

Project Violet Podcast – Season 3

Season 3 Intro

	Music
Jane	Hello, I'm Jane Day, Community Learning Tutor at Regent's Park College, Oxford.
Helen	And I'm Helen Cameron, Research Fellow at the Centre for Baptist Studies at Regent's Park College Oxford. Together we were the co-leaders of Project Violet.
Jane	Welcome to Season 3 of the Project Violet podcast. Project Violet was a research project investigating women's experiences in ministry whilst developing women ministers. It worked to understand better the theological, missional and structural obstacles women ministers face and identify ways forward.
Helen	The research phase of the Project ended in January 2025. Currently stakeholders across Baptist life are implementing the commitments to action that they made in October 2024. Jane and I are now focusing on the academic dissemination of the Project. In this third season we wanted to catch up with some of the work that has been going on since last October.
Jane	We hope that listening to these episodes will help you engage with some of the outcomes of the project.

Helen Cameron

Today, I'm pleased to be with David Mayne and Mark Fairweather-Tall who are both regional minister team leaders. Thank you both for coming onto the Project Violet podcast. Let's start by asking you a little bit about your current ministry roles. David, can you talk to us about what you do?

David Mayne

Yeah, so I'm Regional Minister team leader for the Eastern Baptist Association. So we work to resource and support and encourage the 172 Baptist churches in the East of England, plus our chaplains and pioneers. So we're working across Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire.

Helen Cameron

Thank you and Mark, what about you?

Mark Fairweather-Tall

Yes, like David, I'm a Regional Minister team leader as well. But in South Wales, and in South Wales, we have around 120 churches, and that spreads from Chepstow, which is just over the Severn Bridge through to the west coast of Pembrokeshire and Broadhaven. Brecon is our most northerly church, and Barry is the most southerly one. So many of our churches are along the M4 corridor the cities of Cardiff, Swansea and Newport, and then up into the valleys the Rhondda Valley and the eastern Valley into the more rural churches of Monmouthshire, and so, yeah, it's my privilege to work and support those churches and ministers and pioneers and chaplains across that area.

Helen Cameron

Great. Thank you very much. Now we're here to talk about Project Violet. It was May 2024 that the findings were released, and they were quite a set of documents when they did arrive. I'm just

wondering what your initial reactions were when you first looked at them. Mark, do you want to open up on that one?

Mark Fairweather-Tall

Yes, I think looking back, there were a mix of feelings. Perhaps the most dominant one initially was sadness. I think when you actually hear some of the stories and hear some of what has been said to those women in ministry, it just made my heart very sad. And I know in the run up to the release, I'd spoken to a few of our women ministers across the association and outside of it, just to find out some of their experience. So there was sadness with that. I think alongside the sadness, there was also something about hope as well, because I had some conversations with women ministers who said, 'Actually, my experience in the Baptist family has been overwhelmingly positive', and I wanted to celebrate that as well and say, 'well, actually, I'm really glad about that, but clearly even one bad story is one too many'. But there's hope, and there's hope. I was reflecting then and still do now. We work with the Baptist Union of Wales, as well as the Baptist the wider Baptist family here, both the Baptist union and Wales of Wales and Baptist Union in Great Britain have general secretaries who are women. And I celebrate that. And I think that's a wonderful thing. So it gives me some hope. So, so I came with those mixture of feelings of sadness and some hope, and I hope within that that then gave me a determination to say, if there are women ministers who have been able to flourish within our family, let's do all that we can to remove the obstacles that others are unfortunately experiencing. So that mixture of feelings between sadness some hope and then some determination to do things better in the future.

Helen Cameron

Thank you. Now, David, I remember you promising me that you would read the findings, and that was a great source of encouragement to me at the time when we were trying to pull them together and get everything to make sense. What were your reactions when you looked at the findings?

David Mayne

Yes, so I very much resonate with what Mark just said about the sadness. I think you can't help but hear some of the pain in the stories that we've heard, and I think it's so helpful we've had it grounded in stories and real experiences. So I'm very grateful for the way in which the research enabled that to come to the fore. But I think I was genuinely very excited. I guess I did my Master's degree 20 years ago. It was written on advocating for women in ministry in Baptist spaces. So it's been a subject I've always had engagement in. In my last church, we sent six, seven people forward for ministerial training and overseas mission service, all of which were women. So journeying with them, we've seen firsthand as local churches, some of the barriers and issues that have come up. So we've been glad to walk so there was something really good. Perhaps something might actually get better. Yeah, perhaps this will turn the heat up. It will move the dial. Progress is always so slow, and there's so much inertia built into Baptist life, but this felt, to me, like a real opportunity to quicken the pace of change. And so it was that tinged with obviously, that sadness and that recognition of the pain that brings us to this point, but a real excitement about where we might go as a result of this.

Helen Cameron

Now, as you all know, a number of the findings the requests for change were directed at Regional Associations. So I just be interested to know from each of you what kind of response has been happening in your associations. Would you like to open up first again Mark?

Mark Fairweather-Tall

Thank you. Well, the first thing we did was bring all the recommendations where associations were mentioned to our trustees, so that we could have a time to talk about that together. We decided to use a traffic light system. As we looked at those simply being that green, we would see as a high priority, and we would actively work at them over the next 12 months. Amber, we saw as more of a medium priority. And said, Okay, we will look at those ones when we have satisfied the green that we're looking at and really want to put the effort in and then the red we said, well, they're a lower priority, possibly because we believe the responsibility for these lie outside of the association, or we just think realistically, we haven't got the capacity to properly deal with that at this time. So it wasn't saying we're not going to do anything. It was just kind of saying, realistically, we can't do everything all at once. How do we prioritize what we are going to do? So I'll give you an example of where we put each of those categories. One example of Green was to have a women's ministry advisor in each Association. We said we really feel that that's an important thing to do, and we want to work at that. So we've had a number of conversations about what that looks like, and how we can progress that. And we've just, I know it's taken a while these things often do, but we have just recently put out an advert asking for somebody who might be interested in becoming a women's ministry advisor in South Wales. An example of the amber one, we said that the ministry to the deaf community is pioneer ministry we want to fully support that we believe it is just that we felt well we would respond to that one if and when something particularly happened initially. So for example, that was about partnering with Northern College to develop appropriate opportunities to pioneer and settle with the necessary financial support. So we kind of said, with that one, okay, if something comes forward, we want to action it, but we don't feel we've got the capacity to be proactive with that one at the moment, although if something happens, we want to be able to be supportive of it. And then an example of one in the red was the monitoring, monitoring data through the vocational pathway, and we felt that the ministries team were better able to take a lead on that, so we put that in a red category. So these are the kinds of things that we've tried to do, to just look and see. Okay, how do we action these things? So again, to give you another example of what we have done, we tried to. One of the areas of my responsibility is settlement. I've tried to particularly take on board the flexibility within ministry. And I've had a few conversations, particularly with those who have children, young children in ministry, to see what they feel able to do. And I was talking to one mother who's been on maternity leave, and she was talking about the fact that she's got two children, two young children. Some nights are sleepless. Some days she feels she can do something, and some days she just thinks I really couldn't go into ministry. Well, okay, the thought of entering settlement was very daunting for her, but is there something about if we explored with a church about interim ministry for nine months to give them some extra support for that time, where you can see how you can manage and if it's proving really difficult, you know, it's time limited. Is there something more flexible we can do with that? And I just remember the kind of relief on the face, on her face at the time of thinking there could be another way of doing this that feels more manageable. So it's trying to bring that flexibility, that I think is particularly key for certain times of life, and try and bring that in. So those are a few things that we've tried to do, amongst many others as well.

Helen Cameron

That's great Mark. And thanks for giving those specific examples. That's really helpful. I think the issue of flexibility is a really good example of how Baptist ways of working and systems have been designed by men for men based upon certain assumptions that there would be a wife in the background taking care of caring responsibilities. And that's an assumption that neither men nor women want to make now. They both want to be engaged in caring responsibilities. And so that does, I guess, push back to the system and say, can the system be more flexible to make way for

people who have other calls upon their lives? And so it's really exciting to hear about that as a specific example, because that's yeah, an exact, an excellent example of what the project was trying to achieve, was to point up examples of where there were women with a calling and with abilities, but perhaps the system wasn't really designed for the way in which they were experiencing life. So thank you for that. David, do you want to come in on this one now?

David Mayne

Yeah, absolutely. I love hearing what's happening in South Wales about this. We always love hearing what our friends do in South Wales because they're brilliant. But it's so encouraging to hear those stories for us. Generally, I think it landed well. I think it's the first thing I'd want to say as an association, we have a long history, pretty much, with the whole of our existence. So 20 or so years, 25 years of having female regional ministers, we've had a female regional Minister team leader in that time. So a lot of churches have had to work through some of the challenges that might come from this report by virtue of the fact that their regional minister is a woman. And so in fact, when I joined the team two years ago, I was the only male member of the team. So I think a lot of our churches have engaged with this previously, which has been very helpful. I think we probably have a very small handful number of churches who would openly not embrace the ministry of women, so that the challenge, I think, for us has been but there are clearly a number of cultural and systemic issues that needs to be addressed where things aren't as they should be, but it's not explicit, and that creates some issues in terms of how you get underneath that. So we, when the thing came out, our trustees worked through it, myself and one of my RM colleagues at Claire Blatchford, we made a point. We sit down once a term. We go through all the recommendations. We said we'll do that going forward, and then it's on every trustee agenda for the next three years as a minimum, at least, if not, I think they wanted to make it five, actually, in the last meeting. So there's a commitment from our trustees and our team to keep this on the agenda. So that was very positive. We were glad when we went through it to accept all of the recommendations that were put to associations. There was one where we asked to amend it slightly, because that was one of the options presented to us, which was the commitment to further research in the way that Project Violet has been done. We said we're very up for research, but it might need to be done in a slightly different way, depending on the project. So with that, with that caveat, we said yes to everything, and then gave ourselves a task of working out, okay, now, how do we implement those things? We had a couple of open meetings with people across the association, which had some really interesting conversations. I mean, almost by default, you get the people who are interested coming to some of those things, but we had people who didn't know each other very well talking about this, and a good mix of men and women as well, which was really helpful. And those conversations were enlightening. And I think some good connections were made that's been really informative. Some of the recommendations were very easy to see us too because there were things that we recognized we'd already been doing, and some of that is the legacy of some of my female colleagues who've been working away on these things for years. So we're very blessed in that respect. Having female RM colleagues meant carving out time for someone to serve, specifically as an advisor for women's ministry. Was something they were keen to do, and we were keen to make the time for them to do the challenge for us was not finding someone, but how do we take other things off their desk to make sure they have the time and space to do it well, rather than just adding it as another thing on their agenda. But we have done that. The trustees have been very committed to it. One that's been particularly landed well in terms of peaking interest was Denise's report on menopause, and that's something we've been actually having some conversations about as a team anyway, but we're going to ensure that some training is had and passed out, and that's something that was really, really helpful to be picked up on, and that was a very tangible change that we've been able to do as a result of that. But yeah, so generally in the association, I would say that it landed pretty well, and it was very enthusiastically responded to the challenges. How do you dig under those things that

aren't explicit to make sure that we continue to work to shape the cost? Culture in the best way that we can.

Helen Cameron

Yeah, and as you said, it's keeping having the conversation is the way by which things are made explicit, and that's getting over people's embarrassment about talking about things like menopause or other issues is a crucial part of normalizing conversations about what some of these more implicit barriers and obstacles have been, so thanks for raising that. Now, one of the things that we were delighted to hear had come out of this was that some associations had got together to collaborate around some of the findings. And I wonder, David, whether you could perhaps talk about what some of the thinking was behind that. And then I'll ask Mark what some of the things are that might have emerged from that?

David Mayne

Yes, so a group of us, five associations, have been intentionally looking for areas to collaborate on, across the board, across our ministry, and at the same time as that conversation was beginning to take shape, Project Violet emerged, and it was the easiest thing for us to do in those meetings. It was the clearest win to say this is where we should start in our collaboration efforts, because we were all fully on board, all very supportive. And so one of our colleagues, Hayley Young, who's a colleague in another Association, agreed to convene a gathering of all the people who were going to be leading the implementation of Project Violet changes across the associations, and any other people that felt they needed to be there. And then we then invited the rest of our colleagues to join. So we were going to make this we were going to collaborate anyway, but then we invited anyone else who also wanted to join the collaboration. And so we had a really good meeting together, talking about where there are natural areas of crossover and where there are things we think, well, one association might struggle to do that, but between us, could we do that together, things like that? There was a really energizing opportunity. I think we need to do more of that across Baptist life. And it was, this was a really great way of starting that, and it was great that it was something that we all felt enthusiastic enough to make the time to collaborate on.

Helen Cameron

Well, that's really encouraging to hear. And for people not familiar with Baptist life, the regional associations are of different sizes and have different resources and so have different capacities to respond to things. And so it's really encouraging to hear of people getting together to see how they might achieve together things which they might not be able to achieve on their own. Mark, is there an example you'd like to talk us through?

Mark Fairweather-Tall

Yes, I can certainly say, from our perspective in South Wales, it's been brilliant to be able to have that collaboration, because there are things that we would not have been able to do on our own, that we are able to offer because we're doing it together. So I'll give two examples of that. First of all, I mentioned earlier on about having a women's ministry advisor in each Association. One of the things we recognized straight away, which we already knew, is both of our regional ministers in South Wales are male, and that means, if somebody is looking for some translocal input, that becomes, of course, we can speak to women, and I hope they will get just as much from us as any male would, but there may be times when they want to speak to a female regional minister. And so

one of the things that was really encouraging to see is that there are, I think it's about eight, maybe nine, regional ministers, female regional ministers, across different associations, have made themselves available regardless of geography. So it means that one of our female ministers could ring up a regional minister, a female regional minister in a different area, and that gives them an option to speak. And we recognize, as well, amongst those eight or nine, there's greater diversity in terms of age and ethnicity as well. So actually it provides for everyone more choice about who they can speak to and who they perhaps feel they would relate to most on the particular issue that they want to speak about. So I think that is a really good thing to have, and we've been able to put together a sheet that is on some of our websites that actually means that people can access that and know who they can make contact with. So that, I think that's one fantastic example of collaboration, which really builds on what we can do together, which we wouldn't be able to do in the same way apart. I think the other example, the prime example I'd use, would be the relaunch of MagnifyYou, the coaching program and encouragement for women to feel better equipped for some of the higher profile roles, perhaps taking on leadership, whether that's in regional Minister team leaders or regional minister, Moderators of associations, leaders of larger churches, those kind of things that very often, statistically, we would say fewer women apply for those roles. So to have some training, some encouragement for those who are recognized in the different associations, you can nominate some women from their particular area to take part in this. Well, we wait to see what the results are, but I'm really hopeful and excited that what it's going to lead to is more women who are applying for these roles, and that will really benefit the whole of the Baptist family. Again, when I first looked at that and I was thinking, can we possibly do something like MagnifyYou on our own. I was just thinking we can't do that, but actually we couldn't, but together, we can. And so I think that collaboration, just as somebody who's been part of that regularly, encourages me generally, because collaboration is great, and relying on the expertise the wisdom of others really benefits as well. But these are two tangible outcomes that we can see for Project Violet that wouldn't have happened without the collaboration, certainly here in South Wales, that's great.

Helen Cameron

Thank you very much for that. I guess with some of these things, like having women regional ministry advisors and having that network of women regional ministers, the thing is building the confidence to use them. I think sometimes, I think particularly about newly accredited ministers coming into ministry, they somehow need to pick up the vibe that, yes, you're actually expected to make use of this. This isn't just an emergency pull cord. These are people who are wanting to interact with you. And these new ways of working that seem slightly at odds with Baptist life, where you might reach out to somebody who's beyond your immediate Association, are things where I think people are going to need some active encouragement to engage with them. And sitting, as I am in a college, I'm thinking, Okay, how do we make sure that our ministers in training and newly accredited ministers see this as something they should be taking advantage of, rather than just something which is on a website in case of emergency. And I guess these are some of the cultural changes that are going to take longer to embed in the system, and where the ongoing encouragement from male role models is going to be so, so important. Well, thank you very much for sharing that news about and that that results of collaboration. It's really encouraging that just a year in, we're seeing some fruits of that collaboration being made available. I guess thinking to the future. I'm just interested in a more sort of longer-term perspective from each of you about how you hope Project Violet will have a lasting impact on your association. Clearly, this kind of change does happen through specific steps like the MagnifyYou programme, but it also happens by changing culture and ways of working. So I wonder, for each of you, what are your hopes for the longer-term future, about the impact of Project Violet.

David Mayne

I'm thoroughly hopeful. I really want to start by saying that I think this already has demonstrated that when we want to change things, we can and therefore the capacity for what we could continue to change and make better is huge, and I'm really hoping that people will continue to get that vision. But also, I think it does something even broader than just Project Violet. I'm hoping it spurs on other pieces of research, and it creates other conversations in other spaces about things that are related to it. I think it's part of how we strive for something better, and we renew our life together in ways that are thoroughly Kingdom centric. And so I'm so excited about that, because I think this is a big part of making that happen. The challenge, I think, is to make sure that this doesn't become something that we all tick the boxes, and it gets put in a draw, and it might be great for the current cohort of women in ministry, because everyone's thinking about it right now. But how do we make sure that the people in five years time are still benefiting from the changes that come from this? That's going to be the hard thing, but certainly from everything I've seen in all the associations, I'm hopeful that that is going to happen, and that's always a dangerous thing to say out loud, but I don't sense that anyone wants to tick the box and put it in a drawer. I sense that across the country, people are wanting to make this better, so that, I guess, I don't know if I've directly answered the question really, but I'm thoroughly hopeful, but that's the challenge.

Helen Cameron

Yeah, thank you.

Mark Fairweather-Tall

I think I would echo a lot of what David has said there. It's great to see what has happened. I hope there are things that are already embedded in our way of doing things. Things now that will have a lasting impact. To give you an example of that, we have a joint ministers conference with South Wales Baptist Association and Baptist Union of Wales. And we also have a church event called Momentum, which is joined between the two of us. So we organize it together. Both events we are asking the question, Have we got adequate female representation in what's being done? So for Momentum this year, when we were planning for it, we said we've had two male main speakers for the last two years. This time, if at all possible, we need to actually, actively look and see is there a suitable woman who can come and speak at that event. And of course, we found one very easily. It's not that it's difficult, but you have to be intentional about these things. So I hope that intention is something that is now embedded. If it wasn't before, I hope it was before, but I think it's become even more obvious with Project Violet, and I hope that that continues. I hope that this is seen as a journey as well. I would want to certainly say, from my perspective and from the association perspective, I'm on a journey. I will not get everything right. I will make mistakes along the way. I hope what people will see in the association and in myself, is a heart to see all who flourish in ministry, and where there are barriers and obstacles, we want to do what we can to change that, and where we make mistakes, we want to apologize for that and try and do better in the future. So I hope that part of this as well will be we've talked about it, people will see something of our heart, and maybe that will give them more confidence to come to us when we get it wrong and say, 'Look, this really hasn't been helpful'. Come to us gently, because we're Yeah, we're trying to get it right, but come and tell us so that we can see that we can do better in the future. So I hope those kind of things will be a message that is heard across our association and wider across the Baptist family. And like David, I just really hope that it doesn't get surpassed with other things that come onto our desk that we need to get done. I've got confidence in Project Violet, because I think it's been so well run all the way through, and I know, for example, there's another event planned for regional ministers and Project Violet team leads to come to in early part of next year to reflect on good practice together so we can learn from one another. So I think it's things like that that I have hope that we will continue to see a lasting impact of Project Violet going well into the future, and my

hope and my prayer is that for all people in ministry, we will be better equipped to help them flourish, because that's what God has called us to do and leads us to that place of flourishing.

Helen Cameron

Thank you very much and just want to thank you both for coming on to the Project Violet podcast, for being gently held to account in a very public way, but for talking from the heart about your passion to see this work through and to continue to engage with it. So thank you very much.

Season 3 Outro

Helen	Thank you for listening to this episode of the Project Violet podcast.
Jane	We invite you to go to the website if you want to learn more about the Project. www.projectviolet.org.uk
	Music