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Autumn 2021

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The magazine for the Baptist Union of Great Britain



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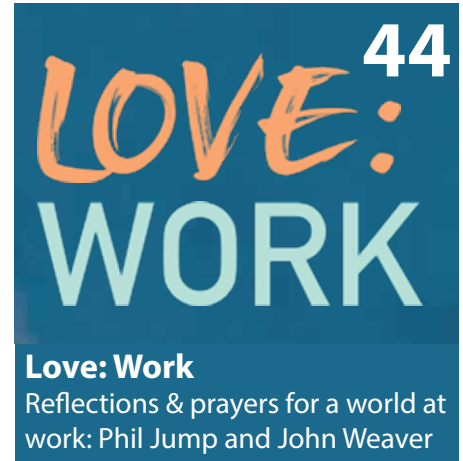
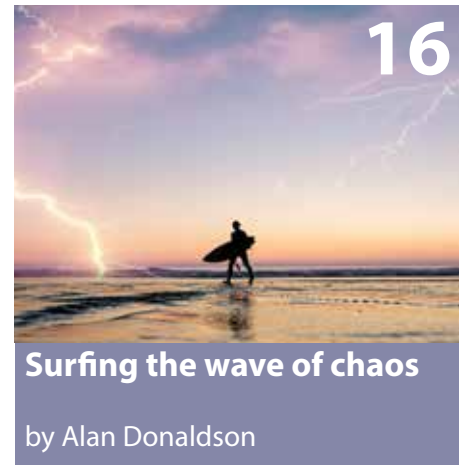
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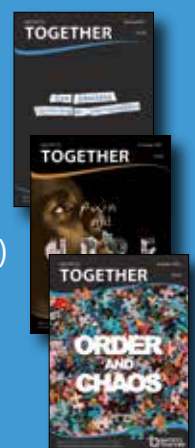
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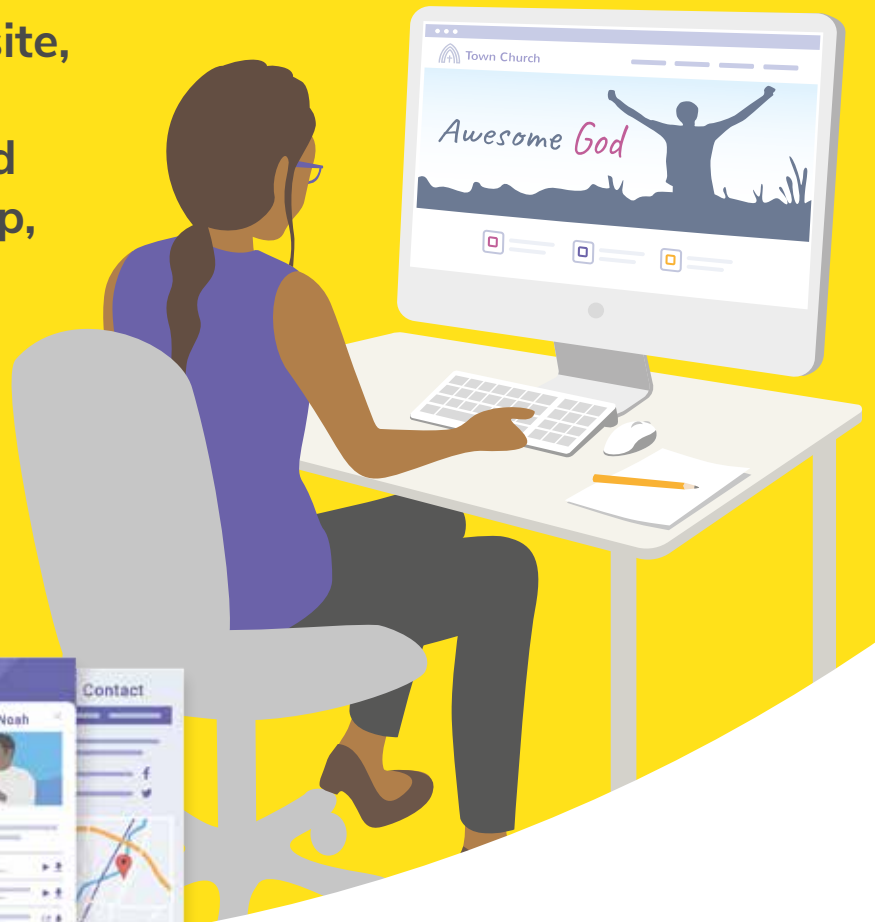
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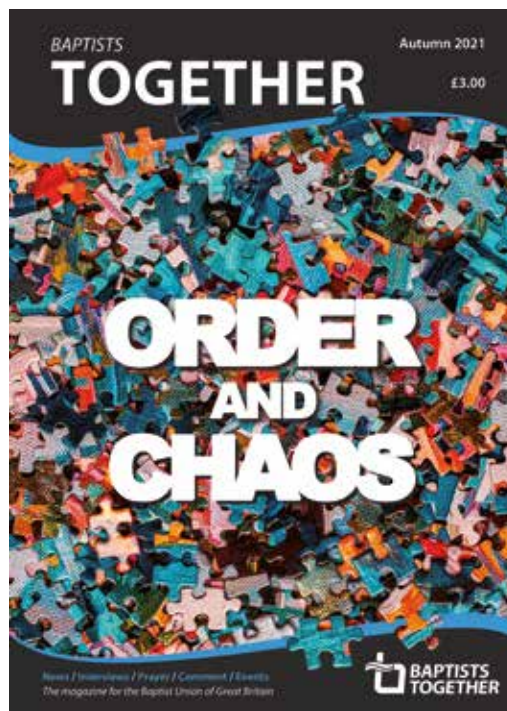
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ORDER AND CHAOS

When the editorial group met to discuss this latest edition of *Baptists Together* magazine, there was a sense that come September things might – *might* – be starting to settle after the upheavals of the previous 18 months. The vaccine had seemingly reduced hospitalisations and deaths; restrictions were duly removed at the end of July (a move the Government described as ‘irreversible’) and activities hitherto unthinkable during a global pandemic – night-clubbing, or communal singing in a church service, perhaps – were permissible again. Yet with the disruption and tragedy so many have endured, it’s clearly not a return to life as we knew it before March 2020.

The current edition of *Baptists Together* attempts to capture something of this uncertain season. The storm may have passed, but what has it done and what now remains?



The idea of order and chaos resonated: many of us feel battered, weary, and fearful. As one writer asks, how will we *be* as we come to terms with what the pandemic has done to our world and the part of it we inhabit?

How do we look ahead when there is such an unforeseeable future?

Will people return to church as we know it, or will our experience of online church have changed things for some time to come, if not permanently? What are people doing differently as a result of the pandemic – and how is their thinking being shaped as a result? What can we learn from each other? And what can we learn from those who have gone before us, say the Early Church, or from our Baptist roots?

With Covid still circulating and the possibility of new variants outsmarting the vaccine, no one really knows what happens next. But the dominant thread running through this collection of articles is that God is with us, and he is moving. Our hope and prayer is that you know this truth deeply, and that there is much in this edition to encourage and strengthen you.

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UNCERTAINTY AND OPPORTUNITY

LYNN GREEN

Pondering where we can find spiritual wisdom as we look to the future, Lynn Green draws insight and encouragement from the Early Church

Ongoing Uncertainty

Looking back at the unfolding events of March 2020 I remember just how much it felt like 'stress city' in those early weeks. Now we find ourselves in the midst of a different quality of stress and uncertainty. Then it was all about fear, having to stop most of our familiar patterns of life and not having any idea when restrictions would be over. Now it seems so much harder in ways we hadn't anticipated. Now, even the relative certainty of rules and restrictions has been removed. We have exchanged a frustration of 'being told what to do' with all the complexities of having to make decisions ourselves. It feels like we are untethered and floating in free space – free, yet also vulnerable. It seems like the idea of 'Freedom Day' was a tantalising prospect that turned out to be more like a mirage in

the desert! And I am so aware that this is especially challenging for church leaders, who would find this demanding at the best of times, let alone at the end of 18 long months of pandemic when energy and resilience are at a low ebb. Pondering where we can find spiritual wisdom as we look to the future, my thoughts turned to Acts 11:19-30 and I want to share some of my reflections from this passage with you.

Being scattered

Acts 8 tells us about a pivotal moment in the life of the Early Church.

'On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.'
Acts 8:1

The external realities of persecution scattered the church and, like the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, so much that was familiar went out of the window! Very soon, though, we read that those who were scattered preached the word wherever they went. God's Kingdom purposes were not thwarted but seeded into new Jewish communities instead. And it must have been tough. All that fear, upheaval and uncertainty. Yet alongside there was all the excitement of new opportunities and seeing God at work outside of comfort zones. I think that we can identify with some of the emotions those early disciples must have gone through.

Similar to the situation we find ourselves in now, what I see happening later in Acts 11 is a deeper journey into uncertainty

- one which had not been anticipated and which formed a further pivotal moment. As for us, the uncertainty and challenges of being scattered stretched the disciples into even deeper uncertainty and uncharted territory as new freedoms emerged. Not only was God stretching the church's geographical spread, he was also taking things to a new level by seeding the good news into other cultures too.

'Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch telling the message only to Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.'
Acts 11:19-20

Oh my! Just when they thought that they had been through enough uncertainty and change here comes yet another massive shift to get their hearts and heads around! As we face yet another massive shift in what it means to be church, I believe that there are some key insights and encouragements for us from this passage as we journey deeper in this new season.

All that fear, upheaval and uncertainty... yet alongside there was all the excitement of new opportunities and seeing God at work outside of comfort zones

Both / And

What I see in these chapters in Acts is a great example of the strength of being a 'Both / And' people. Did you see in that first quote from Acts 8, above, they were scattered, but the Apostles remained? Did you see in the quotes from Acts 11, some took the message to Jews and others to Greeks also? The fact is that some stayed and many went. The fact is that some preached to Jews and others reached beyond to connect with new cultural groups. As I will draw out later, the Apostles and the scattered ones who went to other Jews and the scattered ones who went to Greeks all played a vital part in God's purposes. When we have a heart for God's Kingdom above all else, we will value others as partners rather than fearing them as competitors.

It's all about people

One thing I love about the Acts 11 passage is that the message of the good news of Jesus was carried by the nameless ones! There was no brilliant strategic plan at play here, humanly speaking. Simply ordinary disciples, pushed and pulled by circumstance, yet open to God's Holy Spirit and being witnesses wherever they found themselves. And guess what, the Lord's hand was with them and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

As we find ourselves in uncharted territory today, as disciples and churches, I want us to keep sight of the fact that the body of Christ – the nameless ones – are still the ones entrusted with the good news of Jesus. Buildings, services, programmes and plans

can all help, but they can never be as vital as each one of us being a witness wherever we find ourselves. Today the Church needs to renew her focus on being communities of disciples who worship, witness and love. God works through ordinary people like you and me, always has and always will. This is key to our future.

God works through ordinary people like you and me, always has and always will

Roots and Wings

Another thing that particularly stuck with me from this passage is the relationship between those who were scattered and those who remained. When we read in Acts 11:22 that news got back to the church in Jerusalem, there is almost an, "uh oh!" moment – with the fear of what's coming to them! Preaching to Greeks also... are they going to be in big trouble now? But do you see what happens? The first response of the Jerusalem church is to send Barnabas (after all, it's all about people). And then we get a glimpse of a beautiful thing; Barnabas *looks and listens* for evidence of the grace of God and then *encourages* them to remain true. The church in Jerusalem provided roots and continuity in a time of huge upheaval and change, yet they also had a gracious heart to be open to the new. I don't see them being controlling here. Rather, they were willing to be open to some wild new stuff involving Gentiles and Greeks and they encouraged and supported the church in Antioch as it worked out what church looked like in a

different cultural setting. And do you know what? A great number of people were brought to the Lord.

This is so relevant for us right now. I believe we need loads of this mature, wise and generous heartedness in the journey ahead. This passage reminds us that there is a valuable role for those who remain and keep us rooted, while others are scattered and spreading their wings. Those who remain can look and listen for evidence of God's grace rather than being in broadcast mode about what has worked in a different era. Those who remain can encourage and support those who are grappling with issues and questions that seem alien to them. Those who are scattered and navigating uncharted territory can welcome the insight and encouragement of those who remain. Those who are scattered can carry the Gospel not only to new places but into new cultures too.

The church in Jerusalem provided roots and continuity in a time of huge upheaval and change, yet they also had a gracious heart to be open to the new

God has blessed us with a rich heritage as a movement. Strong roots of relationship and common purpose. Agile wings of creativity and innovation. As we embrace both these strengths we will flourish and adapt as a movement and glorify Jesus.

Partnership

This sort of Kingdom partnership means being confident in your own gift and call (as a church or disciple) and blessing and releasing others into their gift and call too. It means allowing each one to be different, yet play their part. It means valuing and honouring the beautiful creativity of God's Holy Spirit. And this is not just about giving, it's also about receiving. In Acts 11 we see the generous sharing of people and resources. Teachers, pastors and prophets all play their part here. What we don't see is people 'defending their corner', we don't see a jealous spirit and we don't see a 'not invented here' mentality. We see believers working together, encouraging each other and releasing each other to flourish because they had a heart for God's Kingdom above all else. Partners not competitors.

(Re) Learning Points

So, somewhat battered and weary, we find ourselves being called deeper into a new and different season of uncertainty and opportunity.

Remember that the Lord knows you and your situation. Trust him and embrace this new season as best you can. Whether you are one who is called to remain, or one who is scattered and navigating uncharted territory, remember you are valued and part of God's purposes.

Remember it's all about people. Be a disciple, and be part of a

discipling community and let church discover new expressions through that. Be thankful for our roots and the ways they help to orientate us in these uncertain times. Graciously perceive and encourage the new wings that will help us to take flight and flourish in new ways. Bless one another and remember that we are partners and not competitors because we have a heart for God's Kingdom above all else.

As we find ourselves in uncharted territory today, as disciples and churches, I want us to keep sight of the fact that the body of Christ – the nameless ones – are still the ones entrusted with the good news of Jesus.



Lynn Green is General Secretary of our Baptist Union

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LEADING WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE YOU ARE GOING



BAPTIST UNION PRESIDENT GEOFF COLMER REFLECTS ON FACING AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE... WITH AN INVITATION TO GREATER TRUST

How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You are Going by Susan Beaumont, is the title of a book I bought back in 2019. It proved to be an inspiring read and one that would have a relevance way beyond its intention, as the pandemic struck in early 2020.

In the summer of that year, I was diagnosed with myeloma and, at the time of writing, I'm recovering having recently undergone a stem cell transplant. I'm doing very well and am realistically hopeful that I will be in remission for some time to come. But I find myself in something of a state of limbo. As President of the Baptist Union, with my theme of 'attentive to rhythms of grace,' I have lots of good intentions but, especially in these early months, post-recovery, what will I be able to do? And more widely, what will there be to do as we continue to emerge from the pandemic? In conversation with many experienced and able ministers,

I hear repeatedly that they simply can't say what church is going to be like in the foreseeable future. Will people return to church as we know it, or will our experience of online church have changed things for some time to come, if not permanently? Importantly, how will we *be* as we come to terms with what the pandemic has done to our world and the part of it we inhabit? My sense of being in limbo is one that I imagine we may all feel for some time to come.

None of this means we simply acquiesce and do nothing. But at the same time neither do we subscribe to the 'don't just stand there, do something' school of ministry and mission. There is much to reflect upon and many guides to accompany us. I found Simon Barrington, speaking on the subject of recovery from his experience of international relief and development for a Baptists Together webinar¹, very helpful. I'm taken with a comment by Roy

Searle that we are being called to be 'co-creators of the future with God rather than curators of the past for God'. But there will be no quick fixes and we may still find ourselves grappling with, 'How to lead when you don't know where you are going.'

In Mark 4: 35-41 we read of Jesus calming the storm. Central to this episode is the fear of the disciples which, in the circumstances, doesn't seem unreasonable. Fear is the extreme end of the anxiety spectrum, but wherever we find ourselves along this spectrum, trusting can be hard, and at times very hard. If the disciples' fear is reasonable, it seems Jesus is a little harsh on them, except that maybe they are rebuked, not for being afraid of the storm, but because their fear doesn't allow them to express simple trust and to say to Jesus, "Help!" Instead they issue a fear-induced accusation, "Don't you care that we're dying?" What is equally central to this episode is that

¹ baptist.org.uk/recoverwell

Jesus is with them in the storm, and he calms the sea. Jesus does care for them. Jesus does look after them. And maybe what we are to hear is that you might be paralyzed by fear and even assume the worst about God, yet God's grace still comes, along with an invitation to greater trust. A message for our time.



It seems that this is a season when it is especially important to be 'attentive to rhythms of grace.' Grace never comes to us by our design. Our deep desire on its own is not sufficient. It is always a gift. And so often grace comes to us left field. But we can, as it were, trustingly put ourselves in the place. A poem by Ann Lewin begins,



'PRAYER IS LIKE WATCHING FOR THE KINGFISHER. ALL YOU CAN DO IS BE THERE WHERE HE IS LIKE TO APPEAR AND WAIT.'

We can cultivate an attitude of attentiveness, of noticing, of becoming ourselves 'present'. One way of doing this, of becoming more attuned, is through the practice of gratitude. 'All around us are traces of God's blessings. Gratitude reveals just how porous the line is between the material and the spiritual.'² One spiritual tradition calls this an Examen. There are some simple steps: I open myself to God's presence; I ask for light and the leading of God's Spirit; I look back over the past period of time

and reflect; and then I ask, what am I most grateful for? And what am I least grateful for? And finally, I ask for God's help.

To reflect gratefully on the day that is past, or some other period of time, is a recognition that God does not know how to be absent and is always with us, even in the storm, and can open our eyes to those moments of grace, both drawing us further into God and refining our discernment of God's presence and action in our daily lives.



Geoff Colmer is President of BUGB 2021-22, and is Regional Minister Team Leader of the CBA

2 C Christopher Smith, John Pattison, *Slow Church*





SHIFTING SANDS

FEAR AND FAITH IN THE MIDST OF A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

There has been a sharp rise in the number of people seeking help for their spiritual distress – and this has led to some dangerous practices, write Gary Serra di Migni and Jayne Irlam, co-leads for the Baptist Deliverance Study Group

The Baptist Deliverance Study Group (BDSG) was set up five years ago to help Baptist ministers provide safe and effective deliverance ministry. As the pandemic tightened its grip from 2019 onwards, the organisation saw a sharp rise in those seeking help, both ministers struggling with cases and individuals desperate to find relief from the things tormenting them.

“It feels as if the pandemic has taken hold of people and shaken them out of their complacency”, says Jayne, lead for education, publication and research. “Suddenly, people felt that they were not sure of what to trust, what to depend on. People

were frightened, vulnerable and searching for meaning... sometimes in all the right places, sometimes not.” As a response to this increased demand, Gary Serra di Migni, formerly the Deputy Lead for the BDSG, took over responsibility for cases, leaving Jayne free to develop the much-needed education, publication and research branches of the BDSG.

‘A quest for power in the powerless’

Coordinating the cases has been most rewarding, writes Gary. Most of the people who come to us are non-believers; and if they are believers, they’re not part of a church. While some aren’t believers when they approach us, after Christ has liberated them, healed them, and/or restored them – they’re believers. So this role is grist to my evangelistic mill.

Before Jayne and I divided the roles, we were both handling

cases, but Jayne sensed God telling us to specialise and that, once we did, he’d send us people to help. And he did: we now have three case handlers who we can call on, and one in training.

And the pandemic? Both we and our siblings in the Church of England have noticed an increase in concern with the spiritual during the pandemic. How so? I can only speculate.

Some people turn to spiritualists and other mediums after a loss. How much more so when visiting passing loved ones and attending funerals is prevented, and pandemic restrictions hinder the bereavement process and closure? Can the confinement of lockdown lead people to experiment with, among other things, the preternatural, simply to relieve the boredom? I have in mind tarot cards, Ouija boards, and/or ghostly reality TV – anything that might spice up their lives a little. Does the

constant bombardment with statistics surrounding COVID-related deaths confront us with our own mortality? Does this in turn lead people to explore their own spirituality and spiritualities? Have the requirements to socially distance, to wear face masks, and be confined to our homes bred in people a sense of powerlessness? And does that sense of powerlessness tempt people to avail themselves of power through power-promising faith systems such as witchcraft? I've had personal experience of what I believe to be a quest for power in the powerless.

As a way into the community, I work as a security officer in a leading supermarket as part of my ministry. To help the customers comply with government requirements, I offer mask-less customers a free face mask. Most accept the masks thankfully, others reluctantly but graciously; some say they're exempt, and I'm certain that some of them are. But, on average once an hour, a customer flatly refuses to wear a mask. Not quietly so as not to attract attention to themselves; not politely out of respect to the shop worker offering something for nothing; rather, pointedly, loudly and in a manner best described as vitriolic that has reduced some shop workers to tears. I've even heard a customer shout, when challenged, "I know I'm putting people at risk, but I don't care!" This reckless display of power, I posit, is a manifestation of the powerlessness felt by many

in the face of the pandemic. Or could such devil-may-care attitude towards the welfare of others be indicative of a more preternatural influence?"

Protecting vulnerable people from exploitation

There has been a lot of talk about 'Covid spirituality' during this pandemic and much interest in how the effects of Covid 19 have played into the human thirst for meaning and security. In a largely secular society, people who formerly looked for their security in material wealth or medical science suddenly had their 'faith' rocked to its foundations as the world scrambled to find effective medical and economic solutions to the crisis. For the church, it has been a time when many have returned to their spiritual roots and looked to the one sure foundation in a difficult time. Others have become lost in a sea of endless online spiritual atrocities and countercultures, dangerous spiritual subcultures and half-truths.

The BDSG is now working with the Metropolitan Police and Greater Manchester Police in a joint project known as Operation Gideon, whose aim is to protect the vulnerable from exploitation during this time. These police forces become concerned with the proliferation of so-called exorcists offering their services, often encouraging the scapegoating of children and vulnerable adults. Some ethnic groups have found that their traditional belief systems have

become distorted under the unique pressures posed by the pandemic, with many of the safeguards which normally protect children – such as school attendance – suspended. There are some harrowing cases of children exposed to unimaginable cruelty when they are literally blamed for the misfortunes of their families, despite the fact that these issues could not possibly be created by these children.

As we see a sharp rise in the number of people seeking help for their spiritual distress, it is ever more vital that called, mature, balanced and experienced Christian deliverance ministers are able to help. However dark the situation may seem, Christ is still in the business of setting captives free through the power of prayer. The pandemic may have paralysed the world but it can never paralyse him.



Baptist ministers Gary Serra di Migni and Jayne Irlam are co-leads for the Baptist Deliverance Study Group. If you are struggling in this area, please contact the BDSG at: irlamjayne@gmail.com

For further reading:

Is deliverance ministry biblical? – interview with Jayne Irlam in which she explains more about the deliverance ministry, how it works, the situations she has encountered, and seeing Christ victorious 'time after time' baptist.org.uk/deliverance



Discovering treasure in life's scars



Kintsugi Hope is a charity based in the UK striving to make a difference to people's mental wellbeing - and has already partnered with more than 40 Baptist churches. One of them is King Street Baptist Church in Thetford, Norfolk. Minister Sally Sago explains how the partnership is working.

Why did you decide to partner with Kintsugi Hope?

As a small church we had been praying about our outreach and asking God to show us where he wanted us to work in meeting a need in our community that no one else was meeting locally. Our answer came in a series of unconnected 'God-incidences' beginning at the end of 2019 before the word 'pandemic' and 'lockdown' were fully understood!

The concept of Kintsugi as an art form, the mending of broken vessels with golden glue, applied to human lives, really spoke to us. After speaking with others who were already partners or working for the charity, we began to pray as a leadership team before asking the church to support a partnership with the charity. By this time it had become increasingly obvious that many were struggling in lockdown and that mental health was a big issue.

The values, organisation, accessibility, standards and training of this faith-based charity made it an easy decision and provides the opportunity to walk alongside others and so fulfils a missional, discipleship and relational approach that we felt called to pursue to meet the need around mental wellbeing.

What's happened so far?

We began our partnership in July 2020, trained two leaders and started our first course on Zoom in September with nine people from our church. We produce a set of notes each week which we email or post to attendees to keep and help build their tool kit. After the first course, the group wanted to continue and they meet on Zoom every fortnight to catch up, chat about their tool kit and generally share together. In February 2021 we began a second group of 10, still on Zoom. This time there was a mixed group of non-church, another church, our own church and a few people who wanted to do the course again.

We have more people expressing an interest and so it is hoped that, in the Autumn, we will open a Wellbeing space/café once a week in the church building (which is in the middle of town) for those having done the course

and for anyone to 'drop in'. We intend to start a third group, possibly this time face-to-face and a new leader who has completed the training.

What kind of issues are people sharing?

Issues range across the subjects covered; depression, anxiety, panic attacks, shame, unforgiveness, perfectionism, stress and real-life struggles with lack of self-esteem and self-worth. These are often difficult and painful to share. Some things are not shared but there is an acknowledgement and respect for unspoken experiences within the group. The course is grounded in week one in honesty, and it has been

a privilege to be part of the groups. For many it is a time when they can share how their faith has or has not helped them in their struggles. The myth that Christians are perfect and should not struggle, is well and truly exposed as unrealistic and untrue.

Any general reflections on how people have responded to the course and being part of the group?

The response has been overwhelmingly positive. There has been much laughter as well as some tears. Comments at the end include; 'I am stronger', 'I am more relaxed', 'I understand more

than when I had counselling', 'it really helped me', 'I am not so critical', 'I didn't know I had a problem with...'; 'I am much more self-aware', 'The tool kit is really useful', 'I am grateful for friendships', 'I felt safe to share'.



Sally Sago is the minister at King Street Baptist Church in Thetford, Norfolk, a church which is partnering with Kintsugi Hope.

Read more online

Our journey with Kintsugi Hope – Earls Hall Baptist Church: www.baptist.org.uk/earlshall/kintsugi



Kintsugi Hope factfile

'Kintsugi' (金継ぎ) is a Japanese technique for repairing pottery with seams of gold. The word means 'golden joinery' in Japanese. This repairs the brokenness in a way that makes the object more beautiful, and even more unique than it was prior to being broken. Instead of hiding the scars it makes a feature of them.

Kintsugi Hope was founded by Diane and Patrick Regan OBE after a series of operations and events that took them to the brink; physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. They faced illness and loss in their family and community.

They wrote a book and produced a DVD about their experiences.

Through opening up about their struggles they realised how many people have felt alone in theirs, and the great need for each of us to be vulnerable, open and honest when life is hard.

The charity wants to create a movement of Kintsugi Hope Wellbeing Groups.

A Kintsugi Hope Wellbeing Group is a safe and supportive space:

- For people who feel or have felt overwhelmed.
- Providing tools for self-management.
- In a facilitated peer mentoring style setting.

And the charity believes this can be done through the Church. "The Church is in every community across this country.

It will outlast government schemes and is committed to people's wellbeing – physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. Kintsugi Hope Groups work in communities through the local church with an attitude of humility – not to judge, fix or rescue, but to come alongside and love one another. We are all broken in some ways and we can all learn from each other."

It has seen its wellbeing groups quadruple during the pandemic with more than 25 per cent of attendees being from outside the church. The charity is now operating in partnership with almost 300 organisations, the majority of which are churches, including 46 Baptist churches.

Find out more: kintsugihope.com





A reflection on complexity theory and finding a way forward in this most chaotic of times. By Alan Donaldson

“I don’t know where I’m going and I don’t know where I’ve been.” Six months as interim pastor of a small Baptist church and, to be honest, the most sensible words I can utter are, *“The best laid schemes o’ mice an’ men gang aft agley, An’ lea’e us nought but grief an’ pain, For promis’d joy!”*

I just don’t understand! It used to work! Are you the same? We tried so hard! Is this all we are left with? If only the church was more like the virus, growing, multiplying, exploring new variants, adapting to the environment, staying one step ahead! Could it possibly be?

In my search to find a way forward in this most chaotic of times, I have found the concepts within complexity theory’s models of leadership the most helpful. They make no promises, offer no guarantees but they do guide and direct my path in a

way consistent with my Baptist principles and with what I read in the scriptures of a Father who is a vine keeper, a self-emptying Saviour and an enabling Spirit.

I describe the place I am in today as ‘the edge of chaos’; in negative terms, it is a place of frustration, devastation and great loss. However, complexity theory offers an alternative view: a place of healthy agitation, potential innovation, a place of *kenosis* (the ‘self-emptying’ of Jesus’ own will and becoming entirely receptive to God’s divine will) and *anastasis* (rebirth, resurrection).

As I understand things, I can focus on the survival of the congregation or seek, in the chaos, fresh opportunities with the faithful remnant. In making my choice, I am reminded of a conversation with Dr Mike Pears who said, *“survival thinking closes imagination, reduces*

risk taking... it is radically quite contrary to the cross.”

My understanding of complexity theory encourages me to focus on three areas with the church. The words ‘with the church’ may be the most important words in this article. In technical terms, it is referred to as self-organisation. Within our baptistic family it would be the rediscovery of the genius of the priesthood of all believers. It is my conviction that the whole congregation has a part to play in discovering the church of the future. My role as a leader is to facilitate the discernment and gathered wisdom of the whole people of God. If we are to discover new paths out of this valley, then they will be discovered together; we must ask whose voices we are missing, and then be attentive to those voices.

The three areas that I believe will enable us to surf the wave

of chaos together are: attention to our foundational values, practice of central disciplines and engagement with our environment.

Attention to our foundational values

We are Baptist churches and, as such, this is a time to rely on the foundational values that are often taken for granted or even disregarded, such as: being a believer's church; practising believer's baptism as an ordination into mission, ministry and communal discernment; our conviction that each local church is competent to discern how they can best serve the purposes of God and his kingdom in their locality and create wide and varied models of worship and witness. This is a time to trust what is in our roots, and grasp the beauty and freedom contained within our Declaration of Principle.

Practice of central disciplines

In John 15, the call of Christ to his disciples is to 'abide in him'. The practice of abiding should be simple to explain and put into practice. In complexity theory, this concept is referred to as fractals or disciplines. For starlings creating the most beautiful murmurations, patterns in the sky, the fractals are: don't get too close, don't get too far away, and when you see a threat, respond! If we desire to surf the edge of chaos, seeking new paths to emergent beauty, I believe it will be small, repeated

disciplines that are foundational: prayer and worship, engagement with God's word, fellowship and witness. During Lent, our church met for one hour a week on Zoom to discuss Luke and Acts. We each read a chapter or so a day and came prepared to say what we had discovered for the first time, what questions we had and what we had learned. I was astonished at the learning that took place, at the fresh engagement with the person of Jesus and our understanding of how to do church in the future. It drew us closer together and was a place of intergenerational, multi-voiced discipleship.

Environmental engagement

There is no doubt that the environment in which we exist as the living church has changed dramatically. There is now great uncertainty as to what work, leisure, family, wellbeing and priorities will be. The role of governments and local authorities, the needs of our neighbours, the approach to gathering, the expectation of technological solutions, all of these will change. We may not be skilled as futurologists but we do not have to be. From a place of humility and modesty, there lies before us an opportunity to listen and learn. Three members of our local church have been listening to a variety of local stakeholders so that we can hear the challenges they are facing. Before the pandemic, we thought we knew what our community needed and we were hoping to provide it. Today we are listening and hoping to find partners we

can work with, recognising that we too have great needs.

We have been pruned, some of our branches have been cut out and burned. More than ever before, we realise our fragility and have experienced significant decline. However, we also recognise the hope of resurrection to a new life, rooted in our DNA, developed through abiding in Christ and contextually expressed in relation to the new environment in which we find ourselves. By faith we embrace the chaos of this time, and seek out new life as a community in Christ.



Alan Donaldson is married to Ruth and lives on the Forth and Clyde canal on their widebeam boat Anastasis. Alan was General Director of the Baptist Union of Scotland from 2010 - 2019 and is currently working bivocationally as an interim Baptist minister and Foodbank Warehouse Coordinator.



WHAT DO WE MEAN BY HYBRID CHURCH?

Hybrid Church already existed before the pandemic – but it has undoubtedly grown since then. Pete Phillips explains what Hybrid Church is, where it came from and why it's here to stay

Hybrid is a fresh expression of church within digital culture, or within what we might call contemporary networked society. This is a society which values connectivity above geography – meeting up with and sharing life with people they get on with, they are networked with. Hybrid Church is a Christian community (the body of Christ) which seeks to meet both onsite (in a building)

and online either for everything or for distinct parts of their ministry. So even if a local church decides to meet wholly onsite for one service, they might meet hybrid for another service, or for Bible studies or for business meetings. Premier Digital has set out the idea in its Hybrid Church Charter.¹

How Hybrid Church grew during lockdown

The Church's worship and ministry did not cease to exist during the pandemic. We innovated. Through the lockdown, many churches went online and hopefully

realised that lots of churches were there already – especially those associated with the very people who find the restrictions of physical church impossible to cope with – people who are disabled, housebound, or long-term ill. These have always been the pioneers of Hybrid Church – offering something more inclusive, more enabling, more flexible. Hybridity is about ensuring that same inclusive model – allowing people to attend onsite or online in whatever way allows them to be part of the body of Christ.

[Let's reflect on how we got here...](#)

¹ premierdigital.info/charter

From March 2020 when physical buildings were closed for public worship, some local churches moved to livestreaming their worship, perhaps also their discipleship, sometimes even their business meetings. Some preferred Facebook Live or Zoom or Google Meet or even ancient technologies known as Skype or Teams. Others replicated this offline through paper order of service sheets sent to houses, dial-a-sermon offers, or drive-in services in church car parks. Others also provided care for local residents – helping with food provision, meals, prescription pick-up services, mental health advice, or as exercise companions. The Church's ministry became hybrid during the lockdown – meeting the needs of the local community

and sharing the love of God through plural technologies both offline and online.

Why people joined online church

During the lockdowns, we found that a lot of people joined with online church – curious onlookers, seekers, people looking for God in a time of pain, people with time on their hands and looking for new experiences to ease their sense of anxiety, people hunting God. We saw an increase in the number of people looking for online church – and the stats which we will see later were amazing.

But on Google Trends, it was clear people were looking not necessarily for church services – they were looking for prayer, for Jesus, and especially searching for God. We believe in a God who is both engaged in mission himself and who models and propagates the mission of the local church. What seemed to be happening was that God was using the lockdown to engage with lots of new people and lots of new people were reaching out to God. In that context, when the Scottish Government approached ministers of religion, John Drane offered himself for 'spiritual care' – not services, not funerals, just 'spiritual care'.

Hybrid Church is about using any technology to welcome as many people as possible whatever their situations into an experience of God within the body of Christ

He was taken up on the offer within 30 minutes and since then has spoken with over 2000 people exploring spirituality. Time and time again, John says people wanted to talk to him about their sense of the spiritual, their connection with God. God, for them, was so much more important than church.

Hence the numbers – probably 16m new people coming to church online, exploring church online, peeking in to see what we were up to. The stories of people finding God through online church are plentiful. And as we come back from lockdown, we find stories appearing of some of those curious onlookers appearing at onsite services. Secret believers, like Nicodemus, popping their heads around the church door and seeing whether God is at onsite church as they'd found him at online church.

The language of onsite and online – not physical and virtual

Note the language that we are using about hybridity: onsite and online. The two words were proposed by Katie Tupling, Diocesan Advisor on Disability for Oxford Diocese. You see our old language of physical services and virtual services was nonsense really. Any type of service which includes human beings is a physical service. As human beings, we are always, 24/7, 365 days a year, 366 on leap years, physical. We cannot be anything other than physical. From the moment God knit us together in our mother's womb, to the day we die and then, God willing, when we receive our resurrection bodies, we were, are, will be physical. So, for many Zoom services have been an



expression of meeting together ('synagogē'), of real presence: the real presence of others we can talk to, the real presence of the Spirit uniting us across the internet, ministering to us in different locations, bringing words of hope and justice and love to different people in different geographic locations. And being able to have a natter over coffee... or to do a business meeting... or to do a Bible study.

The point of Hybrid Church is not necessarily to promote digital church as the only option

Opening up the Church – with God at the centre

Hybrid Church is about using any technology to welcome as many people as possible whatever their situations into an experience of God within the body of Christ; to diversify our means of engagement in order to incorporate more of the body of Christ – especially those who have historically been marginalised by our focus on building and Sunday mornings. The aim is to open up the Church giving greater access to worship, discipleship, prayer and at all times greater access to God.

But the point of Hybrid Church is not necessarily to promote digital church as the only option. It's one of the big things I learnt during the first lockdown. I asked some friends to write a chapter for my book on Digital Church¹. I thought they were all experts on doing things digitally - but they all talked about the use of lots of different technologies:

Bryony and her paper orders of service going around the village, of her dial-a-sermon service (the only human voice some people heard each week); Matthew doing a rosary pilgrimage into a Maltese village to bring church to village square; and Joanne with her easel at the gate, her labyrinths in the car park and her drive-through communions.

God is at the centre of this. How do we offer people opportunities to encounter the living God? The point is, of course, that the Church isn't just a physical thing. When we join in worship, we share in the worship of heaven - the throne room scenes of Revelation 4-5. We join with the church militant across the whole world, sharing with billions of other Christians worshipping God across the globe. But we also share with those who have gone before and with creation itself giving praise to the creator. All earth and heaven worshipping God. At the breaking of bread at communion this is even more so – as all time and space meets in the one eucharistic moment as we celebrate and remember Christ's death upon the cross. We transcend our physicality and join heaven in adoration of the Lamb. To lock down such a moment to a local celebration in a chapel or church building with a few locals in attendance is to miss the theological point that we as a Church with capital C transcend our locality, transcend our chapels, join with all God's people in that great cloud of witnesses. What an opportunity to make use of every technology we can.

Hybrid Church looking forward

It may be that we gather for worship more in a building

and do more discipleship and business online. Human beings are used to proximal connections – we like being in meetings together. We like hugs and breathing the same air. We like the opportunity to hear each other singing the praises of God and affirming our faith together. We like the opportunity to catch up with one another face-to-face without a screen in between. But we need to remember the whole body of Christ – those who have reasons for not attending in buildings, those who have lost the habit of attending, people with disabilities or long-term illness, those fearful of crowds. Whatever their reasons, these people are cherished members of the body of Christ. We need to make the best use of technology to allow them to be present in our 'building-focussed' worship – remembering that it should be 'God-focussed' worship in buildings!

But Hybrid Church is also about offering a shop window for the Church online.



¹ *Hybrid Church*, published by Grove Books

There are plenty of stories and statistics of many people, not previously regulars at church, who have popped into online worship to see what we do inside our buildings. Whether they are there because they are fearful of the pandemic, or bored in lockdown, or simply curious, we made these people welcome. Some churches have indeed seen remarkable growth through such curious onlookers. Why would we decide after the pandemic to limit their engagement to onsite-only? If they have learnt to enjoy church online, shouldn't we continue to provide that way of engaging rather than expect people to fit our agendas, in our buildings, when we choose to open then? Shouldn't we be making these people more and more welcome?

To maximise the impact of our online engagement, we should be showcasing the brilliant people we have in church, not just mimicking a stage performance showing only the

preacher and the worship group. We should be creating online rituals which allow a depth to our worship rather than a reflection of broadcast entertainment. We should be inviting engagement opportunities for those popping into worship – practical help and wellbeing support via email or phone contacts, invitations to Zoom coffee meetings (or similar), opportunities to meet in a coffee shop after lockdown is lifted, online *Alpha* or prayer courses.

In short, we should be offering Hybrid Church wherever we can. Not replicating everything across all technologies but choosing wisely to use the right tech for the right purpose. I can envisage large services livestreamed, smaller services on Zoom or Facebooklive, business meetings on Zoom or Teams, housegroups on Google Hangouts, prayer groups on Whatsapp or Signal. I think the Hybrid Church is here to stay. It is a mission-centred opportunity for the Church whether pandemics come or go. But this means the Church will need to reinvest in technologists and creatives alongside the clergy – many of whom are exhausted by their efforts. We need to invest in the future, in mission, in providing opportunities for the whole body of Christ to engage alongside those intrigued by the Church and thirsty for an encounter with the living God.

For further reading

Zoom ecclesiology: the Church scattered and gathered - Baptist theologian Paul Fiddes explores the forms covenant, fellowship and body are taking 'virtually' www.baptist.org.uk/zoomecclesiology

In short, we should be offering Hybrid Church wherever we can. Not replicating everything across all technologies but choosing wisely to use the right tech for the right purpose



Pete Phillips is a Digital Theology Researcher at Durham University, where he leads the Centre for Digital Theology, and Head of Digital Theology at Premier Media. He is the author of *Hybrid Church: Blending Online and Offline Community* (Grove)

Spurgeon's College has partnered with the Centre for Digital Theology and Premier to offer an MA in Digital Theology, the first degree of its kind across the world, offering a unique opportunity for theological reflection on digitality and its implications for the contemporary church spurgeons.ac.uk/ma-in-digital-theology/



—Bringing young people— —through the storm—

Most good children's and youth work is born out of chaos.

It may be the messy games, creative crafts, sleep-deprived residential or unexpected question just as you are locking up. It feels like these last 18 months have taken away all of our familiar tools and left us with the chaos – should we try and restore what we did, or aim to redevelop with something new?

Our conventional wisdom has been thrown out of the window. In previous years, children's workers developed strategies for using play to meet with God huddled round the activity table, and youth workers ran football teams or music groups to build community. CYM (The Institute

for Children, Youth & Mission) has spent 20+ years training youth workers to recognise that the conduit for discipleship and evangelism is the messy, chaotic relationships we have with young people. When you can't meet face-to-face it has at times felt like God's voice has frozen, like the church Zoom connection. So what *has* been working?

In the last year we've seen some amazing examples of children, youth and family work (CYF) evolving to create the most creative responses to ministering in lockdown. Linda, a Children's Ministry student in Leicestershire, has become locally famous for her front-garden teddy displays, giving people an excuse to get out of the house and walk round to see the latest story and

join in conversations over the garden fence.

Let's go outside

The teddies are one example of moving CYF work outside the church building, and I hope this is a trend which will continue. *Muddy Church* resources families and small groups to find God in their local woods; youth workers are rediscovering the art of detached youth work – hanging round on streets and public spaces with a purpose; churches are putting up *Messy Church* tepees in their car park and running Bible studies with takeaway coffee in the park.

This echoes so much of where we see God speaking in Scripture:

building memorial cairns on the road to remind Israel where God was at work; battling prophets of Baal on the mountaintop; seeing God and his Kingdom through a farmer sowing seed, growing a vine, a shepherd protecting his sheep and so on. Of course we live in a different world now but there is little doubt that the deep stillness of the outdoors thinly veils the presence of God.

Locked in

One of the most significant impacts of successive lockdowns has been the loss of face-to-face groups. We already read about the economic and educational impact of Covid, but it will take time to know the cost to children and young people's social development and the mental health challenges many of all ages have faced – and we should perhaps also make links to the spiritual impact of having to self-isolate on your faith journey.

John Westerhoff, in his classic book *Will Our Children Have Faith* generalised that the faith of young teenagers is a corporate one – *we believe* in God; *we are leaving* the church, and so on. That's why you often see groups of young people coming to faith or getting baptised together. Many youth workers (and churches) have seen attendance drop at online sessions as children and young people are exhausted after hours of online education, but also I wonder if some of this is that they are not doing their discipleship and other groups *together*.

The final impact of isolation is the loss of the informal space. At CYM we often use the analogy of Jesus meeting the disciples on the Emmaus Road after his resurrection. While he did teach

from the mountain, we also read that he walked alongside two of the disciples, asking questions to help them explore what has just happened. The *being with* of CYF work is massively significant. In fact, I think it is why many young people leave church when they become adults – they are no longer *with* each other at church. Instead, they are expected to simply watch other people do their faith at the front.

Think small

Dan, a Baptist youth worker in Stockton-on-Tees, spoke at the Baptist Assembly in May about his dismay when the young people stopped attending his online sessions – it's the common ministry anxiety of doing the wrong thing or not working hard enough and it's your fault they're not coming. Significantly, he chose to focus on the few who *did* attend rather than only worrying about those who did not. This is a challenge for all of us in our CYF work that we feel we need to attract the crowds, fill our buildings, and pull them in, whereas perhaps equipping them to go out becomes a more fruitful model. We need to focus on discipling those we have - as *they* are in school while *we* are not.

The Families of God

The final aspect that was coming to the fore before lockdown, but has been highlighted during the pandemic, is the need to support families and households in their spiritual journey. We might see our church children or young people for a few hours a week, perhaps, but they see each other all the time.

Many children's work teams in particular have become adept at

providing resources for families to do together this year – activity packs, discussion questions, craft activities and so on – but so often we hear that parents don't know how to support their teenage children's faith. At the Baptist Assembly, Rachel Turner's book *It Takes a Church to Raise a Parent* was recommended to us. Rachel notes that churches need to provide parents and carers with core skills to disciple their children, and then share stories of each family interpreting those skills to their particular family context.

Going forward I think we need to train, enable and encourage (extended) families to live out their meandering Christian lives together, to focus on finding God in the chaotic relationships at home, outside and even in church if we can renovate our practices well enough.



Robin Smith is the Academic Studies Manager for the Institute for Children, Youth and Mission (CYM) in Nottingham, training Children, Youth and Families workers in undergraduate and postgraduate Practical Theology degrees. Find out more at www.cym.ac.uk



Small Church
Connexion

BIG BLESSINGS IN SMALL CHURCHES

The last 18 months have been a season of new challenges for the smaller churches, as we left our buildings and faced a steep learning curve of connecting digitally. Zoom and other video conferencing technology has been a blessing and churches have enjoyed worshipping with local, national and international people tuning in. Alongside this, there have been sermons in print and on disc to share with those with no tech, as well as phone calls and visits with cake! Bags of goodies have been distributed to neighbours and craft bags have kept families engaged with church. Meeting in person was sorely missed.

More recently, the challenge became 'if and when' to begin gathering again with all the restrictions in place. Sensitivity was needed to the different levels of anxiety people felt about meeting in person again.

There has been both good and bad news regarding church buildings. Some have been decorated and even refurbished while empty but some are in a bad state of repair and much prayer is needed as to the way forward.

BUT... God is always with us through **every season and circumstance** and we are reminded in Romans 8:28 *'that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose'*. Support and encouragement were brought to the smaller churches by the **Small Church Connexion**¹ through four national webinars during lockdown. These Zoom sessions were well attended and the great speakers covered a range of topical issues, alongside a retreat day. Many of the churches shared stories of unexpected blessing. Here are six to encourage you:

1 www.baptist.org.uk/scc

Welling Baptist Church (Bexley) had decided on a refurbishment plan and a new name before lockdown. The work took four months and they were back in the building in early July. **'The Vine Christian Community Church'** is exploring partnership with local groups and has already opened as a Covid test centre. Their approach is hybrid, with Zoom during the week and in person with live streaming on Sundays. The church plans to start a Christianity Explored course in September. Part two of the refurbishment is coming in 2022, to spruce up their large hall and to set up groups for wellbeing, domestic abuse, IT training and a job club. They are excited about the future!

www.vinechurch.uk

Prayer Requests

- Christianity Explored course in September
- Large hall refurb and the plan for new groups

Lawrence Weston Baptist Church (Bristol) was blessed by running an *Alpha* course on Zoom jointly with two other churches and seeing people grow in faith. They have all benefitted from more contributory services with a number of people sharing, commenting or asking questions on the short talk. Faith is growing!

www.hopecafeandchurch.org.uk

Prayer Request

- Plans to start a Renew Wellbeing Cafe

Bromley Common Baptist Church (London/Kent border) were blessed by getting to meet, know and relate with immediate neighbours around their building. The tranquil church garden was a place of quiet and refuge for many on their daily walk. There has been more freedom and willingness from people to stop and chat on the street, sometimes having quite deep conversations. This strange time has been a wonderful opportunity to slow down and be still with God, to think about what is important in life and faith - to take stock.

www.bromleycommonbaptist.org.uk

Prayer Requests

- To rethink how we do things; to be more creative in what we do and how we do it.
- For a refreshing touch from God and have the energy to move forward

Totteridge Baptist Church (High Wycombe) enjoyed having new people meet on Zoom sessions and then attending the church in person. One of their new additions has applied for membership and is actively helping within church already! Church members were allowed to sing in the car park at the front of the building, an unexpected way to share joy with the neighbours. Smaller numbers meant that they were all able to meet in person without the same problems with logistics as in a large church, once worship services could resume.

With the building closed, major repairs to the roof and gas supply could be done without disrupting services or the dementia group that meet in the church.

www.totteridgebaptist.org.uk

Prayer Requests

- New people involved in the spiritual leadership of the church.
- People seem positive and excited for the church to be open and meeting in person.

West Drayton Baptist Church (West London)

experienced God's abundance during lockdown, with 45-50 devices tuning in weekly on Sundays on Zoom and giving increased as more people gave online instead of cash. Prayer too has increased, as people gained confidence, speaking out or writing prayers in the chat box. The children's work has also blossomed! But the most unexpected blessing was a call from a local Heathrow hotel asking for a local minister to meet some Christian Iranians. At the time of writing, at least 40 Iranian Christians have passed through the church; some were sent on to other parts of the UK, some have stayed. Sixteen were baptised on the three Sundays the building was open, bringing the total of baptisms for 2020-21 to 32. The Thursday Bible studies are now translated into Farsi and the Q&A session about the Bible for new Christians has been very helpful.

www.thechapelwestdrayton.com

Prayer Requests

- Changes to the service format to involve young people more
- To be patient, wait, pray and seek God for the next step.

New Brighton Baptist Church (Merseyside)

John Cheek had just been appointed minister when the pandemic began. "I began in November 2019 and didn't think I'd have to close the church four months later! We have remained closed for public worship since then, but we've had a weekly Zoom evening service each Sunday and on-line midweek meetings. Church members have been developing their talents, from hosting Zoom meetings to helping people in the community with financial advice, or cookery skills.

"Every week in lockdown, we have delivered free food-parcels to impoverished households in the area and for some, it's their first experience of church and it's a very positive one."

www.baptist.org.uk/newbrighton

New minister John is a presenter on Flame Christian and Community Radio
flameradio.org 4-6pm The Drive Home Show with John (Fridays)

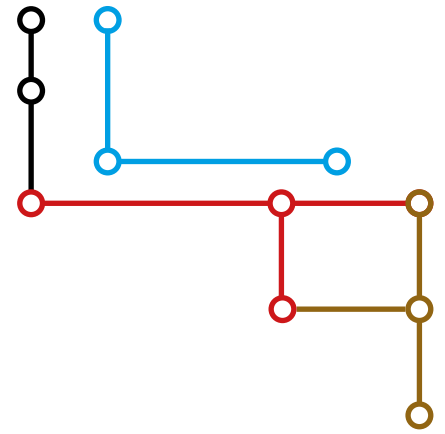
[www.facebook.com/
NewBrightonBapt](https://www.facebook.com/NewBrightonBapt)

Prayer Request

- Just to re-open again, safely!

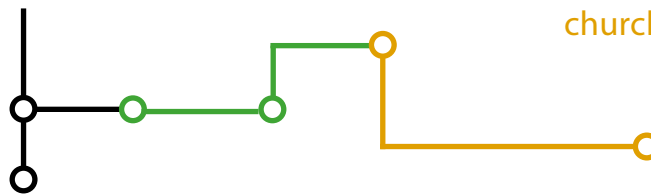
God is always with us through every season and circumstance and we are reminded in Romans 8:28

'that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose'.



Hilary Taylor is the London Baptists Small Church Enabler

There is an area on the Baptists Together website dedicated to smaller churches: baptist.org.uk/smallerchurches



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Why churches should invest in their minister's development



By Tim Fergusson and Winston Bygrave

“College never prepared me for this” has been a common refrain among ministers

A Triumph Herald, the small family car first built in 1959, has terrible rear suspension. It uses a swing-axle design. If the driver turns sharply one way and then the other, the inside rear wheel for the first manoeuvre – bear with me, there’s an illustration in here somewhere – arcs downwards so that when it becomes the outside rear wheel on the second manoeuvre, it is tucked under the body of the car. This results in a dangerous loss of grip and a possible visit by the car’s back end into the undergrowth. If, like me, you were training to be an automotive engineer in 1989, you wouldn’t want to discover, as I did, that your lecturer’s career highpoint had been the design of the Herald’s suspension thirty years before.

My point is that there is a limit to what you can glean from a person whose thinking and experience has failed to develop in line with changing times. Which is one reason why it is in *everybody’s* interest that we support the Continuing Ministerial Development of our ministers. It is in ministers’ own interests, of course, to remain fresh in their learning, attentive to God, accountable to others, connected with the wider Baptist family and open to review and feedback. But their development is also absolutely in the interests of the churches and mission settings they serve. This has been starkly demonstrated over the last 18 months. “College never prepared me for this,” has been a common refrain among ministers, as

churches *expected* the sudden development of ministers in all sorts of new areas, the most obvious being technical proficiency with digital platforms.

So, what if this expectation continued, but was softened to look more like ongoing encouragement?

For this article is not aimed at ministers. If you are a minister, I hope you have happily embraced the concept of CMD. It’s aimed instead at those of you who aren’t ministers – at churches and church leaders. Because with your investment in your minister’s CMD, they and you will be enriched, not just in the crisis, but year in, year out.

What does this investment look like? It begins with encouragement, time and money.

- Encourage your minister to read, go on retreat, meet with colleagues, join a learning community, play their part in wider Baptist life, and so on. Show an interest in their growth and especially in their well-being.
- Allow them time for these activities. Don't demand they spend every hour in direct service of the church, but give them room to flourish.
- Offer them a budget for the costs associated with CMD. We recommend churches put aside £500 a year for their minister's development costs, in addition to paying for their attendance at an annual Association ministers' conference and, at least from time to time, at the Baptist Assembly. (We have made grants available this year for ministers in the least affluent settings and hope to do so again in 2022.)

But even better, if you are part of a church's leadership team, you could make a commitment to develop *together* – please see the accompanying story from Winston Bygrave for an example of this.

I think I can reasonably promise that your minister and your church life will be the better because of this support for development. I am privileged to have pastored two churches that have encouraged mine. There is simply no question whatsoever in my mind that the refreshing of my ministry through the practice of CMD helped to bring new life and even new direction to those churches. It is the same as for all successful investments – we receive back with interest what we initially sacrifice.

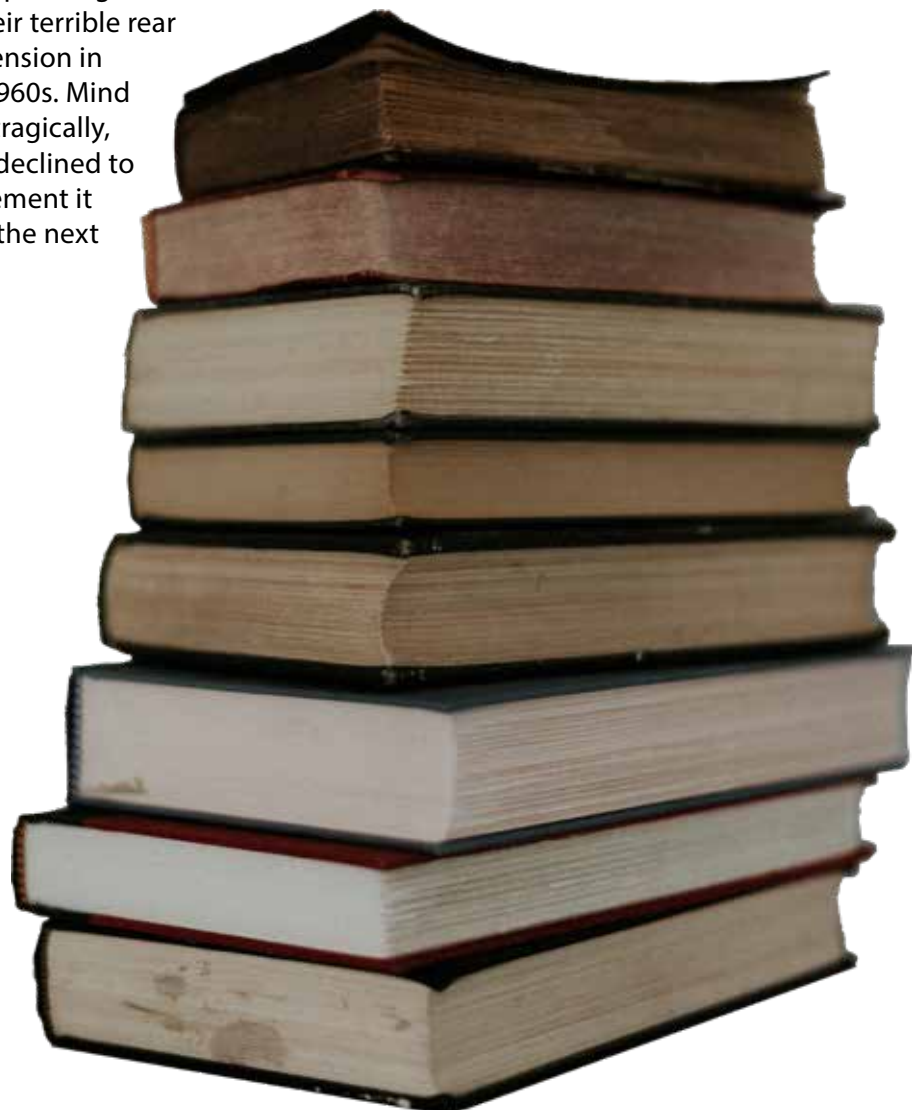
So, please, if you are a church member, deacon, elder or leader, invest in your minister's development. Because ministry is always moving on. As is suspension design, by the way. Though my lecturer may not have been there to see it, Triumph designed a solution to their terrible rear suspension in the 1960s. Mind you, tragically, they declined to implement it until the next

decade because they deemed it too expensive... a lesson for us, surely?

For a brief explanation of the CMD framework, please see www.baptist.org.uk/cmdsummary



Tim Fergusson is Baptists Together Ministerial Development Adviser



One minister's CMD journey

On entering Baptist ministry, the concept of ongoing development was familiar to me. During my 25-year teaching career, all teachers had been duty bound to pursue continual professional development (CPD) as part of being an effective teacher.

In ministry, West Hendon Baptist Church (WHBC) from its very beginning demonstrated their commitment to contribute to my continuing ministerial development. They covered the cost of my ministerial training at Spurgeon's College, and have since paid for my attendance at our Association's annual ministers' conference, as well as my regular attendance at district ministers' fellowship and events.

Such commitment to CMD is important for any church wishing to remain spiritually vibrant. It is expressed by allowing a minister the opportunity for

ongoing learning and supportive accountability from outside. It contributes to the minister's spiritual and intellectual benefit, and also to his or her self-care and effectiveness in their calling, 'to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ' (Eph 4:12).

But at WHBC our training budget extends beyond my own ministerial development to the development of our diaconate, and the congregation. We have an annual 24-hour leaders' conference every October, in which both the diaconate and potential leaders enjoy relevant leadership training away, at the church's expense. This ongoing leadership programme provides us with future leaders and charity trustees when our current leaders have served their relevant terms. It reflects our belief that church funds are not simply to be stored away and spent frugally on church maintenance. Rather, they

are the provision of the Lord to be used to develop all aspects of ministry and mission within the local church.

If churches expect CMD of their ministers and then allow their ministers both the time and a budget to pursue it, we have a chance of developing effective teams. This in turn will change the culture of our local Baptist churches into places in which the 'whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work' (Eph 4:16).



Winston Bygrave, minister of West Hendon Baptist Church and London Baptists Regional Minister



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A UNIQUE HOPE IN THE MIDST OF CHAOS AND UNCERTAINTY



Seidel Boanerges endured personal heartbreak during the pandemic. He explains why he has HOPE in the face of an uncertain tomorrow

I remember listening to the speech of the Director-General of the World Health Organization declaring Covid-19 as a pandemic from an epidemic in March 2020. Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus stressed the fact that “Pandemic is not a word to use lightly or carelessly. It is a word that, if misused, can cause unreasonable fear, or unjustified acceptance that the fight is over, leading to unnecessary suffering and death”.¹ Unfortunately, it has caused fear, anxiety, suffering, loss, death, chaos, disruption, and uncertainty in the last 18 months. Sadly, I lost a few friends and relatives to Covid-19; some friends were made redundant from their work; I saw how it affected some of my older friends

in care homes. As a minister or a friend, what can I say to these people that will comfort them? I was doing everything I could – calling people and encouraging them; financially supporting poorer families; shopping for my neighbour who is a single mum etc. But what is the role of faith in such situations? How can our faith in Jesus Christ comfort or support us during these challenging times? We have a saviour who gives us glorious hope not only for eternity but also here and now.

Early this year, I lost my dear mum, who suddenly had a stroke and passed away in India. As soon as I landed in India, I was forced to quarantine in a hotel

for 14 days despite a Covid negative test. I was not even allowed to see her at the hospital or even at home, where she will be placed for others to see. I felt helpless, locked in a hotel room. This pandemic has made it so complicated that we cannot even grieve properly in such situations. I cried out to God, *“Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body with grief”* (Psalm 31:9); *“Give me relief from my distress; be merciful to me and hear my prayer”* (Psalm 4:1).

The beauty of the Christian faith is that our triune God knows what it means to lament. He laments for us and through us.

Photo by Eriks Abzinovs on Unsplash

Jesus is our Immanuel – God with us (Isaiah 7:14). He is our Immanuel in our fears, suffering, despair, chaos and uncertainty. He can bring hope and comfort to those who lament. The Bible says: *'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted'* (Matthew 5:4). The Lord came to my rescue and strengthened me, and I had the peace of God, which transcended all understanding (Philippians 4:7), and the Holy Spirit comforted me as I lay alone in my hotel room.

My faith in Jesus Christ gives me the hope that this suffering and death is not the end. I am not lamenting without hope as some do; I am lamenting with glorious hope. A hope that I will see my mum one day in heaven, and I will be reunited with her. Eternal security/assurance is very distinctive to the Christian faith. You would not find this kind of assurance in any other worldview or religion. There are around 4,200 religions in this world. None of them has this kind of hope we have in and through Christ.

Is our hope just eternal? Not at all! Our saviour gives us a hope to face the uncertain today and tomorrow. We might know people who struggle with health problems, financial difficulties,

broken families, marriages, or relationships, who look at the future and say, "Ah, it is just another day of pain and suffering". The good news is that Jesus can give us hope in the midst of these uncertainties. I am not saying all these problems will be instantly resolved, but Jesus gives us the strength and courage to face these uncertainties. Our 'Immanuel' journeys with us in our chaos and uncertainties. The more we grow in our relationship with our triune God, the more we can experience this hope today. The Bible repeatedly asks us to cast our burdens, uncertainties, fears, anxiety etc, onto the Lord (Psalm 55:22; 1 Peter 5:7), and he will sustain us. When Habakkuk cried for help, *"How long, Lord, must I call for help?"* (Habakkuk 1:1), God gave him the feet of a deer to tread on heights so he could see the big picture, to see his problems from God's perspective.

The more we focus on God and get his perspective, our finite problems become just that - finite problems. The more we fix our eyes upon Jesus rather than upon the waves of chaos and uncertainty, the more we will be able to say "many things about tomorrow I don't seem to understand, but I know who

holds tomorrow, and I know who holds my hand". That gives me the hope to face the uncertain tomorrow. We have a unique hope in Christ and Christ alone for now and forever!



Seidel Abel Boanerges is a Tutor in Christian Mission and Theology at Spurgeon's College, London

Recently, Seidel co-edited a book with Anthony G Reddie and Pamela Searle, called *Intercultural Preaching* (Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2021). It is a practical resource for those concerned with developing responsive, contextual, and spirit-filled preaching that speaks to the increasingly diverse and culturally varied congregations across the UK.

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STORIES FROM THE GROUND : ONLINE

Godly Play online

Sue and Arnie Hensby had seen several families join their growing church prior to the pandemic. They explain how they adapted the children's ministry at **Sutton St James Baptist Church** during the lockdown restrictions.



The pandemic and accompanying lockdowns came at an inopportune time for Sutton St James Baptist Church (SSJBC). Sue and Arnie Hensby had joined in 2017, seeking to breathe new life into the small Baptist chapel which had served the Fenland village for more than 200 years. They had been blessed by God with many previously unchurched families, and at Christmas 2019 had just welcomed 10 more people into formal membership.

"The family was growing in number and in intentionality on their faith journeys," says Sue, the church's pastor. "Having to close at such a crucial time in our rebirthing process was particularly tough as we were just getting a real head of steam. We had to rethink almost everything that we had done previously."

Part of this re-thinking involved their children's provision. With Sue being the church pastor,

Arnie had led the children's work through a weekly Godly Play session for around 15 children each Sunday.

"It's based on the Montessori approach – helping the kids on their journey, leaving space for God to do his bit," Arnie says. "I was sceptical at first, but became a real convert after I went on the training course, which I would say is a must, if you want to do Godly Play. It has worked well to engage the children and help

them explore their spiritual journey.”

There are several key parts to the approach: greeting each person individually; gathering; presentation of the story; a space for wondering with open-ended questions about the story; a feast time, where those involved share prayers over some food and drink; a response time where the children are encouraged to be creative on their own about the story, with a wide variety of materials; and a blessing and goodbye.

“When lockdown happened we said we needed to carry on,” notes Arnie, “but we quickly realised that younger members didn’t want to be on Zoom.” He decided instead to film a session for the church’s YouTube channel.

Clearly, with an approach as interactive as Godly Play there are limitations with a pre-recorded session. “It does restrict you a bit,” Arnie explains. “You can’t do ‘the wondering’. You don’t have the interaction. The editing takes a long time. But I adapted it: I upped some of the introductions. The ‘wondering’ - I asked a few more questions. We collect prayer requests from the kids. There are ways of making it more engaging online.”

All the sessions (described as ‘brilliant’ by Mark Clay, EMBA Regional Minister Team Leader) are available on the church’s Youtube

channel, alongside the pre-recorded services.

“We don’t get lots of feedback, which can be disheartening, but when we have people seem to have enjoyed and appreciated it. It’s out there,” says Arnie.

It’s part of a sense the couple had for SSJBC to be a beacon of hope in troubled times. Sue set up the Sutton St James Support Group to offer shopping and prescription collection for those having to self-isolate. Halloween bags and Advent bags were delivered to local children. They’ve tried to remain in contact with the membership and have used the time the doors were closed to step out in faith to refurbish the Old School Room.

Arnie has recorded several Godly Play sessions for local schools, and the church teamed up with Duggie Dug Dug (Doug Horley) to offer Christmas and Easter videos too. These have been shown to more than 340 children

and many more families will have watched at home – all hearing a simple but powerful Christian message.

“We were completely new to this,” says Arnie. “We are two ordinary people. And God has amazed us with the things he has done.”

Watch the Godly Play sessions on YouTube via the church’s website: ssjbc.org.uk



Online church – what next?

With restrictions lifting, and church buildings now open again, how has Covid-19 affected **Oadby Baptist Church's** online services? Interview with Tom Cox



Oadby Baptist Church is in a similar position to many. At the outset of the pandemic it began livestreaming its services, and has continued to do so ever since. With restrictions officially ending in July (and the Government keen they don't return), there's much to consider about the next phase of life. How is the church approaching the future?

"Covid doesn't end when restrictions end," minister Tom Cox said. "There remains a lot to consider and it's the same for churches – things have changed. It takes time to establish rhythms and routines. The shock of coming back into the building is very real. We have to relearn how to live again."

The church decided to livestream to foster a sense of togetherness at a time of great uncertainty. "The big message was: we are doing this together, everyone is going to join at the same time. We don't want the church to be a social club – church needs to be more life-giving – but we recognise Sunday is an anchor for many."

The church has adapted its services so they work better online. The pace and content mix of the services changed – fewer songs, for instance, while liturgical prayer with its call and response seemed to be appreciated.

Tom stresses, "Oadby is not a 'techy church' – things have gone wrong, or haven't worked. As time went on it was harder and harder to keep the excitement of online". Nevertheless, the church has recognised the value of livestreaming, and has made the decision to continue. Whereas previously it used to record services almost as an afterthought, now it uses three cameras compared to one, with improved lighting, a couple of new screens and new worship presentation software. This financial investment of its limited resources was made in discussion with the leadership team and church membership.

One reason to continue is the increased reach. As with many churches, being online has piqued the interest of those who wouldn't have physically visited on a Sunday. Tom feels like it's taken the doors of the church closer to people's homes.

"We've not done anything like *Alpha* or an Enquirers' course – but missionally it's brought the church closer, especially for those who wanted to explore faith, or wanted to find some hope and comfort in strange and uncertain

times. Through moving online, we have made it easier and accessible."

But, he adds, this raises questions about what happens next. "So, we've moved the doors of church, but do we leave it there? Is there that strategic step to say "that's stage one". If so, what's stage two?"

There have been 'interesting conversations about mundane stuff' – such as where to put the cameras. With only 30 in the building in spring and summer, one camera was placed in the middle of the room to represent people at home. But in time it will probably move. What will the service look like when more people are in the building than at home? And just getting to that place is a big step for many.

"The social anxiety is a real issue," says Tom. "At what point do we actively encourage people to come back into the building? Are we happy that some people are staying at home? What are their reasons – is it anxiety – or is it because it's easier?"

"We don't have the answers – these are some of the questions," he continues. "To some extent it's about being open and vulnerable."

"But we hope and trust in Jesus. And as a church we provide a sense of hope and comfort, both to our congregation and the wider community."

“The community has changed – and we need to change”

Justice Enabler Wale Hudson-Roberts also serves as the minister of **John Bunyan Baptist Church** in Oxford. He explains how the church is exploring its response to a post-pandemic future.



“Through Covid our eyes have been opened to the needs of the community in a new way,” says Wale Hudson-Roberts. “One example is an increase in homelessness. There are various factors for this, such as unemployment and domestic abuse.

“We’ve had homeless people present themselves at the church. How do we respond with the love of Christ? How do we respond in a way that Social Services is happy? – they don’t want people to become too dependent on the church. The café at the church has been fantastic in supporting them, but Social Services is concerned about dependency - it’s a really difficult balancing act.

“Issues like this are much more in our focus now. So we are asking the question: ‘what next?’”

Wale explains that John Bunyan is a ‘traditional’ church, and one of the things he and the congregation are trying to recognise is how their traditions can create a ‘dissonance’ with the community.

“In some ways we are old fashioned. Our worship is liturgical. This can make a church inaccessible to a community, so we have been looking at how we can make ourselves more accessible.”

The congregation is dividing itself into various groups to try to discern the voice of the church, the voice of the community – and the mind of Christ.

Each team has a specific agenda to explore. One group will look at preaching, and how it can be made more accessible to the church and community. Other groups are looking at worship, and church meetings.

One group is exploring the external aspect – what resources are needed to enable the church to develop cohesive actions and plans that meet the needs of the community?

Each group will be designated a period of time. They will feed their findings back to the leadership team, and there will be discussions with the wider church and various external stakeholders to discern the best way forward.

“The pandemic has shown us a lot of things about the community in which we exist,” says Wale. “Some aspects we knew already, others have been brought into greater focus, whilst others have arisen because of the pandemic. Our congregation is very open to exploring how we can meet some of these needs and respond with the love of Christ.

“The community has changed – and we need to change.”



“We have responded to needs that have arisen in the pandemic”

How Gorse Hill Baptist Church in Swindon has moved to meet community needs over the last year. Interview with Heather Prictor.



Gorse Hill Baptist Church had a fair idea of its community's needs, notes church member Heather Prictor – but one impact of the pandemic has seen the church play a far bigger role in meeting them.



Aware of pockets of child poverty in local neighbourhoods, the church had teamed up with the charity TLG (Transforming Lives for Good) with a view to offering a holiday lunch club later in 2020. Those plans had to be adapted following the introduction of restrictions in March 2020. Instead of lunch clubs, the charity encouraged participating churches to provide Boxes of Hope - food with activities for the children. Gorse Hill began this in June. It started small, initially to families

connected with the church, before being extended more widely across the town. The church started to take referrals from schools and other agencies, and gave people the option of self-referring. The boxes were aimed at families experiencing a sudden drop in income in the pandemic.

More than a year on, they are now packing and delivering between 50 and 60 boxes per week. Heather calculated that by mid-June they had delivered 2200 boxes 'all over town'.

“We wanted to make sure the food went to families that really needed it”, says Heather, “and it’s been a really interesting journey. In meeting people’s needs we have experienced from them many different emotions; some being so grateful and expressing this through e-mails, cards, texts and thanking the people personally delivering the bags. Some have asked us for prayer and we have prayed with others there and then. Through contact with many local agencies we have become known and trusted in the support and care that we give, and showing the love of Jesus in action.”

The project had the support of the church membership as it had already voted to support MakeLunch. The team that were planning to run MakeLunch are the main volunteers packing the boxes (though they are more

accurately bags) and delivering them. They’ve also had lots of regular help from many other church members packing and delivering the bags.

Gorse Hill Baptist Church has become very well-known throughout the town and built great relationships with community champions from the supermarkets. Morrisons has donated much of the food, while some has come from Asda. The church has successfully applied for grants to fund additional purchases, and has had financial support from the borough council. The bags contain toiletries and cleaning products alongside key food provisions. They make between 50 and 100 bags at the start of the week, then when the referrals come in they can be personalised. For instance, there are always some treats and activities for families with children.

Where appropriate they have tried to have a theme – Christmas, Easter, Valentine’s Day. The bags also contain a hand-written card, written by a church member. There is some Christian literature for the children and adults.

“It’s been very busy and exciting,” said Heather. “Sometimes we’ve had nothing, prayed about it, and then the next day that very thing has been donated in one way or another. God has really provided for all of our needs.”

“We want to make it as personal as we can. When children receive it, we want it to be exciting and nice. It’s about a personal gift, sharing love and hope, and there’s been a really good response. It’s not just about food – it’s about so much more.”

As the project has grown, the church has become more aware of other ways it can meet the needs it has encountered. In June it opened a community fridge.

“Because of the Boxes of Hope, Chris Anthulakis contacted me – would we be interested in helping him start a community fridge? He contacted Hubbub and it started from there.

Because we had a lot of things in place we could get it up and running quickly.

“So now we’re also able to provide perishables. It’s open three days a week, 11am – 2pm, and because of this we can now add fresh food to our Boxes of Hope.”

Heather explains the church is also looking at setting up a Renew Wellbeing café, CAP money courses and job clubs. (Honda, a large local employer, closed its Swindon plant in July).

“Throughout this time we have tried to quickly respond to the needs that have arisen caused

by the pandemic. We are feeding families physically but also want to respond to support them with their mental health needs, their well-being and their spiritual needs. As to the future months ahead, as the problems continue to unfold, we hope to be able to continue to meet the needs of the people around us.

“We had a good idea of the needs, but the pandemic has made us look at things in different ways. We know we are able to do so much more about it and have become much better at responding.”

To find out more about TLG (Transforming Lives for Good) visit: www.tlg.org.uk



Heather (2nd left) at the opening of the community fridge in June, alongside Swindon Mayor Garry Perkins, volunteer Chris Anthulakis and Morrison’s community champion.

“You’ve created a real sense of community”

The disruption of the pandemic resulted in **Little Kingshill Baptist Church** bringing a much-needed amenity to its village. Interview with Martin Hatfield.



Little Kingshill is a small village, about four and a half miles north west of High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire. It has one school, one pub and one church - Little Kingshill Baptist Church. Martin Hatfield has served as the minister there since 2015, and early in his time he placed

a whiteboard in the summer fete asking residents what was missing from the village: a shop was the top answer; closely followed by café.

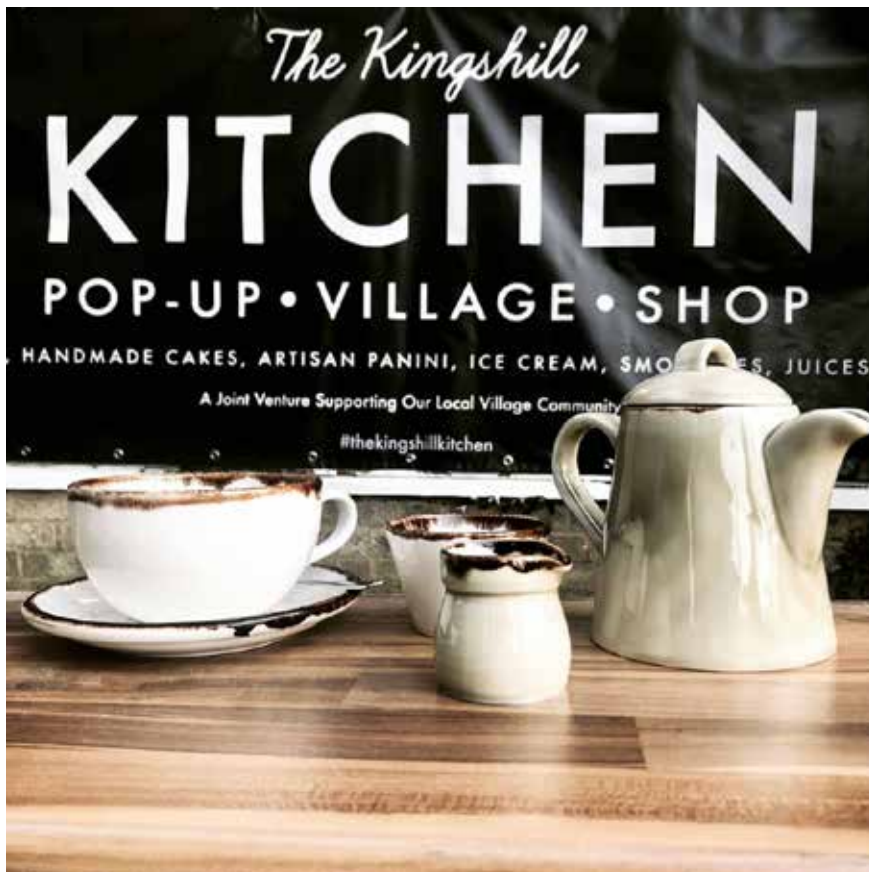
“We’ve always known the village would benefit from this,” says Martin, “and running a coffee shop is something we as a church have talked about for a long time. Our building is an ideal place opposite the village green, near a play area. However, once you start to drill into the detail it becomes more problematic. You really need someone to manage the day-to-day running – and could we support that? Would we have enough volunteers?”

It meant the idea of a church-based coffee shop remained just that – an idea. Until this year.

In January Martin received a call from another Little Kingshill resident. Silvio ran a chain of coffee shops in London which were all shut as the country had entered another national lockdown. He had noticed the church hall was closed, that members were meeting on Zoom, and had a proposition. “Would you like to open a coffee shop in the church hall in the village?”

“The question felt like a dream come true”, says Martin. Silvio proposed he move some of his equipment from London into the church hall, where he would serve quality Italian coffee and stock Italian delicatessen products, bread and milk and operate as an essential business. Deacons and trustees were supportive, and within a couple of weeks the idea had the church’s backing. Silvio would have rent-free access to the space and donate a proportion of the profits; but both he and Martin were clear that providing a service for the village was the overriding factor.

Silvio worked to spruce up the hall, giving it a lick of paint and new flooring, and the new venture opened on Easter Monday.



Initially it was as a takeaway-only, but when restrictions eased around a month or so later, they were able to offer outdoor seating, "even using the marquee that we used to take to Soul Survivor," Martin pointed out.

Martin says the reaction was almost universally positive. Word quickly spread on Facebook and the coffee shop was very busy from the start. Around four weeks in, a friend of Martin's remarked: "You've already created a real sense of community around this."

"This was fantastic to hear," says Martin. "It's had a massive impact in the village. Somebody even said it's the most exciting thing to happen in Little Kingshill. It's undoubtedly serving a need in our community. It's something that people have asked for – and we are part of that."

Martin says, "the church is meeting people who've never previously set foot on the church premises, and it has opened the eyes of others in the village to our genuine desire to serve Little Kingshill.

"It is providing hospitality: time and again in the gospels we see Jesus and friends gathered around a table and offering a place for others to do likewise feels like a very missional thing to do - particularly at a time when residents are spending more time in the village due to fewer commutes and working from home.

"It's the little stories too," Martin continues. "We had contact from a local florist – she'd never previously had an outlet to sell in the village, and wondered if the coffee shop could sell flowers? We were happy for this. Then one day an 80 year old man rushed back in after finishing his coffee to buy his wife some flowers – it was the first time he'd been able to do this in years. In the last few weeks we've been able to employ some young adults to give them work experience, and that's been really well received."

The big question is what happens next. The formal arrangement between the church and Silvio ends in September, and there will be demand for the hall for other

activities. Silvio has appreciated working in the village where he lives – but will he want to carry on? And if he doesn't, what will the church do?

"I want to see something continue, and I think as a church we would be missing a trick if it doesn't, but we'll see," says Martin. "It has opened the eyes of our fellowship to just how differently church might need to operate.

"I just know it was the best chance of running a coffee shop we've had. There was a strong sense of God being in the process right at the beginning. It was very clearly accepted by the church, and it felt like a movement of the Spirit. For me, this is one of the best things the church has done."

He adds: "Covid has provided us with this unique opportunity – seizing the moment and taking a risk was vital, and doing so has given life to the building and fellowship at what has otherwise been an often difficult time."

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EVENTS

Education Sunday

12 September

A national day of prayer and celebration for everyone in the world of education on the theme 'A word in season'.

www.cte.org.uk/educationsunday2021

Peacemaking Sunday

19 September

Resources available from the Fellowship of Reconciliation to help churches mark Peace Sunday.

www.for.org.uk/peacesunday

CMD webinar – how to pull together a CMD audit

29 September

Tim Fergusson of the Ministries Team explains how best to undertake your first annual CMD audit.

www.baptist.org.uk/cmdaudit

Prisons Week

10-16 October

Encouraging prayer and awareness of the needs of prisoners and their families, victims and prison staff.

www.prisonsworld.org

Christian Resources Exhibition (CRE)

12-14 October

Sandown Park, Esher
Your one-stop shop for church supplies, resources and ideas.

creonline.co.uk

One World Week

17-24 October

People working together to build a just, peaceful and sustainable world, on the theme 'Act now for our children's world'.

www.oneworldweek.org

Anti-slavery Day

18 October

A day to raise awareness of human trafficking and modern slavery.

www.antislaveryday.com

Sam Sharpe Lecture

21 October

'Setting The Captives Free - forging the paths to freedom'

Delivered by Amanda Khozi Mukwashi, CEO of Christian Aid (19:00, online).

www.baptist.org.uk/samsharpe

Bible Sunday

24 October

A day to celebrate the continuing impact the Bible has on individuals and communities.

www.biblesunday.org

Baptist Women's World Day of Prayer

1 November

The theme is 'Courageous Life!' Hebrews 13:6.

www.bwawd.org

**Project Violet:
Discernment, dialogue
and the Church Meeting:
A way forward**
4 November

An online event hosted by Project Violet with Rachel Muers and Ruth Moriarty.

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

**International Day of
Prayer for the Persecuted
Church**
7 November

Every year, Christians around the world set a day aside for prayer of our sisters and brothers who are persecuted for their faith.

www.idop.ca

Remembrance Sunday
14 November

[www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-
involved/remembrance](http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/remembrance)

Interfaith Week
14-21 November

Aims to strengthen inter-faith relations and increase understanding.

www.interfaithweek.org

Advent Sunday
1 December

World Aids Day
1 December

www.worldaidsday.org

Human Rights Day
10 December

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights turns 70.

[www.un.org/en/observances/
human-rights-day](http://www.un.org/en/observances/human-rights-day)

**International Migrants
Day**
18 December

[www.un.org/en/observances/
migrants-day](http://www.un.org/en/observances/migrants-day)

Christmas Day
25 December

For more visit
[www.baptist.org.uk/
events](http://www.baptist.org.uk/events)

Project Violet launches

A new three-year research project that aims to help us understand more fully the theological, missional and structural obstacles women ministers face in the Baptist community in Great Britain, and identify ways forward, has launched.

Project Violet aims to investigate women's experiences in ministry while developing women ministers.

The project is participatory in approach so participants will be engaged as co-researchers and supported in asking questions and researching answers. They will be accompanied through

the project so that their own voice as advocates for change is developed. A participatory approach will enable women to set the questions the project will address.

The project will be co-led by Helen Cameron, Research Fellow, Centre for Baptist Studies, Regent's Park College and Jane Day, Centenary Development Enabler, Baptists Together.

Christine Joynes, Director of the Centre for Baptist Studies said, "I am delighted that the Centre will be hosting this important project. The Centre is fully committed to serving the needs of the Baptist Church and I see Project Violet as a way of contributing to

the contemporary task of furthering women in ministry".

Mary Taylor, Chair of the Baptists Together Gender Justice Group said, "It is clear there is further to go in achieving gender justice and we hope that this project will contribute to that journey".



For more, visit projectviolet.org.uk

Global evangelism award for Estonian church

A 'bold and innovative' church in one of Europe's most secular countries is the recipient of a new global Baptist evangelism award.

The 3D Church was planted by a group of young students in 2010 in a university city, Tartu, Estonia. The church has a strong culture of welcome and discipleship, and more than 200 people have given their lives to Jesus Christ since it launched, many of them first generation Christians in their 20s.

Pastor Jakob Remmel received the first-ever BWA-KIBC Evangelism Award on behalf of the church at the recent

Baptist World Alliance (BWA) Congress (bwa2021.org).

The award was presented by the BWA in collaboration with Kowloon International Baptist Church (KIBC) in Hong Kong.

Jakob was part of planting this church with a call of the Great Commission at the age of 19 to reach his generation with the good news of Jesus Christ.

In accepting the award, he said: "I think this award represents God's reminder that he still moves in this faithless Europe."

European Baptist Federation (EBF) General Secretary, Tony Peck, said: "In Estonia, one of the most secular countries in Europe, many young people have come to faith in Jesus Christ through the work and witness of 3D. New disciples quickly became disciple-makers, and this has been a most effective means of reaching their friends with the Gospel.

"I am delighted that the innovative mission and evangelism of 3D has now been recognised by the global Baptist family in this first-ever BWA Evangelism Award."

'A wonderful witness to the wide variety of British Baptists' theological work'

A number of Baptist writing projects have been published in 2021, with more to come before the year is done, writes Andy Goodliff.

Three PhDs have been published, by David McLachlan, Anthony Clarke and myself. My book is a study of Baptist Union life in the 1990s; David's explores disability and the doctrine of atonement and Anthony's is focused on what we are doing when we form or train Baptist ministers.

Mary Cotes has published on women in scripture and history and how they witness to women's calling to

kingdom work, while Emma Nash offers a powerful engagement with the experience of childlessness.

Earlier this year Anthony Reddie, Seidel Abel Boanerges and Pam Searle edited a collection of essays on intercultural preaching as an aid to helping those of us who preach to consider how we might preach, conscious of the different cultures present in scripture and in our congregations.

Myra Blyth's new book, written with Matthew Mills and Michael Taylor, takes up the issue of restorative justice and the place of forgiveness within

it from the perspective of theology. Finally, Anthony R Cross and Brian Haymes have edited a collection of essays in honour of Ruth Gouldbourne on the occasion of her 60th birthday, highlighting the important contribution Ruth has made, and continues to make, to Baptist life and thought.

Here is a wonderful witness to the wide variety of theological work British Baptists have been doing. There is much here that will help those in ministry or anyone who wants to think about the difference Christ makes to our being Christian today.

'My welcome was very warm – and I want others to experience this'

Sharon Shek has been appointed to lead our response to the growing number of Hong Kongers seeking refuge in the UK.

Sharon is a British national (overseas) who served as a minister in a large Baptist church in Hong Kong before arriving in England in February.

As the Baptists Together Hong Kong Response Co-ordinator, she is responsible for:

- liaising with church leaders seeking to leave Hong Kong, connecting them with local Baptist congregations;
- encouraging Baptist churches to be places of welcome for migrants from Hong Kong;
- enabling training and networking, and helping Baptists discern God's missional activity in the midst of the migration.

The role came about after the UK Government introduced a new visa at the end of January that gives 70 per cent of the territory's population the right to come and live here. The visa was introduced to the former colony because the Government believes China is undermining Hong Kong's rights and freedoms.

It is estimated that about 300,000 people will take up the visa offer over

the next five years. This has been described as the biggest planned migration since Windrush.

While many are leaving Hong Kong as economic migrants, some need to flee for their own safety. Indeed, some Baptists have been at the forefront of the pro-democracy protests, and early targets of the new security laws.



Sharon's commissioning service at Trinity Baptist Church in July

The Baptists Together Mission Forum discussed how our Union might be able to facilitate and co-ordinate our response as a Baptist family, and released the funding for this new role.

Sharon is working two days per week in this new role, and is sited in the Faith and Society Team. A Hong Kong Working Group – comprising a group of UK Baptists – has been set up to support her.

She was formally commissioned into the role during a service at Trinity Baptist Church in July.

Sharon said she would like to make Baptist churches aware of what's happening in Hong Kong. "The situation is very serious there. In the last two years we have had so many broken relationships because of differences of opinion.

"Many people are worried about the future – the judicial system, education, their freedoms – and many families have decided to move to countries such as Taiwan, Canada and the UK.

"So we are very pleased the visa was offered to come here. It's special - but there are many difficulties in starting a new life here. We want to work with people and get them used to living here."

Sharon, who has settled at Trinity Baptist Church in Derby and whose hobbies include cycling and dragon boat racing, added: "Our lives are very different, so your experience is very helpful.

"Helping us with practical information, explaining the many new aspects of living in a foreign country, is very important. My welcome was very warm – and I want others to experience this."

Internships for young adults across Baptists Together

A new focus on promoting and facilitating internships for young adults in Baptist life is gathering pace

A diverse group of leaders from across Baptists Together have developed proposals for a more co-ordinated approach and clear statement of intent to internships across the denomination. The statement reads:

Baptists Together aims to encourage, promote and facilitate internships for those called to a wide range of missional settings across our regions in England and Wales, so that: Interns may explore their gifting; grow in their faith as disciples of Jesus; invest their time, skills and energy; and receive training and practical experience.

Churches, mission projects and associations may provide opportunities for those called to explore their gifting; invest in developing new leaders; grow together with their interns as their gifts are identified for use in the local community; and reap the harvest of an experienced crop of young leaders across the Baptist family.

A set of guidelines for churches wishing to host interns is in an advanced stage of preparation, alongside proposals to appoint a Baptists Together coordinator for the development of our next generation of leadership.

An internship project group was commissioned by the Core Leadership Team (CLT) following the 2019 report

that investigated the presence and contribution of young adults to our Baptist family.

One of the recommendations of that report was to create opportunities for those young adults already connected to our churches to develop in their discipleship and leadership – not least through internships. The hope is not only to nurture the skills and faith of interns, but also to create a culture of Baptist belonging for a younger generation.

If you can offer any input into this work, or have ideas to share with the project group, email interns@baptist.org.uk.

For more, visit baptist.org.uk/internships

LOVE:WORK

Reflections and Prayers for a World at Work

You are not contained by my imagination
You are not defined by my expectations
You are not hindered by my disappointments
You are not restricted to my ideas.

You are not controlled by my ambitions
You are not bound by my abilities
You are not measured by my resources
You are not reduced to what I can comprehend.

You are not curtailed by my shortcomings
You are not diminished by my mistakes
You are not shaped by my assumptions
You are not limited to what I can believe.

And yet you choose to call me yours.
To make mine the hands and feet through which you might be present today
Mine the lips through which you might speak
Mine the life in which others might glimpse your presence.

So release your presence through me I pray
That this clay jar might somehow display the treasure contained within.

Amen

You could have kept on walking when a woman touched your garment's seam;
Compelled by the urgency of another whose voice was louder.
Their need more public holding a position that would cause many to afford him more attention.

You could have kept on walking when you knew your power had done its work;
Problem solved
Mission accomplished
Needs met
Goods delivered
Box ticked
Case closed.

But you stopped, and chose to find the one whose petition you had unknowingly granted;
To affirm her faith restore her dignity and declare her release.

You could have kept on walking but you chose to stop because you cared.

And in this world of deadlines and schedules where human endeavour is reduced to results and statistics,
The fruit of your creation, a commodity to be costed and measured
Help me to know when it is right to pause and engage with another because you have called me to care.

Amen

God of all being, you hold in your hands the farthest corners of the universe, yet your eye can see inside the tiniest atom
You reign above the affairs of all humanity yet know us so well that even the hairs on our head are numbered.

Help us find strength when all around seems turmoil
Not by making sense or grasping control but through deepening our trust in you and pointing others to that rock on which we stand.

May we find our certainty not by expecting to always understand but through the security of your presence in the midst of our confusion.

Let your cross still speak: The place where you touched the depths of human suffering yet opened to us the doorway to eternity.
As we proclaim its message, we also bear its mark and so embrace reality with all its hope and pain.

Amen

Teach me to pray Lord;
To do more than place before
you my own concerns and
expectations;
To seek help to accomplish more
than simply what I have already
determined;
To assume more than simply my
definitions of good
are those to which you should
comply.

Remind me that prayer is not an
invitation
for you to become involved in my
agendas
so much as one that I might
accept
to align myself with your intent
and purpose.

Help me to hear your voice
amidst the noise of this day's
clamour;
To align my routines according to
your ways;
To seek to see this world
through the eyes of the one to
whom all things belong.

Amen

Ever present God
We reach out for you
not to escape the troubles and
tragedies of this world
but to help us make sense of
those we can
and to find strength to bear
those that we can't.

We struggle at times to
comprehend
the harm that we seem capable
of doing to one another
and we struggle no less to
understand
why at times, tragedies that are
of no-one's fault
inflict the pain that they do.

Today we pray for all who bear
the brunt of that pain
Those caught up in the stories
that we all know about
and those whose troubles are
unseen
but no less a challenge to bear.
And we pray for ourselves
for we are not untouched by the
realities of this world.

And yet we thank you too
that amidst the struggles that we
face
are glimpses of your goodness
and grace
moments of immeasurable joy
and signs of hope

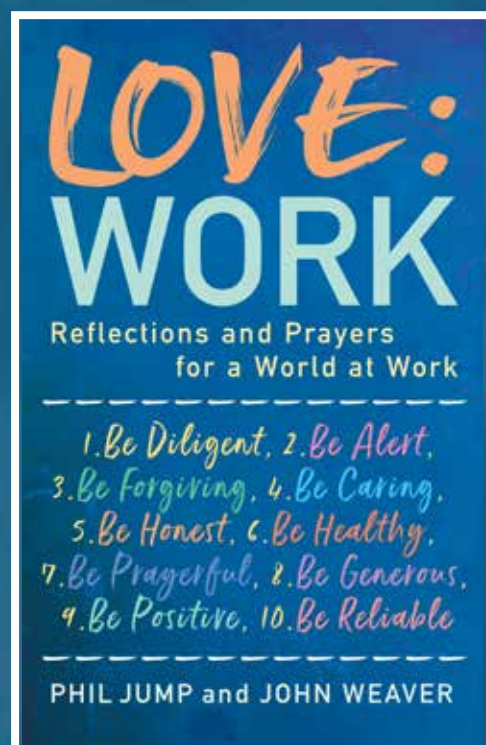
May we never be defined by the
circumstances that surround us
but who we are in you
the hope that is contained
in the Gospel that we share
and the promise that is ours for
eternity

Through Christ our Saviour and
Lord

Amen

**These prayers are
taken from
*Love: Work - Reflections
and Prayers for a World
at Work,*
co-written by Baptist
ministers Phil Jump
and John Weaver, and
published by Darton,
Longman and Todd in
2021.**

**It is available from the
Baptists Together online
shop
www.baptist.org.uk/shop**



Climate resources for churches

A crucial conference for the climate is taking place in Glasgow in November. COP26 is a global United Nations summit about climate change and how countries are planning to tackle it.

Here is a small selection of resources and links to help churches prepare and pray about the issues, as well as take action.



Climate Sunday

Climate Sunday is an ecumenical initiative which equips churches to put climate action at the heart of discipleship and mission. In this crucial year ahead of COP26, it has the dual aim of bringing churches together to pray and act on the climate, and of giving churches which haven't taken action on the climate yet a chance to get involved.

It is encouraging churches to hold a climate-focused service to explore the theological and scientific basis of creation care and action on climate ahead of COP26, to pray, and to commit to action. There are lots of resources to enable that to happen.

The Baptist Union of Great Britain is an official supporter.

climatesunday.org



Eco Church

Make a commitment as a local church community to take long term action to reduce your own greenhouse gas emissions.

Eco Church is an awards scheme from the Christian charity A Rocha that helps churches become eco-friendly.

ecochurch.arocha.org.uk



Operation Noah

Operation Noah is a Christian charity working with the Church to inspire action on the climate crisis. How should Christians respond to global warming? Should the church be involved with politics? How do Christian values relate to climate change? Operation Noah aims to tackle these questions in several ways - theology, campaigning, equipping, prayer, communication and partnerships.

operationnoah.org



Young Christian Climate Network

The YCCN was launched at the beginning of August 2020. This new network is an action-focused community of Christians in the UK aged 18-30, choosing to follow Jesus in the pursuit of climate justice and who are looking to act on climate change.

It has organised a walking relay from Cornwall to Glasgow and the COP26 venue to show that supporters care about climate justice and creation care.

yccn.uk



The Baptist Union Environment Network

A new Baptist network that connects people with a passion for the environment and climate change, which launched in September 2020.

BUEN has prepared a COP 26 guide for Baptist churches: baptist.org.uk/cop26guide

baptist.org.uk/buen



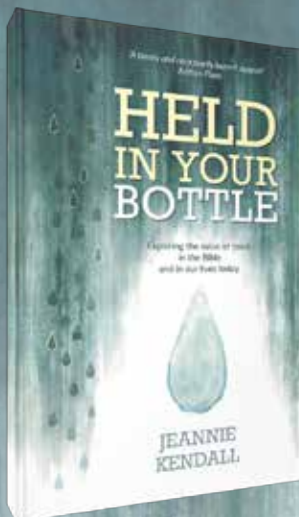
Doxecology

Doxecology, by Resound Worship, is a collection of 13 contemporary, congregational worship songs on themes of creation, ecology and Christian hope. Alongside the album there are scores and charts, backing tracks and lyric videos (with streaming permission), and an accompanying book of studies with contributions from some leading scholars and practitioners in the fields of environmental concern and worship.

resoundworship.org/projects/doxecology

'A great tool for those involved in caring for people in distress.' Linda Abel Boanerges

PB: 9781788931717 £9.99



Combining contemporary stories, biblical narrative and psychological insights, *Held in Your Bottle* looks at the many reasons why we cry, and why these tears are important to our wellbeing and to God.

A valuable resource to help you in your pastoral ministry.

JEANNIE KENDALL teaches on the Pastoral Supervision course at Spurgeon's College.



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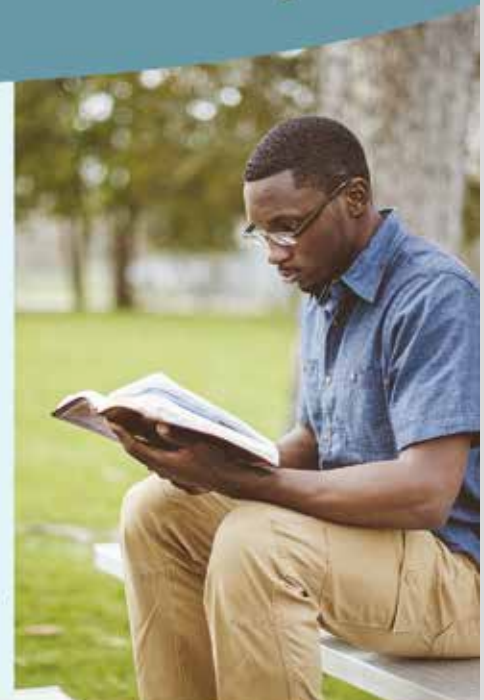
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