

UNITED IN MISSION: TOWARDS A SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF MISSION

*The journey, the latest resolution draft, and an invitation
to discern together*

(September 2026)

A SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF MISSION

Across Baptists Together, in churches and communities of many different shapes and sizes, we share a desire to participate faithfully in the mission of God. We proclaim the good news of Jesus, nurture communities of faith, seek to be present alongside our neighbours, respond with compassion to those around us, pursue justice and peace, and care for God's creation.

Over recent years, the Baptists Together Mission Forum has been asking whether we might find words that express something of this shared calling: not to define every aspect of mission, nor to prescribe what mission must look like in every local context, but to offer a common understanding that can inspire and encourage us as we seek to follow Jesus together.

Following an extensive process of prayer, conversation, listening and discernment across our Baptist family, we are now inviting churches to consider this latest draft:

A Shared Understanding of Mission

Abiding in God, and participating in His mission, we as Baptists bear witness to Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, through words and actions:

By **PROCLAIMING CHRIST**, inviting people to repentance and faith, to be baptised and to follow Him as lifelong disciples;

By being **PRESENT AMONG** people and nurturing Christian communities;

By **PRACTISING COMPASSION** towards our neighbours;

By **PURSUING JUSTICE**, peace and the flourishing of creation.

These few sentences are deliberately concise. They cannot say everything that might be said about Christian mission, and they are not intended to. Rather, they seek to express a shared foundation: rooted in God, centred on Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and expressed through words and actions.

This document explores what we mean by *A Shared Understanding of Mission*, tells the story of how we have arrived at these words, and invites churches to continue praying and discerning with us as we journey towards Baptist Assembly 2027, when delegates from across Baptists Together will gather to discern together whether we might affirm this as our shared understanding of mission.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY A SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF MISSION?

The Shared Understanding of Mission is an attempt to put into a few words something of what we believe about the mission of God and our calling to participate in it.

At its heart is the conviction that **mission begins with God**. It is not first a collection of activities undertaken by the Church, but our participation in what God is already doing in the world. Our mission therefore begins by *abiding in God*: attending to God, seeking God's will and allowing our lives, individually and together, to be shaped by Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

From there we are sent to bear witness to Jesus through **words and actions**.

Mission through words and actions

Sometimes different expressions of Christian mission have been separated from one another. Evangelism and disciple-making can be spoken about as one kind of mission, while serving our communities, responding compassionately to need, pursuing justice or caring for creation are treated as something different.

The understanding reflected in this resolution is often described as **integral mission**. It recognises that these belong together within the mission of God. We proclaim Jesus Christ and invite people to repentance, faith, baptism and lifelong discipleship. We also seek to embody the good news we proclaim: living alongside people, forming Christian community, loving our neighbours, seeking justice and peace, and caring for God's creation.

This does not diminish the importance of evangelism by replacing words with actions, nor does it make acts of compassion or justice simply a means of creating opportunities for evangelism. Rather, **our words and actions belong together as expressions of our witness to Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God**.

Rooted in the biblical story

This understanding is deeply rooted in the biblical story. Scripture tells of the God who creates and loves the world, who acts to restore what is broken, and who calls a people to participate in his purposes. The prophets speak of God's concern for justice, peace and right relationships, while looking forward in hope to God's renewal of all things.

In Jesus, the Kingdom of God is announced and embodied in word and deed. Jesus calls people to repentance and faith; forms a community of disciples; draws alongside those who are excluded or overlooked; responds with compassion; challenges injustice and misuse of power; and announces good news to the poor (Luke 4:18–19). In Christ, God is reconciling all things to himself (Colossians 1:19–20), and Scripture points towards the renewal and flourishing of all creation.

The risen Jesus sends his followers to make disciples, baptise and teach (Matthew 28:18–20), promising his continuing presence with them. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit empowers the Church for its witness (Acts 1:8; 2:1–4). From beginning to end, then, the biblical story draws together God's transforming work in people, communities and creation, and our calling to bear witness to Jesus through words and actions.

A longstanding Baptist instinct

Of course, none of this begins with the Shared Understanding of Mission. For generations, Baptist churches have sought to share the good news of Jesus in words and actions: proclaiming Christ and making disciples, planting and nurturing churches, serving their neighbours, challenging injustice, working for peace and responding to the needs of their communities. The language we use to describe mission has developed over time, but the instinct to hold together what we proclaim and how we live has deep roots in our Baptist life.

That continuing conversation was particularly visible at Baptist Assembly 2023, with its theme **Mission Is...** Through reflections on the Great Commission, Assembly explored evangelism and discipleship alongside practical love, justice and the Kingdom of God, considering how the good news of Jesus is both proclaimed and demonstrated. These were not yet conversations about a Shared Understanding of Mission, but they form part of the wider context from which this process of discernment subsequently emerged.

Part of a wider Baptist understanding of mission

Nor is this understanding unique to Baptists Together in Britain. It resonates strongly with a longstanding conversation about *integral mission* across the worldwide Baptist family.

In 2016, the European Baptist Federation, of which Baptists Together is a member, affirmed the value of *integral mission* as “*the proclamation of the Gospel by word and deed*”. Its Tallinn Resolution on Mission recognised both that the Church's call to repentance has social consequences and that Christian social action bears witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ.

The Baptist World Alliance has similarly affirmed over many decades a vision of Christian mission that holds proclamation and demonstration together. Within that longstanding commitment, the language of integral mission has become increasingly prominent. In 2019 the BWA created the senior role of Director of Integral Mission, appointing Rev Everton Jackson in 2020 – a significant structural step that embedded integral mission within the leadership and life of the global Baptist movement, rather than treating it simply as a theological emphasis.

Most recently, in 2026 — while our own process of discernment was already well underway — the BWA adopted *Integral and Polycentric Mission as Guiding Missional Principles*. The resolution draws explicitly on earlier Baptist affirmations and describes integral mission as bringing together evangelism, discipleship, compassion, justice and creation care as inseparable aspects of God's mission. **It also explicitly encourages Baptists throughout**

the world to embrace this approach so that together we might witness to the reconciling love of God in Christ “to all peoples and all creation”.

There is something deeply encouraging in this resonance. Our Shared Understanding has emerged through listening and discernment within our own Baptist family; it has not simply been adopted from elsewhere, yet what has emerged sits within a much longer Baptist tradition and remarkably closely alongside what our European and worldwide Baptist communities have also been discerning and affirming about the nature of Christian mission.

A shared foundation, not a mission strategy

Calling this a ***Shared Understanding*** is important. It is **NOT** intended to be:

- an exhaustive definition or theology of mission;
- a centrally imposed mission strategy or programme;
- a checklist against which churches will be assessed;
- an expectation that every church should undertake every possible expression of mission; or
- an attempt to prescribe what faithful mission must look like in every local context.

Our Baptist understanding of the local church means that churches must continue to discern prayerfully how God is calling them to participate in God's mission in their particular place and circumstances.

Instead, the hope is that this can provide a **shared foundation**: something that helps us recognise and celebrate the breadth of mission already taking place among us, encourages us to notice aspects of God's mission we may have neglected, and gives us some common language as we consider together what it means to participate faithfully in God's mission.

Affirming a shared understanding does not mean that every church will express every aspect of mission in the same way. It does invite each of us to consider the breadth of God's mission and where God may be calling us to grow. It can also affirm and encourage those whose calling has led them to particular expressions of mission that have not always received the same visibility or recognition within our shared life.

And, as Baptists Together, it can help us ensure that the full breadth of mission is reflected in the stories we tell, the conversations we encourage, and the ways we support and resource one another across our regional and national life.

It does not tell every Baptist church what to do.

It asks whether, amid all the diversity of our churches and contexts, **this is an understanding of mission that we can share.**

A JOURNEY OF DISCERNMENT

The words we are now considering have not emerged from a single meeting or small group. They have developed through two years of conversation, prayer, listening and revision, involving Mission Forum, Baptist Assembly, churches and individuals from across Baptists Together.

At each stage, the intention has been to listen carefully to what Baptists are saying about mission and allow that listening to shape the words themselves.

From Mission Forum to a first draft

The idea of developing a Shared Understanding of Mission grew from conversations within **Mission Forum**, a body which gathers people from across Baptists Together with experience and responsibility in different areas of mission for mutual support and enrichment, to reflect together on what we see God doing missionally, and to help shape our shared vision for mission.

Those conversations repeatedly returned to the breadth of God's mission and the importance of holding together expressions of mission that can sometimes become separated from one another, as well as those that may be inadvertently overlooked or undervalued.

As the first draft began to take shape, the conversation was deliberately widened. A small group of people from across our Baptist family, recognised for their wisdom and leadership in different expressions of mission, were invited to engage with the developing text. Their insights helped shape the version that was eventually brought to Baptist Assembly, and they subsequently offered their own commendations of the draft.

Among them were voices reflecting local and community ministry, global mission, environmental mission, public witness and wider Baptist and evangelical perspectives. Their commendations approached the Shared Understanding from different directions, but shared a recognition of the value of holding together proclamation and demonstration, word and deed, within our participation in God's mission.

Assembly 2025: beginning a wider conversation

The first draft was introduced at **Baptist Assembly 2025**, the first of three Assemblies gathered around the theme *United in Mission*.

It was presented as the beginning of a wider process of discernment. Those attending Assembly were invited to engage with it, and churches and individuals across Baptists Together were encouraged to continue the conversation during the following year: to pray, discuss, question and respond.

That wider conversation produced both encouragement and challenge. There was considerable support for an understanding of mission that brought words and actions together, but also a clear desire to strengthen and clarify the proposed wording.

Several recurring themes emerged. Baptists asked for:

- shorter, clearer and more accessible language;
- greater clarity about the purpose of the Shared Understanding and how it might be used;
- a more explicit recognition of the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding and empowering mission;
- greater emphasis on evangelism and making disciples, alongside proclamation;
- clearer language about personal repentance and faith;
- stronger roots in Scripture and the Christian story; and
- greater expression of our Baptist identity and distinctives, particularly baptism.

Some of these requests naturally pulled in different directions. The desire for a shorter and more memorable statement sat alongside requests to make more things explicit. That tension became an important part of the subsequent work: how could we say more clearly what mattered, while also using fewer words?

Assembly 2026: listening again

The emerging themes from the year of conversation were brought back to Baptist Assembly 2026. Participants were invited to reflect on what had been heard and to help discern which concerns should carry particular weight as the work continued.

The strongest emphasis was on making the Shared Understanding **shorter, clearer and more accessible**, closely followed by the need for greater clarity about its purpose. Participants also affirmed the importance of explicitly recognising the Holy Spirit, evangelism and disciple-making, repentance and faith, biblical grounding, and our Baptist identity.

Mission Forum then returned to the wording in the light of all that had been heard.

We listened — and the words changed

The current draft has been significantly reshaped by this process of discernment.

We heard that personal response to the good news needed to be clearer.

The draft now speaks explicitly of “inviting people to repentance and faith”.

We heard that evangelism, disciple-making and our Baptist identity needed greater expression.

The draft now speaks of “PROCLAIMING CHRIST”, and of people being “baptised” and following Jesus “as lifelong disciples”.

We heard that the Holy Spirit's place within mission should be explicit.
The draft now describes our witness as “empowered by the Holy Spirit”.

We heard that the statement needed to be shorter, clearer and easier to remember.
The breadth of mission is now gathered around four simple movements:

**PROCLAIMING CHRIST, (being) PRESENT AMONG, PRACTISING COMPASSION
and PURSUING JUSTICE.**

Some of what we heard is better expressed in this accompanying explanation than squeezed into the Shared Understanding itself. That is why this document says more about the biblical and theological foundations of the statement, its purpose, and the wider Baptist understanding of mission within which it sits.

The result is the draft now before us: recognisably descended from the conversations that began in Mission Forum, but significantly shaped by the prayer, questions, experience and discernment of Baptists from across our shared life.

The original draft of the Shared Understanding, presented at Baptist Assembly 2025, together with the resources that accompanied it, remains available on the Baptists Together website. This allows churches to see the starting point for this process and how the wording has developed through subsequent listening and discernment.

MISSION ALREADY AMONG US

Alongside the conversations about the wording of the Shared Understanding, we also wanted to listen to the stories of mission already taking place across our Baptist family.

Ahead of Baptist Assembly 2026, churches were invited to share something of how they were participating in God's mission in their own context. More than 130 stories were received from across the country. Most of the postcards were brought to Assembly by people from the churches whose stories they told, with others sent beforehand. They were laid out across a large map, creating a striking visual picture of mission taking place across the country.



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During the plenary session, some stories were shared from the platform before all the postcards were gathered up and distributed among groups of delegates. Together they read

the stories they had been given and prayed for those churches and communities, as well as for one another's own contexts.

The stories themselves were wonderfully varied. We heard of churches creating warm and welcoming spaces where relationships formed and conversations about faith grew; of Alpha courses, new disciples and baptisms; of cafés, community fridges, toddler groups and support for people experiencing isolation or hardship; of churches welcoming asylum seekers and refugees; of ministry among children and young people, in prisons and hospitals; of concern for the natural world and practical care for creation.

And often these were not separate stories.

One church described how a woman first encountered them through a warm space, later joined Alpha and Sunday worship, came to faith in Jesus and was eventually baptised. Another told of Alpha and baptism alongside work to encourage wildlife through wildflowers and swift boxes. Iranian asylum seekers encountered practical welcome and love from a Baptist church and began exploring Christian faith, with some going on to be baptised. Elsewhere, community cafés and food projects had become places of friendship, prayer, faith and belonging.

These stories remind us that the different expressions of mission named in the Shared Understanding do not always fit neatly into separate boxes. Proclaiming Christ, being present among people, practising compassion and pursuing justice can overlap, reinforce and flow into one another as churches seek faithfully to follow Jesus in their particular places.

Perhaps that is one of the most encouraging things we have heard through this process. The shape of mission described in the Shared Understanding can already be glimpsed in the stories Baptist churches have shared with us. The words have emerged not only from conversations about mission, but from listening to churches describe the mission they are already living.

There is much here for which to give thanks, much to affirm and encourage, and much from which we can learn as we seek to participate faithfully in God's mission.

TOWARDS ASSEMBLY 2027

The journey now returns to our churches.

Between now and Baptist Assembly 2027, we invite churches across Baptists Together to spend time with the latest draft of the Shared Understanding of Mission: to read it, pray with it, talk about it together and consider whether these words faithfully express something of our shared calling to participate in God's mission.

We hope those conversations will draw on the journey described in this document and on the listening and discernment that have already shaped the words before us. But discernment is not simply about looking backwards. It is also about listening afresh to God and to one another as we ask what we are being called to affirm together.

At **Baptist Assembly in May 2027**, the Shared Understanding will be brought to Assembly as a resolution, when delegates from our churches, colleges, associations and wider Baptist life will be invited to discern whether to affirm it on behalf of Baptists Together.

For that reason, we particularly encourage churches to talk about the Shared Understanding together and **to send delegates to Assembly who can bring something of those conversations into our shared discernment**. Our hope is that Assembly 2027 will become the culmination of a genuinely shared process: local conversations feeding into our gathering together, as together we seek the mind of Christ.

If affirmed, the Shared Understanding will, of course, not mark the end of the conversation about mission. Rather, it will give us some words we have chosen to hold in common: a foundation from which we can continue to encourage one another, tell the stories of what God is doing among us, resource mission in its breadth, and discern how God is calling us to participate in particular places and changing times.

After two years of conversation, prayer, stories, questions, listening and revision, the invitation before us is ultimately a simple one:

Can we say this together?