missional disciples committed to kingdom transformation. Each member dwelling deeply in the networks in which they live, work and play; planting the gospel there and seeing what emerges.*



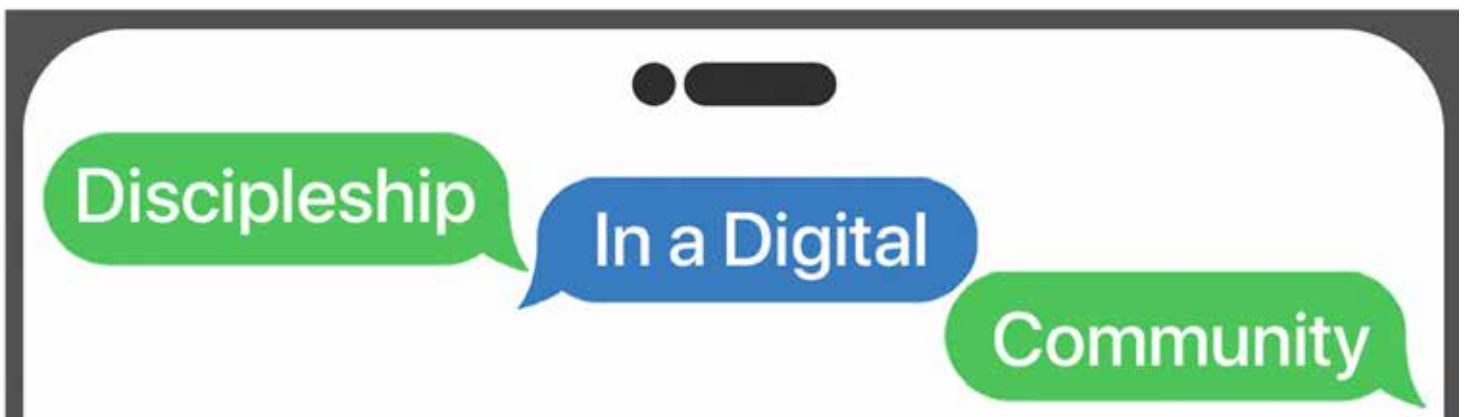
[baptist.org.uk/defrag](http://baptist.org.uk/defrag)



Femi Onanuga is a youth pastor, minister-in-training and former London Baptists intern – and he has a passion to see people use their social media for evangelism

*Anyone who has a social media account, if we all share what Jesus is doing in our lives, just imagine the impact that will make around you? Everyone has their own individual story and purpose. A Bible verse you read today. How has God been good to you? What are your struggles and how is God working with you through them?*

[baptist.org.uk/femi](http://baptist.org.uk/femi)



How an online community – CoffeeShopSunday - has met the spiritual needs of both new and experienced Christians. Interview with Simon Werrett

*It draws people from around the world, including Kenya, Australia and the US. Friendships and mutual support networks have developed that couldn't have happened otherwise.*

*The majority who attend are retired, says Simon, and a good number are active in their local church community. Being part of this initiative is an opportunity for them to simply receive, away from the busyness of their active church roles.*

*People young in their faith have also been part of the community. Simon says there is an informality to being online - it's much easier for instance to ask a question during a Facebook Live, than interrupt a preacher in an onsite sermon. The accessibility also means people can turn their camera off and just listen.*

[baptist.org.uk/CoffeeShopSunday](http://baptist.org.uk/CoffeeShopSunday)



A church for video gamers has existed since 2016 – and Alice Cheeseman is a volunteer there. She explains more:

*Our mission point, however, calls to a deeper, more spiritual side: 'GodSquad Church exists to connect gamers to God by meeting them where they are.'*

*For the more academically theological among us, this may feel distinctly familiar as a form of relational or incarnational ministry, especially the versions modelled by Andrew Root. Going out to where the people are and making the relationship the goal.*

[baptist.org.uk/GodSquad](http://baptist.org.uk/GodSquad)



Around 1500 people visit the website Christianity.org.uk each day - and more than a quarter of new enquirers are people looking to become Christians. It's easy and free to link from your own church website, writes Cherry Hamilton Bond

*It's clear that people are less interested in dogma and tradition, and more in the big questions of what faith means for them personally.*

*So where are people increasingly turning for answers? The internet, of course! And there's a lot of unhelpful content out there.*

*That's why our ecumenical team at Christianity.org.uk have created an attractive and easy to use site, offering a wide range of balanced and thoughtful articles about Christianity, alongside our unique and popular offer of confidential online conversations about faith.*

[baptist.org.uk/evangelismplatform](http://baptist.org.uk/evangelismplatform)



# RESOURCES



## The Bible Course - New Edition - Bible Society (2025)

Free small group resource will help you and your church discover how Bible characters, stories, and themes are connected, from Genesis to Revelation.

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[biblesociety.org.uk/explore-the-bible/the-bible-course](https://biblesociety.org.uk/explore-the-bible/the-bible-course)

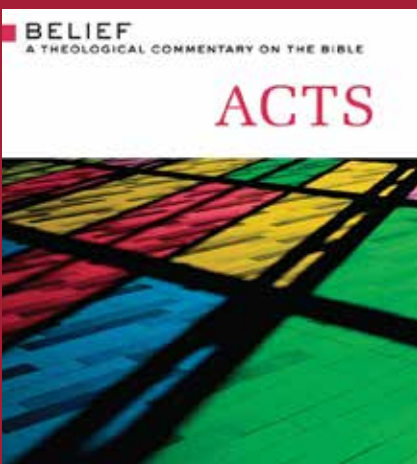
## *Telling the Big Story - the Bible in 60 minutes* by Lucy Marfleet (Kevin Mayhew, 2025)

A resource for communicating the big story of the Bible in a local church context, in 60 minutes.

'If your church can put on a Nativity, you can stage *The Bible in 60 Minutes*,' writes Lucy.

Born out of a successful event at Histon Baptist Church.

[lucymarfleet.com](https://lucymarfleet.com)



## *Acts: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* by Willie James Jennings (Westminster/John Knox Press, 2017)

Theologian and ordained Baptist minister Willie James Jennings explores the relevance of the book of Acts for the struggles of today. While some see Acts as the story of the founding of the Christian church, Jennings argues that it is so much more, depicting revolutionlife in the disrupting presence of the Spirit of God.



*Wholehearted Solutions - Empowering leaders and cultures to flourish from their true selves*  
by Simon and Ceri Harris (2025)

'An invitation to step out of striving and shame, into a more integrated, grounded, and grace-filled way of leading; offers guidance for anyone longing to lead from a deeper place'

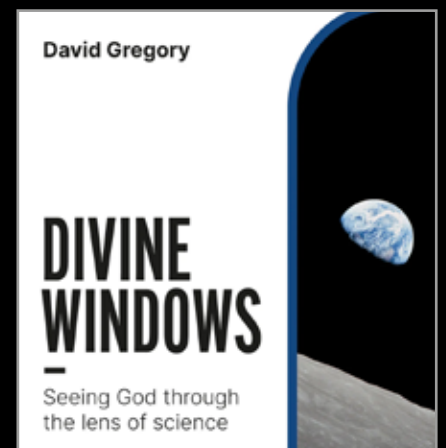
Ceri and Simon are part of the leadership of Burlington Church, a Baptist church in Ipswich where Simon is the Senior Minister.

Visit their website [wholehearted.solutions](http://wholehearted.solutions) for more

*Divine Windows: Seeing God through the lens of science*  
by Dave Gregory (BRF, 2025)

Where science and faith meet. Scientist and minister and former Baptist Union President David Gregory invites you to see something of God's creative hand on the world around us revealed by the creativity of science.

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# PRAYERS

## BE PRESENT

Be present

Presence

Just showing up

Surely there's more to it than that

Just being there

Staying in a moment

With another

Without agenda

Presence

Better than our gifts and presents

What better can we give another being

Than our being

With them fully

In their story

One human being to the other

Presence

Surely this is what we believe

What we seek

What we long for

What we practise

The 'Word became flesh' and he is present

Presence

As we embrace this moment

Not the next

We choose to be present

To the one who is ever-present

And in doing so we become his presence

To the ones for whom

Presence is the greatest present of all

## BE PRAYERFUL

To pray

Is to breathe

And in breathing know

The warmth of your breath

On us

In the stillness

To pray is to say

Anything and nothing and

To know as we are known

Spending time where love, not words, are the currency

To pray

Is to ask

Believing he is good and he longs to give

To pull up a chair to the table with Jesus

And another for the stranger

And to cry out for the thing that breaks our heart

And to wait, knowing

He hears

He cares

He answers



Prayers taken from:  
*Slow Down, Show Up and Pray - Simple shared habits to renew wellbeing in our local communities*

by Ruth Rice  
(Authentic, 2021)





# PRAYERS OF GATHERING

In the stillness of dawn, in the morning of a new day,  
*listen to the voice of God calling us by name.*

In the meeting of our lives, in the joining of our hands,  
*listen for the voice of God giving us our name.*

We are God's people.  
*Redeemed and renewed by the love of Christ.*

We are God's people.  
*Shaped and formed by the power of the Spirit.*

We are God's people.  
*Let God's people bring praise and worship.*

**By Graham R Sparkes**

O Lord, our God,  
may this floor be holy ground where we stand to meet with you.

O Lord, our God,  
may these walls resonate with the sound of your voice, revealed in your Word.

O Lord, our God,  
may this ceiling be thin between heaven and earth,  
so that we may feel ourselves touching heaven as we worship you.

O Lord, our God,  
fill this space with your Holy Spirit  
and change lives for ever here.

Glorify Jesus, for we pray in his name.  
Amen.

God our Father,  
we come to you this day in worship and praise:

to honour your name,  
to hear you speak,  
to be encouraged in fellowship.

We come because of who you are:  
a good and loving Father.

You are our carer, protector, provider,  
our rock to stand on during storms,  
our fortress to hide in for safety during troubles.

When we realise who you are,  
we come to worship in gratitude and love.

We come to discover why you show all this care and concern for us.  
Why you look upon us with love and compassion.

And we come to ask where we can experience your love.  
And to be assured again that it is always and everywhere.

There is nowhere we can go to escape you.  
No hiding place where you cannot be.

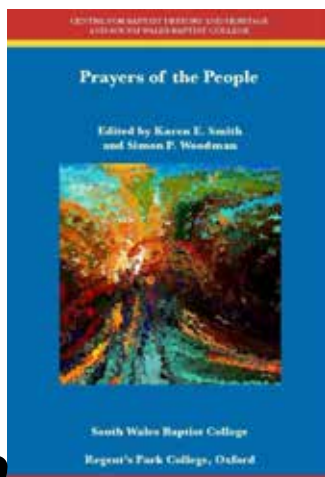
No experience where you are not with us.  
No darkness where your light cannot reach.

And when do we know your self and your love?  
When we see Jesus.

Open our eyes and ears today as we read your word.  
Reveal your love to us again, because we need reminding often of your grace.

So help us today to see you, to hear you, and to praise you as we ought.

**By Margaret Hughes**



Prayers taken from:  
*Prayers of the People*

edited by Karen E Smith  
and Simon P Woodman  
(Centre for Baptist History  
and Heritage, 2011)

# TWO POEMS IN RESPONSE TO THE THEMES RAISED IN THIS EDITION, BY BAPTIST MINISTER MIKE SHERBURN

## BECOMING A MOULDED HUMANITY

I am becoming, I am  
I stand before Jesus,  
my friend, my brother  
and I am becoming

My birth-again, my baptism,  
my quiet time, my rooted vine,  
and I am becoming

But what am I becoming?

a Cartesian caricature of a Jesus follower?  
a cardboard cut-out believer,  
with a fixed-grin and thick skin?  
an icon of spiritualised individualism,  
a cartoonified Christian?

a desert island compact disc disciple,  
scratched-up, isolated, endlessly spinning, shiny and  
brittle,  
out of reach and out of date?

Do I only need myself to grow?  
To mix saintly yeast in the bowl of  
my faithfulness and raise a crust of piety  
as proof of my religious adulthood?

Or does the early church stir a different blend?  
Does Theophilus learn gathering in Acts?

Gathering in constant prayer,  
in temple courts,  
in breaking bread at home,  
in organisation,  
in testimony,

Gathering to hear, to unify, to love,  
Gathering to know the Spirit and one another,  
Gathering to be moulded by a heavenly potter,  
to become the Father's jars,  
formed by his sanctifying and his saints,  
formed by humanity, heart, hope and humility

Gathered and formed and becoming

## ENDURING GOD'S OFFER

Can I need what God offers?  
Accept the invitation to his vast vault  
and enrich myself in his coffers?

Can I want what Jesus shares?  
Walk in to the throne room and sit  
alongside others on those jewel-encrusted chairs?

Can I endure what the Spirit provides?  
Allow myself to be handfasted  
to every saint walking besides?

For these are the gifts of the human divine  
The present of those who are present to us  
A staff room of stalwarts in the family firm  
These people, His people, in sacred supply

We come to be given by Jesus to others  
We're cheerleaders for all our sisters and brothers  
Each one the glory of Jesus, which must never be  
smothered

Gathering weaves us, day-by-day:  
It's the tapestry threads and cross-stitching patterns  
It's an opened-up soul that can let others lead us  
It's a softened-up heart – and ears that will listen

We cannot claim to be people of Jesus  
We cannot say we belong in his pasture  
if we turn down the gifts:  
the people God offers  
the people Jesus shares  
the people provided to us by the Spirit

In them, with them, through them, we become  
the family of God.

Mike Sherburn is the minister of Watchet  
Baptist Church. Access his spoken word  
poems at [youtube.com/@revmikesherburn](https://youtube.com/@revmikesherburn)



## Baptist World Alliance leadership role for Lynn Green

General Secretary Lynn Green has been elected as the Baptist World Alliance's (BWA) first ever Vice Chair – the first woman to have a leadership role at this level in the BWA.

The election took place at the BWA Global Council, which convened in Brisbane, Australia in advance of the 23rd Baptist World Congress.

The Council also saw the election of Karl Johnson, the former General Secretary of the Jamaica Baptist Union, as the first BWA Chair.

Both will serve in these roles for the next five years until the next Congress.

The elections represent a new leadership model for the BWA, which previously had a President and First Vice President.

This new BWA role is voluntary and will run alongside Lynn's duties as General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain. In recent years Lynn has been a part of the BWA General Council, Executive Committee, and Human Resources Committee.

"It's a tremendous honour to be called into this role," said Lynn, who explained a key aspect is to chair the meetings of the Leadership Council.

"I am looking forward to establishing Christ-centred, Spirit-filled, collaborative relationships together as we seek to mirror godliness and

provide governance for the BWA mission, vision, and impact in the world," she said.

On being the first woman in such a leadership position, she said, "I feel really honoured to be able to stand in this space. I hope that being in this position will inspire and encourage other women to listen to God and to respond to God's call."



## Shared understanding of mission sought

Members of the Baptists Together Mission Forum introduced a proposed Mission Resolution at the 2025 Baptist Assembly, designed to build a shared understanding of mission across the movement.

This marks the beginning of a two-year process of discernment, dialogue, and engagement, with the goal of the resolution being adopted at the 2027 Baptist Assembly.

"The resolution seeks to inspire Baptists to embrace a holistic understanding of mission - embodying both the proclamation and demonstration of God's love in every context," explained Sandra Crawford, Pioneer Minister in Jaywick, Essex.

The engagement process spans two years. Following its introduction in 2025, Baptist Assembly 2026 will share and celebrate stories of mission.

Finally, at the Assembly in 2027, the resolution will be brought to a vote for adoption as Baptists Togethers' shared understanding of mission.

Churches are encouraged to use this process as a catalyst for conversations, to share their missional stories, and to send a delegate to vote on the resolution in 2027.

The Resolution and accompanying resources can be found at [baptist.org.uk/missionresolution](https://baptist.org.uk/missionresolution)



## Everyone Everywhere church planting and evangelism focus

With input from missional strategist Alan Hirsch, the latest Everyone Everywhere national conference explored how evangelism and church planting might move forward locally and across Baptists Together.

Everyone Everywhere is a Baptists Together wide collaboration that seeks to equip Baptists to share Jesus fully.

The conference, which took place at King's Cross Baptist Church on 23 May, was shaped around a set of core questions distilled

from over 60 written responses and 30 additional conversations across the network prior to the gathering.

These were the five core areas discussed.

- 1 Reproducing discipleship: empowering everyday evangelism
- 2 Diverse teams: recognising and releasing gifts
- 3 Local movement: from organisation to multiplication

4 Microchurches: small models, big potential

5 Network to movement: collaborating across the whole

Dot Tyler from 24/7 prayer led intentional session of prayer and worship while Alan's content fed lengthy discussions, conversation, prayer, and collaborative thinking. Josh Kane from London Baptists and Isabella Senior, Baptists Together Young Leaders Development Coordinator, joined a panel discussion with Alan.

For a full report, see: [baptist.org.uk/eehirsch](http://baptist.org.uk/eehirsch)

## Closure of Spurgeon's College

Spurgeon's College announced its closure on 31 July, with immediate effect.

The College entered the insolvency process following the unexpected termination of financial support from a charitable foundation, according to a statement from its board of trustees. The announcement was made with 'deep sadness and great regret'; the statement continued.

The College was founded in 1856 and has trained many women and men for Baptist ministry and mission.

The Trustee Board of the Baptist Union of Great Britain also issued a statement, saying it was 'deeply saddened' at the news.

Both statements highlighted the devastating impact of the closure on staff and students and encouraged prayer.

Specialist Teams, Associations and the remaining colleges have worked to offer appropriate support.

Bristol Baptist College, in partnership with London Baptists, are offering Spurgeon's students the opportunity to join a London-based hub.

The Ministries area of the Baptists Together website is providing information for Baptist students.

Access it here: [baptist.org.uk/spurgeonscollege](http://baptist.org.uk/spurgeonscollege)



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# BAPTISMS

## BAPTISTS

Each month the *Baptist Times News Round-up* email shares stories of recent baptisms. This is both to celebrate how God is working among us, and encourage prayer for those newly baptised. Here is a snapshot of the messages and stories we have received in 2025:

Delighted to say we baptised Megan at **Aston Clinton Baptist Church**, Buckinghamshire, on Easter Sunday (20 April)... one of the Gen Z folk much spoken of at the moment.

*Nick Harris, minister*

On Easter Sunday (20 April) **City Road Baptist Church**, Edgbaston, Birmingham celebrated with Ladajah, a former member of the Junior Church. Ladajah returned from university to make a public declaration of her faith by going through the waters of baptism. We continue to hold her up in prayer.

*Pearline Mills, secretary*

We were filled with joy at **Charlbury Baptist Church**, Oxfordshire when one of our newest members, Zena, was baptised on Palm Sunday (13 April) by the Revd Dr Nicholas Wood. She wanted to testify publicly to her faith in Jesus after some challenging situations in which she had known his presence and support.

It was such a long time since the baptistry had been used so our handymen worked hard to repaint it and find a suitable heater. Now we long to see others witness in this way.

*Kay Colyer, secretary*

On Palm Sunday, Thea professed her faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and was baptised as a believer at **Shipley Baptist Church**. Thea has grown up in the church and was baptised by her mother, Yvonne, and by one of the Youth Leaders, Katrina Butterworth.

A church packed with school friends, grandparents, family and the congregation of Shipley Baptist heard Thea give testimony to her faith.

*Keith Jones, deacon*

**Carey Baptist Church**, Hemel Hempstead rejoiced to hear the testimonies and to share in the baptism of three of our young people: Robbie, Ruhama and Nana on Easter Sunday. Two of them have been part of our fellowship for many years, having come through Junior Church and Robbie has taken part in our Carey/Belmont Youth Camp for many years.

But it was the baptism of a young, Iranian refugee at Carey last year, which was partly responsible for prompting Robbie to take this step of faith himself. Others at Carey are now asking to be baptised, to share how God has been changing their lives and to signal their desire to follow Jesus. We praise God for what has been happening in people's lives and we thank God that we can all be partners in Jesus' good news mission.

*Colin Cartwright, minister*

Easter Sunday saw the baptisms of Giovanni, Nelson, Amelia and Ian at **Tabernacle Baptist Church**, Wolverhampton. It was such a joyous service.

*Kenton Samuels, administrator*



# A C R O S S TOGETHER

"Thank you for guiding me through the waters of baptism. I really appreciate it. A day I will never forget."

This pretty much sums up Pentecost Sunday (8 June) - and perhaps the perfect day to hold Believers' Baptism, where the Holy Spirit came as promised, baptising three new believers into Christ and giving them power to be his witnesses. When Sam, Oluwafunke and Dawn shared their testimonies, there was not a dry eye in the house, so those gathered, both church and unchurched were also 'filled with the Spirit.'

Then, on Trinity Sunday (15 June), Joshua went through the waters of baptism - an incredible moment in his journey of faith, when God's presence and blessing met him, and when he made a personal commitment of faith in Jesus as Saviour and Lord. Sam, Oluwafunke, Dawn and Joshua were also brought into membership, covenanting together with the church - promising to share their life and journey of faith with the people of **High Street Baptist Church**, Merthyr Tydfil, and being ready to serve others and to witness to Jesus Christ.

*David Powell, minister*

**Newbury Baptist Church**, Berkshire were delighted to share in the baptisms of four of its young people, Ellie, Jemima, Ollie and Theo on Sunday 6 July. Close friends who have each grown up in the church. It was such an amazing service and we thank God for them.

*Neal Rankin, secretary*

On Sunday 29 June, two young ladies were baptised at our morning service at **Billingham Baptist Church**, Stockton on Tees after sharing their testimonies. It was a joy to share with them. It was extra special for one of our elders, Lee, who was baptising his youngest daughter Naomi and his niece Megan.

*Julia Monument, secretary*

It was a joy to open our baptistry for the first time for a few years and witness the baptism of Carol who had been part of **Tilehouse Street**, Hitchin for many years. Her baptism was the focal point of our Easter Day celebrations on 20 April and spoke powerfully of the patient, persistent work of God in our lives.

*Jane Robson, minister*

We at **Harrogate Baptist Church** are really happy to share with you our Easter day news. It was fantastic to have yet another baptism on Easter day.

A fabulous witness to all of us and a testimony to speak to her teenage peers, some of whom were not Christians, and she bravely invited along. Great celebration, and on her 15th birthday too!

*Liz Getgood, secretary*

With a hallelujah and by the grace of God, I can report that we were truly blessed as we heard testimonies and witnessed the Resurrection Sunday baptisms of Noel, Shiva, Delroy and Marcia at **Pollards Hill Baptist Church** on 20 April 2025.

As has happened at other baptisms at **PHBC**, Delroy, who joined the church as a result of an outreach event, and Marcia who has been part of the church family for some time, responded 'on the spot' to an invitation to be baptised, and we truly give glory to the Lord for this.

Please join us in holding them all in prayer as they journey through their new lives in Christ.

*Deji O Ayorinde, minister*

If you would like to share news of a baptism in your church, please do so via: [baptist.org.uk/btcontact](https://baptist.org.uk/btcontact)



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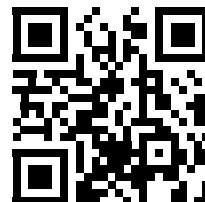
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