

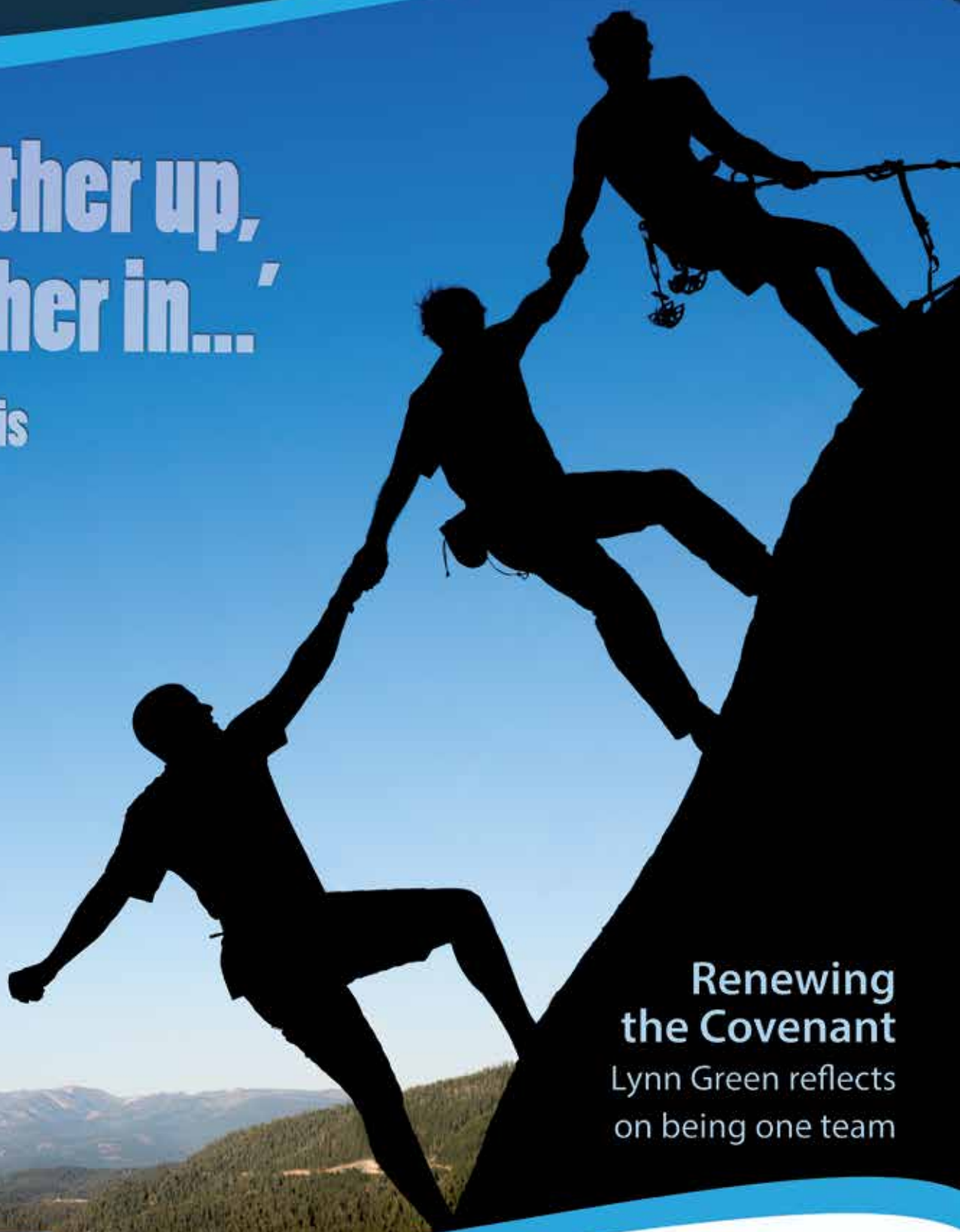
BAPTISTS

Spring 2016

# TOGETHER

'Further up,  
further in...'

CS Lewis



**Renewing  
the Covenant**  
Lynn Green reflects  
on being one team

Photo: Vernon Wiley

**News / Interviews / Prayer / Comment / Events**  
*The magazine for the Baptist Union of Great Britain*

 **BAPTISTS  
TOGETHER**



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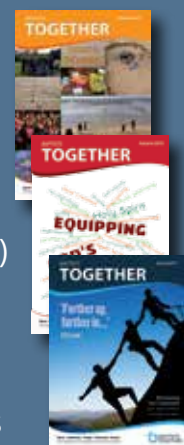
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# 'Further up, further in'

In *The Last Battle*, the final novel in the Chronicles of Narnia, the Christ-like figure Aslan leads his followers into the real Narnia. As they leave the old world behind to welcome the new, a realisation dawns that this is where they belong: the children enter exhorting one another to come 'further up, further in!' In doing so they embark on an adventure of exploration that takes them into more truth and beauty, without denying any good thing from the past.

The image of walking alongside each other to somewhere greater came to mind as the *Baptists Together* editorial group produced this latest edition, which explores aspects of what it means to be a community covenanted to God. Paul Fiddes points out how Baptists have historically responded to Christ's promises to us with relationships of mutual trust. Fast forward to 2016 and, as Lynn Green explains, covenant theology underpins a key aspect of our renewed culture: in all our diversity we aspire to feel like one team. By keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, we will increasingly follow his ways, which cannot be done in isolation.

Further up; further in. A life with and for Christ, together.

May God's call on our lives, and our sense of belonging to a family that extends beyond our local church, be strengthened in 2016.



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## *Renewing the covenant*

Have we at times prized our independence over our commitment to relating to each other? General Secretary **Lynn Green** reflects on the aspect of our renewed culture as Baptists Together where we aspire to feel like one team

I absolutely love the many aspects of my role, but right from the outset I have been particularly passionate about building a renewed sense of team among Baptists Together. When explaining how Baptists relate together to those outside our Union I am often met with incredulity. And we have to laugh at ourselves don't we? Our way of being church is definitely not efficient by contemporary standards and it is neither slick nor streamlined! In fact, many people I talk to are daunted by the mere prospect of offering leadership to the more than 2019 distinct charitable bodies that network together as the movement known as Baptists Together.

**Baptists Together is not some historical anomaly to be preserved; we are a Kingdom force in the present and for the future**

I relish this challenge, however, and

really believe that, as we rediscover and develop our sense of being one team, we will see God at work among us in new and powerful ways.

So, in this edition of our *Baptists Together* magazine, we are focussing on that aspect of our renewed culture where we '*Feel like one team: Celebrating diversity; valuing, respecting and trusting each other as we work together in partnerships – making sure everyone feels included and listened to (1 Corinthians*

*12:24b-27)*' A Biblical term for this is covenant. I sometimes feel that we forget that whilst any church can be a Baptist church, Baptist churches and leaders that

have *chosen to become part of Baptists*

*Together* are committing themselves to relating to each other. In this issue we are going to be exploring what this means for us today and in the future.

### **We share a common bond and a common purpose**

If we read the Bible and look back to our history and DNA we quickly see how important covenant relating and team work are to us as Baptists. The article immediately following this one by Paul Fiddes does an excellent job of unpacking this aspect of our theme. What stands out for me is that each local church which is part of Baptists Together is in one way independent, and yet in committing to walk together and watch over each other we make the choice to *become interdependent*. What binds us together as a Union of churches, associations and colleges is our shared love of Jesus Christ and

common mission to share his good news. It was the genius of our forebears to keep the focus firmly on the most important things – Jesus and his mission – and we continue that focus with our vision today *'Growing healthy churches in relationship for God's mission'*. In the context of our renewed culture, that vision is worked out across Baptists Together in four key ways: *pioneering and planting, equipping the local church for mission, investing in Godly leadership and having a voice in the 'public square' both nationally and internationally.*

I don't need to tell you about the enormity of the mission challenge that we face today; you will see that clearly in your own situation. It is essential that we work together so that we can be faithful to God's call for us to make disciples and see lives and communities changed in our own day. As we have a clear understanding of our shared vision for the future I believe that we will strengthen our sense of being one team.

### **We need each other**

If we are serious about responding to the mission challenge of our generation I believe that we need to lay down any spirit of independence that remains among us. It sometimes feels like we have taken the goodness of the insight

about the liberty of the local church and turned it into an unbiblical, 'I will do what I like and no one can tell me what to do' attitude. That is not what Jesus or our forebears had in mind.

In the local church we need to be rich and diverse communities of love where there is space for everyone and where everyone can play their part. Communities where we can be creative, innovative and counter-cultural in modelling and nurturing covenant community in the midst of an individualistic, consumer driven world. I know that it is not easy and that not everyone in our churches 'gets it', but we need to keep faith with a Biblical vision of covenant community and not sell out. We also need to be communities not only with strong centres but also with open borders so that we don't become a 'law unto ourselves' but we can naturally and easily flow and connect with other parts of Baptists Together. That freedom and connection will enable us to serve our local communities better, help each other in times of difficulty, offer insight and wisdom to each other, provide

**If we are serious about responding to the mission challenge of our generation I believe that we need to lay down any spirit of independence that remains among us**

practical support and funding for others and provide a space for mutual accountability.

As leaders, we are called to nurture and model this in those spheres that God calls us into. Our Union wants Christ-centred, passionate, courageous, compassionate and wholehearted leaders who also have the humility to receive from others and be mutually accountable (and not just with the people who are like them!). We need to allow and enable ourselves and our churches to play their unique part in our common purpose; not wanting everyone to be like us but delighting in the different ways that God uses each of us.

I sense that it would be helpful if we could develop a succinct and clear articulation of what covenant relating looks like for us today. Not in the contractual sense, but as an expression of how we aspire to embody our biblical and historical vision in concrete terms in the here and now. We can no longer assume that everyone even knows or understands what covenant means and so, if we are serious about embedding this in the face of such strong messages from our culture, we need to be able to communicate our alternative and subversive reality.

### **We may need to hold back**

In thinking about team working, I am sure you won't find it hard to imagine all the positive things that this entails, but it also involves some of us having to hold back in order to let other members of the family make their contribution! I have a particular vision of how things should be and others definitely have another! When we are thinking about feeling like one team, that will sometimes mean that we are the ones having space made for us and at other times we are the ones making space for others. Covenant and team working seek positive consensus and ownership and that sometimes involves us holding back for the good of others. This takes maturity and, trust me, we are going to be needing a lot of maturity in the years ahead but I believe that we can rise to this challenge.



Photo: Ian Britton

**We share our stories and enjoy the fruit**

In writing this, I am reminded of the power of reminiscing and story-telling and how this builds our sense of family and belonging. How important it is for us to keep listening to one another's stories as churches, associations and colleges; I am wondering how we can encourage more of this? As I mentioned earlier, we are a large network of around 2,000 churches, 13 regional associations and five colleges and it is not easy to maintain relationships across such a movement. We need to consciously take every opportunity to build relationships and celebrate not only our common bonds but also, by God's grace, the fruit of our endeavours. God is at work in and through us in amazing ways and it is good to just stand back and celebrate and be thankful that, together, we can be part of his purposes.

**Renew the Covenant**

When I was on retreat last summer, I sensed the Lord say to me, "renew the covenant" and I want us to intentionally move towards being in this place. And when I say 'renew the covenant',



I don't primarily mean that some of us will stand up and read words off a page, although I am sure that this will be involved. I am thinking of a time when we are so deeply passionate about our shared love of Jesus and our common purpose in his mission that it will no longer be ok to 'hang loose' to the Union as a leader or a church and to wear that as a badge of 'honour'. Please let's leave this behind us now. If we delight in the unique way we have been led to being church, if we value and respect our fellow leaders and churches, if we are filled with compassion for those who don't yet know Jesus, then let's be the best that

we can be and fulfil our unique place in God's purposes. Baptists Together is not some historical anomaly to be preserved; we are a Kingdom force in the present and for the future; independent and interdependent, Christ-centred, mission-hearted and relating as one team for the sake of the Gospel. I cannot make this happen; **each of us needs to choose** to live in this reality in 2016 and beyond.

**Lynn Green** is General Secretary of our Baptist Union. To find out more of about our renewed culture visit [www.baptist.org.uk/culture](http://www.baptist.org.uk/culture)



How do you respond to Lynn's message? Share your thoughts at [www.baptist.org.uk/oneteam](http://www.baptist.org.uk/oneteam)

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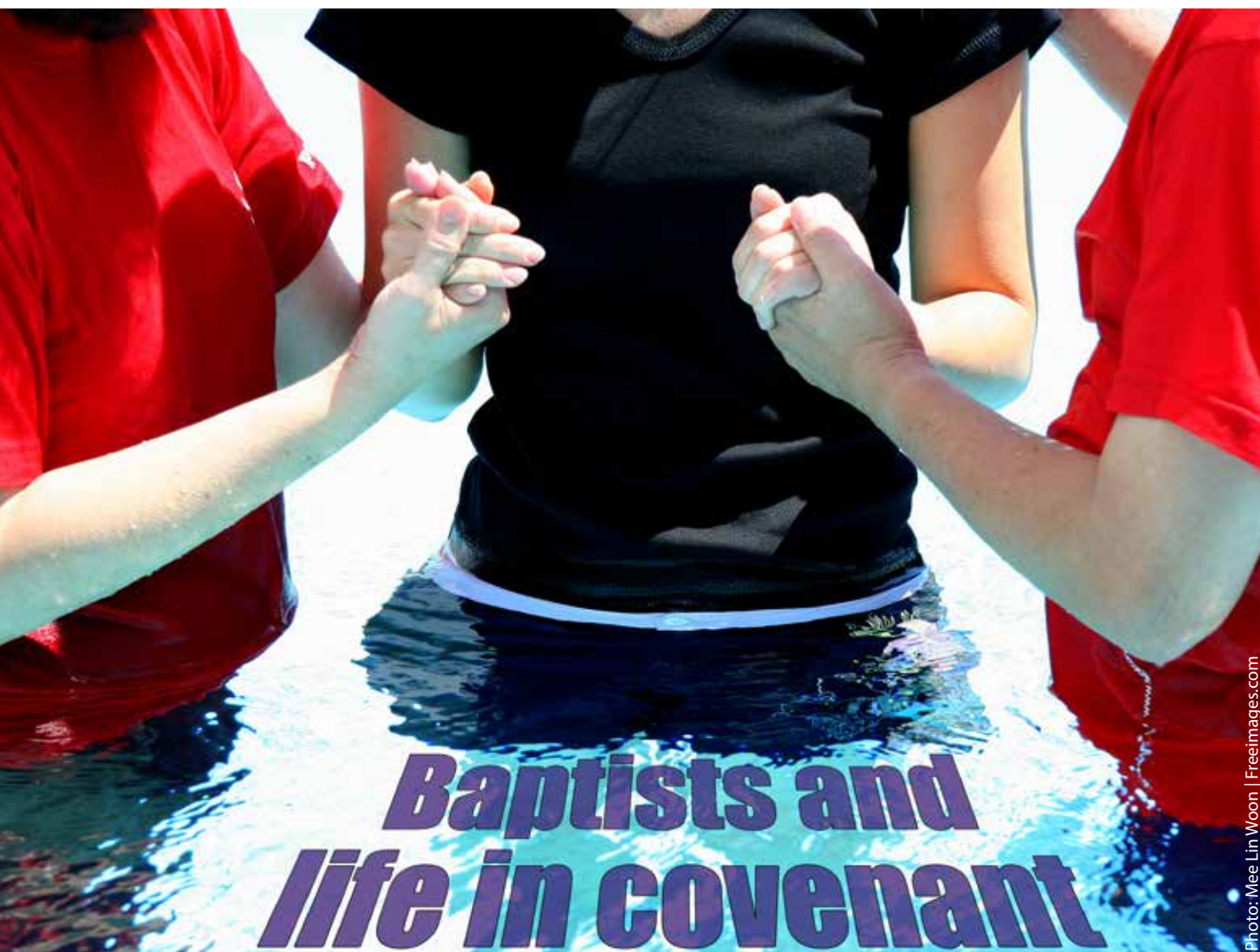


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Responding to God resulted in relationships of mutual trust for the persecuted early Baptists – and has shaped how we’ve walked ever since, writes **Paul Fiddes**

### The beginnings

More than four hundred years ago a company of Christian believers met in a village in Lincolnshire and made a covenant together. They were facing persecution, imprisonment and even the prospect of death because they wanted to worship God freely in the way they believed God was calling them to do. One of their number, looking back on the event some years later, recalled that the members ‘joined themselves by a covenant of the Lord into a church... to walk in all his ways, made known, or to be made known to them... whatsoever it should cost them, the Lord assisting them.’

This congregation left England shortly afterwards to seek freedom abroad in Amsterdam where, through reading the Scriptures, they made a startling discovery. At the heart of this covenant promise was the baptism of believing disciples, of those who were able to respond to God’s grace with their own faith. Baptism expressed the covenant, and

through baptism the covenant became actual in time and space. Thus this company became the first Baptist church, and some of their members returned just three years later to face oppression and hardship as they established the first Baptist church on English soil.

As time went on, another phrase was usually added to the covenant promise among churches of the Baptist movement. Members were to ‘watch over each other’, holding each other up to discipleship and holiness, in a life that might contain many unexpected developments as they ‘walked together’ into a future in which God made their way ‘known to them’. These three notes of walking in fellowship, watching in mutual care and openness to ever-new possibilities have rung down the years in Baptist churches, and are enshrined in the ‘Covenant 21’ service of covenant renewal that many Baptist Union churches and associations use today.

## 'A response to Jesus Christ'

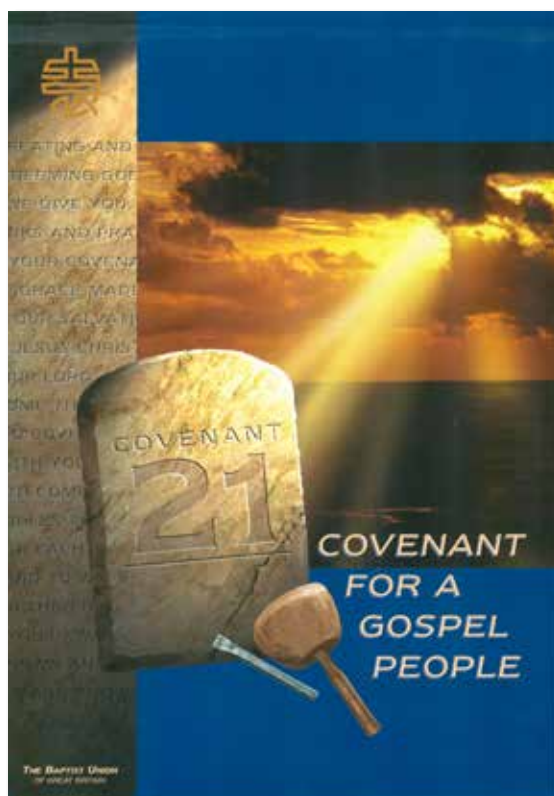
Not all Baptist churches have written actual covenants to be read and signed by the members, but Baptists have generally understood their life together to be covenantal in nature, and their understanding of baptism has always been covenantal. I mean that covenant has two dimensions, that we might call 'vertical' and 'horizontal'. In the first place it is 'vertical': God makes agreement with us, giving disciples gathered together all the benefits of the salvation which has come through the death and resurrection of Christ and calling for our response to these gifts.

At the same time, it is an agreement that is 'horizontal', in which disciples promise to be faithful to each other. Covenant is therefore not merely a human choice to join together and do certain things together. It is not the kind of 'strategic alliance' that can be made in business and politics. It is – as those early seventeenth-century believers affirmed – 'a covenant of the Lord'. It is a response to Jesus Christ who, as the maker of the New Covenant, is gathering us together and who stands in the midst of his people as the risen Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit. This covenant is sealed in the water of baptism and continually renewed in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper.

From the beginning of their church life, Baptists thought that 'walking together and watching over each other' was not just a matter for individual believers in a local congregation. Just as members of one church walked together in covenant, so congregations also walked together in 'association' with each other. Just as members in one church watched over each other, seeking to find the mind of Christ for their life and mission, so churches together were to watch over each other and seek the mind of Christ as they assembled together through their representatives.

### No legal contract, only the way of trust

It is essential to realise that this covenant is not a legal contract. The 'way' in which covenant partners walk can only be one of mutual trust. This is where Baptists have given an insight to the universal church which is a true gift. In the local congregation, covenanted together, all the members 'watch over' each other, and this 'oversight' happens in the church meeting as they seek to find the mind and purpose of Christ for them. At the same time, Baptists have always believed that Christ calls some of these members to exercise 'oversight' (or a 'watching over') in a spiritual leadership of the congregation. Among Baptists there is no legal provision, no church law, which regulates



the relation between these two forms of 'oversight', the one corporate and other personal. Congregations must therefore learn to live in the bonds of trust between the people and their ministers. Oversight flows to and fro freely between the whole congregation and its spiritual leaders.

In the same way, oversight flows to and fro between the local congregation and the association of churches. The single congregation lives in a covenant made by Christ, and Christ is present among them to make his purpose known. The congregation is his body, where Christ becomes visible in the world today. This is why the congregation has 'freedom' to make decisions about its life and mission, and cannot be coerced or imposed upon by any church authorities outside it. The congregation is not 'autonomous', which means 'making laws for itself'.

Christ makes its laws, and the church has the freedom and responsibility to discern his ways. It is free because it is ruled only by Christ.

But Christ also calls local congregations together into covenant, in association. Where churches are assembled through their representatives, there too Christ is present, there he becomes visible to the world in the body of his people, there his mind can be known through the help of the Holy Spirit. Local congregations are thus 'interdependent', needing each other's spiritual gifts and understanding if they are to share in God's mission in the world.

Yet in the covenant principle there is no legal contract, only the way of trust. In their search for the mind of Christ the local church meeting must listen to what the churches say as they seek to listen to Christ together. It must take with complete seriousness the decisions made at an association level, and will need good reason not to adopt them for itself. But in the end it has freedom to order its own life as a covenant community which stands under the rule of Christ. It needs the insights of other churches to find the mind of Christ, but then it has the freedom to test whether what is claimed to have been found is truly his mind. It might feel called to make a prophetic stand on some issue, and will stand under the judgment only of Christ as it does so.

Other churches may think that this covenantal approach of mutual trust is hopelessly impracticable, and that it would be better to regulate the relation between people and clergy, between churches and diocese or province. Baptists have learned over the years to live with the risks of trust and love. Here there is plenty of opportunity for muddles, mistakes and frustrations, but also room for all to flourish.

## A national Union of churches

Quite late on in their history, it seemed to Baptists in the UK that they were being called to make a larger covenant. Just as churches were held in the covenant bonds of an association, so churches and associations could be held together in the covenant of a national 'Union' of churches. The driving force behind this conviction was the need for an effective mission in the whole country. Christ could be embodied, and could become visible to others through one Union at national level as well as through separate associations of churches. So compelling was this vision that Baptists of different persuasions, especially those who had previously been known as 'Particular Baptists' and 'General Baptists' came together in mutual trust.

Baptists expressed their commitment to each other and their sense of being called together by Christ in the 'Declaration of Principle' (first made in 1904). This is not a full confession of faith, but a covenant document in which Baptists commit themselves to love and work



together in obedience to Christ as the supreme authority. They still seek his mind together through the two instruments of union which are the Council and Assembly of the Baptist Union of Great Britain. The one expresses a covenant between associations, and the other a covenant between all the separate churches and colleges in the Union. It is the same covenant, though the varying forms it takes in Council and Assembly require trust for union to work.

In all the changing circumstances of life, covenant remains the way of trust, on a path which is yet 'to be made known' by the Lord of the covenant.

Paul S Fiddes is a Baptist minister and Professor of Systematic Theology in the University of Oxford. He was formerly Principal of Regent's Park College, Oxford, and has been Chair of the Doctrine and Church Unity Commission of the Baptist World Alliance.



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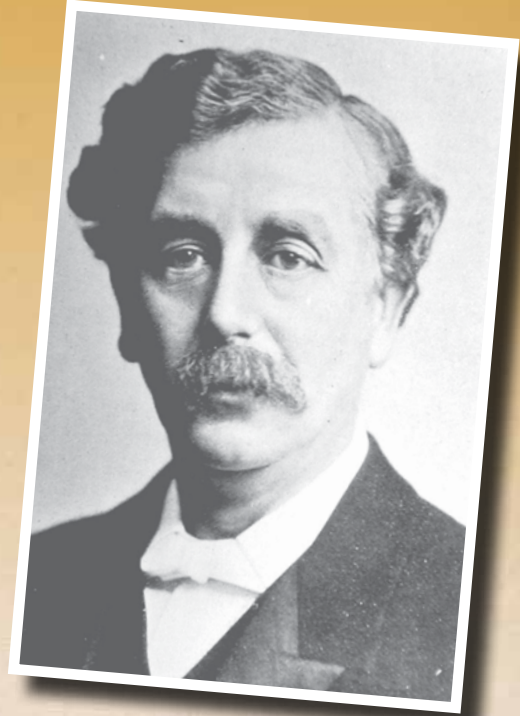
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## An interview with Shakespeare

Much of how our Union is structured today stems from reforms led by former General Secretary John Howard Shakespeare at the turn of the 20th century.

**Peter Shepherd**, author of a book about that era, imagines an interview on the occasion of Shakespeare's retirement as General Secretary of the Baptist Union in 1924, after 26 years in office.



*Mr Shakespeare, what did you hope to achieve when you became General Secretary of the Baptist Union in 1898?*

When I was appointed, Baptists were facing the new century in a fragmented and disorganised condition. I believed that only the Union could put that right. It had very little influence then, but now, thankfully, that has changed. I was also deeply concerned about the condition of our Baptist ministers. Most were ill-prepared, poorly paid and inefficiently employed.

*Raising the Twentieth Century Fund was one of your first big tasks - how important was that?*

It was absolutely vital. Apart from the practical things it enabled the Union to do, like supporting mission initiatives and building Baptist Church House in London, it created a sense of national solidarity, and so was the foundation of much that followed. The denomination should be proud of what we achieved. Mind you, it was a herculean task that nearly destroyed me. It took three years of very hard work, and there were times I despaired of success.

*Another important part of your legacy is the creation of the Baptist World Alliance in 1905. Was that in your mind in 1898?*

The idea came from our Baptist friends in America, and I just took it up and ran with it.

*But you were the main organiser of the first international Baptist Congress, held here in London.*

Yes. And what a thrilling occasion it was - particularly the closing rally in the Albert Hall. Among other things, it led to a much greater sense of unity among European Baptists, which has proved so important in the years since the Great War.

Laying the Foundation Stone of Baptist Church House



Baptist Church House,  
Southampton Row, London



Council Chamber of Baptist Church House

*You mentioned your concern for Baptist ministers. Has their position improved during your time in office?*

We have raised standards, we are able to guarantee all those recognised by the Union a living wage, and we can make much more effective use of their time and gifts - so, yes, they are in a better place now than they were. In many ways, the creation of the 1915 Scheme, which made these things a reality, was the highpoint of all my efforts.

*This was the Ministerial Settlement and Sustentation Scheme?*

Yes. It was not without controversy, of course - particularly the creation of Area Superintendents to administer it. I was particularly pleased that the Associations saw the need for unity, and were willing to co-operate.

*In more recent years, you have devoted yourself to an even more controversial set of proposals for Christian Unity. How did that come about?*

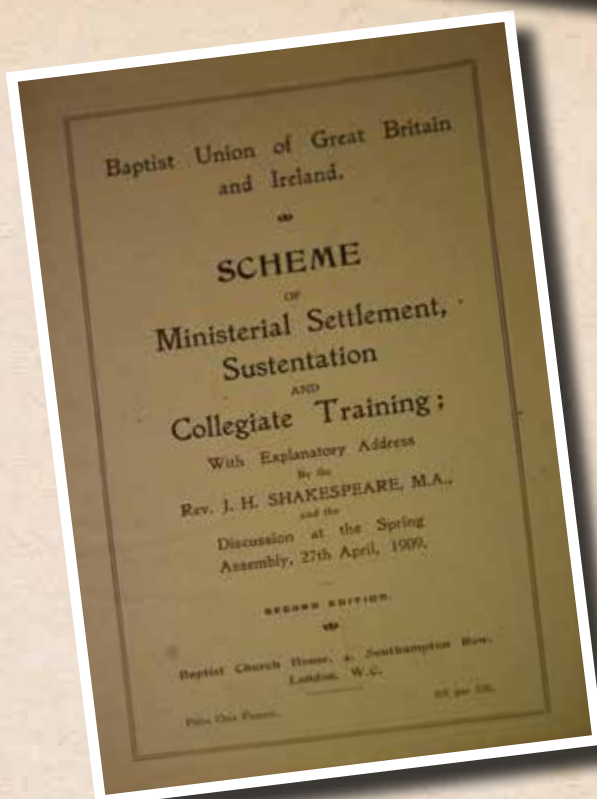
It's a long story. The desire for closer union between the Christian denominations has long been felt. Substantial progress only really happened during the War, partly because of the co-operation of chaplains serving our troops at the Front. Once the Free Churches had begun working together, it seemed natural to me to look for wider unity with the Church of England. But, sadly, that looks quite unlikely now.

*There are many aspects of your work we have not mentioned, but overall, as you look back, what are your feelings as you approach retirement?*

To be honest, I am a doer, and regret that ill-health prevents me from continuing with the work. Of course, I look back with satisfaction to many things, but I wish I had been able to do more, particularly for our retired ministers, and for the cause of Church Unity. Who knows, perhaps I shall be able to continue serving the denomination in some ways. I don't think I shall take to retirement well.

(JHS did not enjoy good health in retirement, and died four years later, aged 70.)

**Peter Shepherd** is minister of Stoneygate Baptist Church, Leicester and the author of several articles and two books on Baptist history: *The Making of a Modern Denomination* and *The Making of Northern Baptist College*.



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Photo: Lise Gagne

## THOUGHTS ON COVENANT

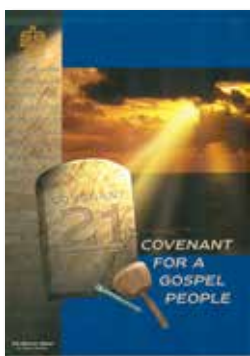
Covenant isn't easy, but an important, healthy and life-affirming mark of our shared commitment to walk together, with God, writes **Catriona Gorton**

I begin with a confession: before I was a convinced Baptist I was, for a time, a member of a Methodist church, and it is to my Methodist friends that I owe my passion for, and commitment to, the idea of covenant. Every year on a cold, dark January evening we would renew our covenant promises: beautiful, challenging words that spoke deeply to my soul and expressed something I knew inherently to be good, to be Godly, to be true.

I was excited when the Baptist Union of Great Britain produced '*Covenant 21*'; reclaiming and restoring an important Baptist tradition of covenanting, of expressing a commitment to 'walk together, with God, in ways known and to be made known'. I remember the Baptist Assembly where this covenant formed part of the communion service, and the sense of belonging it gave me, part of a movement much wider than my local church or Association. I share these reflections as someone unashamedly pro-covenant, pro-connexion, pro-union, and who tries to express that in her day-to-day ministry.

Induction services are sometimes compared with marriage ceremonies – happy occasions when we delight in new beginnings and within which we make solemn vows designed to help us fulfil our commitments one to the other whatever life brings. They are, whatever form of words we choose to employ, covenant making services: minister and church each pledging to each other, and before God, their commitment. With each of the churches I've served, I have made a point, at or around the anniversary of the induction, to revisit some aspect of those promises and, usually, to renew the covenant. Just like marriage, church-minister relationships need to be tended in order to thrive. This understanding of covenant informed my approach to a challenging time shared with my first pastorate, when they were forced to give me notice as they could no longer afford to pay me: as well as a 'Covenant for Troubled Times,' which we used at the start of the notice period, I created a liturgy for 'release of covenant' which we used at our final service together. This allowed us to recognise

**Just like marriage,  
church-minister  
relationships needed  
to be tended in order  
to thrive.**



and release the disappointments and failings on each side, and to celebrate all that had been good and Godly along the way. Importantly it gave us a sense of emotional and spiritual closure: this was no ugly 'divorce', nor was I abandoning them, rather we continued to value and affirm each other in the parting of the ways.

As ordained ministers, we find our names on list of those who are in covenant relationship with the Baptist Union (or Unions in my case) that accredits us to serve their churches. For me, this too is really important: not only do I take seriously my ordination vows, I also recognise a commitment to accept the discipline of the Union(s). This is healthy and it is challenging! The first clause of the Declaration of Principle asserts that each local congregation is at liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer Christ's laws. Diversity, difference and even disagreement are possible, even, dare

**Above all, covenant for me is a vibrant expression of the oft cited 'priesthood of all believers' – once explained to me as "I'll be your priest, you'll be mine, we'll each be each other's."**

I say, desirable, within a covenanted relationship; my own discipleship and ministry has been greatly enriched by sharing with ministers whose theology and spirituality differs significantly from my own. One of my favourite Biblical metaphors for the church is Paul's use of the human body in all its diversity, yet, within it, each part is vital and

valued for what it is. For me, covenant delights in diversity, recognising the potential enrichment it offers each participant, and generating new insights into what it means to live as Christ's disciples, whether that is within the local congregation or more widely at cluster, Association or Union level.

**Diversity, difference and even disagreement are possible, even, dare I say, desirable, within a covenanted relationship**

Above all, covenant for me is a vibrant expression of the oft cited 'priesthood of all believers' – once explained to me as "I'll be your priest, you'll be mine, we'll each be each other's." Covenant means sticking together whatever life throws at us; it means weeping with those who weep and rejoicing with those who rejoice; it means that you are permitted to hold me accountable and I to challenge you. Covenant informs every aspect of church life, whether it is sharing communion with elderly house-bound folk, arranging rotas to make the after-service refreshments or making huge decisions to sell or redevelop premises (each of which have arisen in both my pastorates!). It isn't easy, and of course sometimes we disappoint along the way, but, for me anyway, covenant is an important, healthy and life-affirming mark of our shared commitment to walk together, with God, in ways known and to be made known.

In closing, I cite the Methodist Covenant prayer in its traditional form, which really says it all:

*I am no longer my own but yours.  
Put me to what you will,  
rank me with whom you will;  
put me to doing,  
put me to suffering;  
let me be employed for you,  
or laid aside for you,  
exalted for you,  
or brought low for you;  
let me be full,  
let me be empty,  
let me have all things,  
let me have nothing:  
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things  
to your pleasure and disposal.  
And now, glorious and blessed God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
you are mine and I am yours. So be it.  
And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in  
heaven.*

**Catriona Gorton** is minister of Hillhead Baptist Church in Glasgow, and is actively involved in wider Baptist life, currently serving on the Baptist Union of Scotland's Board of Ministry and as a mentor for Pre-Accredited Ministers (equivalent to Newly Accredited Ministers).



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What's your experience of covenant?  
Share your thoughts at  
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# Introducing Seventy-two



Associations are exploring new opportunities to collaborate – and hope to inspire individuals in every church waiting to find their way in God’s mission. By **Ruth Whiter**

In Luke chapter 10, we read about Jesus sending seventy-two individuals, in pairs, to every town and village he was planning to visit.

How many people in your church do you think might volunteer for such a trip?

Nigel Coles, Regional Team Leader at **West of England Baptist Association** (WEBA), has a hunch that in many churches in our Union, you might find six people who are ready and waiting to find their way in God’s mission. It’s primarily those six (or so) people that he’s hoping can be inspired, engaged, and resourced by means of the *Seventy-two* initiative.

*Seventy-two* grew out of conversations between four Regional Team Leaders in the South and West of England, and Wales.

“For some years we’ve been away on retreat together along with Roy Searle” Nigel explains, “and *Seventy-two* is merely an articulation of some of the heart and vision, which has emerged through walking and praying together.

**Baptists began as a discipling movement, and the deepening and widening of discipleship is perhaps the primary challenge for the UK church today**

“Core to our concern was our awareness of the heartfelt cry, expressed through the Baptist *Futures* process, of people wishing to identify more with a ‘movement’ than an institution, across our Union.”

## Regional partnership – what’s the point?

‘Association Partnerships’ was one innovation of the Baptist Futures process in 2012. Four associations – **Southern Counties, South West, South Wales, and West of England Baptist Associations** – have made good progress in working together in areas such as Ministerial Recognition (ie the process of testing an individual’s call to trained ministry) and the allocation of Home Mission grants. They are also sharing resources in areas like safeguarding training for association staff, and video production to promote Home Mission.

There is, however, little point in perfecting these systems and areas of work, if we are to face the sharp decline in our churches that their current age demographic might suggest is on its way.

## The Need

To face the reality of decline among our churches



## The Purpose

To preach the gospel, and live the kingdom, and encourage all our churches to own this





“Our purpose is to preach the gospel and live the kingdom, and we want to encourage everyone within our churches to own this,” Nigel explains. “We want to be a catalyst for missional movement, across our regions, through Baptist networks.”

### Partnership for mission

Using Luke 10 as a starting point, the *Seventy-two* initiative has identified three ways in which associations can be this catalyst:

#### 1 Igniting Mission:

Finding ways to encourage and support pioneering ministry both in new situations and in our existing churches.

#### 2 Inspiring Discipleship:

Baptists began as a discipling movement, and the deepening and widening of discipleship is perhaps the primary challenge for the UK church today.

#### 3 Infusing Culture:

The challenge is less to engage with popular culture, more to infuse the myriad of cultures with which we engage.

### So, what will be different?

There's no doubt these objectives are already priorities for the regional teams. What difference will it make if associations work together?

In one sense, the answer to that question is that working together will enable more partnership. After all, partnership was a key feature of the way the original *seventy-two* began their adventure. As *Seventy-two*, the partnership has greater scope to engage with others who are working to be catalysts for missional movement.

“Our purpose is to preach the gospel and live the kingdom, and we want to encourage everyone within our churches to own this”  
*Nigel Coles*

For example:

- 1 **Baptist Insurance** have a strategic imperative to support prime evangelistic outreach through the Baptist family. The company has awarded a grant to *Seventy-two*, which has already made possible both staff time and a dedicated website (now under development, at [seventy-two.network](http://seventy-two.network)). This will be a guest blogging site with three ‘pathways’ – **Igniting Mission**, **Inspiring Discipleship**, and **Infusing Culture**.
- 2 **Spring Harvest**, which has a long track record of equipping the local church for mission, is partnering with *Seventy-two* in 2016. At Minehead week 3 in particular, there will be an exhibition area, a breakfast reception, and seminar input under the *Seventy-two* banner.
- 3 **Forge** aims to equip Christians missionally where they are, through a training course with a focus on coaching, peer group learning, and working in a real life missional setting. *Seventy-two* will partner with Forge England and Wales to provide a hub for South West England and Wales. (<http://formission.org.uk/trainings/forge>)

Developing *Seventy-two* as a kind of brand identity will facilitate partnerships and initiatives like these. It might also help people to get on board. The hope is that in churches across the partnership, and even beyond it, those six individuals we're guessing are waiting for God's call will find and follow the footprints as they discover their way in the mission of God.

Anyone can sign up to receive the *Seventy-two* monthly newsletter at [seventy-two.network](http://seventy-two.network). For more information about *Seventy-two*, please contact [nigel@seventy-two.network](mailto:nigel@seventy-two.network)

Author and illustrator **Ruth Whiter** is communications co-ordinator for the West of England Baptist Association



## Igniting Mission



## Inspiring Discipleship



## Infusing Culture

The challenge is less to engage with popular culture, more to infuse the myriad of cultures with which we engage





## Reimagining membership

As pioneering expressions of churches develop, we need to find new ways of belonging, writes **Simon Goddard**

### What is church?

It's a question which is asked as part of the *mission-shaped ministry* course that I've been involved with for the last few years, and answering it might not be as simple as you think. I've noticed that an individual's response is often influenced by the denomination of the congregation to which they belong. An Anglican, for instance, might emphasise the need for a priest so that the Eucharist can be celebrated, and a Methodist may talk about the local circuit, or the Connexion, and the fact that the church only exists when it is in relationship with others.

As a Baptist, however, how would you answer the question? We believe in a priesthood of all believers and the autonomy of each congregation – so your emphasis will probably be different. Whatever theological responses you might give, or biblical passages you might refer to, practically speaking a Baptist church exists when it has a constitution that defines, amongst other things, who the members are and how the congregational governance will take place. No constitution, no church – at least not one that can join our Baptist Union or a Regional Association.

Constitutions may vary from one Baptist church to the next, but generally the inherited shape of membership involves an interview by a couple of existing members or deacons, a



subsequent report to the church meeting, and a vote on whether to approve the membership application. The question, however, is whether this model continues to be fit for purpose in the 21st century, and if it isn't, what might a reimagined membership look like?

### Time for change?

My own view is that the inherited model is straining at the seams. As a Regional Minister I find that the membership statistics for some churches bear no resemblance to the attendance on a Sunday morning – and it works both ways. Sometimes the congregation

is much bigger than the membership, with many people attending regularly and actively participating in the life of the church – but for some reason choosing not to become members. On other occasions the congregation is much smaller than the stated number of members – with people who have moved away, or are no longer in regular attendance, still being counted. In both cases the membership has become a 'virtual reality' with no correlation to the true situation.

Some churches, realising that this is the case, have experimented by talking about partnership instead, or by introducing an annual renewal of membership. At a special covenant service, often on the first Sunday in January, the members recommit themselves to God and to the ministry

and mission of the church. Other churches, perhaps more dedicated to the inherited model, have sought to introduce membership courses so that those who come from a non-Baptist background can understand and engage better.

**New models**

These approaches have had varying degrees of success in established congregations but, it seems to me, even more reimagining needs to be done in order for us to find models of membership that will be appropriate for the congregations that are emerging as a consequence of pioneering. This is the case for the new churches planted as a result of incarnational ministry, for example the Urban Expression teams, as well as for the fresh expressions that develop as an outcome of the missional activity of an existing church.

In pioneering church plants there can often be an emphasis on working with the local community in ways that might require the setting up of a charity, and the associated appointment of trustees, even before a worshipping community has begun to take shape. The charitable incorporated organisation (CIO) structure is a new development which helps to limit the liability. The processes involved in this aren't appropriate for every church, but a growing number of pioneering plants are finding this is working for them.

The challenge is slightly different for existing churches who have started a Messy Church, a Café Church or some other

type of fresh expression. Whilst some churches see these as stepping stones into 'proper' church, done correctly a fresh expression should mature into a connected, yet distinct, congregation. But what does membership look like where there is one church with multiple congregations? Can you only become a member if you come to the main Sunday morning service, or is membership also open to those who come to faith through the fresh expression and are regular in their commitment to that congregation?

There are more questions than answers at the moment, but we need to be open to discovering new models of membership that are fit for our changing context. I believe, if we are to flourish as a Baptist family, the years ahead will require us to do some reimagining...

**Simon Goddard** is the Co-ordinator of the Pioneer Collective, and a Regional Minister in the Eastern Baptist Association



If you want to know more about the *mission-shaped ministry course*, and in particular the online version being facilitated by the Pioneer Collective, visit [www.missionshapedministry.org/online](http://www.missionshapedministry.org/online)

To know more about *pioneering* visit [www.pioneercollective.org.uk](http://www.pioneercollective.org.uk), call 0845 475 4003 or email Simon at [simon.goddard@easternbaptist.org.uk](mailto:simon.goddard@easternbaptist.org.uk)



What might a new model of membership look like? Share thoughts at [www.baptist.org.uk/reimagining](http://www.baptist.org.uk/reimagining)

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Church painting created by a thousand hands at Bromley Baptist Church's 150th anniversary street party

What happened when a church discerned that membership was a lifestyle to be opted into, rather than a process that happened behind the closed doors of visits and votes at church meetings? By **Simon Jones**

Baptists have often described themselves as covenant people, but often that sense of being committed to relationship and journey seems to be missing from our expressions of membership. So, when we were reviewing the way we welcomed people into membership at a leaders' meeting almost a decade ago, many expressed misgivings at the way we did things.

In particular, two things caused anxiety. The first was that we 'subjected potential members to a grilling', as one long-serving elder put it. We visited their home and asked questions (some of them needlessly intrusive) about their lives. Then we asked the church meeting to vote on their suitability to join us on the basis of a report produced by the visitors (at which the prospective members were not

present). I pointed out that this was long-standing Baptist practice, but some were increasingly uneasy about it. The second was that I was having a lively discussion on my blog about baptism and its relationship with church membership. A whole range of views were expressed and it left me with a growing uneasiness about what we were doing.

And there was a third factor sneaking in to our conversations (both in church and online). It was something that I'd been wrestling with for the best part of a decade since writing the first version of *Building a Better Body*<sup>1</sup>. If we believed that people should belong in our community while they were sorting what they believed, at what point did membership (as Baptists conceived it) come into the picture?

For some Baptists, the answer to that is simple: people become members after they've come to faith and expressed that in baptism. But increasingly we were finding people with complex journeys to faith, ebbing and flowing from church involvement and lives of discipleship.

All this led to us asking some fundamental questions about membership: what is it? who is it for? how should it be practised? We were sure that our answers had to do with helping people become disciples of Jesus.

Reading the gospels we discovered that Jesus' disciples similarly ebbed and flowed in their faith and understanding of who Jesus was and what he was up to. We read Acts and the letters and found that various pictures were

<sup>1</sup> ISBN: 978-18507 8745 7

used to describe the gatherings of Jesus' followers – family, household, fellowship; we further discovered that 'membership' of these groups was fluid with people coming and going because they were curious, attracted, keen to find out more.

We came to the view that membership was something people opted into rather than something that happened behind the closed doors of visits and votes at church meetings. More than that, we realised that membership was not a decision we made on a particular evening but a lifestyle we adopted; membership was about belonging and belonging was about sorting out belief together.

So, we composed a covenant and put it to the church meeting for their views. We also shared it with others who came to the church, indeed who had come for some time but never expressed an interest in 'becoming members'. The church meeting was pretty positive, if a little nervous about how it would work. Those who hadn't become members were universally positive; many said, "oh yes; this is what we feel about being here, it's why we come".

In the light of this, we adopted a new way of doing membership. The covenant, along with our ethos and

values statement, is available to anyone coming to the church. It becomes part of the conversation that our welcome and ministry teams have with those who have made a few visits and begun to get to know people. At some point in the conversation, we ask whether they agree with the words they've read and thought about. If they do, they sign the covenant declaration and we welcome them as members at the next communion service. Then every year – usually on Pentecost Sunday – we renew the commitment we have made by affirming together the covenant as part of our worship that day.

by affirming the covenant,  
we are agreeing to make  
ourselves accountable to  
one another for the way  
we live as followers of  
Jesus

The covenant expresses our individual desire to walk as a follower of Jesus in company with the others similarly committed to this life at  
**Bromley Baptist**

**Church.** It means that by affirming the covenant, we are agreeing to make ourselves accountable to one another for the way we live as followers of Jesus. We encourage people to make this part of the conversation we have with each other over refreshments that take place in the middle of our gatherings.

we realised that  
membership was not a  
decision we made on a  
particular evening but  
a lifestyle we adopted;  
membership was about  
belonging and belonging  
was about sorting out  
belief together

There is no rule about being baptised to be a member – though we do insist that trustees are baptised as believers – but our ethos and values statement strongly urges everyone in membership with us to consider baptism as part of being a disciple of Jesus.

We still have a long way to go on this journey. But handling membership in this way has opened up all sorts of avenues of conversation much earlier in people's lives with us; we're able to talk about gifts and talents, skills and interests as part of conversations about how the church operates. And these often become the catalyst to people wanting to join. We listen to their stories and hear what contribution they could be making to our life together. We have become a more multi-voiced church as a result, active in more areas of mission and ministry and involving more people. Long may the adventure continue.

**Simon Jones** is ministry team leader of the Baptist Church, Bromley. He is an author, teaches New Testament at Spurgeon's College and blogs at a *A Sideways Glance* (<http://bromleyboy.blogspot.co.uk>)



Photo: Dave Herriman



## Different approaches to covenant



Photo: James Karran

### Llan

The concept of covenant has been part of Christian tradition since the earliest days, writes accredited Baptist minister **James Karran**, the Cardiff-based leader of a new monastic community called Llan.

The 1st century Christian text of *The Didache* reveals that those who wanted to explore becoming a follower of *The Way* were asked, after a lengthy period of training, to live according to 'The Way of Life' as opposed to 'The Way of Death'. By necessity this also involved committing to be in community with those who had also 'chosen Life', for accountability, encouragement, and a communal witness.

Over the centuries this notion of covenant, centered around a commitment to discipleship, has been adopted by many Christian traditions, including monasticism and anabaptism, and is the principle underlying Llan's approach to community. We too commit to living by a 'way of life' as Christ's apprentices, which is our summary of Jesus' teaching and example. Our 'way of life' consists of three aspects: hospitality, blessing and journeying, and commitment to these is the glue that binds our community together.

**Watchet Baptist Church** in Somerset moved to a more covenantal system of membership with an annual Covenant Service on Pentecost Sunday.

It continues to discern the mind of Christ as a church through prayerful discussion among those who are Partners (its new name for 'Members') but decision-making within a congregational system of church government is no longer the primary 'point' of membership. Instead, being a Partner of the church reflects those who are a 'part' of the church family, in relationship with God, each other and those in the wider communities in which we live.

Minister **Carl Smethurst** says, "Whilst I am convinced that no change of membership system will be the key which unlocks 'revival on these shores', I feel sure that reclaiming a more covenantal understanding of how we relate to each other will strengthen us together as disciples of Jesus and enable us to more effectively join him in his mission and see his Kingdom come."

For full story visit: [www.baptist.org.uk/watchet](http://www.baptist.org.uk/watchet)



Photo: Watchet Baptist Church



Photo: Richard Shorter

**Church1v23** in Harold Hill, London is a new expression of church working with predominately unchurched and dechurched folk. It meets once a week on Friday for a church meal, where those gathered share communion.

Membership is based around an annual renewable covenant model. Seeking advice from the Baptist Union Corporation (BUC) and the Eastern Baptist Association, Church1v23 made steps to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), a new form of legal entity designed for non-profit organisations in the UK.

"We wanted to aim for a discipleship community, with a commitment to follow Jesus," explains Richard Shorter, who leads the church with wife Alison. "We are trying to get people to learn to covenant together, to be a discerning community, to give people a voice."

"In our constitution you won't see much difference in our paperwork to perhaps a more traditionally shaped Baptist church, but you'd see a lot of difference in the way we practise the 'church meeting' elements, while at the same time trying to hold to the same theological values and principles."

For full story visit: [www.baptist.org.uk/haroldhill](http://www.baptist.org.uk/haroldhill)



# Covenant Leadership

**Israel Olofinjana** was a member of the *Ignite Project*, the latest phase of our Baptist Union's review into how we identify, equip and support our ministers and leaders. He reflects on what led him - a Nigerian with a Pentecostal background - to becoming a Baptist minister in the UK, and the work of *Ignite* in relation to covenant

## Why I became a Baptist minister

As someone from an African Pentecostal background one of the reasons I became a Baptist minister was the accountability factor. This ensures that the minister is not only in a covenant relationship with and accountable to the local church, but is also in covenant and therefore accountable to the association and Union.

An example of the minister's accountability to the local church is the covenant relationship enacted during worship at induction services. My last induction was at **Woolwich Central Baptist Church** and on the right are some of the words which described a covenant relationship. I used the words in plain text while the congregation at Woolwich used the words in bold font:



Photo: Woolwich Central Baptist Church

Praying for Israel and his wife Lucy at his induction service

Today we stand with each other.

**recognising the Christ in our midst.**

affirming our faith in the God who loves us with a love that transforms us.

**and who calls us to work for a transformed world.**

Today we stand with each other,

**recognising the Christ in each other,**

affirming the calling of the Spirit

**who has brought us together this day.**

Today I bring myself and the gifts I have, and I covenant to serve and encourage this church and community; to respect and care for you, to journey with you, to take responsibility among you, to seek God with you, to listen to God in you, and to work with you to be Christ in this world.

**Today we bring ourselves and the gifts we have, and we covenant to serve and encourage this church and community:**

**to respect and care for each other, to take responsibility for the people we are and the people we hope to be in Christ, and to encourage you as our minister as we make this journey together.**

(Induction service taken from *Gathering for Worship*)



This clearly describes a covenant relationship between the pastor and the church, but also involves our Union and Associations, with regional ministers present to affirm this covenant.

**The Ignite Project**

If the priesthood of all believers, a key Baptist principle, is anchored in covenant theology, what implications does this have for Baptist ministers today? In terms of understanding accredited ministry as a covenant relationship, the *Ignite Project* explored three fundamental questions:

- 1 What sort of ministries will we need in the future?
- 2 What support will these ministries need?
- 3 What of these should be done locally, regionally and nationally?

The first question is trying to affirm what many have been saying for years: Baptist accredited ministry can no longer be reduced to the role of pastor-teacher, as our changing contexts need different types of ministries. Those who are pioneers and also people called to bi-vocational ministries.

The second question is trying to raise the level of support we give to these ministries by redefining how we support ministry. However, whatever structures and partnerships we put in place, the local church is still the foundational place for ministry support. Therefore it is essential that we invest in our local churches through proactively promoting and encouraging a foundation in Christian leadership that will equip leaders in our churches, develop a local church



code of practice that enables ministry to flourish, help churches to understand their responsibility in supporting ministers and ministries, and create opportunities to explore the call to ministry with young people.

The third question addresses the sharing of responsibility of how we support ministry that leads to proper accountability of all our structures. This is to help us re-imagine how we recognise and develop ministry.

The *Ignite Project* suggested the following:

- » An integrated ministerial recognition that is consistent and responsive;
- » Formation partnerships that will recognise the relationships between an academic community and those who support ministry on the ground, building on the effective collaboration already taking place between associations, colleges and other groups such as Urban Expression and Pioneer Collective;
- » Training and support of bi-vocational ministries;
- » And the introduction of a new benchmark for affirming an individual’s call to ministry called ‘Marks of Ministry’, a term that expresses less of an interest in what individuals can do, in favour of an emphasis on who they are and why they do what they do.



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**Lost covenant**

Some of these suggestions have arisen because we have lost our covenant relationship in some cases. We have not recognised and enabled those with pioneer ministries such as prophets (those called to inspire us about God's idea of justice and challenge us with uncomfortable truths of the Gospel) and apostles (those called to pioneer new areas of ministry and embody in their ministries certain Gospel convictions) to function properly within our Union. Some with these giftings have therefore left or created their own space, so that they are not accountable to us.

As someone whose spirituality and ministerial formation were shaped by African Pentecostalism, I believe in the fivefold ministry gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher as stated in Ephesians 4:11-13. I would encourage that our structures of accredited ministries change to embrace all these gifts so that they can flourish under a covenant relationship. For instance we have to ensure that we don't try to pigeon-hole people called to pioneer ministries into a full-time stipendiary role of a pastor-teacher. In other instances, we need to recognise those in our midst whom God has used to birth new

Apostolic ministries and movements. We need structures flexible enough to understand and support people called into bi-vocational ministry and missional emerging contexts. This is what the *Ignite Project* sought to convey.

The second implication is that our interdependence has to move from lip service to practice so that it is not only ministers that are accountable to the Union, but that all within our structures (Baptist Steering Group, Ministries team, associations, colleges and others) operate in a spirit that embraces review and accountability. Our covenant with each other has to be a mutual commitment and accountability that interacts, participates and engages all of us. This is what it means to operate in covenant leadership.

**Israel Olofinjana** is the minister of Woolwich Central Baptist Church and Director of the Centre for Missionaries from the Majority World. He is a Nigerian with a Pentecostal background, and the author of *Turning the Tables on Mission* and *Partnership in Mission: A Black Majority Church Perspective on Mission and Church Unity*



For more on the Ignite Project and its findings, visit:  
[www.baptist.org.uk/ignite](http://www.baptist.org.uk/ignite)



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# The Practical

Belonging to Baptists Together gives access to a range of practical expertise that is equipping our churches for mission. It could be advice in organising accounts, receiving guidance on various legal, property and charity issues, providing loans to fund major building projects or a whole host of other issues that crop up in the life of a church.



Photo: Emsworth Baptist Church

## Emsworth Baptist Church, Hampshire

*'Enables our fellowship to have an appropriate and effective ministry in his name'*

Emsworth Baptist Church in Hampshire has benefited from the Baptist Union Loan Fund: a loan of £500,000 enabled the building of new premises that had been originally dreamt of in 2001, when members were stirred by a vision of more space. Since its inception, the congregation has faithfully and financially supported the project, and the Baptist Union loan ensured completion of the £1.9m development.

"We are deeply grateful to the Baptist Union, and in particular to the Loan Fund Team, who were extremely helpful in all the communications we had with them," said minister Joel Ferreira. "The project would not have been completed on time without their loan assistance."

"The design of the new building significantly reflects the glory of Christ and enables our fellowship to have an appropriate and effective ministry in his name. This ministry is enhanced by modern facilities that express the warmth of our heart to make disciples and serve our community. It is a safe place for people to explore their spirituality in a rich variety of ways."

For more information about the Baptist Union Loan Fund, including more stories of churches helped, visit:

[www.baptist.org.uk/loans](http://www.baptist.org.uk/loans)

## Chipping Norton Baptist Church

*'A win-win situation for all'*

Legal advice has enabled one Baptist church in Oxfordshire to not only renovate its 19th century premises in a sustainable and community-focused way, but also provide a template for other churches struggling with old and inefficient buildings. Renovation work on Chipping Norton Baptist Church, originally completed in 1816 but crumbling after years of neglect, began last May and will provide the small Baptist community there with a beautifully restored worship centre as well as a focus for its outreach activities. The church has received legal guidance and support from the Baptist Union Corporation, on account of the latter acting as property trustees for the building, and due to the building's grade-2 listed status.

But there's more: financially the development is being made possible by the addition of eight affordable apartments in a community that sorely lacks them. It's being carried out by B&R Developments, a small company set up specifically for this purpose after partnerships with traditional property developers failed to bear fruit.

Joe Rice is both a deacon and one of those behind B&R. He explained that the developers see the project as a 'win-win situation for all'. "Not only does the church receive a restored beautiful building for their worship and communal activity, but the project is also providing eight affordable homes in a location that is desperate for good housing," he said.

B&R is now hoping to take on similar projects which can also benefit churches and their communities.

Contact: [office@bandrltd.com](mailto:office@bandrltd.com)  
Tel: 01608 641600

Joe Rice in Chipping Norton Baptist Church



Photo: Simon Williams

To find out about the full range of legal and financial support available in our Baptist Union, visit:

[www.baptist.org.uk/supportservices](http://www.baptist.org.uk/supportservices)





Photo: Stuart Wood

## Five features of churches working together fruitfully

Jim Currin of the ecumenical organisation *Churches Together in England* shares some observations

1

### Focus on the local community rather than the church

I have often reflected on my own ecumenical journey and written about 'tectonic plates' of change. I remember well discussions about what size and how many cups to use at Communion, and whether there would be Ecumenical Bishops. I even remember in one Anglican Church Council meeting about a carpet colour someone commented: "You can't have blue because that's a Methodist colour."

Important though theological dialogue might be, these are not the main issues today. With regards to mission and unity the focus has moved from 'church' to 'local community'.

Huge initiatives in 2012 illustrated the changing landscape with the Queen's Jubilee weekend 'Big Lunch' and all the mission initiatives which followed with the Olympic Games. Churches were naturally coming together – sometimes in large numbers – as they served the local community.



Add to that Food Banks, Street Pastors, Night Shelters, credit advice and a myriad of social engagement projects and millions of pounds added to the national economy by volunteer hours of local Christians, it becomes clear that the focus of our ecumenical endeavour is the local community with our prayer being for transformation and the coming kingdom. In this regard, remember Oecumene means 'whole inhabited earth'.

'Being ecumenical' was never intended to be just about inter church relations.

**difference is not to be ignored or reconciled, so much as to be recognised and celebrated**

2

### Recognising our connectedness

We know we belong to the Body of Christ but sometimes need to be reminded. 'The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you" ... On the contrary,' says St Paul, 'those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour' (1 Corinthians 12: 21-23a). As followers and disciples of Jesus we are connected as brothers and sisters. It is a great joy when the gift of the 'other' is recognised.

There are many ways used to describe our Christian connectedness. 'Covenant' is one, while 'fellowship' is another. Interestingly, at a national level, other words are used too. Baptists will be familiar with 'Union', while other churches use the following: Army, Society, Federation, Communion, Connexion, Conference, and Exarchate. Do you know who uses which?



Churches Together in Huddersfield: Street Angels

Photo: Philip Clements-Jewery



Gateshead Foodbank

Photo: Ian Britton

**3**

**Celebrating our differences**

There has been much written about the goal of 'visible unity' but that seems to be changing. Some, like Keith Clements in *Ecumenical Dynamic* (WCC 2013 p13) speak of this as an 'ecumenical winter' as 'structural unity' seems to be off the agenda. Others, including Pope Francis in a recent video about Catholic Protestant relationships, (paraphrased) says, 'don't wait', but 'walk, pray and work together now'.

Many church leaders recognise that we will never agree about a whole host of issues that have previously divided the Body of Christ, even within individual churches and fellowships. How healthy and refreshing it is then to hear and read that difference is not to be ignored or reconciled, so much as to be recognised and celebrated.

This shift in emphasis opens the door to all sorts of new arrangements, partnerships, and covenants. It is perhaps one reason why the General Secretary of Churches Together in England has described the current growth as an 'ecumenical spring'.

Photo: Derek Cooper



Churches Together in Waterloo: Good Friday Walk of Witness

**4**

**Fruit is of the Holy Spirit**

In John 15, we read, 'I am the vine and you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit' (v5) - a theme picked up again in Galatians 5.

Today, in the light of significant movements for word and deed mission, like *Hope* that celebrates 'doing more and doing it together', there is much discussion about how we name the name of Jesus and share our faith so others believe. Recent research *Talking Jesus* suggests 1 in 5 people may be interested in hearing more about Jesus from their Christian family and friends: I believe that will happen naturally if we pray for the Holy Spirit who sends us. 'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses' as we are reminded in Acts 1:8.

**'Being ecumenical' was never intended to be just about inter church relations**

**5**

**Prayer is always the key**

Billy Graham would always say there were three essentials to evangelism: 'The first is prayer. The second is prayer. The third is prayer'. My own book *Sharing Faith the Jesus Way* suggests that every Christian can share their faith and the best way is to follow the Master/Teacher. The main reason I don't always witness is because I have not held people in prayer.

Prayer is a dangerous thing. Always full of surprises and unexpected fruit, it makes us responsive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit in response to Jesus' own prayer. Significantly, a number of new unity mission movements are growing with prayer as their key focus. The Archbishop of Canterbury with his new *Community of St Anselm* at Lambeth Palace is one example, as are other 'new monastic communities' that keep prayer as key to mission. Prayer groups for neighbourhoods, schools, police as well as *Global/National Day of Prayer* and large prayer gatherings praying for 'transformation' are several more. All these initiatives bring Christians together from different traditions and empower us for mission.

**Jim Currin** is a commissioned Church Army Evangelist in the Church of England. Currently he serves in Evangelisation, Mission and Media at Churches Together in England. His book *Sharing Faith the Jesus Way* is published by Bible Reading Fellowship



# Loving your neighbour

Photo: Layton Thompson/Bible Society



Being a covenant people means being a blessing to others – and seeking justice is at its heart, writes **Wale Hudson Roberts**

## The death of Jesus heralded a new covenant between God and his people

Whether we read, 'the blood of the covenant poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins', from Matthew 26: 28, or 'the new covenant in my blood poured out for you', from Luke 22:20, Jesus was affirming that his death was the means by which the new covenant, the kingdom of God, would become a living reality.

## A sign of this new covenant relationship is justice

To love your neighbour as yourself is a central narrative in the teaching of Jesus. Indeed, this way of relating should drive our moral universe, inform and shape our foreign policies and act as a barometer for diplomatic relationships.

Theologians have attempted to articulate what this means. According to Joel Edwards, former General Director of the Evangelical Alliance, 'holiness, righteousness and justice form a trinity of interpersonal virtues by which the holiness 'accounted' to us exclusively through faith in Jesus, expresses itself communally in Christian neighbourliness and becomes translated in our biblical response to institutional or systemic evil.'

Or to adopt the sentiments of Wesley, 'the Gospel of Christ knows no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness'.

The Apostle Paul develops this idea. In his letter to the Romans, he settles for crafting its structure around justice. The word 'justifying' could rightly be rendered 'righteousness-ing' – God bringing righteousness to birth in us. The word righteousness is too often wrapped in narrow, nearly myopic confines. Biblical righteousness is broad. It refers not only to moral purity. It is expansive. It is communally orientated too. Or to use the words of Proverbs, 'righteousness exalts a nation but sin condemns any people.' This suggests that righteousness of religion should have private and public benefit.

## What does this 'being a new covenant people' look like?

Martin Luther King, one of the world's most respected Baptist theologians, put it this way, "We are called to play the Good Samaritan on life's roadside but that will be only an initial act... True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring."

There are many very current examples of unjust edifices: the UK committing

to taking in just 20,000 Syrian refugees over a period of five years when countries like Lebanon are hosting much more; the refusal to even process asylum applications for refugees languishing in Calais, some of whom have relatives already in the UK and therefore a right to be here; the dangerous shift from the core principle of the welfare state that the amount families receive in benefits should be sufficient to meet their basic needs. In all these examples, Baptists have sought to voice their concerns and lobby for change.

As a New Covenant people we are encouraged to integrate holiness, righteousness and justice, both in our vocabulary and our actions. To have a religion where these virtues are not working is to have a Christian faith which fails to care for the widows, the orphans, the elderly, the abused, those caught up in a youth gang culture.

Conversely, to have a faith that embraces the three mentioned qualities is to have a faith which upholds the rule of law, religious freedom, human rights, human dignity and human flourishing.

**Wale Hudson-Roberts** is the Justice Enabler for our Union





# The Highest Goal

From its very foundation **BMS World Mission** has worked to share God's covenant love to the far corners of the earth. It continues to do so through six distinct ministries

**BMS World Mission** has been taking the message of Jesus Christ into the world for more than 200 years. The organisation of mission personnel, planning of trips, financing, support and publicity have evolved through the years, keeping BMS relevant to the time, yet focused on its overall vision.

Its vision was encapsulated in its strategy document published in 2014, which stated: *'The Highest Goal of all we do is to bring people to faith in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and an experience of the abundant life that only he can provide.'*

The vision comes from Jesus' own words. His claim, 'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full' (John 10:10b), is bound up in his great commission given at the end of his life on earth: 'Go and make disciples of all nations'.

Just as we are all specially equipped for service, so there are many different ways of serving. BMS, currently

supporting between 350 and 400 personnel in about 35 countries around the world, delivers this vision through six distinct ministries.

## Church ministries

The Bible knows nothing of lone Christians, but rather of faithful communities of believers who follow Jesus together. BMS is committed to partnering with local churches which take many different forms and expressions, including supporting and equipping church planters as they seek the growth of the church in places where there is none.

## Development ministries

BMS believes that people should know Christ and that, whilst the gospel message of salvation is key, it must also find expression in bringing life in all its fullness through practical ministry to the vulnerable. Development ministries aim to re-establish God-given dignity by providing economic opportunity, community resilience and freedom from abuse.

## Education ministries

Across the world there are many schools and colleges that were begun by BMS pioneer missionaries. The early missionaries recognised the importance of education as a means of sharing the gospel. Today education is seen as no less important, as a tool of liberation and empowerment and also a way to disciple and encourage young people.

## Health ministries

BMS is committed to health and medical work with nationals, either through sending personnel or by supporting national workers financially - providing training and resources. The goal is to bring health and wholeness to the lives of people. Its health ministries help to prevent sickness and provide care for the ill and dying in desperately poor situations around the world.

## Justice ministries

As mission involves revealing God's character to the world, BMS would be remiss if it did not communicate God's characteristic of justice. It seeks to send people into justice mission and to empower local believers.

BMS conducts high profile campaigns which draw attention to global injustices like disability exclusion and human trafficking. However, to bring lasting change, we concentrate on bringing the cause of the vulnerable to places of power where change can occur.

## Leadership

Jesus invested time in training leaders such as Peter and John. The Apostle Paul invested in training leaders such as Timothy. Good leadership is vital to the strength of churches. BMS devotes time and energy to equipping leaders in both churches and partner organisations who are seeking to make Christ known.



Find out more about how BMS is working through its six ministries on [www.bmsworldmission.org](http://www.bmsworldmission.org)

Sign up for its weekly email: [www.bmsworldmission.org/news-blogs/weekly-email-update](http://www.bmsworldmission.org/news-blogs/weekly-email-update)



# Covenant and belonging within the European Baptist Federation



European Baptists hail from greatly differing cultures, but share a depth of unity

Lebanon Zahle School children

In many parts of Europe the concept and the language of 'covenant' has not formed Baptists in quite the same way as in the UK, at least not explicitly. But all the elements are there in the life of the **European Baptist Federation (EBF)**; the prior calling of God to be his covenant people, the desire to live together under the rule of Christ, the 'walking together in ways known and to be made known' and the covenant people seeking to be a blessing to the world.

The movement of God's Spirit among us calling us together is seen in the amazing diversity of the almost 60 member Unions, Conventions and churches that make up the EBF. We have over 30 languages, and greatly differing cultures, theologies and ways of being Baptist. It should just not happen that we can gather together under the same roof and find the depth of unity and koinonia that we do. That we do so is a testimony to the sheer grace of God, enabling us to 'preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace'.

But we not only come together in the same space. When we gather our leaders for our annual Council, most recently in Sofia, Bulgaria, we find we are able to collectively seek the mind of Christ for what we can do together, even with our differences and diversity.

One example of this would be that, together, we have resolved to provide the resources to enable gifted men and women to plant new churches in Europe and the Middle East. Over the past 12 years we have planted over 200 new congregations, with an estimated 10,000 new believers coming to faith in Christ through their ministry.

Of course there are times when our ability to handle diversity among us is challenged, for instance in our differing views concerning the ministry of women. But the recent election of our BUGB President Jenni Entrican as only the second woman EBF Vice-President showed how we can disagree about the issue and still reassure one another that we can stay in fellowship.

And we have sought to be outward facing, using what we have experienced together of God's covenant love to share it further with the world.

At our Council in Sofia in September we listened to one another as we described honestly and openly our very different experiences of the refugee crisis in Europe and the response of our churches and Unions. We turned to the Scriptures for support and guidance and sought the mind of Christ together. As a result we agreed to 'map' what is happening by and through our churches, to set up a Task Group to see where together we can best focus our own resources, and the offers of help from elsewhere in the Baptist world.

In these and many other ways the members of the EBF continue to covenant to 'walk together' in the light of Christ.

Tony Peck is General Secretary of the European Baptist Federation



Lebanon Food Distribution Office



Church Plant in Poznan

Photos: European Baptist Federation



# Lee Abbey

Christian Community



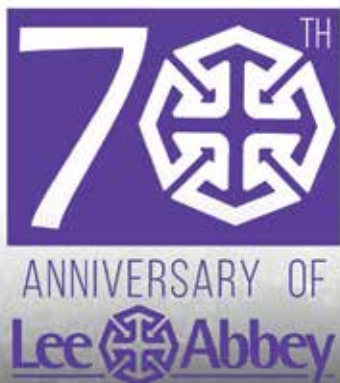
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 All I have within me, I give You praise  
 All that I adore is in You

# Short time, huge impact



Long distance friendships, nurturing teaching and opportunities to grow: Rebecca Tooms explains why Innovation – the youth stream at the Baptist Assembly – has been crucial to her growth as a Christian.

I remember being first involved in 'Innovation' when it was held in Bournemouth in 2009. Right from day one I've always felt that it welcomes you as a friend, nurtures you as an individual and then says goodbye to you as a part of the family. Even though the friends I've made there are scattered around the country, we are joined together in heart and spirit by God.

These friends have been the greatest support and inspiration for me, and why I no longer feel alone in my walk of faith as a young person. It's often hard to grow up as a Christian when most of your friends don't believe in the things you do, and the friends made at Innovation have always been there for me during the hard times. I have to thank 'Innovation' for that too, because they encouraged the small group work, and organised the times when we were able to pray together.

It's not just about the friendships. The talks and the leaders have always been there to answer the questions that can sometimes present obstacles for us as Christians. I've felt God speak and connect with me during the sessions; hearing people's testimonies, listening to the talks, watching short dramas, and especially through the music played. I have always left 'Innovation' feeling inspired, refreshed and encouraged to go out and share the Good News; as I've become older and developed friendships with my leaders, my passion for Christ has increased.

This became evident to me last year in Peterborough when 'Innovation' was incorporated into one of the main sessions. I remember Joy Clark (an Innovation leader) speaking about the people and pastors who have died, and yet left their marks on us. We related this to our pastors today, and the people who are sharing Jesus now, and

followed this with a discussion about welcoming the pastors and linking this with youth. This exemplified the idea that we are the next generation to share the news of Jesus and what he has done in our lives, so that we too can leave behind foundations to support the future generations of Christians coming after us. Being a part of this talk made me feel valued and involved in Baptist Assembly and the wider family of God.

I also felt privileged when I was asked to read the closing prayer, as this not only ended the Assembly for another year but also closed another fantastic year for me at 'Innovation'. I came out of that arena with a massive smile on my face, and I remember just talking all the way back whilst feeling excited and driven to be a disciple of Jesus. I felt encompassed by his love and joy and was ready to be baptised (which took place in July 2015).

It's fair to say that 'Innovation' has been the guidance, support and extra kick that I have needed to make my faith real and active in my life. It's amazing how even though the time we spent together is short, the impact and influence that it has had on our lives will always remain with us.

**Rebecca Tooms** is studying a BEd (Hons) in Primary Education, and is a member of Tabernacle Baptist Church, Wolverhampton



Photo: Ian Britton

Local churches are not called to live in isolation. Local and regional groups will network and share fellowship for mutual encouragement and support. At a national level, we do this as the Baptist Union, Baptists Together, a national expression of the Body of Christ and a covenanting fellowship of churches, associations and colleges. We are intentional in our fellowship: we share resources and support new initiatives through Home Mission, we support one another through regional associations and we meet face to face in annual assembly.

In assembly, we gather to worship God and to seek his will for our life and witness together. We network with old friends and we encounter people we don't know but who join with us in making up this particular expression of the Body of Christ, Baptists Together. We organise meetings to inform and stimulate, we hold debates to sharpen our understanding, and we share meals and swap stories together. Above all, we worship together - as praise and



confession, intercession and scripture, shape and direct our shared life and witness.

In recent years the shape and scope of the assembly has varied. For many years, it was a series of services and

business meetings mainly assembling in London. In more recent years, in partnership with BMS World Mission, it has had something of the character of a Christian conference, with a residential experience enriching fellowship and a comprehensive menu of fringe meetings, special interest groups and exhibitions, alongside the formal business of BUGB and BMS. Currently, we are in the middle of a three-year experiment of doing assembly in just one day each year - so watch this space as we pray and evaluate both our experience of assembly and our hopes for it.

But in all this we need to hold on to our vision of how assembly helps us - to be open to God, to encourage one another in discipleship and mission, and to gather intentionally to celebrate and pray for the coming Kingdom of God.

**Chris Ellis** is a former Baptist Union President



Photo: Adam Green



# Sharing God's diverse kingdom

Teenager Isabel Green reflects on the impact of attending the Baptist World Alliance Congress in July, the global gathering of Baptists that takes place every five years

'What did you think about the Baptist World Alliance and the global family of Baptists before you went to the BWA Congress?'

The honest answer to that question was that I just didn't really think about it. Our society is so individualistic that we are often too focused on our own church as an isolated community, but BWA helped me realise that God is longing for us to view ourselves as an integrated community rather than an isolated one.

I was particularly struck by the variety of languages spoken at the Congress. Every time we heard a Bible passage it would be read in the mother tongue of whoever was reading it. Absolutely beautiful. I really felt God emphasised

this to me as if he was showing me a foretaste of heaven. The beauty and diversity of God's kingdom I find absolutely amazing. This is what it will be like in heaven; God's people joining together in one united voice with praises rising up to him in every language.

But I also found this a challenge. How are we sharing this beauty and diversity? One meeting I attended was a regional gathering of the European Baptist Federation. The challenges that some of the churches are facing really make you think. It reminded me that, too often, we sit here as Christians and say 'well, sharing the good news of Jesus is hard.' And we are right, but we are missing the key bit. 'It's hard, but with you, Jesus, we can do it anyway.'



With the power that we have in the almighty God who loves us and helps us, is it really that difficult to overcome our own fears for the glory of the kingdom?

Knowing and understanding that Baptists form a large, global family has shown me the importance of building relationships with people beyond the walls of my own church and how powerful those relationships can be when we make a stand as one body with genuine love, even on a local scale. Since the Congress the youth group at my church, **Wokingham Baptist Church**, have been building relationships with the other local youth groups, from different denominations, through getting together for youth prayer meetings and having breakfast together once a month and it has been amazing. God designed us to be in relationship with our local, national and global Christian community and when God's plans come together it really is beautiful.

Isabel Green is a member of Wokingham Baptist Church, Berkshire



Photo: Adam Green

# The promises made at a child's dedication

What do our children and young people understand of them?  
And how are they being lived out?



Photo: Jessica Photo

Dedication and infant presentation services offer an opportunity for thanksgiving and commitment of children by their parents and the local community.

*Gathering for Worship* notes that as we present a child before God in the presence of the church community, we:

- give thanks;
- make promises as parents and church concerning the protection and nurture of the child;
- ask God's blessing on the child;
- surround the child and their family with prayer and love;
- and welcome and introduce the child to the church community.

As part of this edition's exploration of covenant, *Baptists Together* magazine wanted to briefly explore the impact of a dedication or infant presentation. Mindful there are different approaches to, as well as varying ages involved in, such services, we simply invited young people in Baptist churches to share their own experiences.



Photo: D P Yancy

## One youth leader's summary

The views of the young people were generally that they felt that having been 'dedicated' at a special service was a positive thing. They understood why their parents thought it was a good thing to do and that it was a chance to invite family to church. Some mentioned that it was a chance to be welcomed to the wider family of the church. While they couldn't give specific examples of how it had made a difference to them, they somehow knew it had. There was also a strong sense of an awareness that they could ask for help or support if they need it, and that the church family is consciously trying to support them.

## Responses

"I was christened, not dedicated because that was in line with what my parents believed at the time, but I've seen children within my church be dedicated and I think it's an amazing way to integrate children into the church and make them part of the family."

"I feel that the promises made by the church allow the church family to commit to share God's love with the child/children and offer support to the child and/or their family by whatever means they can, displaying compassion to them."

"I've been blessed to see many infant dedications during my time as part of Baptist churches and I always love seeing young families come before God. I also find it a massive encouragement when the church then stands together as the extended family in Christ as it affirms that sense of ultimate belonging to him."

"I was not really aware I was dedicated. Yes, I feel that going to the church where I was apparently dedicated had made a difference to me, but I can't explain how."

"I was dedicated and understood that my parents wanted me to be able to choose when ready, to be able to make my own decision about the Christian faith. I thought the dedication was an opportunity for my family to have a party too! But I'm not really aware of the promises made by the church, so am not able to say how or if it is working out."

"I remember the extended family coming to church and

having to stand at the front of church as their immediate family unit. I saw this day as being introduced to the church family and remember it as a good experience!"

"I don't remember my own dedication, but I am pleased my parents chose to have it because I appreciate being allowed to make my choices. I prefer it to a christening service. I've seen other children/babies being dedicated and that is a way of church promising to 'help them along in life'. I wonder if maybe dedication is a way of the church promising to help children and people in their spiritual growth. In terms of the promises made, I know if I need help I can ask for it."

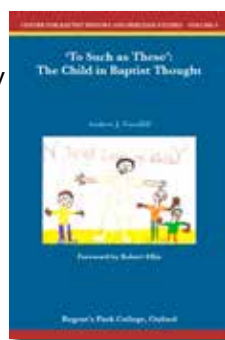
"There are so many different roles taken on within the church, whether these are official with titles or not. I've noticed how many people offer some kind of support, nurturing and encouragement to the children."

"The dedication promises are actively and most obviously upheld in the children's and youth work: these are obvious outreaches to young people and help to achieve inclusion and integration into the church family."

"As a young person myself with a strong faith I think I too share the responsibility to look out for those younger than myself in church or those with younger faiths. To do so often can simply include small things like asking them how their week was, or just having fun with them before, after or during (sometimes) the service so that they can enjoy being at church surrounded by those who love them because God first loved us. [1 John 4:19]"

## Further reading:

*To Such as These: The Child in Baptist Thought* by Andy Goodliff



## Events



### Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

18-25 January

Theme is 'Salt of the Earth'  
<https://ctbi.org.uk/week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity-2016>



### Homeless Sunday

24 January

An opportunity to listen to God about homelessness, and consider the action we are being called to take  
[www.homeless-sunday.org](http://www.homeless-sunday.org)



### BMS World Mission

#### Day of Prayer

1 February

A day to pray for the work of mission, with BMS staff in the UK and around the world  
[www.bmsworldmission.org](http://www.bmsworldmission.org)



### Church Action on Poverty Sunday

7 February

A day to focus on working together to close the gap between rich and poor

[www.church-poverty.org.uk/sunday](http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/sunday)



### Fairtrade fortnight

29 February – 13 March

Events and promotions to make sure the message of Fairtrade is getting a national voice

[www.fairtrade.org.uk](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk)



### Women's World Day of Prayer

4 March

Theme 'Receive children, receive me', written by women in Cuba.

[www.wwdp.org.uk/resources](http://www.wwdp.org.uk/resources)



### Baptist Assembly

14 May

Join us with a group from your church at the 2016 Baptist Assembly in Oxford

[www.baptistassembly.org.uk](http://www.baptistassembly.org.uk)



### Christian Aid Week

15 - 21 May

Support and pray for the work of Christian Aid

[www.christianaid.org.uk/getinvolved/christianaidweek](http://www.christianaid.org.uk/getinvolved/christianaidweek)

## New Resources

### Baptism cards

A new range of six baptism greetings cards, suitable for believers' baptisms.

[www.baptist.org.uk/baptismcards](http://www.baptist.org.uk/baptismcards)

### Welcoming the Stranger

Updated edition to help churches engage theologically and practically with the plight of refugees.

[www.baptist.org.uk/welcomethestranger](http://www.baptist.org.uk/welcomethestranger)

### Multiethnic Church

A six week course for small groups to help develop healthy, integrated churches

[www.baptist.org.uk/multiethnic](http://www.baptist.org.uk/multiethnic)

### Safe to Belong

The safeguarding adults at risk policy is now available by free download

[www.baptist.org.uk/safetobelong](http://www.baptist.org.uk/safetobelong)

### Making a Splash (new edition)

Explores what Christians believe by considering questions often asked when someone is baptised.

[www.baptist.org.uk/splash](http://www.baptist.org.uk/splash)

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An interview with

# Chris Maggs

**Moderator of the Baptist Pension Scheme Trustee Board**

## How did you become a Christian?

My decision to follow Jesus was made when I was eleven years old, but even before that I was very much aware of God. Church was a major part of family life. We attended **Brixham Baptist** in Torbay when I was very young. My Dad was involved in running the youth work and sometimes open-air preaching on the quay.

At the age of seven we swapped Devon for the West Midlands. Again as a family we became immersed into **Tabernacle Baptist** in Wolverhampton and this was a happy spiritual home throughout my teens. It was in the church hall, watching a film about the second coming (it was the 70s after all) that I realised the importance of letting God know whose side I was on. I have not looked back since.

## Where do you currently worship?

My wife and I now live just south of Birmingham and are part of **Dickens Heath Village Church**, a small congregation meeting in a school hall on a fairly new development area. The church has been going for 13 years and we've been involved in various roles over that period. With my financial background it's no surprise I've been the treasurer since we began but, although I love numbers, my real passion is words. I like to be creative and interactive when leading services. I love the fact that Jesus told stories rather than preach three-point sermons.

Unusually, our church has shared denominational links. We are part Baptist and part Fellowship of Churches of Christ. It reflects the backgrounds of the group that first came together to set up the church. We are part of HEBA and have good links with other local Baptist churches.

## You are Moderator of the Pensions Trustees – how did that come about?

I spent 23 years as an actuary and pensions consultant, helping companies manage their pension schemes. Towards the end of that time I had some serious health issues that made me reassess how I should spend my time and my reduced energy levels. I applied for a pension job at BUGB in 2013 with an open mind and heart. I didn't get the job but I was asked to take a voluntary role as a pensions trustee. It fitted well with other opportunities and did not seem too onerous. However, it was the thin end of the wedge!

I am getting nearer the thick end of the wedge now as I have taken on the Moderator role and work around two days a week on different aspects of the Scheme. I do get paid for some of that time, for which I am grateful, but it is a pleasure to bring together the professional experience I have gained and the church world I love being part of.



## In a nutshell, what's your role?

There are so many aspects to running a pension scheme, especially one as complicated as the Baptist Scheme. Most schemes I have dealt with in my career have one employer or a group that's owned by a holding company. In the Baptist Scheme there are around 1,500 independent employers and that creates all sorts of complications in terms of communications, legal issues and administrative complexities. We have some good people working to deliver this on the ground but the Trustee body has oversight and responsibility for it all. My job is to keep on top of everything and make sure my fellow Trustees are kept in the loop and able to make decisions at crucial points.

## What are the challenges faced?

The main challenge is managing the shortfall in the Scheme. It has mainly arisen because of changes in economic conditions over the last ten years. There is a long-term recovery plan in place but the path is not a smooth one. I am very aware of the financial strain it places on many churches in the Baptist family. We are working hard to get the right balance to meet the requirements of pensions law and help churches who are in difficulty.

## Where can churches go for more information?

Unfortunately, some churches get into difficult situations because they do not understand what actions they need to take when, for example, a minister leaves. The Baptist Pension Scheme website ([www.baptistpensions.org.uk](http://www.baptistpensions.org.uk)) has plenty of helpful information so that is a good place to start.

## And when you are not thinking about pensions?

My main creative outlet is writing. I've produced three books in different styles. One is a personal story about living through ill health, another is a humorous fiction about a church drama group, the third is a biography of a contemporary evangelist. I'd say the common theme throughout is honesty. I find too many Christian books leave people feeling inadequate. I like to write about how we pull through the storms, by God's grace, often just clinging onto the wreckage. My current project is a romantic tragedy.

For more from Chris about the Pension Scheme, read this additional interview:  
[www.baptist.org.uk/pensionsinterview](http://www.baptist.org.uk/pensionsinterview)



## The heart of God

*I must confess to being a great fan of the Toy Story films, perhaps because they are some of the few movies that genuinely entertain our whole family. For all the cartoon antics that you expect from such offerings, there are also some reasonably serious plot lines too – and one key theme that regularly emerges is identity and belonging.*

*This is particularly true in Toy Story 2 when Woody is faced with a real dilemma – where does he belong? Is he destined to join the original boxed set of the Roundup Gang or remain part of that eclectic mix, in various states of disrepair, that simply go by the name of ‘Andy’s toys’. Eventually, the latter prevails, if only to ensure that there is a third film in the trilogy.*

*Similar questions of identity often beset us as a Baptist community – who are we? Where do we belong and what are the implications of that? For most of my ministry, part of that answer has been expressed through what many might call ‘social action’. I’ve often found inspiration for that in the biblical texts of Deuteronomy and Leviticus – for all their lengthy, legalistic incantations, they express a vision of community that is laced with social justice, practical care, mutuality and common good.*

*Those early Old Testament texts are wide-ranging, prescriptive and offer plenty to keep us busy, but we are never allowed to forget that at their heart is not some vast social agenda but a simple covenant ‘Love the Lord your God with every ounce of your being’ (if you’ll allow my paraphrase). That same imperative is the foundation of the Gospel story of the Good Samaritan, and of course it is here that Jesus adds “love your neighbour as yourself”.*

*It is easy to simply see ourselves as a people with traditions to maintain, principles to declare, agendas to pursue and tasks to fulfil. But if we lose sight of this covenantal foundation, that we are first and foremost bound to our God and each other in Agape love, then we have lost sight of who we truly are. We speak often of the principles of independence and freedom that our Baptist ancestors fought so hard to establish, yet I wonder if, with time, our perception of that has become skewed.*

*Do we sometimes confuse their stand against a unity that is imposed and legalised in favour of one that is freely expressed through mutual covenant, with a belief that our collective identity doesn’t really matter? God’s word reminds us that the principles of Kingdom faith and social justice emerge from that underlying sense of covenant, and without it, as another New Testament writer once said, it just becomes a noisy clamour.*

**Phil Jump** is the Regional Minister Team Leader at the North Western Baptist Association



## Generous and committed but lacking mentors

**A new report has revealed key concerns for young Christian adults**

*Building tomorrow’s Church: the views and experiences of young adults in the UK Church*, was published by the Evangelical Alliance. It focused on millennial Christians – those aged between 18 and 37.

Despite living in cash-strapped times, millennial Christians are extremely generous, the report found.

A combined total of almost half (47 per cent) give away at least a tenth of their money. Black and Minority Ethnic Christians (BMEs) are markedly more generous – with 60 per cent giving away at least a tenth of their income.

Almost three quarters of respondents stated faith as the most important factor in the decisions they make.

However a quarter of young adults said that older people in their church struggle to relate with them, and a fifth were thinking about leaving.

The Church seems to be doing less well in helping young adults to find a marriage partner and develop leadership skills. Almost a third of respondents said they didn’t have a Christian mentor, or a group of friends they are honest and accountable to about their life and faith, and a third said their church was not really helping them to live out their faith at work.

To find out more, and access the report visit: [www.baptist.org.uk/millennials](http://www.baptist.org.uk/millennials)



## Small Church is a big deal

2015 was been a year of change around our Baptist Union as some Associations took up the challenge of gathering small churches together for days of encouragement, networking, teaching and eating, writes **Hilary Taylor**

Representatives of ten associations met in London in October to feed back.

It was suggested that the Associations hold a variety of events, to ‘scratch where the churches are itching’. What are the local issues? What resources do they lack? Do they want training? What subjects do they want to discuss?

Newsletters and websites were discussed. It was decided to refer people to the LBA website ([londonbaptist.org.uk](http://londonbaptist.org.uk)) **Small Church Connexion** pages for specific good stories and resources. Additional resources include the blog I write for small churches ([smallchurches.wordpress.com](http://smallchurches.wordpress.com)).

Let us celebrate our small churches, which make up half of our denomination, encouraging them to reach out in mission. Many small churches are doing amazing work in Jesus’ name, often on a very limited budget, impacting not only their local communities but also globally.

It really is not about numbers; it’s about health. Let’s think ‘Kingdom’ as we work together and learn from each other across our Baptist Union.

Hilary Taylor is the Small Church Enabler for the London Baptist Association, and a member of **Ashford Common Baptist Church**.

For the full story visit: [www.baptist.org.uk/smallchurch](http://www.baptist.org.uk/smallchurch)



## Mission, ministry and money - Baptist Union Council, October 2015

Three major reports that will develop the strategy of our movement as Baptists Together were shared and discussed at the October Baptist Union Council gathering. The reports focused on our mission (*Fit for Mission*), the leadership and ministry needed for that (*Ignite*) and how we are going to resource it (*Project Loaves and Fishes*).



### Fit for Mission

*Fit for Mission* is an ongoing piece of work assessing and reflecting on the state of our Baptist Union. Stuart Davison, Regional Minister Team Leader of the South Eastern Baptist Association presented what had emerged from the findings of a detailed survey so far.

Many churches responded by stating there was a need for a stronger internal spirituality. "There's a recognition in churches that they don't pray enough; and have a strong, clear vision", said Stuart.

The *Fit for Mission* team will now be undertaking in-depth research with one Association to explore underlying issues and trends.

### Ignite

*Ignite* is a review into ministry established by Council in March. Its key brief was to establish a small team that would consult as widely as possible on all aspects of ministry among Baptists Together.

The group took its findings to Council, where members were invited to feed back on the findings before the report's final publication. (See Israel Olofinjana's feature on p23 for more).

The full report will be available from the Ignite section of the website.

Visit [www.baptist.org.uk/ignite](http://www.baptist.org.uk/ignite)



### Loaves and Fishes

The Loaves and Fishes Project was set up to explore ways to increase income so that our Union might be even more effective in mission.

Following a comprehensive consultation earlier this year, the Project came up with several recommendations, including a renaming of Home Mission and a more compelling communication of our vision as Baptists Together.

The findings and feedback from Council members are being reflected on by the Baptist Steering Group.

For a full Council report visit [www.baptist.org.uk/council](http://www.baptist.org.uk/council)  
To read Lynn Green's reflections on the latest Council meeting visit:  
[www.baptist.org.uk/councilreflection](http://www.baptist.org.uk/councilreflection)  
Baptist Union Council next meets 15-16 March 2016.

# SPRING HARVEST 2016

Spring Harvest

**Join Baptists from around the UK at the perfect mix of holiday, festival, conference and encounter with God.**

There's something for everyone at Spring Harvest, with Bible study and worship for adults, all-age celebrations, children and youth programmes, Splash Waterworld, adventure playgrounds, beaches and more!

The West of England Baptist Association is encouraging member churches to gather at Minehead Three where Malcolm Duncan, Gavin & Anne Calver and WEBA Regional Team Leader Nigel Coles will be among the speakers.

**Join us at Spring Harvest to be inspired and equipped for mission.**

MINEHEAD THREE 6-10 APRIL

FIND OUT MORE AT [SPRINGHARVEST.ORG](http://SPRINGHARVEST.ORG)



# A CHURCH OR COMMUNITY COVENANT PRAYER

(CAN BE USED ON EASTER SUNDAY OR OTHER TIMES)

We meet, Alone and Together, in the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We gather as a Community from many places for this time to be together. Together we celebrate Christ's risen life praying that all the world might know him in his living power and that all people everywhere will hear his story.

We acknowledge the call of God upon our lives and in following Jesus Christ, we leave our old ways and journey in the new life God has called us to embrace.

As a Community of Faith we come together seeking the blessing of God to be upon us this day, that we being blessed, might be a blessing to others in all that we are, in all that we do and in every place where God calls us.

We come, conscious of a world of broken dreams, where dreamers are hard to find and friends are few; to be renewed and rekindled, to dream, to learn, to dance and sing and tell again the wonders of God's story.

**Risen Christ, kindle the flame of your love in our hearts, touch and inspire us with the creative life-giving presence of your Spirit.**

We meet to express and deepen our togetherness and to strengthen our common heart and vision of community. Aware of other Companions and Friends in Community

**Risen Christ, be the Love that unites us.**

**Risen Christ, be the light that guides us.**

**Risen Christ, be the wisdom that directs us.**

**Risen Christ, be the peace that surrounds us.**

**Risen Christ, be the hope that sustains us.**

## CHURCH OR COMMUNITY CONFESSION:

We confess before God our Father, from whom nothing is hidden; who knows and understands us; whose love and compassion is unending and all enveloping and whose grace and mercy forgives.

As a Community, Alone and Together we confess our sins...

**Lord, have mercy upon us.**

For the times we have failed to live out our Rule of Life...

**Lord, have mercy upon us.**

For damaged relationships through misunderstanding and a failure to love...

**Lord, have mercy upon us.**

For our fear and lack of trust... Lord, have mercy upon us.

For wrong attitudes, selfishness and obstructiveness...

**Lord, have mercy upon us.**

For our unwillingness to learn or let go...

**Lord, have mercy upon us.**

For our preference for comfort over calling, accumulation over giving, protectionism over risky living...

**Lord, have mercy upon us.**

When we have been blind to the stranger, deaf to the cries of the poor and indifferent to the needs of one another...

**Lord, have mercy upon us.**

As we humbly confess our sin, so we also receive God's and one another's forgiveness. God's heart is gentle and compassionate towards us. Let the light of God flood our souls and his renewing Spirit heal and restore our lives.

**Risen Christ flood my life, my heart, my soul with love, mercy, kindness and generosity. Risen Christ flood our lives, our Community, with love, mercy, kindness and generosity**

## MEDITATION

As the tamed horse still hears the call of her wild brothers and as the farmed goose flaps hopeful wings as his sisters fly overhead, so too, perhaps, the wild ones amongst us are our only hope in calling us back to our true nature. Wild ones who have not been turned to stone by the far-reaching grasp of the empire and its programme of consumer sedation, the killing of imagination. Where, my friends, have the wild ones gone? 'Come to the edge', he said. They said, 'We are afraid!' 'Come to the edge', he said. They came. He pushed them, and they flew.

*Day 29 Meditation,*

*Celtic Daily Prayer: Vol.2, Farther Up And Farther In*

**ENCIRCLING PRAYER**

My dear ones O God, bless them and keep them in every place where they are....

Family and Friends, bless them and keep them in every place where they are...

Brothers and Sisters, bless them and keep them in every place where they are...

Keep them in the arms of your embrace, shelter them under your wings

Be their light in darkness, be their hope in distress, be their calm in anxiety

Be their strength in weakness, be their comfort in pain, be their song in the night

The peace of all peace be upon them, within and around them.

**TOGETHER PRAYER**

God in community, we meet you here, alone and together, in quietness or conversation.

In this place as we play and pray, that friendship, wonder and worship grow.

In your name we welcome each other; weak or strong, weary or lively, children full of curiosity and fun, to share these moments in your presence.

**PRAYER OF POTENTIAL**

For the potential you have given us. For the potential you see in us and the possibilities that lie ahead:

**Christ be before us.**

For our plans and their fulfilment, for your promises and their unfolding:

**Christ be before us**

In the problems that beset us and the perils that ensnare us:

**Christ be within us, be around us, above us and beneath us.**

**COMMUNITY PRAYER ADAPTED FROM NGATIWA RIVER MONASTERY**

We welcome you, Spirit of God, you who seek our company and chose to make yourself known to us.

We are grateful for your many blessings, including bringing us together at this time in this place.

We ask that you would use this time to challenge us, to encourage us, to change us.

That we may continue to grow and be transformed and, in this process, find hope to offer the world around us.

In our conversations and our sharing, in our eating, resting, learning and laughing, may we notice you, find you, follow you and offer you.

Amen.

**OUR ULTIMATE LOYALTY**

Lord God, may there be sense in our persistence, and reason in our tenacity. May a divine discontent give colour to our dreams, and a passion for holy heresy set the tone of our thoughts. And may our ultimate loyalty be only to you, that we may never surrender to the threats of falsehood, or capitulate to the idols, caesars, and powers of this world.

**A MISSIONAL MOVEMENT PRAYER OF LONGING AND COMMITMENT**

Covenanted together within the love of Christ, embracing his call upon our lives, alone and together, in our churches, communities, Associations and Union we seek to live out God's purposes in the world...

**Your will be done**

Lord hear the longing and desire of our hearts...

**Your will be done**

Lord, help us to be a movement of missional communities led by your Spirit... Inspire and ignite us, renew and revive us by your Spirit...

**Your will be done**

Lord help us reflect you in all that we are and do... Consume and compel us by your love, direct and lead us by your love and grace...

**Your will be done**

Lord help us to reveal your beautiful holiness in who we are and how we live and work... Celebrating our diversity, rejoicing in our unity, ending all schism, denouncing all sectarianism, loving one another as you commanded...

**Your will be done**

Lord help us to embrace the adventures you are calling us to... To move swiftly in our obedience to your Word and with openness and eager responsive to your Spirit's calling... To take risks, pioneer and move outside our comfort zones into uncharted territories and unfamiliar ways... May faith, not fear, govern our ways, trust triumph over caution and wisdom illumine our paths in breaking new ground for your kingdom...

**Your will be done**

Lord help us to be the bearers of your good news... Keepers, tellers and interpreters of your story, heralds, beacons and bearers of your love and compassion, carriers of your grace and generosity, reflectors of your tenderness and care...

**Your will be done**

Lord help us to be true to our calling... prophetic and apostolic, pastoral and teaching, sharing and serving... Proactive and responsive, unfettered and radical, spontaneous and nonconformist, creative and imaginative, daring greatly and walking humbly...

**Your will be done**

Lord help us to hunger for righteousness and thirst for justice... To pray and work, to confront and contribute, to challenge and construct, to hear the heart cry of the poor, to welcome the stranger, to reflect the heart of your compassion and express the love that leaps beyond the barricades and removes the boundaries...

**Your will be done**

Your kingdom come...

**Your will be done**

*Compiled by Roy Searle, Overseer, Northumbria Community, with some taken from extracts and adaptations of prayers and liturgies in the Community's Celtic Daily Prayer, volume 2 Farther Up and Farther In ([www.northumbriacommunity.org](http://www.northumbriacommunity.org)).*





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