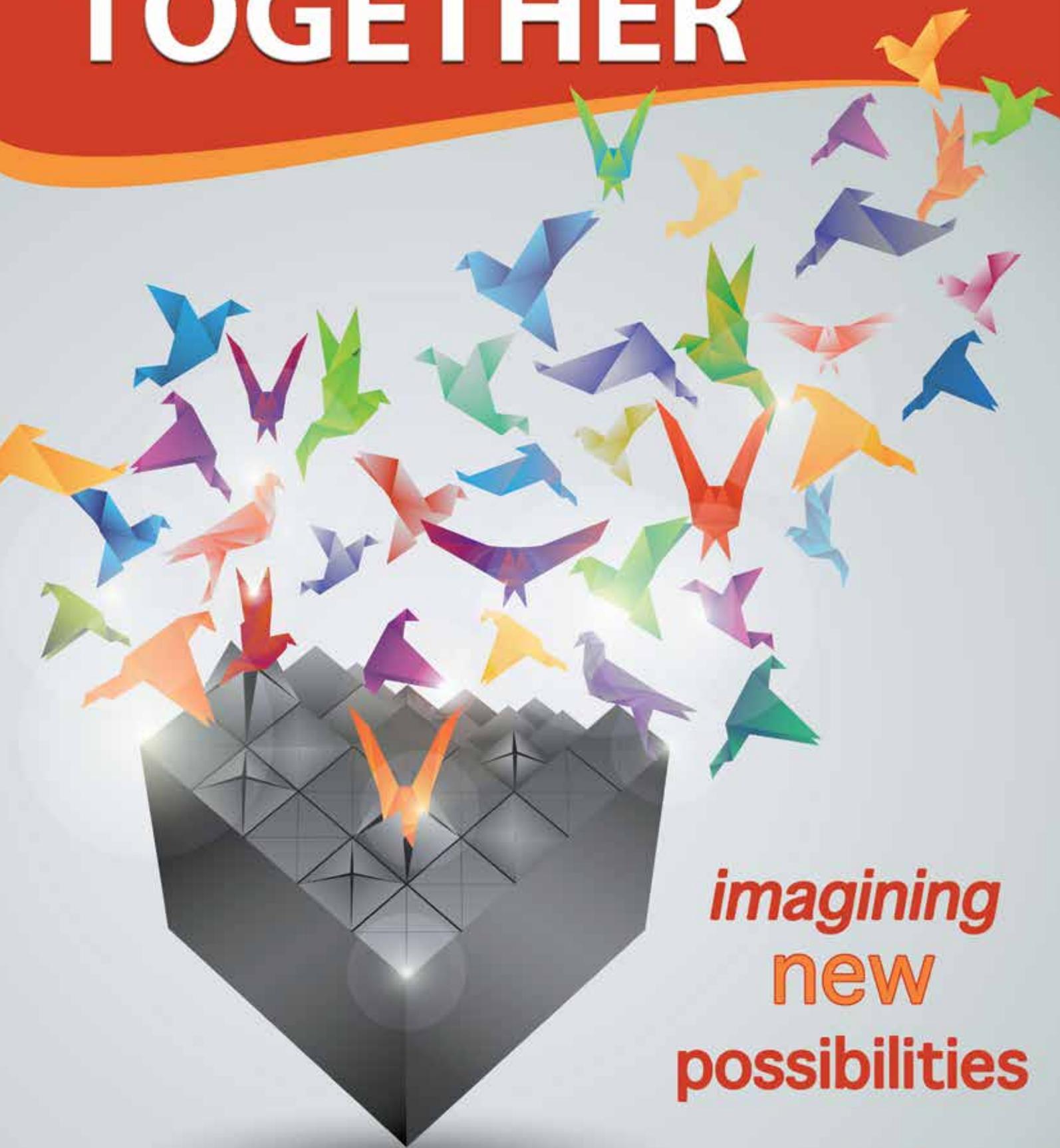


BAPTISTS

Autumn 2017

TOGETHER



imagining
new
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The magazine for the Baptist Union of Great Britain

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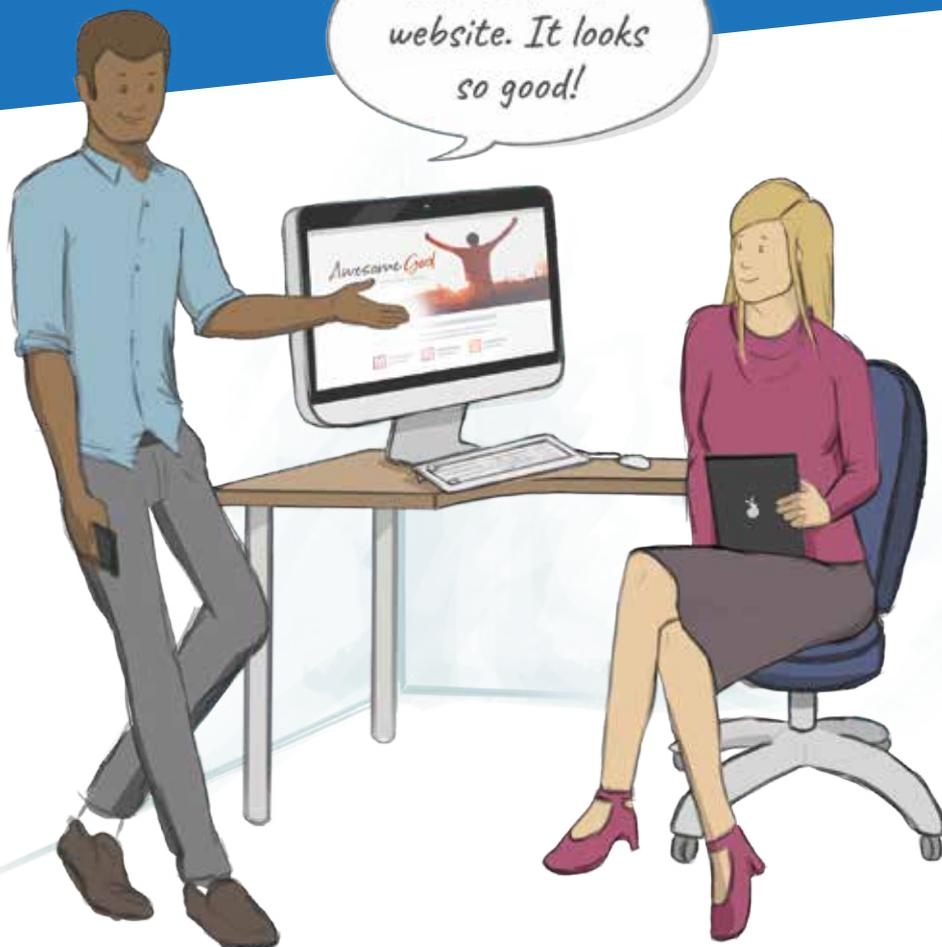
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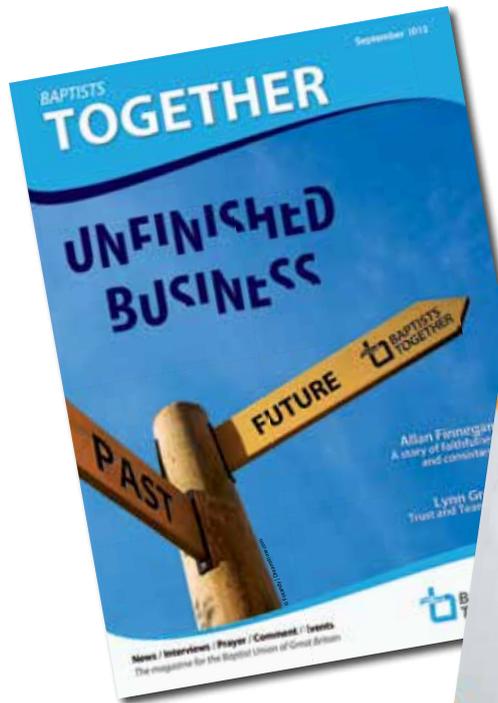
Imagining new possibilities

Welcome to the latest edition of *Baptists Together* magazine, the 12th since its launch in September 2013.

Though just four years ago, hasn't so much changed in that time? The coalition government was in power, Barack Obama in the first year of a second presidential term, and David Moyes just settling into his short-lived reign as manager of Manchester United. Technological changes have continued apace. There's been a rapid growth in the use of mobile technology to both receive and share our news, while the number of Facebook users has effectively doubled from 1 to 2 billion.

That first edition of the magazine, conceived in the wake of the Futures process, spoke of 'Unfinished Business', of being responsive to emerging needs and possibilities. Four years on we return to the theme of transition, exploring how some local church communities and Associations have perceived and engaged with the need to change.

Alongside are features that look at change more generally. What can we learn from our predecessors who also experienced times of tumultuous change? How do we reflect on the transitions the Christian community in Britain is experiencing?



Change can be unsettling, but it challenges us to explore fresh ways of sharing and living the Gospel. What the stories in these pages show is we can be confident that the God we seek to follow journeys alongside us each step of the way.

May you and your church be blessed as you imagine new possibilities.

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Transition for mission

Four ways Baptists need to transition

By Lynn Green

We are acutely aware we live in changing times. When I was born, my dad ran up the road in the middle of the night to the telephone box to call for the midwife. When my son was born, my husband phoned our family from our home phone downstairs. Just two years later I lay in bed and used my mobile phone to tell my mum of our daughter's arrival. Nowadays photos are shared within minutes via social media!

As a local church pastor I particularly enjoyed visiting my oldest member. Elizabeth was born at the end of the 19th century, and it was always fascinating to listen to the life and faith story of someone who lived through two world wars and the unbelievable technological advances of the 20th century.

Of course, our churches are not immune from this bewildering onslaught. But as Peter Morden rightly points out (page 10), while the changes themselves may be new, the fact of change is not. Every generation has to respond to the call to worship and follow our God who dwells in the eternal present. If we want to be with him, we need to stop trying to live in the past and embrace the present moment as well. To help us, here are some thoughts about the sort of transitions we need to be entering into.

We need a mind-set transition

The first and most fundamental transition I believe we need is in our thinking and self-understanding. Through the 19th and 20th centuries Baptists thoroughly enculturated themselves in the mode of institutions and this is reflected in the life of our Union as well. While I see many signs of a transition in progress here, I also see an unhelpful commitment to institution that can act as a negative pull in our attempts to move forward. Surely what we must learn from the trajectory of the church through the ages is the need to renew our focus on Kingdom rather than institution; on whole life discipleship rather than Sunday attendance; to move from a preoccupation with rules and boundaries to an undefended commitment to loving God and others; a focus on community transformation rather than empire building; from sucking resources in to being a source of blessing; from 'keeping the show on the road' to participating in God's mission to the world; and from 'once majority to vast minority'.

In order to navigate these transitions, we need the spiritual gift of discernment; an ability to discern between outward form and inner content. We struggle in transition when we invest too much emotional value

in the 'ways we have always done it' and fail to see beyond those ways that have served us well to the fresh ways that will embody our commitment to Christ in the present. So whether it is in our small groups, local churches, Associations or our Union, I believe we need to continue to be open to the renewing of our minds through the Holy Spirit so we can see and perceive God's new thing in the present moment.

We need a demographic transition

Globally, while the West grows older, the rest of the world is growing younger. It is estimated that by the year 2020 almost 70 per cent of all Christians worldwide will be under the age of 45¹. In Asia, Africa and Latin America, where Baptists are growing fast, that is particularly true. Countries such as Ghana have witnessed a 1700 per cent increase in Baptists since 1990, according to the Baptist World Alliance. The average median age in Ghana is 21.5 in comparison to 39.4 for the United Kingdom. Interestingly the two largest churches in our Union are both Ghanaian churches.

¹ www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050

throughout our Union we are on the journey of transition already

In the light of these demographic shifts it is significant that the recently appointed General Secretary Elect of the **Baptist World Alliance**, Elijah Brown, is 36 years old.

In our own context, the ageing population in the UK is going to present us with several challenges in the coming years. As we cherish, honour and care for the elderly, we need a blessing from them for us to grow younger as churches and a Union, so we can be faithful in handing on the faith to our children and children's children.

The statistics above also show us, however, that age is not our only significant demographic shift. They clearly point to the need for us to embrace the journey of transition and reflect the fact that the world is now on our doorstep – literally. In these days the Lord has graciously given us another opportunity to reflect in our churches and Union the 'all nations' vision of the Kingdom that is conveyed through Scripture. May the history books record that we had the faith, humility, prophetic courage, grace and vision to make this transition, and to make it well.

We need a leadership transition

As our position in society becomes more marginal and as our financial resources are challenged by many factors, such as changing demographics and loss of denominational loyalty, our capacity to resource full-time, 'professional' ministry will become increasingly difficult. As Stuart Murray-Williams points out (page 8), we can either look back and lament our former glory, or we can make the choice to look for the opportunities this new era will bring. Our DNA as Baptists includes a very strong commitment to the priesthood of all believers and this will serve us well in this particular area of transition. I believe that in these times of transition we will need to ensure that we focus on the nurturing of Christian character in all of us, and in our leaders in particular.

We also need to be willing to imagine and release all sorts of flexible patterns of leadership so that the rich gifts of God's people are developed and released for the sake of his Kingdom mission. I am confident that this leadership transition will enable us to see a much more rich and diverse network of leaders emerge and flourish and contribute to the health and growth of our churches and communities.

We need a relational transition

It seems to me that, at our best, in our institutional phase as a Union and as churches we have expressed our historic commitment to interdependence as Baptists in distinctive, and rather formal, ways. Our challenge going forward is to discover new ways to embody our interdependence so that we can continue to nurture our passion to see mission and ministry flourish contextually from the grassroots. As the UK church has become more marginalised in recent years there has been a growing willingness to forge partnerships. It is encouraging to see Roger Sutton and others being so key in nurturing unity movements such as Movement Day (see p 40) across the UK.

We cannot fail to see that this sense of partnering for the sake of the Kingdom arises from the heart of God who desires that 'they all may be one'. Just as Jesus called the first disciples to head out into deep water and cast their nets, so it seems clear to me that if we want to see God's Kingdom come then we need to be weaving the nets of relationships and partnerships that will be able to contain the harvest in God's heart. No doubt we have much more to learn about humility and seeking God's Kingdom first in this time of transition, but it is good that we are on the journey into closer partnerships.

There is no doubt that throughout our Union we are on the journey of transition already. The question for me is whether we are going to travel that journey 'the scenic route' like God's people in the wilderness in Old Testament times, or whether we are going to devote ourselves to prayer, being attentive and obedient to the call of Christ in this present moment and take seriously the invitation to participate in the life of God's Kingdom here and now.

Lynn Green is
General Secretary
of our Baptist Union



Photo: mgkaya | istockphoto.com



'Transitional times are unsettling but exciting'

Christians in Britain are transitioning from majority to minority status: of course there are challenges, but this is a time to imagine new possibilities, writes **Stuart Murray Williams**

Post-modern, post-Christendom, post-industrial, post-colonial, post-secular... commentators on transitions impacting western societies often resort to 'post' words to describe these. Observers of church life identify post-evangelical, post-charismatic, post-denominational and post-institutional developments. These words refer backwards, not forwards, telling us where we were, not where we are going, but insisting that things are changing. Sadly, 'post-truth' has joined their ranks, creating a necessary but regrettable climate of suspicion.

Times of transition present challenges and opportunities for our society and our churches. If we are hidebound by traditions and inflexible in our responses, we will become marginalised and moribund. If we react simplistically and uncritically to an emerging culture and lose our moorings in searching for 'relevance', we will betray the gospel and lose our integrity.

We can learn from previous generations who experienced transitional eras, including early Baptists in the maelstrom of seventeenth-century England and Anabaptists in the turmoil of the sixteenth century.

New strategies, priorities, structures and practices are pioneered in such periods, along with fresh ways of understanding Scripture and doing theology. Transitional times are unsettling but exciting.

A transition the Christian community in Britain is experiencing, but on which we have not yet reflected deeply, is from majority to minority. There are different ways of estimating the size of the Christian community – membership, attendance, affiliation, beliefs, practices – but all now indicate minority status. This provokes numerous questions – theological, institutional, financial, strategic and practical. How do we interpret this change of status? Where is God in this? What forms of church life are needed now? What is the social and political vocation of a minority

Christian community? What activities can we no longer sustain? What should we do differently? How do we nurture and sustain disciples in minority communities? How can we use our still considerable resources in more creative ways?

The significant issue is not that we are a minority – many Christian communities across the world are minorities – but an *ex-majority minority*, which presents different challenges.

Reflecting on this transition, I wrote *A Vast Minority*. I drew on material presented on the Crucible course (www.cruciblecourse.org.uk), which encourages participants to think like cross-cultural missionaries in a transitional era.

Here are some of the challenges we face:

- » Can we simplify church life so that we stop burning out our members by trying to maintain unsustainable programmes and release energy for mission?
- » Can we be more intentional about nurturing disciples? Are sermons and singing enough? Can we re-imagine our churches as 'communities of discernment and resistance'?
- » Can we make better use of resources by reducing duplication? We don't need four English Baptist colleges!
- » Can we prioritise and resource pioneering, risk-taking and experimental initiatives, rather than safety-first strategies?
- » Can we embrace pruning alongside planting and move beyond a survival mentality to an authentically missional perspective?
- » Can we learn to speak and act as a 'prophetic minority' rather than a supposed 'moral majority'?
- » Can we respond theologically and missionally, not just pragmatically, to our changed status and changing context?
- » Can we seize the opportunity to think afresh about the nature and scope of the gospel in contemporary culture?

Photo: Krivosheev Vitaly | shutterstock.com

Perhaps there is an analogy, as many suggest, between our experience and that of the Israelite exiles in Babylon. If this was God's intention – 'I have sent you into exile' (Jeremiah 29:4,7) – and had a profound and beneficial impact on them, maybe minority status could be salutary for us too. Perhaps we also need to heed Jeremiah's counsel: don't hanker for the past, don't despair, don't expect quick solutions, but settle down and seek shalom for those around you, not just your own community. Trust God in a time of transition.

We have no choice about being a minority. Whatever we were and might become, this is our current status. But we can choose what kind of minority to be.

We could be a frightened, despondent and beleaguered

minority preoccupied with survival and disconnected from the rest of society. Or a fragmented minority, drawing lines in the sand to exclude others and exhausting ourselves with infighting. Or a belligerent minority, protesting whenever our sensibilities are offended or our interests are threatened. Or a compliant minority, watering down our truth claims, giving no offence, allowing ourselves to be co-opted in return for appreciation. These deeply unattractive futures are present realities in some sections of the Christian community. We need a more compelling vision.

But minorities can do things majorities cannot or will not. Minorities are less concerned about reputation, social standing, numerical strength and institutional stability.

They aren't hamstrung by needing to succeed or maintain control. They have less invested in the status quo, so they can question what most regard as 'common sense', imagine new possibilities and pioneer new initiatives. Minorities can be creative, prophetic and hopeful.

Baptists and Anabaptists emerged in times of transition as creative minorities. Maybe it is time to reclaim our heritage.

Stuart Murray Williams is a trainer and consultant with the Anabaptist Network, author of several books on mission in post-Christendom, and one of the national coordinators of Urban Expression.



CHALLENGE AND CHANGE AND BAPTIST LIFE

By Peter Morden

Massive economic upheaval. Much political uncertainty. Seismic shifts in culture. Sharp divisions between rich and poor, city and countryside. Huge challenges for the churches.

This could easily be a description of twenty-first century Britain, but it serves equally well when applied to the eighteenth century. The so-called industrial revolution was beginning to transform people's lives. It caused considerable social dislocation as the population shifted from the countryside to grimy towns and cities that became what one Baptist writer described as places of 'smoke, burning and terror'. The cultural certainties of previous generations were being challenged by 'enlightenment' thinking. Church attendance in many places was plummeting. Yet by the end of the century Baptist congregations were growing, new churches were being planted, and global mission was being pioneered.

How did this happen?

Biblical theology

There were two streams in English and Welsh Baptist life: 'Particular' Baptists and 'General' Baptists. By the middle of the eighteenth century both were in serious trouble. The 'Particulars', who emphasised God's sovereignty, were committed to biblical orthodoxy but were often inward looking with little commitment to mission. The 'Generals', who stressed human free will, were caving in to the surrounding culture. Many rejected the doctrine of the Trinity, which they thought made no sense in a rational, 'enlightened' age. But as the century wore on Baptists experienced biblical renewal for mission. Among the Particulars, key ministers such as Andrew Fuller became convinced that engagement

in mission was a biblical priority. They drew from the Evangelical Revival and the example and writings of non-Baptist missional thinkers such as George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards, whilst retaining a strong commitment to key Baptist principles. Amongst the Generals there was no corresponding revival in biblical theology and many churches dwindled away. But in 1770 Dan Taylor founded a new grouping of Evangelical General Baptists, with a strong stress on biblical mission. Radical change was sweeping through Baptist life.

Renewal of Association

Many eighteenth-century Baptist churches were isolated. In the west of England, the Western Association and the Baptist Academy at Bristol showed what could be done through greater cooperation. Others began to see the value of coming together for mutual support and encouragement. The Northamptonshire Association brought together Andrew Fuller and other Evangelical Baptist ministers, including a young enthusiast for mission, William Carey. Fuller worked with his new friends in church planting. Dan Taylor's New Connexion – as their name suggests – emphasised the 'connectedness' of their churches from the beginning. New networks of missional thinking and practice were being forged.

Prayer

Prayer was a vital springboard to action. Leading figures in the Northamptonshire Association called member churches to establish meetings for prayer 'for the revival of real religion'. They were to pray not only for their own communities but for other denominations, as well as for global possibilities. Again they were influenced by thinking from outside Baptist life – in this instance a pamphlet written by Jonathan



Andrew Fuller (1754-1815)

Edwards. This blended biblical reflection and cultural analysis to argue that the need of the hour was a dynamic movement of intercessory prayer. Churches responded, and not only with prayer, but also with action.

Vigorous mission

It is hard to underestimate the change that took place. The New Connexion grew vigorously, especially in the north of England. But it was the Particular Baptists who saw the most remarkable growth. In 1718 there were around 220 Particular Baptist churches in England and Wales. By 1752 that number had declined to approximately 150, with many congregations small, isolated and struggling. By 1789 the number had grown to 316 and, by 1798 to 369. Many existing churches developed building projects to cope with increasing numbers of new believers. A deep missional piety drove ministers and 'lay people' alike. **Cannon Street Baptist** in Birmingham grew substantially and also pioneered new ventures outside of the city. In 1797 they identified a hamlet to the south of Birmingham, Shirley, as a possible site for church planting. They hired a cottage and Elizabeth Walter moved in. Walter was described as 'a godly woman, who employed every opportunity to preach the gospel and assisted in the conduct of a Sunday school in her house'. She was aided by a number of young people from the parent church who walked the seven miles from Cannon Street every Sunday afternoon in order to teach in the school. God's people were being mobilised for mission.



Cross-cultural outreach

The global prayer emphasis stirred something in the hearts of Baptists. Carey in particular was keen to engage in cross-cultural mission overseas. In 1792 the Baptist Missionary Society was formed to facilitate such work, and Carey led a small group to India. The BMS missionaries saw many men and women come to Christ and engaged in community transformation. Hannah Marshman arrived in India in 1799. She served with distinction for nearly forty-eight years, despite the indifferent health which necessitated her one and only return to England in 1820–21. Her work in women's education was pioneering and effective. By 1824 there were 160 Indian girls attending six schools. Social action and evangelism went hand in hand.

Eighteenth-century Baptists made mistakes, but their story shows how God can work through ordinary people who exhibit an extraordinary commitment to God. It should also provoke reflection and action from Baptist Christians working in their own challenging context today.

Peter Morden became Team Leader of **South Parade Baptist Church**, Leeds in September 2017. He was previously Acting Principal of **Spurgeon's College**



Photos: Regent's Park College, University of Oxford

Further Reading

- » Stephen Copson and Peter Morden (eds), *Challenge and Change: English Baptist Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 2017)
- » Peter Morden, *The Life and Thought of Andrew Fuller* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2015)
- » Brian Stanley, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1992)



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CHURCH

STORIES

We live in challenging times, but our churches are continuing to make an impact. Over the next few pages we share several examples of how churches are sharing the gospel in their own contexts.

The Beacon Church, Stafford

One church, eight diverse congregations. Average weekly attendance up from 70 to 350 in five years. Forty-two per cent of its membership are new Christians. Paid staff up from five to 16. An aim of planting three new churches every year.

While these bald figures clearly don't tell the full story, they provide a backdrop to the exciting developments at **The Beacon Church** in Stafford.

"All we have is a story to tell," says pastor Alex Harris. "We're not saying we have the answers. It's just great stuff that Jesus has done."

A church has existed here since 1948, gathering for many years as a faithful community for the Sandon Road housing estate. When Alex, 'an evangelist at heart', arrived from **Spurgeon's College** in 2012 he met a congregation of 70 with a missional culture. A few years earlier members had taken 'a very courageous step' of a lease on a second building on Staffordshire Technology Park. (The cost of the lease in that first year was greater than the income the previous year.) Jesus has used the match-up of a missional congregation and a young Baptist evangelist to grow the church exponentially ever since.

"Just great stuff that Jesus has done."

The Beacon has a structure that prioritises evangelism. It uses a multi-congregational, or multiply model, which sees new congregations planted 'from within' churches that already exist. It's a model that combines the intimacy of the small with the resources of the large. Each congregation is relational (once it reaches 100 people, it has to plant). Freed from duties such as building maintenance, financial management and charity law compliance, local leadership teams are responsible for mission and evangelism.

Minister Alex Harris



"We try to release the local level for one thing," says Alex, "to reach people for Jesus."

And reach people they have. Each congregation is mission specific. There is a Sunday afternoon congregation aimed specifically at sport loving families, who are otherwise engaged on a Sunday morning. There's a dual English/Mandarin service on Thursdays. A service takes place each Wednesday lunchtime for workers on the Technology Park, home to the Beacon International Centre, where the church has its lease. The church has bought a house in a new housing development called Marston Grange. Another group is steadily growing in the Highfields estate, meeting in the Ox Leathers pub each Wednesday under the name 'Serve', and since Spring it has also been meeting every fourth Sunday of the month for Pub Church. The church's original building – still called **Sandon Road Baptist Church** – hosts a traditional 'hymn sandwich' service on Sunday evenings. Throughout there has been an exploration of what doing church means – "if you want to reach new people with the gospel, you have to do different things", says Alex. Many have come to faith for the first time through these congregations.

At the time of writing The Beacon consists of eight congregations. They are all diverse, each reaching a different community. However, they

are authentically 'one church,' says Alex. Each congregation is linked to a central body of deacons, who have oversight of areas such as finance. Alex, alongside two elders, provides theological oversight and a strategic view of the whole. The local congregation leaders have responsibility for mission and pastoral care.

Alex admits things have moved quickly and things are 'a little messy'. "An analogy I frequently use is that God is growing the vine, but the trellis behind it is rickety.

"But the growth is remarkable. There is an excitement and it's crystal clear this is Jesus' work."

Alex clearly believes more is to come. The Beacon aims to grow 20 congregations by 2020; and 50 by 2030. Some will be as far afield as Nepal, others closer to home in the county, where smaller churches have asked if the church can take over their buildings.



Photo: The Beacon Church

"We are not saying that Jesus has promised this, we have come up with these numbers," notes Alex.

"But Jesus has called us to pursue this. As a church we don't want to be left wondering what he might have done. It seems outrageous and foolhardy! But talking this outlandish language energises people, and creates a fervour and a momentum.

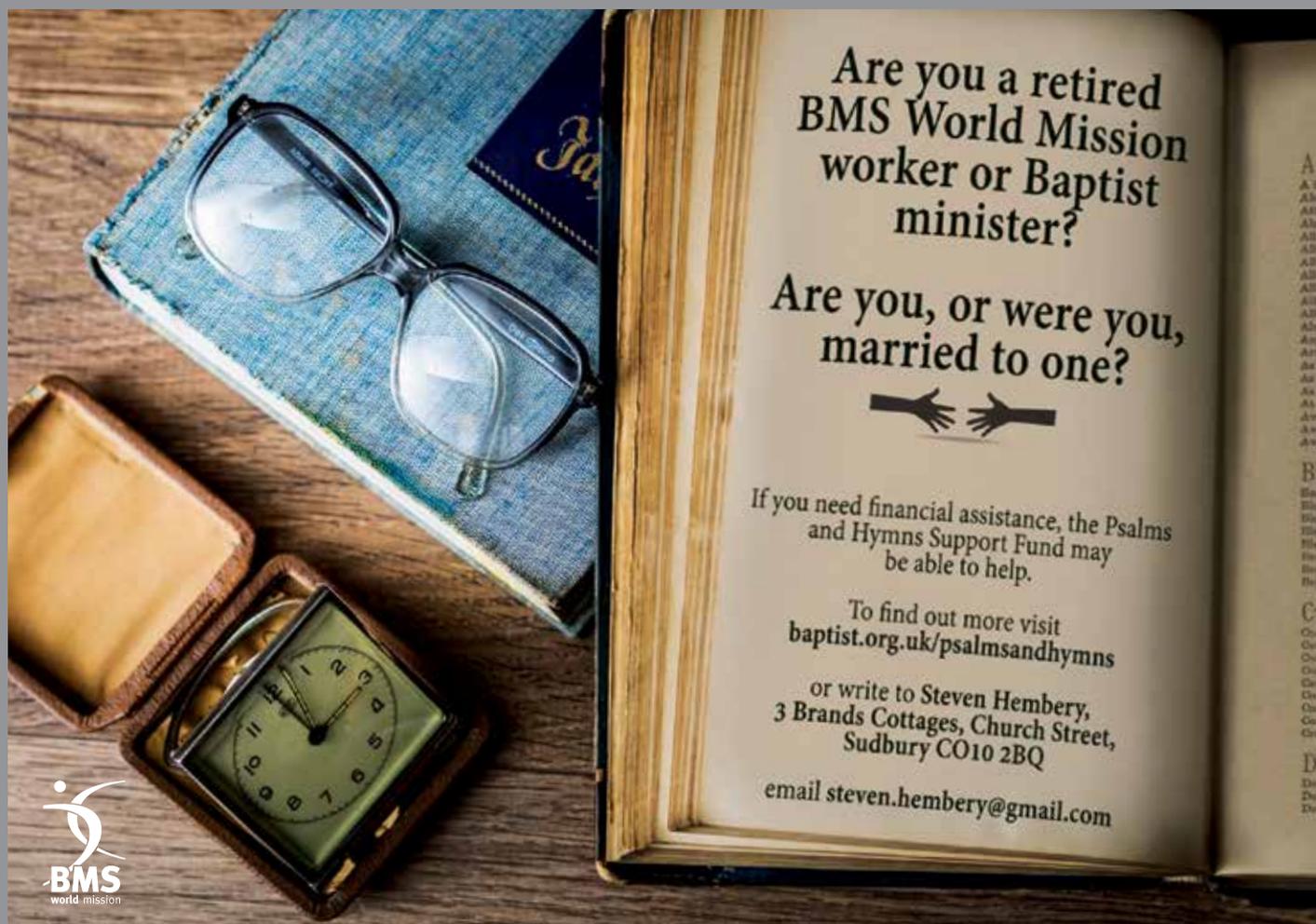
"The journey we are on is doing new things, and reaching new people for Jesus."

Three lessons The Beacon has learnt:

1 Redefine what maturity means. Traditionally, churches deemed to have reached maturity become independent. However, none of The Beacon's congregations are on a journey to independence. They are looking to grow, and plant. Maturity is therefore more about planting, rather than becoming independent.

2 Not waiting to feel ready. "We have learnt we mustn't wait for the right leaders, or enough money," says Alex. "We don't wait for the numbers – we are desperately stretched. We don't even wait for clarity of vision. But that's how we've ended up in partnership with a pub in one of Stafford's roughest areas."

3 Making people understand they are in a spiritual war. "When you know you are at war, it changes everything – what your house is for, how you use your money, how you raise your children. Prayer becomes a desperate radio-call for reinforcements. We find words like 'safe' and 'comfortable' are a barrier."



Small church stories and ideas

Several of our smaller churches have asked God for his plan - and have found they can be effective in his Kingdom in ways they couldn't have imagined. Hilary Taylor, Small Church Enabler for the London Baptist Association, reports on what's happening in the capital.

Psalm 92:12-14:

But the godly will flourish... even in old age they will still produce fruit; they will remain vital and green.

Over recent years, churches have seen a decline in numbers and there are now many smaller churches with older faithful people running out of energy and ideas. Below are ideas and stories of how churches of older people are still being effective for God. **Prayer** is always the key, asking God for his plan, big or small.

Young at heart

"Our Parents and Toddlers group at **Eldon Road Baptist Church**, Wood Green, has been running for more than 35 years and has been led by older members of the fellowship for much of that time. Its current leaders are aged 60 and (almost) 80. The wider team that regularly attends to support them are also in their 70s and 80s.

"This is a key outreach to our local community and the team play a valuable role in being a friend and listening ear to the parents and carers. Whether chatting to them, sharing their own experiences, playing with the children, singing, telling stories or showing the love of Jesus in other ways, they prove that you are never too old to be young at heart!"

Wonderful welcome

Ham Christian Fellowship has only nine members but they are passionate about God saving the lost. They have a wonderful ministry of welcome, listening, prayer, scripture and tea. Their spiritual depth is inspiring. In their small way, they are saving the world... one at a time.

Global mission

Hampton Wick Baptist Church, Kingston upon Thames: "We had a request for 80 uniform jumpers for a school, run by 'Grandmas', in a brothel in Kolkata. As a small church, we couldn't manage 80 quickly so we put an advert in the local newspaper for knitters to help us. We had an enormous response. We provided the wool and the pattern. All 80 were completed in time. A few months later we invited all who had participated to come and hear the full story from the Director of 'Grandmas'. This event was a great opportunity to share the gospel, as many of the knitters were totally unchurched."

They started a toddler group, amongst other activities, and families came in. The church is growing and reaching the community in a new way.

Resurrection

For many smaller churches, it's the buildings which are the biggest problem. With fewer and older people, maintenance and decorating are problems along with the soaring costs of heating and light. **Hammersmith Christian Fellowship** had realised that action was needed as their old building was unsustainable.

They prayed and knew that God still wanted a church there. Some people left until only six remained. They called in a developer who wanted to buy the back half of the building and agreed to refurbish the front half. A mezzanine floor was constructed, kitchen and disabled toilets installed as well as a lift to the worship area upstairs. It is a lovely, bright and practical building, a minister has come and the church is growing.

Minister in Training

At **Hersham Baptist Church** in Walton-on-Thames, there were 30 members, but all getting older. They wanted a young minister and people in their 30s to come but didn't know how to go about it. After prayer, they asked for a Minister in Training to be placed at the church. A young man came with his wife and children. They soon settled in and started making contacts. After his training was completed, the church invited Phil to stay and work full time.

Heather and Philip Fellows - minister of Hersham Baptist Church



Photo: Andy Pinks

Other ideas for smaller churches

Coffee Morning – all you need is coffee, a morning, a venue and a kettle! Many people are lonely so are drawn to a welcome, a hot drink and conversation.

Be creative with your church building – open it for groups to use and encourage church members to either attend the groups or make the tea! Consider groups such as a Christians Against Poverty money class, English classes for adults, an after school club, baby and toddler group, neighbourhood watch meetings, parenting classes, community choir...

Join in with other churches – many older people help at Foodbanks by chatting to people over coffee, at village fairs, Alpha groups and Messy Church. Volunteer to be active or a prayer warrior for Street Pastors. Age and disability are no barrier to prayer.

Secondment – ask a larger church to second someone for a set period of time to either set up a new work (toddler group etc) or to teach skills to those who are willing to learn and serve.



Photo: Ravenscourt Baptist Church

Merging

In West London, there were two small churches, just over a mile apart, both with ministers, manses, rambling buildings and older congregations who were struggling. God set things in motion as one minister retired and the other died, making a merger an obvious course of action. A new minister was called to the newly formed **Ravenscourt Baptist Church** and the money from selling one building paid for the refurbishment of the other. The new minister had a heart for the community and soon people of many nationalities were coming to church.

Replanting

One church had reduced to a few older people, so they spoke to a large church with a heart for church planting. The small group accepted that the church as it was had to close gracefully, for a new work to begin in the building. The closing service celebrated all that God had done in the past but looked forward to all that he was going to do in the future. The decorators arrived to refurbish the old building and soon, the new church opened and the old members became members of the new church, very much part of it but without the responsibility. **Everyday Church** continues to flourish in the centre of Kingston on Thames.

Do keep in touch with other small churches for encouragement – contact your Baptist Association about small church events and check out the blog for small churches smallchurches.wordpress.com



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

Baptism at Ravenscourt Baptist Church

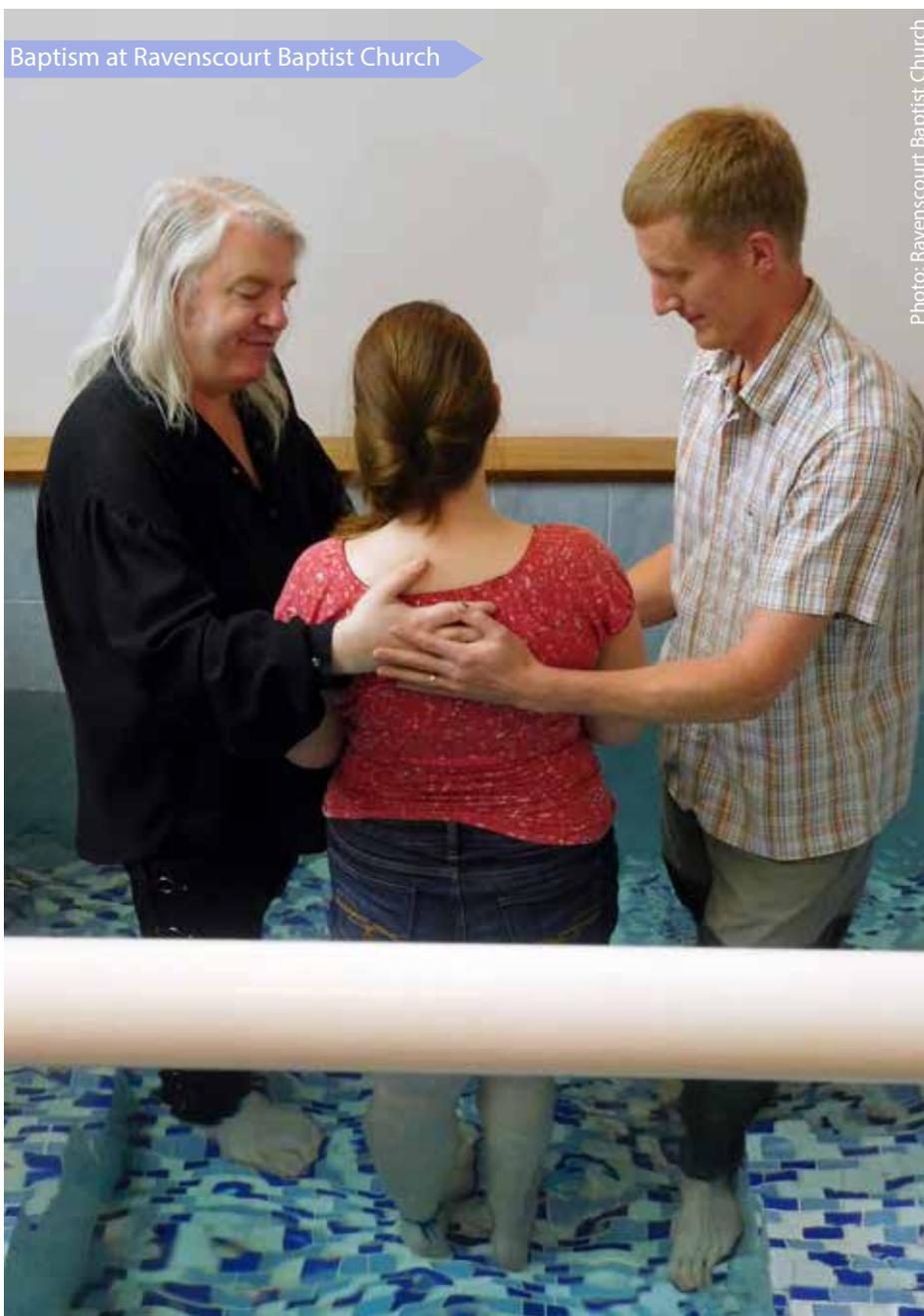


Photo: Ravenscourt Baptist Church

Alternative gatherings

How *Chichester Baptist Church* has combined its traditional Sunday morning service with being good news to people who would never enter the building.

"If we're really honest, most people in our community won't come into our building, no matter how good our services are. Is there a way that will encourage our people to go where people are?"

Such are the kind of questions asked by Chichester Baptist Church in recent years. Even though it is one of our Union's larger churches (a typical Sunday attendance would be around

350), there was a dissatisfaction underneath. "We weren't impacting our community with the gospel in the way we'd have liked to," says minister Ellen Wild.



Ellen Wild

It led to a period of thinking, praying and asking the church members. Were there things the church could be doing differently to take Jesus' Great Commission more seriously?

What emerged was an idea of Alternative Gatherings, or missional communities. One Sunday morning a month, members have been invited 'to go and be good news in the community', by building a community around a people group, or hobby or act of service.



Two teams serve a free meal, on two Sundays each month, that is especially for the homeless and those in need

The church leadership deliberately didn't set something up. Instead, people were asked: "What do you feel passionate about? What do you feel excited about?"

From small beginnings, the Alternative Gatherings have grown organically. There are currently eight, each taking place one Sunday a month. Every gathering has a name, and a mission statement (to keep the missional intention). Each team has been commissioned at the front of the church.

Some are based around hobbies. Early Birdies, for instance, takes place on the golf course. Members are encouraged to invite non-Christian friends. The group gathers for a thought for the day or a question to talk about during the round. They finish up in the clubhouse for a coffee or a breakfast.

There's a ladies' art and craft group, and a cycling group (halfway through the ride the bikers stop for a prayer and a psalm, before continuing and gathering for breakfast together).

Others are based around a service. A visiting group meets isolated people in the estate the church is based. One gathering takes services in six nursing homes around the city, while another organises a meal for the city's homeless and vulnerable.

In all, around 200 members give up one Sunday morning service each month to participate in an Alternative Gathering.

There is still a service each Sunday morning: a key to this working is inviting members to give up a traditional Sunday service – time they had already committed to the church – in order to do something else.

"It's just been a brilliant journey," says Ellen. "On any given Sunday we will be standing up at the front saying 'Welcome, great to have you here. But while we're meeting in this way, two or three gatherings are out being church in different ways this morning. Let's pray for us, and let's pray for them. We think we are reaching as many people out, as in."

Senior minister Ken Benjamin adds, "At the door on a Sunday, we're greeting almost as many people coming in, telling us about how their Alternative Gatherings went, as those coming out. And please don't see this as only for large churches. Could a smaller church do one Alternative Gathering each month?"

For more information, visit:
www.chichesterbaptist.org.uk/alternativegatherings.htm

Ken and Ellen are leading a session about Missional Communities on 11 November at Chipping Sodbury Baptist Church, Bristol. To find out more, visit: www.webassoc.org.uk/event/leadership-teams-morning

The Cairn: Radical Transformation

How a declining Baptist church in Bristol transformed into a new missional community.
By Ruth Whiter

I remember meeting Phil Lawrence in 2011 to film him talking about his family's move to the Knowle West Estate in South Bristol. What stayed with me was his reference to some old songs he believed were prophecies yet to be fulfilled, perhaps in the streets around him:

*From house to house in families
Shall more be gathered in
And lights will shine in every street
So warm and welcoming*

(One shall tell another, Graham Kendrick : ©1981, Thankyou Music)

Six years later, I was invited to the Sunday lunch Phil and his wife Alice provide in their kitchen for up to forty people each month. There has already been a transformation from the declining traditional congregation that was **Knowle West Baptist Church**, to a new missional community based in the former vicarage where they now live, **The Cairn**. They're currently entering a new phase of transition, as many of the new contacts they have made are ready to move on to more intentional discipleship.

This new community has grown through a network of flexible, interconnected groups, some initiated by The Cairn and others run by outside agencies. Many of these are designed to address the social isolation experienced by men on this estate. In addition to the monthly lunch, there have been men's breakfasts, a baking group, a guitar club, and a spiritual seekers' group.

"I've started to believe in God again" one man told me. "The nice thing is that Phil won't pump it into you if you don't believe – he will talk from his own personal experience, rather than 'text book' religion. It's a way of restoring faith through friendship".

Phil uses a fishing metaphor to describe what's happening now. "It feels like a season when a lot of the 'ground bait' work has been done, a key time to ask who God wants us to 'fish' for, and disciple."

This new phase is finding expression in two ways at the moment. Phil and Alice have begun to break bread with a small group each Sunday morning, moving on from the informal worship that happens after the monthly lunch. Secondly, The Cairn is partnering with a local youth project to provide a Life Recovery Group in a central location on the estate. "It's designed for people who would be comfortable with a group like Alcoholics Anonymous" says Phil, "but who have come to believe that their 'higher power' is Jesus. It's also been designed for people who wouldn't find it easy to fit into a conventional small group, but who are exploring Christianity. We've been praying and planning this for a long time; we feel it could be a really key discipleship tool moving forward."



Photo: Ruth Whiter

Phil and Alice Lawrence
in their kitchen at The Cairn

Phil and Alice are in this for the long term, but the Home Mission grant that currently supports their ministry has to be transitional. They hope that assets raised by the sale of the church's former manse will be used to build new housing in the grounds of The Cairn, providing an income for the church in a community where paid ministry has never been affordable.

I was beginning to see how Graham Kendrick's prophecy of lights shining in every street could be realised here. "But it needs God to do the radical transformation" Phil adds, "or it doesn't work."

Ruth Whiter is communications co-ordinator for the West of England Baptist Association



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Oasis House – Trinity Baptist Church

Trinity Baptist Church has responded to its growing congregation with a new building and a vision to reach many more.

“This is not a monument – but a legacy for the next generation.” So explains Kingsley Appiagyei, senior pastor of Trinity Baptist Church, capturing the vision of his church’s impressive new building.

Oasis House was officially opened in April; a 27,000 sq ft warehouse in Croydon, meticulously converted to help the church fulfill its commission. Its vision is threefold: firstly, it’s an investment in the Kingdom of God in the UK, in an era where church buildings are being lost to non-Christian organisations; secondly it’s a ‘beacon of hope’ against the onslaught of secularisation and other religions in the UK; thirdly, it’s ‘a covering for our future generation against social ills that seems to be on the increase.’

“Oasis House has been built as a revival centre, from where missionaries will be trained to ignite those fires of revival, not only in UK, but also Europe,” explains Kingsley.

“It’s also a youth resource centre for many, many young people for various reasons – because of broken homes, or unable to cope with the pressure of society.

“I believe with this capacity, and the resources the Lord is giving to us, we are in a very good position to train the next generation of young people, and fit them well into society.”



Pastor Kingsley worshipping with Trinity Baptist Church, Thornlaw Road

Photo: Trinity Baptist Church

A short history

Trinity Baptist Church began life in the 1980s in a room of Kingsley and wife Cynthia’s home, with just eight people. Its first few years were a nomadic existence, holding meetings and services at a variety of churches in south London. In 1994 it acquired its first premises, in Thornlaw Road in South Norwood. The church continued to grow and it wasn’t long before it considered expanding its building.

However, things initially didn’t go to plan. The church failed to get planning permission to develop Thornlaw Road, experiencing opposition from both the community and local council. It began to look further afield and acquired the Croydon building in 2008, a disused site on an industrial estate tucked off one of Croydon’s main roads. The site is close to rows of residential housing, and a place where gangs would gather.

Learning from its experiences when trying to expand in South Norwood, Trinity fully engaged the new community with its plans. It made sure there was no interest in continuing to use the building as a warehouse, and sent consultation leaflets to all neighbours informing them of its proposals, and communicating how the building and its activities would benefit the community. It addressed all concerns, including travel, parking and noise.

“We did a lot of work to get support from the community here for the project,” says project manager Sam Adu Poku. “It took two years to get planning permission, but we got support from every corner.”

Engaging the youth

Planning permission was granted in 2011. Several councillors on the committee were Christians and could see the potential of what was being proposed. As church members envisaged the next chapter of their life in Croydon, they became aware of the borough’s problems with youth crime. Gangs and a sense of hopelessness are prevalent. In 2016 Croydon had the fourth highest levels of youth violence in London.

Therefore, some of the key features in the building have been geared towards engaging those who, for a variety of reasons, are ‘falling through society’s cracks’ and finding solace in gangs.

Worship at Trinity Baptist Church, Thornlaw Road



Photo: Trinity Baptist Church



The new 1000+ seat auditorium at Trinity Baptist Church's Oasis House

There is a youth/sports hall, equipped with showers and changing facilities. The hall can be used for a variety of games such as basketball, table tennis, five-a-side football and snooker. A music studio has been built to enable the youth to record music and channel their creativity. There is a youth empowerment office, with a church member working alongside the council. The church has a mentoring programme, where professionals can get alongside young people and help guide them.

"It's our vision to bring people in, and this is a place where they can rethink their lives," explains Pastor Daniel Boakye, Trinity's Chief Operations Officer.



Pastor Dan Boakye

"If youths are gathering outside, we will approach them, and try to engage them. We want to show them 'you've got friends here, not enemies'. That sort of contact breaks the fear."

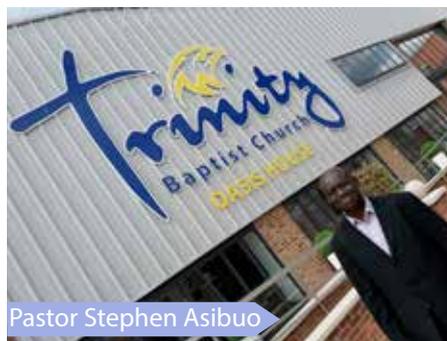
"Our aim is to offer them a career service, give them pastoral advice, and help them find their feet," resident Pastor Stephen Asibuo continues.

"Our aim is to make sure they get best education so they can get the best job and turn their lives around.

"Then they can see what church has brought them. We want to reach out to the youth, not only so crime in the community can be reduced. We want to engage them and reach them for Christ."

Oasis: 'a place of rest and refreshment'

In addition to the youth hall and music studio, the centre-piece of the new building is its 1000+ seat auditorium, where Sunday services take place. Trinity still operates its West Norwood building, and together with a church plant in Accra, Ghana, describes itself as 'one church; three locations'. (It has a total of 18 church plants in England and Europe, all of which are now autonomous churches.) There are four services each Sunday in the buildings at West Norwood and Croydon for its 2,200 membership: two English services, one in Ghanaian, and a youth service. Before Oasis House opened, all four used to take place at Thornlaw Road.



Pastor Stephen Asibuo

That the youth service takes place in the new building shows what Trinity has sought to learn from Hillsong Church. "Pastor Kingsley asked some of the leadership team to visit Hillsong to find out why it was attracting so many

young people," explains Stephen. "One of the conclusions was its high quality multimedia, so we have incorporated this into the new building. All our services are recorded live and are accessible on Youtube. Food is available after the service. Everything is done to a high standard."

Adjoining the auditorium is a series of smaller meeting rooms, where the church's children's work can take place. These rooms can be used as training rooms that can be hired by the community (this part of the borough lacks such facilities). Good parent counselling sessions, crime and prevention classes and business support services are all planned.

There will also be a range of other activities as the building becomes fully operational. A crèche has been created for parents and toddlers. There will be regular activities for the elderly. The sports hall can double as an events hall for weddings and parties. Activities long-established at West Norwood will continue, such as the Saturday School, where the church's teachers provide tuition for those unable to afford private tutors, and the foodbank (the Trinity Baptist Church foodbank is the highest foodbank donor in the West Norwood Community).

"Trinity Baptist Church is called to be an oasis where people find rest and refreshment," says Dan, "and this is what we hope they will find here."

Kingsley adds, "We believe it's only the good Lord that has brought us this far. We believe Oasis House will be put to good use as we continue the mandate to proclaim Christ, transform lives, and fulfil destinies."



The Well, Sheffield

How a new Baptist church in Sheffield is refreshing the spiritually thirsty.

“We’re amazed at the spiritual hunger we’re seeing,” says Nick Allan. “We’ve found that people are very receptive, probably more so than in the last five years.”

Alongside wife Marjorie, Nick leads *The Well*, a Baptist church planted in an old Methodist building in the heart of Sheffield two years ago. They sense that people are spiritually thirsty, and are aiming to meet that need by presenting what a community of faith is to people who aren’t yet Christians. “The Well reflects living water, and is a place where people will hopefully be refilled”, Nick explains.

Right from the outset they wanted The Well to be an attractive, welcoming place to be. In terms of being missional: it’s all about speaking the same language as those un-churched people who pass its steps everyday. The front of the building was transformed into a contemporary café, which leads into a more traditional church sanctuary with pews. All the church’s branding and signage is modern and accessible (many people have walked into the building thinking it was bar rather than a church).

The welcome is non-judgemental, and people who become engaged with The Well are encouraged to join the various communities the church has sprung up across the city. Going out on the streets, sharing faith and making people aware of their activities have been significant.

The Well offers a number of initiatives with spiritual seekers in mind. Twice a month on Friday nights it hosts a Spirit Café, which offers prayer, healing and the prophetic, though this is not described in those terms: its flyers speak of physical healing, spiritual direction, peace treatment, spiritual cleansing.



Another initiative is a 90 minute healing event every other week. It’s advertised with big signs, and many people come in from the street.

“It’s a great way to introduce God, and the kindness of God,” says Nick.

For that’s key at The Well. While the language used is accessible and non-churchy, it is all about people encountering and meeting Jesus. “There is no compromise on the message of Jesus,” Nick continues. “All we do is preach the gospel, give people the opportunity to turn to Jesus.”

Those from all walks of life, including young adults and older, spiritually thirsty people, have been responding. In addition to un-churched, The Well

has seen a significant number of de-churched people come back into the church family (“A big thing a new church plant has to offer,” says Nick). The church has grown around 250 per cent and has baptised around 20 people since its launch.

“Our aim is to love people, whoever they are, wherever they’re at,” says Marjorie. “To give them opportunity to encounter God. We meet people of all different faiths and no faith. Every age comes in but often the young people are particularly spiritually hungry.

“We have opportunities to lead people to Jesus every time that we’re open. We always give them a Bible and try to contact them afterwards. We have seen a percentage of people become part of the church and be baptised. There’s a real joy in that.”

To find out more about The Well, visit:

- » The Well website: <https://wellsheffield.com>
- » The website for the Spirit Café: www.spirit.cafe
- » Nick and Marjorie’s blog: <https://openthewell.com>

Read this *Baptist Times* story published shortly after The Well’s launch:
www.baptist.org.uk/thewell

“... it's not about shoe horning people into the current Sunday congregation, it's a church in its own right.”

Developing Messy Church

Wigan Baptist Church doesn't want to see Messy Church as simply another activity of the church, but a congregation in its own right.

It was four sessions before anyone actually came to Messy Church in Wigan. “Initially it was difficult, we really had to persevere,” remembers Wigan Baptist Church pastor David Hall. “But God was amazing in it. We did get a number of people, and numerically we have been very successful.”

Four years on and now Messy Church at Wigan is beginning another journey for which perseverance is required. The church has begun to explore what it means for Messy Church to be its own congregation. It currently meets once a month, and while very few are completely ‘unchurched’, the Messy congregation consists of those very much on the fringes of church life, lots of families and also a group of adults with learning disabilities.

Wigan's Messy Church has its own pastor, Sandra Crawford - a youth specialist Baptist minister, who joined in October 2016. Her induction took place during Messy Church.

She says that we need to move from a mind-set of Messy Church being an activity which we ‘do to people’ to one where all of us participate, learn, explore, worship, offer pastoral care and so on. She has started to build a Messy Church core team, who are exploring together how to develop this congregation.



Wigan Baptist Church pastors Sandra Crawford and David Hall

The questions currently being wrestled with by the team are: How do we encourage discipleship? How do we disciple families all together? What would Messy Church baptism, dedication and communion look like? How do we grow leaders? How do we encourage mission and social action? The key thing is discipleship, she says.

“As a youth worker my experience over the past 20 years has been that families have brought their children to church, expecting the youth team to disciple their children,” Sandra explains.

“The exciting thing about Messy Church is that it's about teaching parents how to disciple their children; as families grow in faith together.”

Two new developments include a midweek worship time beginning in September, which, like the main Messy Church gathering, will gather around food and be accessible for all ages and abilities. The team has also begun an adults-only group which meets in the local pub, based around ‘Table Talk’ conversations and the pub quiz.

“We are trying to transition,” she explains. “Messy Church is not just another activity, it's not about shoe horning people into the current Sunday congregation, it's a church in its own right. We are trying to re-think church around those people God has brought to us, many of whom are not engaged by current Sunday worship format.”

David adds, “It's exciting, but it's a massive challenge. It's a journey into discipleship. We're excited about what God is doing amongst us. It's something that's very different.”

Sandra is hoping to draw together a few Baptist leaders in the north to talk about what discipleship looks like within Messy Church, and what a Messy Church looks like in a Baptist context.

If you're interested in being part of a conversation you can contact her on sandrawiganbc@gmail.com

Read more church stories online:

- » **The Table, Cardiff** – ‘where everybody has somebody’ - www.baptist.org.uk/table
- » **Struggling to afford a full-time minister?** Benefitting from pastors across the Atlantic is one option for UK churches - www.baptist.org.uk/aipm

Transition:

theology and management theory in conversation

The Bible and management theory share three key ideas that lie at the heart of successful change, writes **Andy Lancaster**

“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked the blind man¹.

You could forgive Bartimaeus for thinking it was an obvious or even cruel question. So why did Jesus ask it? Change often offers benefits but invariably there are associated costs. Christ’s question, motivated by grace and compassion, demanded thoughtful engagement. Healing would bring Bartimaeus unimaginable gains but also implications on how a changed life would have to be lived.

Change, even good and desirable change, has consequences.

In another potential transition scenario, the rich young ruler went away sad as the requirements proved too costly².

In my role in organisational learning and development I work with businesses engaged in change. The reality is often stark! To remain the same isn’t an option, unless you want to join the list of companies which have slid into oblivion. However, the necessary change demands different goals and approaches which, like a pair of new shoes, are painful in the short term.

In a world of relentless change, we shouldn’t be surprised that the church must also transition to remain relevant and effective. It’s not that the message should change but some of the methods must.

As a Christian supporting transition in business there are well-proven theories that are helpful in facilitating change. What’s interesting is many have parallels with scriptural truths and principles. That commonality suggests that there are clear keys to successfully implementing transition.

Kurt Lewin proposed a change model that focusses on ‘unfreeze-change-freeze’. He highlighted that successful transition requires a sufficient reason to thaw from the existing frozen state. If we don’t feel enough ‘heat’ then it’s unlikely that change and its implications will be enough of a priority to reshape into the new format.

That echoes Christ’s question “What do you want me to do for you?” The starting point for change is a revelation that we cannot remain living with the status quo. No doubt the environment inside the whale was essential for Jonah to reflect that his approach was not aligned with God’s plan and he needed to change. Attempts at transition are often neutralised by an underlying and undermining belief that things are perhaps not as bad as some would make out.

¹ Luke 18:41

² Matthew 19:21-22



John Kotter proposed a well-used change model, which also starts with urgency about the current state but then highlights the need for a committed 'guiding team', a clear communicated vision, empowerment for action and persistence to keep going. This resonates with another key Biblical transformation scenario.

Given the challenge of changing the world through the message of the gospel, what was Christ's strategy? He gathered a small group of 12 whom he engaged and instructed on the nature of the 'Kingdom of God' and whom the Holy Spirit then anointed to head out into Jerusalem. The commission was to keep going until change had reached the ends of the earth.

Effective change is rarely facilitated by a 'top-down' process but rather 'bottom up' where the fresh approach and behaviours are initially role-modelled by a committed few who replicate the new DNA.

From a business perspective, neuroscience and the study of the brain is also shedding fresh light on transition processes. The concept of neuroplasticity, in which the brain adapts to new circumstances, has debunked the saying 'you can't teach an old dog new tricks'. Research shows that as we choose to embrace change our brains are literally rewired. New neural pathways are developed which channel thought processes from old well established ones to new ones that increasingly become the norm. A study found that the brains of London taxi drivers physically changed as they gained the 'knowledge' of the new routes³.

In change, we cannot underestimate how longstanding thinking and behaviours are firmly embedded and instinctive. Imagine my embarrassment when we last moved house and in the first few days I inadvertently drove back to my old home on autopilot. Thankfully, it was only a mile or so away and I didn't try to unlock the door!

Well established thought processes can hamper personal and church transition. The Bible reminds us that we can only test God's will and experience transformation when our minds are renewed⁴. Equally, a change in thinking must be accompanied by a change in lifestyle; repentance was not just a thought process but a matter of observable action⁵.



Illustration: liuzishan | istockphoto.com

3 Changes in London taxi drivers' brains driven by acquiring 'the Knowledge' at: <http://bit.ly/taxiknowledge>

4 Romans 12:2

5 Luke 3:8

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It reminds me of my time working in rehab with those battling to overcome addiction. Clients were encouraged to act 'as if' by modelling the new lifestyle long before the desirable thinking and behaviours had become their norm.

Successful transition demands a change in our actions, even if it feels uncomfortable. "We've always done it this way" is said to be one of the most dangerous phrases for any organisation!

So, it appears that the Bible and management theory share three key ideas that lie at the heart of successful change. Transition's ABC ...

Acepts that the status quo isn't an option; a conscious choice that a new way is a non-negotiable

Begins with a fully committed group; who model the change and support momentum

Commits to action; where new thinking is accompanied and evidenced by new behaviour

Andy Lancaster has more than 25 years' experience in learning and organisational development. As Head of Learning and Development Content at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (www.cipd.co.uk) he is responsible for leading the direction and delivery of CIPD's new vision for learning. Andy is on the leadership team at *Windsor Baptist Church*



'More responsive, localised and flexible'

Some examples of how Associations are transitioning



Illustration: iuzishan | istockphoto.com

Our Baptist Union of Great Britain comprises 13 Associations. Each has a team of regional ministers and administration staff that support the local church pastorally, advise on mission and practical matters, and organise beneficial training events.

In recent years the work of our Associations has been evolving to meet the needs of the churches they serve. Significant changes occurred as a result of the 'Futures Process' of 2012, that period when serious questions were asked about whether our structures and ways of being were truly what was required for a missional church in the 21st century. One clear message of the process was of a desire for something far less structured and organisational. Many changes taking place in Associations are a response to that desire.

Home Mission funding and Ministerial Recognition

Key outcomes to emerge from Futures included the devolution of the allocation of Home Mission resources to Associations. Previously grants were awarded centrally. Each Association now sets their own missional criteria for the allocation of grants, which is allowing for greater flexibility and adventure in the investment of Home Mission. They also have responsibility for the promotion of Home Mission.

Similarly, Associations now have a greater responsibility for Ministerial Recognition – the process of testing an individual's call to trained ministry – and for the support of Newly Accredited Ministers (NAMs).

Association partnerships

Another idea to emerge was Association Partnerships, as it made sense for Associations to work more closely together. Not only was this a recognition that a pooling of resources could be beneficial, but it also spoke to the age-old Baptist principle of covenant. Our Union is defined primarily not by a set of legal procedures and regulations, but by the commitment of local congregations of Baptist Christians to walking together and watching over one another in love.

The area where this has really taken hold is in the south west of England and Wales. Four Associations – *West of England, Southern Counties, South West* and *South Wales Baptist Associations* – are collaborating in several areas beyond Home Mission grants and Ministerial Recognition.



The mission partnership **Seventy-two** is one result of the collaboration of these four Associations. Seventy-two is an umbrella term for various partnership initiatives that are designed to act as a catalyst for missional movement across the region, through our Union's networks. For more information about how this is working visit:

<http://seventy-two.network>



Staff changes

Staffing is another way in which Associations are evolving. When Andy Hughes left his role as Regional Minister with the **South Wales Baptist Association** (SWaBA) after 10 years, to become Ministries Team Leader, the SWaBA Trustees with Nick Bradshaw, Regional Minister Team Leader, prayerfully considered how to proceed. They involved the Council of Churches' meetings in their thinking. In a statement announcing the appointment of three new regional ministers (one full-time alongside two part-time posts) they explained how they felt it was important to increase the staff team to enable them to offer more support for churches and ministers, to encourage and enable mission through those churches.



South Wales Baptist Association Team

Instead of a single team leader, the **South West Baptist Association** has had a vision of a collegiate model of leadership within which there are three leaders working together as a team, each acting as leader within their designated areas.

Each staff member acts as 'Team Leader' in their own areas of responsibility. Nigel Manges' role primarily is to 'pastor the pastors', support and encourage the churches, oversee mentoring, support NAMs, ensure Continuing Ministerial Development, offer conflict resolution in churches and be part of the National Settlement Team. Chris Fry, as Operations Manager takes the lead in all governance matters and general operations for the Association plus safeguarding and Ministerial Recognition. Carl Smethurst's role focuses primarily on inspiring, enabling and resourcing mission (both pioneering and in established churches) across the whole Association as well as promoting Home Mission.



South West Baptist Association Team

"I am grateful for it because it enables and empowers giftings in a way that the challenges of the established model of Regional Ministry would find more difficult to do," says Carl. "Inevitably there is overlap between our three roles – this system would cease to work if we weren't all committed to meeting together weekly – but in so doing we have the advantage of having 'three heads' rather than one considering the best ways to serve our individual churches and pioneers... it means that each of our individual churches and pioneers get the best of all three of us within our 'specialties'."

Other notable outcomes in recent years include the **Eastern Baptist Association**, which has supported Simon Goddard, one of its Regional Ministers, in taking a national pioneering role alongside his regional responsibilities.



Transition in the north west

Certainly more localised and responsive teams could point to the future. The **North West Baptist Association** (NWBA) appointed Tim Presswood as its Transitional Regional Minister in the North Western Baptist Association on a full-time basis from January 2014. Tim's role had a particular emphasis on implementing and developing the outcomes of the Baptist Futures Process.



Three years on and a set of proposals lie before Baptist churches in the Association. The recommendation is that NWBA moves from its current, largely centralised, structure to a more responsive, localised and flexible one, based upon a series of networked hubs. Each network would consist of a hub church served by a minister 'shared' between the church, the Association and potentially other partners (such as Northern Baptist College). There would be more Regional Ministers – up to 10 – working part-time for a hub church and part-time for NWBA.

Each of these posts will be shaped by the context of the hub church. They will have an element of local church ministry, an element of regional ministry to the churches in the surrounding area, and an element of special expertise to be shared across the whole Association. Under the proposals there will be no overall Regional Minister Team Leader; the regional office would be simply for meetings and storage.

The proposals have been widely consulted on and will be put before the NWBA Council in September. Tim said NWBA welcomed the recommendations of the Futures Process as "presenting significant opportunities for us to develop more responsive ways of supporting our churches."

"Although the conclusions may appear radical, they are in fact the outworking of the direction in which NWBA has been travelling for some time," he explained.

"What is emerging is a vision for a more flexible and responsive 'networked' Association, based around a number of hub churches. It is not uncommon to hear people in local churches refer to 'The Association', as though it were a distinct entity, removed from the life of its member churches. The new model makes it clear that the Association does not exist outside of the local congregations. The proposals are for a much more peer-based network of support – which feels very Baptist. It's a more distributed system.

"We feel that focusing NWBA's work more closely on network hubs will enable Baptist churches to feel more closely part of the broader Baptist community."



'Mission is a privilege for all Christians'



Photo: BMS World Mission



Dr Kang-San Tan
and his wife Loun Ling Lee

Dr Kang-San Tan will take up his post of General Director of BMS World Mission in October, the first non-European to do so. He says there is a major shift in global Christianity, which brings great opportunities for BMS and Baptist churches in the UK. Nevertheless, certain things don't change...

What can we expect from you as General Director of BMS World Mission?

I think at least two things. One, I hope I will be able to continue in affirming BMS' vision, the *Highest Goal*, and continue the close partnership between BMS and our Baptist churches.

At the same time, I think we are witnessing a major shift in global Christianity. There are new opportunities to partner with other missions from the non-Western world. I would like to be able to be faithful to the gospel, to our Baptist vision, but also be open to opportunities to partner with global Christians, both outside Britain and also within Britain, with its growing migrant communities, and the black and minority ethnic churches.

I hope there will be a pioneering of new opportunities for mission, locally as well as globally.

How did the Muslim community around you and your Buddhist family react when you became a Christian?

I remember telling my mum that I had now made a Christian commitment, and it was a real shock to my family. There was very strong family pressure. We have a saying "One more Christian means one less Chinese". Because in those days to be seen as Christian was dishonouring to your parents and your culture. It was quite a difficult time for my family to receive that news.

The perception that Christianity is not Chinese, is not Asian, that it's a foreign religion - does that still persist? How can we change that perception?

For Asian Christians when we come to Christ, I think, number one, we tend to reject our past cultures.

And, number two, often we receive the Western forms of Christianity, rather than really living out authentic discipleship that is more sensitive within our culture. I think contextualisation and being able to value our past cultural identities is quite important for Christianity in the non-Western world.

Do you think that your multi-faith context in which you grew-up has given you lessons that may influence the way that you think about mission, and leading a mission organisation?

Yes, I think when I first looked at my doctoral work, I've been really drawn to a statement that says beginning with people of a different faith is probably one of the most controversial, challenging mission issues. There's potential for Asian Christianity, which comes from a multi-faith context, to contribute. Different religions are now at our door. In almost every town in Britain we have Hindus, Muslims and others. I do hope this engagement can bring a certain balance.

But many BMS workers now work in a mission situation that could contribute to Baptist churches in Britain in terms of building bridges with our migrant communities that come from non-Christian backgrounds.

With finances tight in Britain, and people struggling more in the age of austerity, how do we continue to convince Christians that it's still worth spending money and prayer and resources and time on the rest of the world? You often hear 'charity begins at home.'

I think in a sense we do recognise that mission is not just out there, but also local. Especially opportunities to be involved with migrants. So that's actually very good. But on the other hand I'm looking at resources that are tightening. It is for British Christianity to learn that global mission is not just a response for those who are rich, but it's actually a privilege of all of us. We hear about the glowing mission commitment from churches in Nepal or Mongolia and we begin to see that global mission is not just for rich nations, but even in times of costly sacrifices that it's a wonderful privilege.

I do hope that BMS, together with British churches, will continue to see that it is a wonderful privilege for the gospel to be shared among the nations. I hope that we can participate with churches from poorer communities, and that together we can continue to play a crucial role in the plan of Christian mission.

If you had one thing to say to all the BMS supporters out there, what would that message be?

Coming from a Buddhist home and growing up in a Muslim community I hope that I'll be able to bring this passion for the Lordship of Christ among the nations. Mission is not a project for the few, but really a wonderful privilege for all Christians everywhere.

Today, more than ever, we have this wonderful opportunity to embrace mission; for every Christian to be a witness everywhere; locally as well as globally.

Mission is for all Christians!

Prior to joining *BMS World Mission*, Dr Tan was Executive Director for AsiaCMS, an Asian indigenous mission network in relationship with Church Mission Society. He is highly respected in the field of Christian intercultural engagement worldwide. In a previous post he served at Redcliffe College in Gloucester, where he pioneered the first MA in Intercultural Studies in Asian Contexts. He was a member of *Kendal Road Baptist Church* in Gloucester during his time there.

In his home country of Malaysia, Dr Tan is a life member of Trinity Baptist Church and Emmanuel Evangelical Free Church. He and wife Loun Ling Lee, together with daughter Chara, moved to the UK in the summer.



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Photo: Len Harvey

AGE IS NO BARRIER

Sylvia Harvey, Kath Durling, Roger Durling and Len Harvey (far right) with children in Ethiopia

“I’m still involved in mission work”

Age is no barrier to being God’s hands and feet, as these Baptists have discovered through the charity **Stand By Me**



Seventy-seven year old Len Harvey is planning to head to Bekoji, Ethiopia for another eye-opening trip in November. It will be the fourth time in eight years he and his wife Sylvia have swapped the comforts of home to visit the mid-sized town some 200km south of the capital Addis Ababa.

Their reason? Following retirement the couple have become deeply immersed in the work of **Stand By Me**, a charity which exists to provide a better life for vulnerable children around the world.

Len and Sylvia, together with fellow **Tonbridge Baptist Church** (Kent) members Roger and Kath Durling, spend up to a month at a time on their biannual visits to Ethiopia working with and caring for the children.

“I never dreamed of doing these things at this age,” says Len, a former glazier. “It’s become much stronger than a hobby.”

Len had long sponsored children through organisations like Tearfund and World Vision. When he discovered that

a friend had visited her child in Kenya in 2008, he was intrigued and a group went out to Kenya. He later heard a talk from the charity founder Dave Spurdle, about the need in Ethiopia. He has been ‘hooked’ ever since.

In Bekoji, *Stand by Me* adopted a school where more than 200 children were crammed into just two classrooms, and went on to build a new campus where 450 children receive a free education and health care. Two years later it built a children’s home to provide a loving family environment for orphaned and abandoned children.



Photo: Len Harvey

Kath and Sylvia painting school beds

“I never dreamed of doing these things at this age”

When in the country they do whatever is needed, whether that’s building water filters or putting together beds, or just simply playing with the children. Between each visit (which they fund themselves) Len and Sylvia, and Roger and Kath raise money for the work of the school and the home. Every month they hold a community breakfast, where any profits are ploughed back into the *Stand by Me* fund.

(Their fundraising once resulted in a new shower block for the school).

“It’s a great part of my faith,” explains Len. “I wouldn’t have stepped out in the first place if it hadn’t been for my faith. I believe it’s God’s will.”

He continues: “Being involved has given me a sense of knowing I’m doing what God wants me to do. In a sense it’s given me proof of my Christianity. If there’s anything I can do that will improve the lives of these children, I will do it: the impact *Stand By Me* has had on the whole town and the children is immense.”

It's a similar story for Norman Stokes of *Upminster Baptist Church* in Essex. Earlier this year, Norman, now aged 82, was part of a team of sponsors to visit the charity's projects in Nepal. Like in Bekoji, it runs a school.

"It was humbling to be there. They are very grateful for the work of *Stand by Me*. You realise it's a small part of the picture of a very big world. But all the small bits add up."

Norman first became involved 25 years ago when he met founder David Spurdle at a church lunch. At the time Norman was a bank manager and the charity was in its infancy. Norman would offer financial advice over the years.

As the charity became more established and Norman retired in 1994, his financial wisdom was in less demand, but he has continued to sponsor children through the charity, and support office staff (the charity is based in Upminster).

Stand By Me encourages its supporters to visit the projects they support, which is why Norman, his wife Janet, and a group of fellow sponsors travelled to Nepal. There he saw first hand the school the charity runs, ("The school looks at the needs of the whole child – it's one of the best schools in the country") and received encouraging feedback from the teachers of a boy he sponsors there. In the months prior to going he had received a report from the boy's school.

"It was clear he was bullying, so I sent him a rather stiff letter back saying this behaviour wasn't acceptable and had to change," Norman recalls. "I was pleased to hear from the school when I went



Norman and Janet Stokes in Nepal, February 2017

Photo: Stand by Me

out that his behaviour has improved, and they said my letter had made a difference."

He says that going on a trip is a good way of solidifying support, making supporters more prayerful and more aware of needs. He adds that his age was no barrier to travelling to Nepal.

"I retired in 1994. I've remained active, I've got all my faculties. I'm still involved in mission work and pastoral care at the church. The Lord is good. By his grace, I expect to be still involved!"

"I feel that *Stand By Me* is fulfilling a need. It's preaching the gospel but supporting the whole child and in some cases their families. I would recommend it to anybody – it's biblically based and practical Christianity."

"Anybody who is involved in mission, you've got to get your hands dirty," he continues. "Mission requires men and women of all ages and skills."

"It's a small part of the picture of a very big world. But all the small bits add up."

Stand by Me founding director David Spurdle,



a head teacher from Essex, went on a mission trip to Lebanon during the civil war to dig a ditch for a sewer for an orphanage. There he saw firsthand the needs of the orphaned children and he knew he had to act.

After this life-changing experience, he took early retirement from teaching and founded *Stand by Me*, running it initially from his garden shed. Since then the charity has rescued more than 10,000 children across 11 countries.

For more visit: www.standby.me



Photos: Stand by Me



'There is a place for everyone on our teams.

'We believe that mission teams can have an impact in the lives of our children. That's why for well over a decade *Stand by Me* has taken teams to engage in life-changing work with our children around the world. Each year, teams pack up their belongings along with their unique skill sets and talents and take to the skies in an eye-opening, life-altering adventure, visiting our projects scattered across four continents.

'Doctors, builders, students, nurses, young people, teachers, dentists, pastors, mums, classroom assistants, youth workers and grandmothers and many more show that there is a place for everyone on our teams.

'*Stand by Me* teams play a vital role in our care for children around the world.'

Statement from *Stand by Me*





Photo: So!Stock | iStockphoto.com

Each September many young people make one of the biggest moves of their lives: leaving home and heading off to university. It's a time when faith can drift, or go deeper. How best to make that transition? We asked for some advice...



Grace Harrison, of **Hoole Baptist Church**, has just completed a four year History and French degree at Exeter University.

My advice to anyone starting university is to do things quickly.

Check out the Christian Union straightaway. If they have a church search, use it – it's much less daunting if a group of you are going to a church for the first time. Don't leave it.

When you do join a church, get involved quickly. If you begin to serve it will help you feel more involved and settle quickly. There will be somewhere you can serve, even if you haven't done it at your church.

I think I visited six churches in the first three weeks. I settled at Frontiers Church (which is now called Grace).

It had a really good way of getting people involved – it used 'Connect' cards, which you filled in to say what areas you could serve in.

I had a strong faith and good understanding before I went to university, but it definitely deepened when I was there. Doing everything on my own I made it my own. I was baptised in my first year.

I found myself very busy with 'Christian activities' which helped me get to know other Christians, but not non-Christians so much. So at the end of my first year I decided to stop being involved in the Christian Union and just focused on my church and other activities (like cricket and a cappella) where I could form deeper friendships with non Christians.

University is such an amazing opportunity to share faith that I think it's really important to make sure Christian students don't get completely into a Christian bubble.



Lois Delong is entering her second year studying Biomedical Science at Lincoln University. Her home church is **Edmonton Baptist Church**.

I wanted to get stuck in straightaway. The weekend before University started I visited a church, and immediately thought "This is the place I need to be." I've loved it ever since.

Someone from our church had been to Lincoln, and was telling me about Alive Church. I like what it stood for.

I went with two flatmates (both are not Christian) which was nice. They wanted to walk me there.

A lady sat with me the whole service. I met the student pastor. It's not a Baptist church, but it does feel like Edmonton. There is a family feel.

My home church helped me to prepare for university, it was part of the youth session. We did a whole month. We were able to speak to people who had finished university. We could ask about anything. It gave us an idea about all sorts of things, like budgeting. It was really helpful.

I was praying about where I would go. When I visited Lincoln I loved it. You meet people with different beliefs, and I feel like I've really grown in faith.



Pip Harrison is studying Engineering at Oxford University. He attends **Hoole Baptist Church**, Chester.

It's been really good. It came at the right time, although it's been a big change.

It's been brilliant for my faith. I feel with the independence here I've taken ownership of my faith.

I became quickly involved in a church, both on a Sunday and in midweek groups. I went to about six churches in my first three weeks, a blitz of looking around. I had some major criteria, so I knew quickly. I wanted to settle in a church quickly. Often people tend to hang back, but settling quickly definitely helped. It's been a brilliant family.

I'm now running my college's Christian Union. It's something new. Started very small – initially only three people out of 600. But lots of people are now interested, and it's been one of the highlights of my year. We're seeing a lot of interest in spirituality. People at university are open to anything! Especially if you offer free food...

My church helped me prepare by encouraging me to be involved, even in small ways like putting the chairs out, or Easter Holiday Clubs. It helps you get used to serving. My minister gave me a UCCF pack, which was helpful in preparing for lots of the practical things about university.

I think churches can help by chatting to people, seeing what their aims are.



Lydia Wright has just graduated from Keele University, where she studied Psychology and Philosophy.

Initially I was a bit apprehensive about going to university. At the time I wasn't very independent and university was very different. I prayed a lot about what was going to happen, about meeting the right people. I asked the church to pray for me and they were very supportive.

When I arrived I made a point of getting involved with the Christian Union as soon as possible. I also found a church through the university's church search. Make use of that. You get the opportunity to go to a variety of churches in the first few weeks. It's important not to look for your home church, but figure out where God is calling you.

It was certainly a time that I thought a lot more about what I believe in. It's a good time to talk to people of different denominations. It's interesting to find out their differences, and why they believe what they do. Do as many extra Bible studies as you can.

It's also important not just to have Christian friends. I was very active in musical theatre. There were probably only a couple of Christians. I tried to make sure my faith was never hidden.

But always put God first. There were so many situations where I had a lot going on, but I still went to church, or away with the Christian Union.

I was always blessed by that, and feel that God blessed my work. There are some times when you can't, but put God first as much as you can.



Ben Ifura of **Willesden Green Baptist Church** has completed two years of a Computer Science degree at Coventry University.

I joined the Christian Union, but didn't really like it, so I stopped going. I also found it hard to find a church. I really had to trust God. I found one that was full of young people like at Willesden. That's what I expected churches to be like, and initially I was happy. But gradually I began to realise that it wasn't the church where God wanted me to be. I prayed about it, and knew I had to move away.

I found another church. It was a struggle to go at first, I was doing it almost out of habit, out of duty. But in my second year I began to realise why God called me there. A lot of young people joined – local people, first years, people doing masters – and I was able to help them settle. In so many ways I've learned to trust God, to rely on him.

One thing to realise is you have a lot of free time, a time without some of the responsibilities that come later. Commit that time to God. God can reveal so much to you that will change your life. Learn new skills, beyond your course.

And enjoy it – eventually you will grow up!



Photo: freepik.com



Photo: patat | istockphoto.com



Left to their own devices?

Confident parenting
in a world of screens

By Katharine Hill

Less than 10 years ago, the advice we would give to parents wanting to protect their children was to put the family computer in the living room so that internet use could be easily monitored. Enter Steve Jobs and the rise of the smartphone, and this advice has been rendered obsolete. Digital technology is advancing at an incredible speed, and it will take some time for society to adjust - and adjust it will. As parents, though, time is a luxury we simply don't have. Our children need our help and guidance now, not in 5, 10 or 15 years' time, when it will be too late.

The digital age brings many advantages and wonderful opportunities. Long journeys with bored children and endless games of I-spy are now a thing of the past. Learning opportunities are so much greater - no longer limited to children with access to books in the home. We can connect with friends across the city and families around the world. And what parent hasn't breathed a sigh of relief when putting a child in front of a screen during the 'happy hour' - 5 pm to 6 pm - when blood sugar is running low, sibling rivalry is at its peak, and the pasta is not yet on the table.

But alongside the advantages, there are a number of challenges. The issue of screen time, for instance, causes many rows at home - you may be tearing your hair out right now with your three-year-old having an iPaddy or a teenager who appears to be surgically attached to their mobile!

Along with worries about screen time, many parents are rightly concerned about the more serious dangers of pornography, sexting, internet addiction and grooming, not to mention the relentless pressure on children of social media and the selfie culture.

From their infancy, our role as parents is to teach our children life skills that will keep them safe. We teach them to tie shoelaces, cross the road, and swim - we have these skills ourselves, so we can pass them on. But when it comes to digital technology, many of us feel our children know more than we do, and we have no idea how to keep a step ahead. Most parents today will be what experts call 'digital visitors'. We use technology as a tool - going online to check the train times, do a grocery shop, or send an email. In contrast, most young people are 'digital residents' - digital technology is an integrated part of their lives.

As 'visitors', even if we digest a digital dictionary and learn acronyms such as pcm (please call me) or, more importantly, pos (parent over shoulder), we'll never be as at home in the digital world as those who live there. It involves a different attitude and approach to life. And therein lies the challenge.

While we don't need to be experts, we can do things not only to protect our children from the dangers, but to help them make the most of what the digital world has to offer. When they are little, we put sharp knives and the bleach out of their reach. In the same way, we can use passwords, filters, and parental controls to keep our children safe online. Many families have found it helpful to sit down together and create a 'family media agreement' - age-appropriate guidelines in line with their family values, that everyone, including parents (here's the challenge!), signs up to.

Boundaries around internet use at home are vital, especially with younger teenagers, but they only go so far. What about when our children are out and about, when we aren't there?



Unless we equip them to deal with the issues, they will only be as safe as the least protected child they know.

Ultimately, our task as parents isn't about raising children or even teenagers – it's about raising adults. We do this by passing on wisdom and values in the context of family life.

The saying that 'values are more often caught than taught' is so true; we may think our children aren't listening to us, but the truth is, they don't miss a thing. We are their role models, and little by little, through conversations, time spent together, and the everyday ups and downs of family life, we sow values into their lives which become their reference point when they make their own decisions in years to come.

The writer of the book of Proverbs says:

Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you.

Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom.

- Proverbs 4:6-7, NIV.

Our role as parents is a positive one. Instead of being naysayers who limit our children's options, we can teach them to manage their freedom well, training and empowering them to make good choices in a world where all choices are possible.

Katharine Hill is UK Director for Care for the Family. Her latest book is called *Left to Their Own Devices?*, where she explores the impact of the digital world on teenagers and younger children





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www.prisonweek.org



Faith and Thought - Open Symposium
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'Handling Biblical Violence'
www.faithandthought.org



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22-29 October
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Events



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www.biblesunday.org



Baptist Union Council
2-3 November
Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick



Adoption Sunday
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www.homeforgood.org.uk/get-involved/adoption-sunday



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3 December



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18 December
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www.scriptureunion.org.uk/3729384.id#.WVUAO4qQzFw

It's Your Move

It's a big deal moving from primary to secondary school. They're leaping into a much bigger, unfamiliar place where there's lots of teenage kids rushing about... a small fish in a BIG pond springs to mind!

But the move is also full of opportunities and adventures. Scripture Union's book *It's Your Move* is there to reassure children embarking on the next part of their educational journey, reminding them that God is always with them.

It's Your Move has been given to over one million children, in their final year of primary school, across the UK each year since 2001, as part of a programme helping them make the transition to secondary school.

From Scripture Union

www.scriptureunion.org.uk/3619244.id#.WVT_z4qQzFw

Marriage and parents

Care For the Family

Care for the Family is a national charity which aims to promote strong family life and to help those who face family

Students

Student Linkup Box (Fusion)

Everything you need for starting university in one Box. Over the last decade Fusion has prepared tens of thousands of students for their university years. This resource is designed to help you lay the very best foundation for your time at university and think about who you want to be, how you want to live and what you want to achieve.

www.fusionmovement.org/resources/product/10

Fusion's loveyouruni bundle contains four brilliant resources for current students.

Living Mission - Living, breathing, being missional in our universities.

The Graduate Alphabet - the essential guide to life after university.

The Stuff of Life - Facing challenges and doing life well.

Fuse Magazine - Your finger on the pulse of student mission.

More resources from Fusion, www.fusionmovement.org/resources

Millennials

Disciple

A brand new discipleship course for those in their 20s and 30s. A 10 week interactive multimedia course to help millennials makes their lives count. It begins with the premise: if you are a Christian, you already have everything you need for your life story to make an impact that will last for ever. What story are you going to write?

www.ficm.org.uk/disciple-overview-each-session

www.ficm.org.uk/disciple

difficulties. It has a range of courses about parenting and marriage preparation.

www.careforthefamily.org.uk/courses

Empty nest

Empty Nest – What's Next?

Parenting Adult Children Without Losing Your Mind by Michele Howe

This resource will offer parents true stories of other mums and dads who are facing the very same challenges. Parents will discover a biblical model of faith-inspiring exercises that enable them to not simply cope with the demands of parenting their young adult children, but also to find peace, freedom, and joy in the process.

www.eden.co.uk/shop/empty-nest-whats-next-4470316.html

Retirement

New ministry for the third age...

The charity Christian Action Research and Education believes that Christian men and women who have reached the 'Third Age' of their lives have so much to offer - with their long years of experience, walking with God and gaining wisdom, patience and understanding. So CARE has set up a new initiative called CARE for the Future, which aims to inspire and encourage those finding themselves at this stage to discover and develop areas of ministry God may be opening up for them. Third Age usually refers to the post-retirement years. However, many people are still working, and living longer! Perhaps it's time to rethink your role at this stage of your life.

www.care.org.uk/future

Finishing Our Course With Joy –

Ageing with Hope – by JI Packer

Veteran theologian Packer offers a vision for lifelong learning, wholehearted service, and running the race until the end, despite all the challenges that come with ageing.

Packer's pastoral words and personal example – he was in his 80s when he penned this book - encourage us to press on towards the upward call of God with endurance and grace.

www.amazon.co.uk/Finishing-our-course-joy-Packer/dp/1783590890

TRANSITIONING

- thoughts and prayers for Baptists Together

Photo: allgor | istockphoto.com

In 2014 the Methodists and the Baptists in Wirksworth Derbyshire officially joined together as a Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP), called Wellspring. We had been worshipping together for a year, and agreed to sell the Baptist building and make the Methodist one our home. Big changes! A huge transition for us all! For many of the Baptists, that church had been their spiritual home for many years. For the Methodists, there were some qualms about a 'Baptist takeover'.

That early transition phase was a mix of the momentous and the mundane: wrestling with organisational and theological issues alongside deciding what to keep and what to give away. Some of this was trivial – too much crockery, too many chairs. Other things were symbolically important - the Baptist communion table and War Memorial. We transferred the heaters and ceiling lights. The Methodist building had to have gas installed; and cupboards and store rooms were cleared of decades of clutter. There were major decisions about styles of leadership, vision-shaping and worship, and what kind of ministry we would need when our two part-time ministers, one Baptist, one Methodist, moved on; we had to seek and gain the blessing of our Churches Together group and our denominations.

We are now on the threshold of our most significant transition – the church agreed to call a Baptist minister (full-time, resident in Wirksworth) Kevin Price will be inducted on 30 September. He and his wife Lesley moved from Watford in August.

The first major transition occurred in 2014 with the final service in the Baptist church followed the next week by the inaugural service of the LEP. These prayers have been written/compiled by the Wellspring Wirksworth Team of Minister and Trustees.

www.wellspringchurchwirksworth.co.uk



Lesley and Kevin Price

Standing on the threshold of a new beginning

The Service of Inauguration was on 21 September 2014, which happened to be the autumn equinox. This was appropriate, as we felt ourselves to be finely balanced between the former things and the new things God would lead us into:

Song for the Equinox

We're standing on the threshold of a new beginning,
Joining hands together as we face the light;
Leaving space for God, the Holy Spirit's presence,
Trusting in his promise for a future bright.

Take us to the places where your change is wanted.
Show us all the people living deep in need.
Help us to be liberal in all our giving,
As we indiscriminately scatter seed.

Take us to the edges with your love's compassion.
Take from us the attitudes we call our own.
Free us from believing in our limitations
Take us to the edges of our comfort zone.

We shall be your servants as we follow in your footsteps,
Confident, courageous, knowing we've been found.
Claiming for the Kingdom all the strength you offer,
Understanding that we're all on holy ground.

Take from us the fear of all the old ways changing;
Give us each the vision of a bonded whole -
So that all the world will see a new revealing,
See the Source of all that beats within our soul.



Then we'll be together in a new creation,
Looking for the dawning of a bright new day,
Walking hand in hand and taking risks in loving
Trusting that in future we will walk your way.

Let us journey on towards a God-planned future.
Celebrating one-ness, relegating fear;
Seeing new horizons 'cross the shining ocean -
Realising that the Kingdom's now – and here!

Unpublished song written by Paul Heppleston with John Bayes, for the Wellspring Wirksworth launch service

The text for the service was Isaiah 43:18-19a

*Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?*

Mike Fegredo (East Midland Baptist Association Regional Minister) preached...

- » Of a God who is bigger than our comprehension;
- » Of a God who is always doing a new thing!
- » Of a God who wants our co-operation, to allow his future for Wellspring to emerge;
- » Of a God who challenges us to give thanks for the past and let it go, not forgetting it, but building on it.



'Doing Church Differently'

At the first congregational meeting, Trustees were elected whose task would be to shape our four-fold vision into reality – worship, pastoral care, reaching out, property. The mantra for all the early meetings, and the challenge ever since, was 'Doing Church Differently.'

This soon became our watchword; our inspiration and our aspiration. We desired to be more than the sum of our parts, much more than two small congregations joining together to pool resources and save money! We wanted to respect both traditions but look to God to shape us into a new community, Wellspring.

We saw our coming together like a wedding – based on love and a desire to be together and to be faithful to each other, but realistic about the adjustments needed to make it work!

Liturgy (or litany?) for transition – the journey so far

Oh the temptation to settle down, after all the excitement of the honeymoon!

Lord, please don't let this happen; keep alive in us the desire you've given us to 'Do Church Differently.'

Inevitably, we have developed routine, rhythm, order, and a Wellspring way of doing things; and we admit we quite like it! Chaos and uncertainty make us nervous.

Lord, thank you for routine and rhythm, but don't let us get too comfortable; unsettle us, keep us on our toes, make us restless; lest we get left behind.

We confess it is hard to take the next step when some things aren't resolved; we have to agree to see things as 'now' or 'not yet', 'sooner' or 'later'.

How scary it is Lord, to move on in faith, one step at a time! But we want to keep walking when we can't see the way ahead; forgive us for the feeble footsteps when you want us to take giant leaps.

We wouldn't be where we are without the 'big picture' people, who keep the vision alive. And nothing gets done without those who ask the practical questions and do the painstaking work.

Lord, you have brought us together as you brought the first disciples; you have given us many and various gifts; you are building your body amongst us. We are so grateful; continue to make us one so that we too can change the world.

Upheaval and change are hard work! After three years, we are aware of the cost, in terms of energy, commitment, enthusiasm, keeping up the momentum...

Lord, even when you were weary, you never lost sight of your goal and your calling; you had compassion on the crowd, you faced all obstacles, you drew your strength from your Father. Help us to do the same.

There have been frustrations, things going wrong, disappointments, setbacks, brick walls and precipices.

Lord, thank you for your unfailing guidance and grace at such times, gently leading us back into your way. Amen

Musings on the word 'Transition'

At a Trustees' Away Day in July, led by our minister Kevin Price, we spent time talking and reflecting on transition, what it has meant for us already, and what it will mean once Kevin's ministry begins.

Transition: *'change is a word people don't like so we have to call it something else.'*

Transition is a process, not a one off event; we can't ever say; 'ok we can relax now, we've done the Big Change.'

Transition is necessary for life; nothing stands still or else it dies. Jesus calls us to follow him and *'never be the same'* (John Bell and Graham Maule).

Transition has to be an act of will; change is inevitable but not *'change and decay in all around I see'*, it must be positive and bold.

We can't know the end from the beginning, we have to start and see where it leads, we will never arrive.

How do we experience God in times of transition? As a pillar of fire and cloud, dancing and running ahead, or does God need to push and shove from behind?

Transposition: musically, that that can mean keeping the same melody and even the same harmony, but changing the key. Whatever it is, the development gives new meaning and energy to the whole piece.

Prayer for transition into the future

Lord, it might seem to us as though we've come a long way in three years. But in truth we are still a smallish congregation with services at the usual times, and our worship space is mostly arranged traditionally with rows of chairs. But we have had glimpses of what might be possible; we're making new connections in our community, we sense the potential, though we know we don't do anything radically differently yet.

What are we waiting for? We ask for your Holy Spirit to give us courage to be bold, to seize the moment, to think big, not content with just tinkering at the edges, so that transition becomes transformation. Amen

Transition, trust and team work

One of Wellspring's Trustees used to be a hockey player and coach, who always encouraged the team to believe that hockey is a psychological game, not primarily a physical one. In other words each player has to 'think team and act team', above all being thoughtful about 'what is best for the other person - perhaps the one to whom I aim to pass the ball'. It was the epitome of a true team sport; and it worked!

Lord, you are revealing to us how good and necessary it is to work together, celebrating and encouraging each member of the team, and growing together in you

You are showing us that Trusteeship is not just a legal, administrative term, but a God-given ideal of partnership and relationship, always seeking the best for the other person, built on trust and openness to your leading.

You know we don't always get it right! But Lord, we want to, we long to, so that we enable and allow your Spirit to lead us on! Amen



More inspiration from Isaiah

The unique Derbyshire tradition of Well Dressing happens in Wirksworth every May. The Methodists have done one for many years, and now it is the Wellspring Well! It takes a week to prepare and is then displayed as part of the town's Well Dressing and Carnival weekend. This year's was based on Isaiah 58: 6 onwards, especially verses 10-12.

The words came alive for us and we believe them to be prophetic for this moment in Wellspring's life.

*If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.*

*The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.*

*Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.*

Isaiah 58:10-12

Meditation on the well-watered garden

(written by the artist and designer of the Well Dressing)

'God, how do I know what you are saying? I can see you all around me.

Can I hear you speaking? Yes, in the beauty of your creation. Convert our vision into something that others can see and feel.

See it in us first, as a church, as individuals.

Even the well-watered garden has to have a Gardener.

We acknowledge you Lord, as Head Gardener,

Fill us up with good things, with water for life.

Make Wellspring like this garden!

The well dressing depicts the garden with gorgeous trees and flowers and water, like an oasis in the midst of a desert, but with a path. Is the path leading in or out; out into the wilderness, leading us into a hostile and desolate place? But the Gardener comes with us!

Wellspring: 'You will be like a **well**-watered garden, like a **spring** whose waters never fail (v 11).

Reflections on verse 12

*You'll use the old rubble of past lives to build anew,
rebuild the foundations from out of your past.
You'll be known as those who can fix anything,
restore old ruins, rebuild and renovate,
make the community liveable again! (The Message)*

Like dry stone walls (common in Derbyshire) the same stones are re-used many times to make a new wall: rubble is not waste material but building blocks out of place and in need of re-arrangement.

*You will be called Repairer of Broken Walls' (v 12)
Broken... what does brokenness look like here?
The new bricks and the old stones build the new walls; walls that support, not divide, laid on our foundation of faith'.*

These words excite us Lord!

To be known as those who can fix anything,
For with God, nothing shall be impossible
Hallelujah

We trust God for our next transition phase:

Moving on

Say it was worth it Lord

All those years

Doing the familiar

Hoping for a future.

Say it's been worth it Lord

Despite the tears

Exploring change

Shaping our future.

Say it'll be worth it Lord

Facing our fears

Forging a new way

Grasping your future. Amen

Prayer from the Iona communion liturgy

(This was very meaningful for us at our Away Day)

Lord Jesus Christ,

You have put your life into our hands;

Now we put our lives into yours.

Take us,

Renew and remake us.

What we have is past;

What we shall be, through you,

Still awaits us.

Lead us on,

Take us with you. Amen

Post communion prayer from *The Wee Worship Book*
Wildgoose Publications 1999 page 101

Reflecting on Transition

- » How does your own church deal with change?
- » Has the Wellspring story and the other stories in these pages anything to say to you?
- » Do you relish or resist change?
- » What are your hopes and dreams for the next months and years? How will you set about achieving them?



Transition

If I had written this piece a couple of years ago and suggested that we would now be in a situation of the UK set to leave the European Union, Donald Trump President of the USA, our Parliament with a minority Conservative Government relying on the support of the DUP, and that Leicester City would have become Premier League champions and then sacked their manager – you would have had good reason to say that I was talking nonsense.

And yet in the space of 24 months or so, all those things have happened, and this is but a small sample of all that has taken place in our world. This edition of Baptists Together is about transition - recognising how local church communities have perceived and engaged with the need to change. There are situations in which we do need to change and adapt, but we don't do this in a world that is simply standing still waiting for us to respond. Society is changing too and we cannot fully anticipate what it might become in just a few years' time.

So when we talk about transition, yes there are important issues for the Church to ask about itself, but there are also broader questions about the role and purpose of the Church in a world that is changing too. How do we faithfully respond to the broader transitions that we see happening around us?

There's a lot more to be said on this subject than can possibly be covered here, but let me offer a few thoughts:

*Firstly, we might ask what things we need to **challenge** in this changing world. This is not about resisting change for the sake of it, but asking questions of those trends and directions that are a cause for concern. One example for me is the changing tone of much of our political debate, which reflects some quite divisive and self-centred narratives. How might we challenge the attitudes and assumptions about others that these seem to betray?*

*Secondly we might also consider the role we have in bringing **hope and assurance** to an increasingly uncertain and insecure world. With issues like Brexit looming, ongoing fragility in many political and economic systems, we can speak as those whose faith is founded in a God who both transcends human affairs, but has spoken into every era of history as one who is the same yesterday, today and forever.*

*And thirdly, what are those things that risk being forgotten and marginalised, that we might call upon our society to **champion and re-discover**. In the current climate, political expediency and economic gain seem to be the standard by which everything is judged. How might we reclaim a commitment to the common good? Whose are the voices that are being drowned out and how can we help them be heard? In a changing world, we need a Church that knows how to transition, but we also need a Church that knows where its roots lie, and can be a prophetic voice in its public debates.*

Phil Jump is the Regional Minister Team Leader at the North Western Baptist Association (NWBA)



See, I am doing a new thing!

The National Pioneer Co-ordinators for Baptists Together, **Roy Searle** and **Simon Goddard**, explain why they would love to get a fuller picture of new ways God is working among us.

In Isaiah 43:19 the prophet announced that God was doing something new amongst his people. As we travel across the country, talking to pioneers and church leaders, there's a real sense of this being a season which is characterised by innovation and creativity in mission. It's wonderful to hear what God is doing in and through our Baptist family, but we know that there are many stories that we haven't heard yet. We'd love to get a fuller picture of the 'new thing' that God is doing amongst us, and so over the next few months we're asking for your help. Maybe you're involved in one or more of the following:

- » starting fresh expressions,
- » planting new congregations in housing developments,
- » experimenting with new ways of sharing the gospel in rural contexts,
- » mission through social enterprise,
- » bivocational or entrepreneurial ministry,
- » new ways of being and doing church,
- » creative mission projects,
- » or other pioneering initiatives.

If you are then we'd really appreciate you going online to share your story, along with your hopes and dreams for the future. Go to bit.ly/baptistnewthing and fill out the short online form. We will be using these stories to inspire others, and to map what is happening across the country. Tell us your story before 31 October 2017 and your church/project might be eligible for a small grant, courtesy of the Baptist Insurance Company.



Unity event aims for transformation

A two-day event encouraging leaders to come together to transform our cities and towns is taking place at Methodist Central Hall, Westminster on 6-7 October.

Movement Day UK will see leaders from churches and those working in business, arts, health, politics, local government, media, and education engage in conversation to imagine a cultural, social and spiritual transformation across the country.

Baptist minister Roger Sutton, who leads **Gather** - a national network of missional unity movements, is one of the key organisers.

He said there is a growing unity movement in the UK, and in the promotional video he asks: "What could our places look like in 30 years if we really began to work together like never before... If we became one, as Jesus calls us to be one?"

Baptists Together is one of the supporting partners of the event, while Lynn Green is a member of its Council of Reference.

All leaders are invited. To book, and for more information, visit: movementday.uk

'Let us continue our journey to justice'

The first comprehensive appraisal of the journey towards equity and reconciliation among British and Jamaican Baptists has been released.

Journeying to Justice – Contributions to the Baptist Tradition across the Black Atlantic is a new book featuring contributions from a variety of scholars and practitioners who together explore Black Baptist relations between England and the Caribbean. It comes as our Union nears the 10th anniversary of its *Apology for Slavery*.

Journeying to Justice has been edited by scholar Anthony Reddie alongside Gale Richards, minister of *Zion Baptist Church* in Cambridge, and Wale Hudson-Roberts, Justice Enabler to our Baptist Union.



For more visit: www.baptist.org.uk/j2j



All three editors, and a number of contributors, were present for the official launch at Regent's Park College, Oxford in June.

Gale authored a chapter which focused on the implementation of *The Journey*, the strategic recommendations which followed the *Apology*.

She highlighted the need for joined-up thinking and strategic partnerships in tackling justice issues. Resources are often few, she said, and the reality is that 'hearts and minds are difficult to penetrate'.

Nevertheless, she spoke of her hopes that the book would help to make others more aware of these realities, which in turn would inspire more people to work towards justice.

New BWA General Secretary

Human Rights specialist Elijah Brown has been elected the next General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA).



Dr Brown will be the ninth BWA General Secretary since its founding in 1905. He will assume the position on 1 January 2018, following Neville Callam's retirement in December this year, after more than 10 years of service.

Dr Brown, 36, has had a decade-long involvement in the international umbrella organisation for Baptists, starting in 2007 when he was named one of 35 global emerging leaders by the BWA.

His specialty lies in human rights and religious liberty. He helped to launch the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative, a religious liberty advocacy agency, and became its executive vice president and CEO.

For more visit:

www.baptist.org.uk/elijahbrown

Thousands respond during *The Turning* street mission

Organisers of a street mission which began in Reading and became known as *The Turning* have revealed that more than 7000 people in the UK have responded to the gospel in the last year.

The Turning's first annual review also showed that more than 2000 evangelists have been trained for *Turning* events in eight areas of the UK. Each area has seen hundreds respond to an invitation to accept Christ.

The Turning originated at Baptist Church *The Gate* (formerly *Reading Community Church*) at the end of May 2016. It sees Christians trained in evangelism before taking to the streets to speak to people using what they have learnt.

Each person prayed for is given the opportunity to respond to an invitation to accept Christ.



The annual review, released in June, also highlighted how *The Turning* has been able to develop tools to help with follow up; tools it said it did not have in the first six months. The tools 'facilitate local churches to do follow up effectively'.

Organisers believe *The Turning* will grow. They forecast that by 2019, after the end of its third year, 375,000 will have responded on the streets of the UK. There have already been *Turning* events in Europe, and the report lists 12 areas where missions are planned for 2018, including London.

The Turning Team Leader is Yinka Oyekan, minister at *The Gate*. He said: "*The Turning* is becoming a phenomenon. What looked from a distance like a technique, on closer inspection is revealed to be a gift from heaven. A gift that miraculously empowers ordinary Christians, enabling them to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ."

For more visit: theturning.eu



An interview with

Siân Ashiru

Association Administrator,
South Wales Baptist Association

How did you come to faith?

I have always found this question difficult to answer. I grew up in a Christian home and my father was a minister of a Baptist church. I learnt from a very young age how to act a Christian - say the 'amens' and 'hallelujahs' at the right time, sing all the songs, have the conversations of 'What has God done for you this week?' and 'I'm praying for you'. I believed I was a Christian, everyone else believed I was a Christian. It was only into my teens I started to rely on God for the challenges I faced in life, praying shotgun prayers like 'Jesus, please help me pass my exams'. Once leaving home, I didn't need to act like a Christian anymore, no one was pressuring me to go to church - I could for the first time choose. I did everything a 'Christian' shouldn't and by the end of my first year realised how far I had come from what I knew - I missed him - I missed my relationship with Jesus. That's when I realised it was real, the relationship was genuine. The short answer is I really don't know when I came to faith, it was gradual not an explosive moment of change but his still small voice, whispering sweet words of love in the times when I needed it.

You grew up in South London - what brought you to Wales?

I moved to Wales to study Film Studies BA at Trinity Saint David in Carmarthen, West Wales.

What happened after university?

Like a lot of young people I could not get a job after I graduated. I ended up being a baker, toy bear maker, waitress and did extra courses in my spare time. I started working on a voluntary basis for Glen Smale, a motor journalist who has published a number books on cars including Porsche and the Le Mans 24hr race. He and his wife then received funding to employ me for six months where I learnt how to edit slides, photos and write content for social media and their website. I then got a job working for a charitable Housing Association for domestic abuse victims. I was their Marketing and Fundraising Officer, the role included organising events, meeting Welsh MPs and writing press stories. Lastly, before going on maternity leave, I ran my own business for 18 months; myself and a friend published her book *Defiance* which is on sale in some independent bookstores and in a few Waterstones outlets. My career has been varied to say the least.



And what does your role at the South Wales Baptist Association now involve?

I am the main point of contact between the Association Team and the Association churches. My role includes admin support for the team members in areas like, Newly Accredited Ministers, Home Mission grants, safeguarding training, book-keeping and event organising. I am also developing the Association's new website, which we are excited to launch later this year.

You've been in this post since March - what's your impression so far?

That the churches within the Association are so varied - you have the smaller churches with six faithful members where their strong point is prayer for their community and the work of God. And you have the large churches with a multitude of members, with experience in foster caring and social work, answering the prayers of the small churches through action and engagement.

Any particular Bible verse resonating with you at the moment?

The Bible verse I am constantly referring to these past few weeks is '*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge him and he shall direct your paths*' Proverbs 3:5-6.

Do you have a particular song that helped through a big change in your life?

I sadly lost three children due to miscarriage before having my daughter last year. Through the trial of starting a family 'Blessed be your name' by Matt Redman anchored me. The line 'You give and take away, my heart will choose to say, Lord blessed be your name' was, and is, bittersweet but is the message of my heart to God.



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