

Autumn 2022

BAPTISTS

# TOGETHER

# DIVERSE PEOPLE

# COMMON GROUND

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

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TOGETHER**



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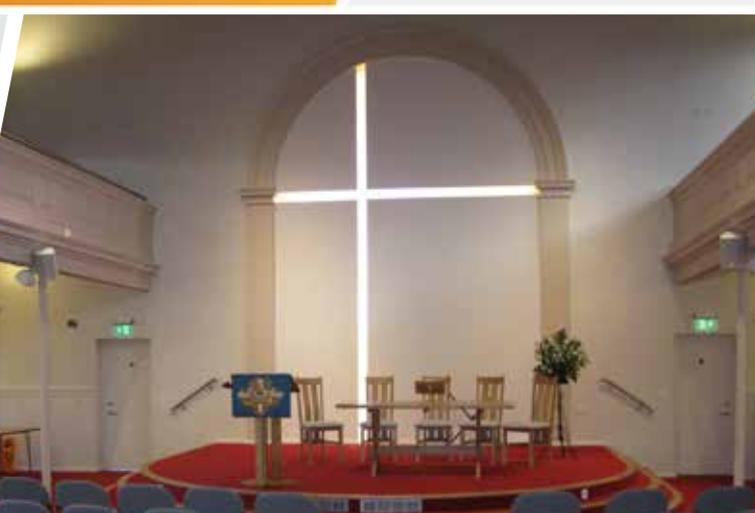
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# FEATURES

- 6** **Something is dying and something is not yet born**  
by Alan Donaldson
- 10** **Voices from Baptist Assembly 2022**
- 12** **To the angel of Baptists Together**  
by Ben Lucas
- 18** **The core of Missio Dei is evangelism**  
by Seidel Abel Boanerges
- 21** **Diverse people: Common ground**  
by Craig Gardiner

## STORIES FROM THE GROUND

- 24** **Whatever comes your way, go for it**  
by Abbey Baptist Church
- 26** **Embodying the Good News in marginalised coastal communities**  
by Barney Barron
- 27** **Commissioned to co-mission!**  
by Matt Wright
- 28** **We are committed to mission in all its diversity**  
by Yinka Oyekan
- 29** **Making the most of opportunities to share the Good News**  
by John Kidd



15

**Let's inspire one another in all we do**  
by Hayley Young and Lynn Green



42

**Listening to our young people**  
by Clare Hooper

- 30** **An underlying enthusiasm for the Word and Spirit to be at the forefront**  
by Clive Bennett
- 31** **Prayer has been the bedrock**  
by Fiona Preston
- 33** **Sharing faith in relevant and real ways**  
by Chris Duffett
- 35** **We don't begin with confrontation**  
by William Wade
- 37** **Conversation starters**  
by the Pecha Kucha presenters

## REGULARS

- 5** **Editorial**
- 44** **Prayers: Around the table**  
by Amanda Pink
- 46** **Events**
- 47** **Resources**
- 48** **News**

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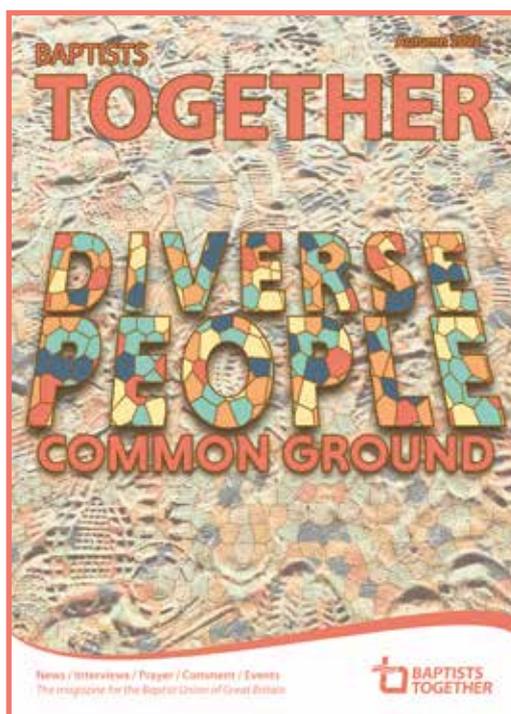


# DIVERSE PEOPLE, COMMON GROUND

**W**e find ourselves in disorientating times. How then, shall we live?

That was a question posed by Alan Donaldson in his Sunday morning sermon at the Baptist Assembly. Rather than a specific three or five point plan, Alan highlighted what he termed a broad direction of travel, one which begins by dwelling in Jesus. Jesus unites us all: he calls us, nourishes us and sends us. We all seek to serve him. Moreover, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Jesus is the only place to start and, as Alan stressed, he holds us as we go.

But where we go from there differs from person to person, church to church, mission setting to mission setting, for while there is much we share, we all live out and understand this call on our lives in different ways and contexts. This much is evident from the Baptist Assembly in May and the edition of *Baptists Together* magazine which preceded it.



It's a collection of pieces captured by a photograph taken of footprints in the Bournemouth sand when hundreds of us flocked to the south coast in May, and has become the edition's theme: Diverse people, common ground. 'Our purpose at the Assembly was to reflect our diversity and celebrate it on our common ground', writes Craig Gardiner, the Cardiff Baptist College tutor who took the photo. Offering his own reflection of what the image conveys, Craig argues that unity in diversity is perhaps our most compelling characteristic as Baptists, and it is in working through our differences, by being both receptive and hospitable to each other, as well as having a willingness to confront, that we will arrive at a deeper understanding of God, his mission, and our part in it.

The times are disorientating, and the way ahead is not clear. But does this give us an idea for how we shall live?

In both, there was a conversation and connection theme where spaces were created to hear from and listen to each other. Many took the opportunity to do so, and this edition reflects some of the messages shared at the Assembly and beyond, and the different ways Baptists are serving Jesus in mission and evangelism.

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# SOMETHING IS DYING AND

## SOMETHING IS NOT YET BORN

by Alan Donaldson

Baptists are encouraged to return to their roots and explore what it truly means to dwell in Christ as we navigate these disorientating times.

That's the message from Alan Donaldson, the European Baptist Federation General Secretary.

Here is an edited transcript of Alan's Sunday morning sermon at the 2022 Baptist Assembly

As I look around the Church in Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East I find myself repeating the phrase '*something is dying and something is not yet born.*'

Everything is being questioned. It is so disorientating. Everything feels so different. Inflation is back for the first time in a generation. War is back in Europe for the first time in a generation. Congregational volunteering is being reported at levels way below what was previously imagined. Many churches are still

operating with congregations significantly below pre-pandemic levels. Young people's ministries seem to have been disproportionately affected.

*'Something is dying and something is not yet born.'*

How will we navigate these disorienting times? That is the key question I am asking in my ministry at the moment. As the Northumbria Community so succinctly asks 'How then shall we live?'

I invite you to explore with me not an answer to the question, but a direction of travel. And I want to lead you to explore the riches of scripture and the riches of our roots as Baptists.

**Making your home in Jesus: John 15: 1-8**

This is one of the great metaphors of the New Testament. It is a metaphor of connection, of truth, of hopefulness – and it's a metaphor introduced by Jesus at a time of disorientation for his disciples. We find it in John 15.

If you flick back to chapters 13 and 14 you will pick up the context of disorientation. John has been revealing Jesus as the true Word, the living God, the Saviour. In sign after sign the disciples have witnessed a triumphant victorious Lord. Water into wine, the blind see, Lazarus is raised from the dead and the crowds cry out "Hosanna!". But now there is talk of betrayal, denial, death and confusion. Thomas says "we haven't got a clue what you are talking about, Jesus. Where are you going and how are we going to get there?"

"I do not have much time left to talk to you," he replies, before painting this picture of the garden with its vine and gardener. He tells them they are the pruned branches on the vine, destined to be fruitful. So with the warning of denial ringing in their ears, and the disorientation of his death and departure still to come, Jesus tells his disciples they will be fruitful – if they remain in the vine. If they 'abide in him.'

John 15 is all about where you make your home as a Christian. Jesus says to his disciples “abide in me” or “make your home in me.” In times of uncertainty, insecurity, disorientation – the message is “dwell in me, the light of the world, the bread of life, the resurrection and the way, the truth and the life.”

This is a key identity statement. We are in Christ. Paul uses the phrase all over the place, ‘To God’s holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus.’ Romans 8:1-17 is full of the affirmation that there is no condemnation for those who are ‘in Christ Jesus.’

Being in Christ is our identity.

### Abiding in Christ - the example of Ukrainian Baptists

In the face of unspeakable evil and the most awful disorientation in their homeland, Ukrainian Baptists returned to their roots and abided in Christ. With bombs, shells and mortars

landing around them, they have sought refuge in church basements and simultaneously sought the presence of God. It’s been central to their response to war: abiding in Christ’s presence by reading scripture together, finding reasons for thanksgiving together, praying together, entering the discipline of gathering together to eat bread and drink wine, baptising new believers. It is here in connection with one another they testify to experiencing the presence of God in the midst of great conflict.

They have received and appreciated the love and joy of Christ by gathering together. They have then daily left the safety of these basement churches to serve their communities. Ukrainian Baptists travelled from Lviv to Kyiv to deliver aid; they attempted to gain access to Mariupol; they walked the frail and elderly from the basements to buses in Irpin amidst shelling, and some have lost their lives rescuing the vulnerable.

The whole people of God have participated in the mission of God. Out of the security of dwelling in Christ, out of the abundance of being found in Christ, they have entered the insecurity of a war zone, and poured out their lives in service and sacrifice.

### Our Baptist roots of gathering in small, deep communities

I fear we are losing this fundamental Baptist emphasis of two or three gathering together in Christ’s name, of prioritising dwelling with Christ in community with others.

It has been under attack for so long, and the pandemic has only amplified it. On the one hand the individualisation of our world, which tells us we should be self-sufficient, separates us. And on the other, the attractational model of church that tells us success is measured by the size of the crowd, separates us from deep community.



General Secretary Lynn Green prays for Alan Donaldson ahead of his Baptist Assembly address



I want to encourage you in times of disorientation to go back to our Baptist roots rather than our recent traditions, and to consider what our forefathers of centuries past discovered about practising 'being in Christ'.

Our Baptist roots as a believers' church draw us naturally into communal, intergenerational discernment and discipleship. Baptist beginnings involved people leaving churches where it was OK to be anonymous in the crowd, to form communities that shared life together as exemplified in the relational union of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Not simply a word and Spirit network but a Christ-rooted, integral, indigenous, organic, adaptive word and Spirit movement. Discerning together the path of faithfulness and maturity.

We have deep roots that, when creatively explored, can help us build our home in Christ and equip us for the future. Peter Barber, the former minister of

Upton Vale Baptist Church and a previous General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Scotland, used to say that "the Baptist time has not yet come". I believe that time is now. Baptist churches should be ready and able to pivot in a time of global uncertainty because in their very roots is this commitment to encountering the risen Christ in and through one another as we build our home together in Christ.

Our way of faith is simple at its root. Connect with Christ, who connects us with each other, and through witness connects us with the rest of the world. It is the trappings of our traditions, often borrowed from other churches or developed for different times and cultures, that have made it complicated and cumbersome.

### As you go, you grow

Nigel Wright in his book *New Baptists, New Agenda* describes Baptists at their roots as activists. Because we live in his life and love, we can serve in our lives

and love. Will we go and invite others to make their home in him? Because if we dwell in Jesus we will want to show others the way. The calling here is to take on the family resemblance in mission as an act of witness.

It is in truly going into this world - its beauty and its pain, its suffering and hope, its loss of identity and search for identity, its self-destruction and creativity, its brokenness and healing, its shame and honour, its hopelessness and hopefulness, its disorientation and reorientation - that we grasp with greater depth the love, the protection, the security, the peace, the wholeness, the joy and hope that we receive as we abide in him.

'Going' is our classroom of discipleship. As you go you grow. Ukrainians don't grow inside the church basement listening to the shelling. It is in the going that Ukrainians discover reasons for thanksgiving, discover reasons for hope, understand how deep

the Father's love and joy is and explore the scriptures with fresh questions, passion and insight.

The fruit of going on the mission of God while abiding in the vine is two-fold; primarily you will be changed – and at times others will come to faith.

Today in the Global South we are seeing millions come to faith in disciple-making movements. The recent estimate is that there are 77 million believers whose leaders see their role being to release the 77 million into mission from day one of their discipleship. Movements that envisage every believer as a missionary in line with our own Declaration of Principle, which says: 'That it is the duty of every disciple to bear witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to take part in the evangelisation of the world.'

Imagine equipping, enabling and releasing - not a couple of thousand ministers in a generation, but a million disciples all willing and able to disciple others to faith in Christ, and to teach them how

to abide in him. These models are slowly arriving in the UK: they are experimenting with them in Yorkshire (see p.47), but it strikes me they fit our roots as Baptists and this era of disorientation. Therefore they require amplification as a potential future model for Baptist churches in the UK. They are a freshly imagined embodiment of our Declaration of Principle to accompany, challenge or even succeed our inherited models for church life.

### Conclusion

These last few years have been tough. And no one really knows exactly what lies ahead for us. *'Something is dying and something is not yet born.'*

How can we navigate these years?

I believe we need to explore what it truly means to abide in Christ. To experiment with new ways of being the Church deeply connected to Christ, to one another and to our roots as a Baptist people. To take time to dig into our roots and creatively

apply them today. To participate in the life, love, joy and peace of God and to know the security of his household that enables us to go out and reveal his light and his glory.



**Alan Donaldson is General Secretary of the European Baptist Federation. This is an edited transcript of his Sunday morning address at the Baptist Assembly earlier this year.**

**You can access his sermon on Youtube at [baptist.org.uk/ba22sunday](http://baptist.org.uk/ba22sunday)**





# VOICES FROM BAPTIST ASSEMBLY 2022

This year's Baptist Assembly had the theme of connection and conversation, and there was a range of ways delegates could voice their thoughts. This is a flavour of what was shared and heard

## LISTENING BOARD

Those in Bournemouth, where the Assembly was held, could contribute to a listening board stationed in the network zone. Erica Bowler, a Baptist minister and missional listener in Purfleet, served as an intentional listener at the stand. She collated the notes and grouped them into different themes:

### Mission

*'Engaging with people 'in the world' who don't see the need for God'*

*'How can we effectively share Jesus and see more people following him?'*

*'Thank you for funding pioneer work - please use any spare monies to forward pioneering'*

*'How do you enable gifted people in the congregation to be released to where the unchurched are and not be over burdened by internal roles?'*

'Mission was the biggest topic people wanted to discuss,' Erica writes. 'There were fundamental questions about mission and how to do it, alongside practical questions about how to finance mission, how pioneers and emerging projects can feel supported, and how churches can act together to create strategy and support.'

### Same sex marriage and same sex relationships

*'How do we hold authentic and open conversation around LGTB+ inclusion without weighting either side and honouring different views/outcomes?'*

'Many people were just confused,' writes Erica. 'Everyone knows someone who is affected, but

they don't know how to have the conversation as a church. Most people who hold a traditional view of marriage didn't want to put it on the board and were feeling silenced at the Assembly. By contrast there was pain from the 2016 Council statement 'humbly urging' those who want to affirm LGBTQ relationships not to do so.

'As well as the pastoral issue there's a missional issue. Some are concerned that we are having these conversations at the expense of mission. But others are wondering how our conversations might affect those we seek to reach.'

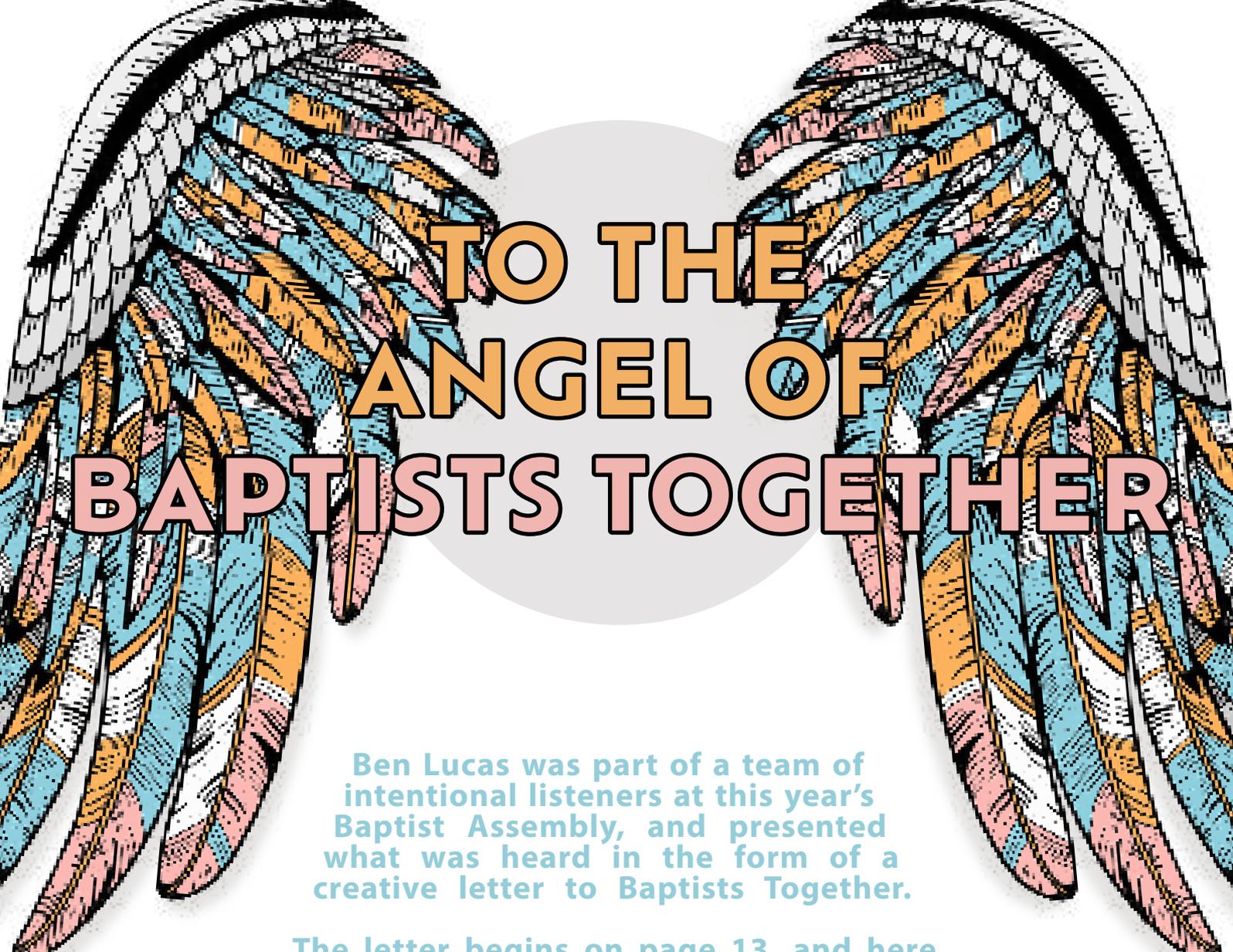
### Other messages:

**Baptist life:** *'How can BUGB listen to its component parts meaningfully?'*

*'How can we more properly recognise our union in everyday church activities and services?'*

**Diversity and unity:** *'How much diversity can our unity embrace? If Jesus is in the middle - lots! If we are in the middle, not much.'*





# TO THE ANGEL OF BAPTISTS TOGETHER

Ben Lucas was part of a team of intentional listeners at this year's Baptist Assembly, and presented what was heard in the form of a creative letter to Baptists Together.

The letter begins on page 13, and here Ben explains the thinking behind it:

So much was heard at the Baptist Assembly. We had listeners at home listening to everything being presented. Listeners in Bournemouth communicating with all and offering opportunities for people to share what God was saying. We had discussions online, conversations with friends; so much was heard in a myriad of ways.

How do we present back all that is heard?

Inspired by something I had done in a previous church, I decided to write a letter to the Angel of Baptists Together. Following the way John writes to the Angel of the churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, I divided the letter into four categories.

Firstly, who the letter is from - who Jesus is. Secondly, affirmation of all that is pleasing to God across our beautiful Union. Thirdly, the difficulties we face and challenges we need to hear.

And finally, a word of hope for all who keep running the race.

The letter, though put together by me, actually contains words from those at the Assembly which illustrate the themes that were heard. I offer you a letter written by those who attended - and it is my prayer that we will hear the love and rise to the challenges expressed as together we continue to be Christ's church.

## To the Angel of Baptists Together.

These are some of the themes that have been heard at Baptist Assembly, gathered by the listening team.

More than that – I was there – I was with you as you sang, as you prayed, as you listened to talks, held conversations, and engaged with Pecha Kuchas. I was there when you ate, laughed, and wept together around dinner tables and over drinks in the evening. I was there when you put your opinions on Slido and social media. I was there in the Network Zone, listening and reading all the feedback and I was there with every individual and church online. I was there when the listening team discerned all that had been heard. I was there.

And who am I? I am the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands; I am the first the last, who was dead and came to life; I am the one who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are burnished bronze; I am the way, the truth and the life. And I am with you now as you read these words and find a way to move forward.

I know and I see all that you did at Assembly. While many of you remember the bits that you celebrated or had chaffed – I remember it all. You were and are one in so many ways. All of you were there because of me - your response to my love. All of you were one as you lifted your voices in worship to me – oh, how it blessed – oh, how the heavens joined in. You were one as you shouted Amens at the end of prayers. You are one in your worship to the one God, Father, Spirit, and Son. The song you sang sums it up well;

*WE were the beggars now WE are royalty; WE were prisoners now WE are running free, WE are forgiven, accepted, redeemed by his grace. You are one in your story and one in your worship.*

Not only are you one in worship but you are one in your mission. Your most liked Slido comment was about mission. There were so many discussions around stopping decline. Each one of you desperate for your community to know the good news of Jesus. You are one in your mission.

As you heard reports from Baptists Together and BMS – you wept as one as you heard about brokenness and division, anxiety and pain being felt across the world. You wept as one when challenged by our young leaders on racism and being asked: where is the Baptist voice? You all wanted to respond to the call to journey to equality, to love without judgement and to love uncomfortably. You were all uncomfortably but beautifully challenged to prioritise the 'others,' the different world views that exist in your communities – to learn their languages and to earn the right to share your stories of me which have the power to transform this world. You were scared but wanted to act courageously to the challenge, to not run away from

tough questions, to display vulnerability, to not worry about embarrassment, to deeply listen and to live transformative hospitality to the stranger and the other. You are one in your mission to see justice, you are one in wanting to see lives saved by me and you are one in your desire to be radical disciples.

Though you are one in these areas there are areas where you disagree – and in some ways this is proving extremely painful for many. Firstly, though you are one in mission, you are not one in how this should be done. Many pioneers feel unsupported by the inherited church and are aware of sceptics – despite having sacrificed much to follow their calling. Many inherited churches feel their tried and tested methods are now largely ignored or deemed unfashionable. If only you could learn from one another and see both as vitally important. I need you all to join in with me with the transformation of all things. Learn to listen to one another.

By far the most painful divisions amongst you are to do with issues of sexuality. My, how much upset, how much pain there is amongst you all. Alongside mission, the most talked about area was how are you going to move forward with such pain and such diverse opinions.



You have those among you who have come to a biblical view of same sex marriage and want to be fully inclusive, and those who have a biblical view opposing same sex marriage.

There are many more, desperately trying to keep both in fellowship while not knowing what their thoughts are – but how do you do it? That is for you to discern, but please know – how you do this, how you communicate, how you do relationships should be done as worship to me. The conversation is more important than the outcome. Be captivated by me, love one another and I will build my church.

Mission and division over sexuality were the most common things heard. In many ways they are linked. As you know, it is I who add to the church daily those who are being saved. As you heard many times during Assembly – the people you are trying to engage with are very much 'other' to those in the churches. How can I trust you with the 'other,' if you cannot 'one another' with those you agree with on most things? By being one you are answering my desperate prayer that you will be one like we - Father, Spirit and

Son - are one. By being one you are missional by its very nature – showing a broken and divided world how to live and love with difference. By being one, it is like the oil pouring down Aaron's beard – my presence with you in unity.

One other thing from Assembly you need to hear and take notice of. There are many feeling unheard and disaffected. I see this and see the wider picture. Some of these are people who had centre stage for so long and now need to share the stage with women, the young and those from minority backgrounds. Make sure their voices are still heard – they still have much to offer. It was great to see so many across the Baptists Together movement from diverse backgrounds, but there are still many whose voices are not being heard – keep learning to listen to the Baptist family. You can never communicate enough.

Finally, a key point of Assembly is that I am doing something new – but it is yet to be born. I am always doing something new, and it is always beautiful. Many of you want to listen until new strategies are revealed, or tough decisions are made. However, listening is the outcome I am

looking for. As you listen you will learn more about me; as you listen you will become closer; as you listen you will be more able to join in with my purposes; and as you listen I can reveal all that I am doing and how you as Baptists can join me in this. But listen well to me and to one another.

Let everyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to Baptists Together.



**Ben Lucas was the minister of a large Baptist church before moving to rural Dorset in 2017. He and his family are living incarnationally, engaged in missional listening.**

**Ben was part of a team engaged in listening at the 2022 Baptist Assembly**





# LET'S INSPIRE ONE ANOTHER IN ALL WE DO

Hayley Young is the President of our Baptist Union 2022-2023, and her theme is 'Building a Bigger Table'.

Inspired by this, *Baptists Together* magazine invited Hayley and General Secretary Lynn Green to gather around a table and have a conversation.

#### LYNN GREEN

Hayley, it's really great to meet with you. You are the President of Baptists Together. I wonder if you can tell us a little bit about what

that role entails, and what your theme is for the year?

#### HAYLEY YOUNG

Thanks, Lynn. It's great to be here. The role of President is really interesting, isn't it? Because it's something that changes annually. It's coming alongside the Baptist movement for a season and trying to share some spiritual insight, and share the stories we're hearing as we travel around. And more importantly, to pray for the movement.

My theme as I walk alongside the Baptist movement is 'Building a Bigger Table', encouraging us to have conversations around

different aspects of our church life and our mission.

**LG:** There's a lot of commonality between our roles as General Secretary and President. The three core aspects of my role are the same as yours, which is about spiritual leadership: Leading out of prayer and seeking God; building a sense of team and connecting; and celebrating the identity of Baptists and representing us.

One of the differences is that I have the ongoing day to day responsibility and oversight of us as a movement.

Another important thing we share is that we're there for all the churches and for all our ministers, and trying to listen to everyone, to be perceiving and discerning what God's doing. And to be able to reflect to different parts of the family maybe what God's doing in other parts.

**HY:** So what are the challenges from your point of view for the Baptist movement?

**LG:** I think they are three-fold probably. I think one of the main challenges is the missional challenge. Times are changing so massively in our context. The Covid pandemic has really brought things into sharp focus. So:

What does it mean to be church right now?  
What is God's call to us?  
And how do we respond to that?

I think this is a huge challenge for our churches. It's kind of a positive challenge. I know it can come out of a less positive place. But actually, 'what does it mean to be following the mission of God where we are right now in this context?', is a real challenge.

I do think we have some practical challenges. Our churches are declining, and that is the reality. The difficulties of financing, getting volunteers, you know, there are all sorts of practical pressures on us we need to think about.

But I think one of the other challenges to us is about what I might call the relational challenge. We live in times of great polarisation and we don't want that to be in our family. We are supposed to be modelling Christ and nurturing the unity we have in Christ. So actually, the way we talk together about difficult things, the way we negotiate what we're doing, the way we serve together, is really, really important.

What sort of things are you seeing in terms of challenges?

**HY:** I think exactly the same and I like to reframe it in a sense of hope. And this is where the 'Building a Bigger Table' comes in. With all those challenges, especially the relational one, my response is: actually, let's just be together.

I think sometimes when we are together and doing community together, we get to know people in their hearts and where they're from. And we see that locally. As Baptists I think we've got a wonderful prophetic image here that we can share with divided communities. Even in difference we can spend time in fellowship and community together.

I think the challenge of churches facing a lack of attendance calls us to a deeper discipleship. Jesus did that round the meal table. And so I'm loving seeing churches adapt: instead of putting 45 minutes of singing as a priority, as wonderful as that is - we missed that! - actually having 45 minutes of eating together and being together is just so wonderful.

And then with the first challenge of mission, of what it means to be church - it's re-imagining everything. Covid allowed us to reset and some of us have swung back to what we've known because it was so powerful. But some have asked: "How do we continue to reach out to new generations?" I think the best way to do that is over a cup of coffee, or a meal.



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**LG:** One of the really exciting things about Assembly this year was using the app Slido to help people to engage with the kind of questions they felt we ought to be talking about. People were able to upvote certain things.

The most upvoted question on Slido this year at Assembly was: *'It's becoming sad that our union does not value evangelism as an equal priority. Can my voice be heard?'*

As well as being President, Hayley, you're also really involved in association life. Maybe you could tell us about your role there and reflect a little on what evangelism looks like from where you are?

**HY:** I really hear this question. And I think sometimes this is about communication. Because actually in association life I'm seeing a great deal of evangelism and mission. I'm based in the Northern Baptist Association, and before that I was in the South Wales Baptist Association. And both associations, as with other associations, have mission enablers, or regional ministers with oversight responsibilities for mission. We are constantly encouraging and engaging our churches and ministers and missional communities to go out and preach the good news of the Gospel in its wholeness, in a context that is right for them.

Some of our churches will do that in more traditional ways, such as *Alpha* courses, inviting guest speakers to share; and others will do it through more creative or different ways, new ways. And I find that interesting.

So evangelism is happening right in our grassroots, and I guess we need that communication to share those stories more widely.

**LG:** Just as you're saying that it's also making me think that while both local churches and associations make up the vast majority of our movement, we also have an increasing number of chaplains. I know particularly from my conversations with military chaplains – I am just amazed by the opportunities they have to share Christ and to just engage with people way outside of the church.

**HY:** What else are you seeing from the national perspective?

**LG:** That's really interesting because I think two of our presidents in recent years have really brought this theme, this passion for evangelism. Chris Duffett in 2012 and Yinka Oyekan in 2020. It was fabulous to see how it worked out in our family.

We've also got groups like the Baptists Together Mission Forum, which is trying to connect what's happening in different parts of our movement, to encourage it and to provide resources. There is a big area for mission on our website, and one of the buttons is for evangelism. We've put articles out recently about the Talking Jesus research and the Hope 23-24 initiative (see pages 48-49), so there's lots of resources and ideas, but also if you've got ideas to share, we want to hear them.

And you were involved in the Mission Forum, weren't you? What were some of the things that you've seen coming out of Mission Forum, in terms of evangelism?

**HY:** The wonderful thing when I was involved in Mission Forum, as a mission enabler for an association, was the *123Go!* initiative (see pages 33-34). This encompassed Chris, Yinka and Simon Goddard, one of our Pioneer ambassadors, really encouraging churches on social media and physically, to get out and share the good news of Jesus. It was a wonderful way of seeing something that was formed in what we perceive to be 'committee', actually having a real kind of flesh on it, and churches are embracing that.

**LG:** Part of our *Declaration of Principle* is about all of us bearing witness and being part of the evangelisation of the world. So for me, it's at the heart of what we do.

There's lots of different ways people want to evangelise, and it's just brilliant how we can encourage all these different expressions across our family. I want to celebrate all of them. And again, as I said, let's share ideas. Let's inspire one another in all we do. Because at the end of the day, we want to see lives and communities transformed for the gospel.

**This is an edited version of Hayley and Lynn's conversation, which took place at Baptist House in June. For more reflections on our life and mission together, access the full, filmed version, here: [www.baptist.org.uk/hayleyandlynn](http://www.baptist.org.uk/hayleyandlynn)**



# The core of Missio Dei is evangelism

## Miss • io Da • ee

(noun)

A Latin Christian theological term that can be translated as the 'mission of God,' or the 'sending of God.'

The belief that mission is at the heart of God's very self, and that mission is his task not ours. The church exists because God has a mission, not the other way around.

Seidel Abel Boanerges of Spurgeon's College responds to the most upvoted question on Slido at this year's Baptist Assembly:

*'It is becoming sad that our union does not value evangelism as an equal priority. Can my voice be heard please?'*

I'm sure most of our Baptist churches wouldn't skip a beat in responding to this question by saying they do see evangelism as an equal priority. Nevertheless, are we humble enough to listen carefully and willing to be challenged about this concern? I was reflecting on what sparked this question? Was it the single 9-minute presentation on making disciples

during the whole assembly? Lack of scheduled evangelism training or events? Or is it because the word 'evangelism' is confused with 'mission'? This short article is aimed at exploring the relationship between mission and evangelism and why we need to prioritise evangelism ministry in our churches today.

I begin my evangelism lectures at Spurgeon's College by asking students to briefly discuss the definitions of mission, evangelism, gospel and outreach. In our discussions, it is very clear that there are diverse views of evangelism today, sometimes even contradicting ones. Evangelism is often confused with 'mission'. Evangelism is mission, but mission is wider than evangelism. The Greek word for evangelism simply

means 'good news'. Evangelism is sharing the good news about Jesus Christ. The words 'evangelism' or 'to evangelise' have been around much longer than the word 'mission'.

David Bosch defines evangelism succinctly in these words,

*Evangelism is the core, heart, or center of mission; it consists in the proclamation of salvation in Christ to nonbelievers, in announcing forgiveness of sins, in calling people to repentance and faith in Christ, in inviting them to become living members of Christ's earthly community and to begin a life in the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup>*

Definition of Missio Dei by Helen Paynter an Old Testament tutor at Bristol Baptist College

<sup>1</sup> David J Bosch, 'Evangelism: Theological Currents and Cross-Currents Today', in *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church*, ed by Lacey C Warner, Paul W Chilcote (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2008), 4-17, (p9).

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The Acts of the Apostles and Pauline epistles testify to the fact that the gospel is primarily about what Jesus has done through his death and resurrection. This is the gospel Paul preached and defended throughout his ministry, and that is the gospel by which we are saved (1 Cor 15:1-11). Salvation does not just mean we are saved from hell; it means we are given a new life in Christ (born again), a new nature (2 Cor 5:17) with a transformed heart that desires the kingdom of God. Luke uses the word 'good news' in Luke 4:43, showing the action of the verb, with the object being the kingdom of God. Evangelism involves an invitation and aims for a response. False evangelism ignores a call to repentance and faith in Christ. Sometimes evangelism happens as a result of an event (Damascus Road), and other times, it is a process (Emmaus Road). We should never restrict it just to process evangelism and underestimate God. Evangelism is always contextual. The language of the gospel can change, but the content or its essence shouldn't.

Some people prefer the term mission to evangelism as the latter brings up some painful oppressive connotations of Christendom or Colonialism. Unfortunately, some Christendom and colonial practices of mission and evangelism did bring disrepute to Christ. However, this is not a reason to stop using the word 'evangelism' but to point to the true gospel of Jesus Christ, which brings redemption and deliverance.

The concept of mission of God (missio Dei, if you prefer a theological term) was developed in the 20th century. The mission of God is God's overall redemptive work in reconciling the whole creation back to himself through Christ (Eph 1:9-10; Col 1:20). Evangelism is a part of this wider mission of God. Mission is not dependent on humanity, but the church joins the Triune God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) in his mission to redeem his creation. I subscribe to and endorse holistic/integral mission. Practising an integral mission protects the church from the false dichotomy between social action and evangelism.

*Integral mission is the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission, our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>*

'The core of missio Dei is evangelism, the communication of the Gospel.'<sup>3</sup> The Anglicans gave us the Five Marks of Mission 1) evangelism, 2) discipleship, 3) social action, 4) justice, and 5) environment.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, they put a footnote under evangelism which states,

*The first Mark of Mission, identified with personal evangelism at the Anglican Consultative Council in 1984 (ACC-6) is a summary of what all mission is about, because it is based on Jesus' own summary of his mission. This should be the key statement about everything we do in mission.<sup>5</sup>*

Therefore, in everything we do, nurturing new believers, helping the poor, the sick and the needy, challenging violence of every kind, solidarity with the suffering and the poor, fighting for justice and faithful stewardship of God's creation, we should never lose our focus from evangelism. It is important to uphold the distinctiveness of evangelism in the wider mission of God and make it a priority in every missional activity.

As Baptists, we have come together, agreeing that it is the duty of every disciple to bear personal witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to take part in the evangelisation of the world. I came across people who are genuinely afraid of talking to people about Jesus, but that is fine, and it shouldn't be a barrier to evangelise. Evangelism can be done in many imaginative and creative ways. The gospel message can be shared in both verbal and non-verbal ways. I believe that every believer can share the gospel in their own unique way if proper training, support and encouragement are given. Proper training in various evangelism styles and methods should be a part of every church's discipleship strategy.

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<sup>2</sup> Micah Global, *Definition of Integral Mission*,

[www.micahnetwork.org/sites/default/files/doc/page/mn\\_integral\\_mission\\_declaration\\_en.pdf](http://www.micahnetwork.org/sites/default/files/doc/page/mn_integral_mission_declaration_en.pdf) [accessed on 15 Jul 2022].

<sup>3</sup> D L Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2000), p49.

<sup>4</sup> Marks of Mission, *Anglican Communion* [www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx](http://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx) [accessed on 15 July 2022].

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

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We need to prioritise evangelism because if there is no evangelism, then there will be no church left in your community to do any ministry. Transfer growth is not evangelism. Some churches prioritise discipleship, but again if there is no evangelism, there will be no one left to disciple.

We need to make sure that evangelism is prioritised in our vision, strategies and publications. Does evangelism feature in our leadership plan? Does it feature in your church's vision for this year? Are you discussing it in your church meetings?

Can you ask your regional association to host some evangelism training or invite our Baptist evangelists such as Yinka Oyekan, Chris Duffett or others to do some evangelism training? Do you need help from one of our colleges to come and speak to your church or do a training seminar? Jesus called us to be fishers of men and women, not to take care of an aquarium. I constantly pray and believe that God will bring a revival in the United Kingdom, but it might not be how we expect it. Let us commit ourselves to prioritising evangelism alongside our other aspects of Christian mission.



Seidel Abel Boanerges is Dean of Ministerial Formation, Spurgeon's College, London

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# DIVERSE PEOPLE COMMON GROUND

Unity in diversity is perhaps our most compelling characteristic as Baptists.

But how can we reach our potential amid conflict? Craig Gardiner offers this reflection

**E**arly on the first morning of Baptist Assembly, I took a walk along the beach. I was tired, but as the sun came up, I felt compelled to tread the shoreline. That week had been demanding, the journey to Bournemouth was long, and my sleep had been punctuated by the noise of passing revellers on the sands. (Probably not my fellow Baptists!) The tide had smoothed away all evidence of their presence and perhaps in my sub-conscious was that image from the Footprints prayer. Maybe I longed for a seashore icon to affirm that God was carrying me. We'll never know, because before I even removed my shoes, I met a

council employee clearing away the nocturnal detritus. As we chatted, my attention was drawn to the overlapping footprints, etched in sand, trampled around the bin. I snapped a photo of night-time trainers, boots and sandals, perhaps even a Manolo Blahnik. It felt like an icon for our diversity and unity, Baptists gathering round a 'bigger table', with varying church experiences, missional endeavours, and theological convictions: here was a diverse people imprinted on some important common ground.

I carried that image throughout Assembly. Notably, as contributors asked, '*What conversation would you like the Baptist Family to have together?*' there was a rich diversity of passions present. But no-one pitched for priority, much less sought an exclusive focus for their concern. Of course not. Our purpose was to reflect our diversity and celebrate it on our common ground.

This unity in diversity is perhaps our most compelling characteristic. It is arguably our greatest gift to ecumenical relations and perhaps the wider world. Baptists don't have to sing from the same hymn-sheet, approve identical theologians or agree a code of ethics to still be Baptist together. Instead, we covenant in relationships that encourage not uniformity, but diverse accountability to God and one another, as churches, colleges and associations. This distinctive way of 'being church', which is 'neither independent nor hierarchical' has repeatedly featured in our college's assignments on Baptist identity this year. Students have wrestled with the tensions of freedom and responsibility in covenantal life. Learning to '*watch over and walk with another*'<sup>2</sup> as our forebearers sought to do and as we seek to emulate in contemporary ministerial formation, means genuinely co-hosting diversity in community. It means celebrating what Letty Russell calls our

<sup>1</sup> Paul Fiddes, Brian Haymes, Richard Kidd and Michael Quicke, *Something to Declare: A Study of the Declaration of Principle*, 1996. This is now out of print but can be downloaded here: [www.baptist.org.uk/somethingtodeclare](http://www.baptist.org.uk/somethingtodeclare)

<sup>2</sup> The historical Baptist language of 'watching over each other' and 'walking together before God' in 'ways known and to be made known' was incorporated into the BUGB Covenant 21 Service written to mark the millennium and can be found here [www.baptist.org.uk/covenant21service](http://www.baptist.org.uk/covenant21service)

'emancipatory difference'<sup>3</sup>, seeing points of diversity not as reasons to define, denigrate or downgrade those who differ from us, but to realise the very thing in others that is not like us, may be an important epiphany for our time. Without embracing such differences, our understanding of Christ is undoubtedly diminished, and our table of communion becomes an anaemic revelation of its host. To live in covenant means persistently enquiring '*who is missing from this table?*' and that demands a discipleship that moves from defensive hostility to open-hearted hospitality. Few people consider themselves as being deliberately hostile, and yet when people passionately disagree about belief and practice, conflict is perhaps inevitable. While conflict need not precipitate hostility, or fence the table of our hospitality, history shows that Baptists do not always handle difference well.

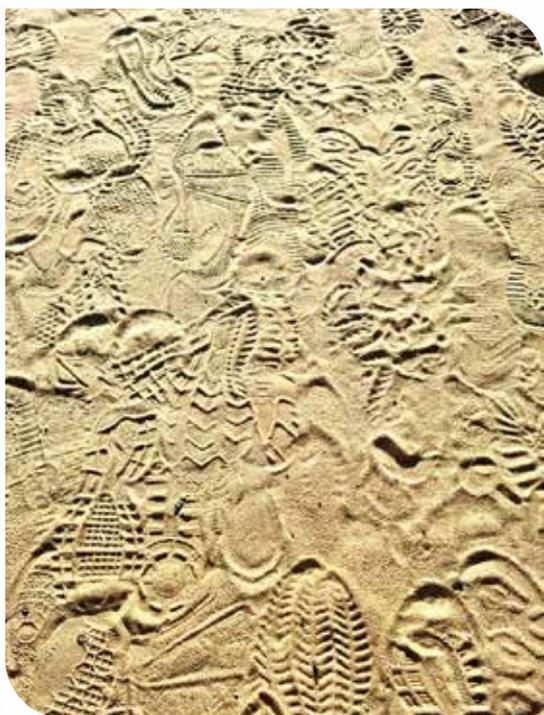


Photo by Craig Gardiner taken at Assembly 2022

Despite reconciliation being at the heart of the gospel, (2 Cor 5:17-19) transforming conflict as ambassadors of Christ's shalom (2 Cor 5:20) is a persistently weak element of our ecclesial culture. Consider, as but one example, the polarising enmity of the Downgrade Controversy<sup>4</sup> in 1887 and the shadow of fear it cast over the denominational consciousness in 1971 as we responded to Michael Taylor's Christological reflections. My observation is that such shadows are far from being dispelled, even among those who affirm that 'new light and truth' can 'break forth from God's word'.<sup>5</sup> Failure to transform hostility into hospitality risks diminishing our care, cheapening our witness and lessening the power of words we preach like reconciliation and redemption. Our fractured world longs for communities that transform conflict into reconciliation and if we have not always demonstrated how to do this, then let's now take heart that chances still present themselves for Baptists to be living parables of balm. But this demands a discipleship that forsakes hostility for hospitality.

It is Henri Nouwen who sees the move from '*hostis to hospes*', hostility to hospitality as the vocation of a maturing church. He suggests that hospitality can never be a '*subtle invitation to adopt the life-style of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find [their] own*'.<sup>6</sup> Christian hospitality can never be an invitation to 'become like us', but rather it offers a space for our

shared emancipatory difference to lead us into communal transformation. To do this well, Nouwen says, we need both '*receptivity and confrontation*'.<sup>7</sup> Receptivity simply means we invite those with whom we may have conflict, to enter our world on their terms not ours. Easier said than done perhaps, of course, for this requires us to be 'at home' in ourselves. If we are not hospitable to ourselves then our need for other's love, approval, and presence, will leave us uncomfortable in ourselves, unable to create or curate a welcome for difference.

But genuine receptivity must include confrontation. Without receptivity, confrontation can be devastatingly wounding, but without owning our differences, hospitality can lack discernment. We are not called to be 'neutral 'nobodies',<sup>8</sup> but people with convictions and boundaries. It's often 'in the fray'<sup>9</sup> of engaging our differences, that we discover the unfolding purposes of God. We have a history that is ours, and for good or bad it is our home. 'An empty house is not a hospitable house'<sup>10</sup> says Nouwen: without the memories of lives shared together, it can never be a home. We must be honest that our Baptist life together is indeed our home, where we walk with and watch over what we believe, how we behave and belong. Only with the empathy of receptivity and the conviction of confrontation are we truly hospitable to the potential of our diversity.

Thankfully we already have a home for such hospitality, one deliberately designed to balance receptivity and confrontation.

<sup>3</sup> Letty M Russell, *Just Hospitality: God's Welcome in a World of Difference*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), p31

<sup>4</sup> [bit.ly/spurgeondowngrade](http://bit.ly/spurgeondowngrade)

<sup>5</sup> These words from the congregationalist pastor John Robinson in 1620 are perhaps best remembered in the Hymn, 'We limit not the truth of God' by George Rawson, see *Baptist Praise and Worship*, (Oxford: OUP, 1991) 107.

<sup>6</sup> Henri JM Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, (London: Fount Harper Collins, 1998), p49.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p70 ff.

Our *Declaration of Principle*, along with our theologies of covenant, commits us to the authority of Christ as revealed in Scripture, but offers each church the freedom to interpret and administer this under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Declaration was a deliberate and hospitable response to the Downgrade Controversy that lured Baptists into increasing hostility. Contending factions risked abandoning Jesus's call to be ambassadors of reconciliation.

**To live in covenant means persistently enquiring 'who is missing from this table?' and that demands a discipleship that moves from defensive hostility to open-hearted hospitality.**

As the authors of *Something to Declare* remind us, the Declaration was '*designed to hold together in covenant a wide Baptist family, rather than to create the kind of boundaries, more typically associated with a Confession, which largely serve to hold people apart.*'<sup>11</sup> We still walk with each other in this way, not for our own sake as the Church but, as the Declaration reminds us, for the purposes of God's mission.

For this mission to be authentic it must be rooted in the heart and mind of Christ as encapsulated

in the Christological hymn of Philippians 2:5-8. Paul's description of Jesus' humble incarnation together with his depiction of the 'rights of an apostle' in I Corinthians 9, leads Morna Hooker to conclude that Christlike empathy is '*the pattern for all mission... - getting alongside those in need - in order to share with them the blessings of the gospel.*'<sup>12</sup> Such empathy challenges us, pastorally and missionally to be present with others in ways that risk daring to temporarily lay aside the values we hold for ourselves to enter another's context without prejudice. If we are to transform hostility to hospitality, then empathy will be the heartbeat of our walking with one another. Empathy is, as Carl Rogers taught us from decades of person-centred therapy, '*a healing agent, because it releases, it confirms, it brings even the most frightened client into the human race. If a person is understood, he or she belongs.*'<sup>13</sup> This desire for belonging is the shared identity of humanity, it is the common ground for all pastoral and missional hospitality, for as Nouwen reminds us '*in a world full of strangers, estranged from their own past, culture and country, from their neighbours, friends and family, from their deepest self and their God, we witness a painful search for a hospitable place where life can be lived without fear and where community can be found.*'<sup>14</sup> Empathetic Baptists might yet become such a hospitable community.

**It's often 'in the fray' of engaging our differences, that we discover the unfolding purposes of God.**

Empathy, hostility and hospitality were on my mind as I walked along a different beach today. I was far from Bournemouth and the busyness of Assembly, but close enough to remember Alan Donaldson's sermon. He preached that '*something was dying and something is not yet born*' and I think he's right. On the sand today, I feel close enough to pray, 'could it be our hostility that is finally dying, and hospitality that is being born? Could Baptists dare inhabit such new and hallowed common ground?'



**Craig Gardiner is a Baptist minister, member of Baptist Union Council, and tutor in Christian Doctrine at Cardiff Baptist College**

8 Ibid, p71.

9 See Helen J Dare, *Always on the Way and in the Fray: Reading the Bible as Baptists* (Oxford: Whitley Publications, 2014).

10 Nouwen, p71.

11 Paul Fiddes, Brian Haymes, Richard Kidd and Michael Quicke, *Something to Declare: A Study of the Declaration of Principle*, pp9-10.

12 Morna D Hooker and Frances M. Young, *Holiness and Mission: Learning from the Early Church about Mission in the City*, (London: SCM 2010), p91.

13 CR Rogers, 'Rogers, Kohut, and Erickson: A personal perspective on some similarities and differences.' *Person-Centered Review*, 1(2), 1986, pp129.

14 Nouwen, p43.



## Whatever comes your way, go for it

Abbey Baptist Church in Reading has seen transformation as it has grown to become an international, intercultural church in the past year.



**‘W**hat a difference a year makes ... from (in essence) a handful of elderly white native British people ... to a packed international, intercultural congregation ... and God did it ... when a small church dares to go with God and think big! June 2021 to June 2022.’

That was a message shared on the Facebook page of Abbey Baptist Church, Reading, earlier this summer, accompanied by contrasting pictures of an empty sanctuary with a full one. Quite a transformation – what’s the story behind it?

The church is led by Julia Binney, who joined in 2018 from Knaphill Baptist Church in Surrey to become the first female minister in its 382 year history. Abbey is one of the oldest Baptist churches and had been without a minister for around three years. It had been declining for longer, and Julia (whose husband Jim is a retired Baptist minister) wasn’t sure if she had been called to help the church die. However, she arrived with a mindset of simply taking opportunities, trusting that God saw a future for the church, and seeing where that would lead.

In the first year she tweaked things a little, introducing some small but significant steps, developing a blended approach to worship - building on the liturgical tradition of the church, but nothing too radical. The church became involved with the local winter night shelter, opening its doors each week, which began to give the fellowship confidence. A timeline of the history of the church was produced to be part of a town-wide event, which helped the church move away from being stuck in tradition to celebrating its heritage. Due to Julia’s interest in mental health, they planned to set up a Renew Wellbeing space.

Then Covid came. Due to the church's liturgical tradition and an elderly congregation, Julia prepared and wrote out the service each week, delivering it to those who were not online.

The lockdowns saw a number of developments. The church offered its building as a storeroom and distribution facility for Reading Red Kitchen, a charity feeding around 60 refugees every day housed in the nearby George Hotel. Another opportunity came for Care4Calais to have a drop-in centre to receive clothing. Stabbings in the nearby Forbury Gardens in June 2020 led the church to open its doors for prayer.

Come September 2021 the church met for a vision day. "Here we really had a sense that our future lay in transitioning to becoming an international, intercultural church," explains Julia. (Reading is one of the most diverse places in the country, and the church building is also used by three other congregations: a Tamil, West African and a Brazilian, Portuguese-speaking one.)

One of the members who owns a language school suggested the church linked with Two-nineteen, a group which helps churches set up English language conversation cafés. A number of Hong Kongers had settled in Reading, the church knew the pastor of a Chinese congregation and were aware of a need for conversation classes. Abbey also linked up with the Welcome Refugee Network, and the classes began.

Helped by connections made through working with the aforementioned charities, around 30 or 40 people started coming in the first week. The classes have met a need and continue

to grow, and this in turn has impacted the congregation. Julia initially led each week and Jim shared a little reflection at the end of each class, and while it's not overtly evangelistic, he invited people to the church's Sunday service.

Though many weren't Christians when they came to the café (apart from people from Iran), dozens have responded to the invitation and Abbey is now looking at a multi-cultural congregation of at least 100. As well as the Iranian refugees, it includes people from countries such as Libya, Romania and El Salvador.

"We didn't do it to grow the church," says Julia, "We did it to help people with English because we knew there was a need in a place as multicultural as Reading.

"But God is good and the church is just completely transformed."

One reason they feel included is the written service sheets Julia originally began producing in lockdown can, with a click of a button, be produced in Farsi, traditional Chinese, Spanish and Portuguese and more. She says "it has been majorly, majorly important in helping the newcomers connect."

Inevitably life leads to life: there have been four baptismal services this year so far including one of the local volunteers with Reading Red Kitchen who is now running the new youth club. Newcomers have set up a toddler group and re-established the children's work on a Sunday morning. An *Alpha* course has launched with around 35 attending and the Renew Wellbeing café has opened.

The age demographic of the church has plummeted.

People are inviting others. The number of refugees continues to grow. Hong Kongers who've been in Reading for years are now coming as well. The church has also welcomed several younger white British people from Reading because they're interested in what's happening. "The vast majority of the original congregation have remained (only one has left) and have been wonderful", says Julia. Over the years they had become risk adverse, but have embraced the new developments.

"There's no clever strategy here," she continues. "This was a group of largely older folk thinking 'What can we do? How can we help?' It's not planned, but it's been extraordinary – and that's where God takes you sometimes.

"There are so many different facets to it, but it just boils down to whatever comes your way, go for it.

"Why not, rather than why?"



## Embodying the Good News in marginalised coastal communities

Barney Barron introduces Coastal Expression, a response to the often-unrecognised deprivation and spiritual needs of many coastal neighbourhoods



**W**hen I was commissioned by Urban Expression to carry out some research into coastal towns, images of summer holidays, golden sands and a paddle in the clear blue sea came to mind. It therefore came as a bit of a surprise to learn that coastal towns are among some of our most deprived communities in the UK, and places where local churches are often in terminal decline.

In fact, the most deprived ward in England is a seaside village called Jaywick, in Essex. The next eight slots in the top ten list of deprivation statistics are all wards in Blackpool.

Following the research, I relocated to Cornwall, famous for its long sandy beaches and picturesque fishing villages.

However, Cornwall is one of the poorest regions in Britain and northern Europe. Fifteen constituencies in the county rank among the most deprived areas in Britain, according to national statistics.

Having benefitted from the connections and support of Urban Expression for 16 years, I discovered there was no such agency supporting coastal pioneers. As I connected with other pioneers in coastal communities, I discovered that there was a general isolation and lack of connection with others who could resonate with the unique challenges and opportunities of incarnational ministry in coastal areas.

Thanks to generous funding from Mission Forum and a private sponsor, Jon Timms and I have now been released as Coordinators for a day a week each. Our aim is to develop Coastal Expression as a mission agency that will connect and support those seeking to embody the good news incarnationally, in under-churched and marginalised coastal communities.

We have begun to share experiences, resources and support through a regular newsletter, an online gathering and a Facebook page and group. We are also busy planning our first physical gathering from 30 November – 2 December, supported by a grant from Baptist Insurance.

We will seek to gather and share the stories of how God is at work in these coastal communities and what we are learning as we journey together, in the hope we will encourage others to consider relocating to a coastal neighbourhood and discover the opportunities for joining in with God's mission there.

**For more information contact**

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## Commissioned to co-mission!

Baptist minister Matt Wright introduces the Inspire Movement, an evangelical, ecumenical and international renewal movement seeking to help disciples of Jesus grow in their love of God and neighbour



**H**ave you ever noticed that the Great Commission in Matthew 28 is literally a call to co-mission: with the Father, in the power of the Spirit and in the name of the Son. We are never alone! As a Baptist minister I've tended to rely on trips, events, programmes and organisations to enable mission. Don't get me wrong - they have their place and we still need them. But even more so we need the everyday awareness of being sent by God, and the ongoing communion with him that makes us aware of missional opportunities as they arise. We need a way of life that imitates that of Jesus himself, which draws us into closer intimacy with him also.

Jewish boys used to apprentice themselves to rabbis, and they would follow them so closely that they were literally 'covered in the dust of their rabbi'. Fellow Baptists, we share strong biblical roots and a rich missional heritage. How about we get covered in the dust of Jesus, and learn to be on mission with him each and every day, and help

empower our churches to do the same? Missional discipleship is the answer, because our missional God is already 'out there', and doing stuff. Are you interested to hear more of how we can join in?



The Inspire Movement is an evangelical, ecumenical and international renewal movement seeking to help disciples of Jesus grow in their love of God and neighbour. There are three main regions of activity: Great Britain, Ireland and the USA. I'm the co-director of the Inspire Movement in Great Britain along with my wife Rachel. We love helping people follow Jesus and become the disciple makers Jesus has called us to be, who are on mission with God in daily life.

### Contact

[m.wright@inspiremovement.org](mailto:m.wright@inspiremovement.org)  
for more information or to arrange a conversation for your church or association.

Matt and Rachel live in Chesterfield in the East Midland Baptist Association and travel across Great Britain making connections and delivering training retreats.



## We are committed to mission in all its diversity

Former President and Baptist pastor Yinka Oyekan offers his perspective on evangelism across our Union



**A**t the Baptist Assembly this year the most upvoted question on Slido was whether we as a Union still value evangelism as an equal priority. Let me reassure you that Lynn and all on the Core Leadership Team (CLT) are committed to mission in all its diversity, and we are talking about how we can further support evangelism specifically.

Right across our Union there are great stories of people getting saved, finding Christ and joining local Baptist communities. I am still persuaded that a renewal is coming to our Union that will amaze and astonish us all.

During lockdown Beth Powney, the Eastern Baptist Association Team Leader, spoke to the CLT on the subject of 'the view from our window'. What is my view concerning evangelism from where I sit?

I see The Gate (the Baptist church I pastor in Reading) investing in missions across the globe, a Baptist church discipling nations

in evangelism. Countries we have taken The Turning to include France, Switzerland and Spain. I would like to highlight just one of the hundreds of converts in Switzerland - a young man called Camre who within six months of being saved was taking Bibles from Switzerland to Turkey and sharing the gospel with his family and friends.

I've seen courageous engagement with evangelism at Gilgal Baptist Church (Porthcawl), Connect Church (Scunthorpe), Salem Baptist Chapel (Tonteg) and Penge Baptist Church. These are all Baptist churches where the members have invited friends to come and hear the gospel, and where individuals responded to a gospel message.

I've had feedback from churches who pioneered new ministries during my presidential year, including Goldhill's new art community. I see evangelists Chris Duffett and Alex Harris loving people into the Kingdom or starting little fires for gospel proclamation across our Union. I see regional team leaders organise their teams for evangelistic endeavour or missional growth, with many regional teams - such as London - investing hard

cash in supporting frontline evangelism.

This is just one view, from one window.

Can we do more? Yes. Should we do more? Yes, the CLT is committed to making Christ known and where churches want help, we are ready to refer you to the many diverse ministries that can help you with evangelism.

Please pray for Lynn and the rest of the Core Leadership Team as new ways of encouraging evangelism are explored and strengthened across our Union.

**Yinka Oyekan is pastor of The Gate, a Baptist church in Reading which has pioneered The Turning evangelistic outreach. Yinka was President of our Union in 2020-21.**



## Making the most of opportunities to share the Good News

Appledore is an old fishing village in north Devon - and there have been several exciting developments for the Baptist church there. Minister John Kidd explains more



**A**t Appledore Baptist we experienced many blessings and challenges through the whole pandemic experience. Most of our routine ministry opportunities had to give way to new ones, and we saw God do good things, particularly through our online efforts.

As we began to prepare for 'post-pandemic' life, we had a clear sense from the Holy Spirit that this was a new season, full of new opportunity. Just like Joshua and the children of Israel standing on the edge of the promised land, we felt God say to us 'be strong and courageous, go in and take possession of these opportunities!' We needed to step out, make room and, even though we can't always see the whole picture, trust him.

Firstly, we had long desired to grow and develop small group ministry within the life of the church. We felt that small groups should spearhead the rebuild of church life, particularly because this close social contact had been limited for so long.

We appointed new group leaders, made room for new groups to meet, and were so blessed to grow the groups from two to eight. We've seen people who never really engaged with church beyond a Sunday morning find a safe place to share and grow, and new people who joined us on the pandemic journey have found a home in these small groups.

One surprise was how a mid-week prayer and praise meeting developed. It has become so popular that we regularly have a third of the church out for this, and it has become a dynamic Spirit-led time together. It has put corporate prayer front and central in church life.

Secondly, as we reflected on the way that the pandemic forced us out of our buildings into the community, we wanted to keep going with this. Through the summer we have church outside once a month, right in the heart of our community - people passing by, stopping, listening, chatting, singing. It's been amazing to sense the presence of Jesus at these services and have opportunity to witness and pray with people on the street.

We also hosted a cream tea for the village Jubilee celebrations outside, where we served 160+ cream teas while giving away a souvenir book about the Queen and her faith. It's just so good to be a visible, relevant and accessible blessing, and we want to keep exploring new ways to do this.

Finally, we plan to begin a new afterschool/youth ministry in Appledore on a Thursday afternoon in September. A big thrust is to somehow support families feeling the cost-of-living crisis.

It's been good to leave behind some old ways of doing things,



and step out into the new opportunities and challenges - not always having all the details, but confident of God's favour!

People need Jesus more than ever, and we want to make the most of every opportunity to bring them the good news.

**John Kidd is the minister of Appledore Baptist Church**

**This is part of a short collection of stories from churches in north Devon, which have shared how God is working through them post lockdown. Visit [baptist.org.uk/swba](http://baptist.org.uk/swba) to access them, including a longer version of the Appledore story.**



## An underlying enthusiasm for the Word and Spirit to be at the forefront

Encouraging developments at Aldwick Baptist Church in Bognor Regis, West Sussex



**S**imon Downing and the Leadership Team at Aldwick Baptist Church emerged from the pandemic with a

clear sense that the Holy Spirit was offering the opportunity for a spiritual 'reset'. We had been greatly blessed during the lockdown period in maintaining the 100 or so members of our congregation and also our finances through weekly online Sunday and Wednesday services, supported by pastoral phone calls to every member of the church fellowship. Of course, the services were also shared online with a wider audience – something the church had never done before.

When the church was free to open we were conscious of the needs of our community (who had been cut off from many relationships) and launched in 2021 our 'Love Aldwick' initiative, with regular activities for the community via a number of different groups such as Toddler

Time, cafés, luncheon club, Messy Church and craft sessions, but all with an aim of demonstrating and sharing the love of Jesus with our neighbours. The church also runs quarterly 'Specials' (in 2021 a Treasure Hunt and Cream Tea and in 2022 a World Cuisine and Quiz Night, and recently a Jubilee Pop-Up Vintage Café) all of which have provided a great 'open door' (as the photograph symbolises) for the community to come in.

We have seen the Lord beginning to bless this outreach and the team engaged in it and there are new individuals who have started to attend services, become church members, and deepen their commitment to the Lord. We recently ran an *Alpha* group and, at the café church celebration, six of the seven participants gave testimony to the blessing they had experienced.

The church needs prayer for the development of its work in the community and for additional resources, with youth and vigour to energise it. There is an underlying enthusiasm for the Word and Spirit to be at the forefront of what the church feels called to be and do - particularly as the post pandemic social and financial needs in our community are increasing.

**This article was written by Aldwick church administrator Clive Bennett, and was originally shared in the South Eastern Baptist Association news email update. It is republished with permission.**



## Prayer has been the bedrock

Called to pray about being used in the community, Headland Baptist Church has developed several partnerships with community groups. Interview with Fiona Preston



**“D**on’t get me wrong, we’ve had some difficult moments,” says Fiona Preston, the minister of Headland Baptist Church in Hartlepool. “Particularly with people having really serious illnesses.

“But the way the church building has gone from not being used much to all this stuff happening, well, it has been unbelievable. And we believe it’s come from God.”

Fiona has led Headland since January 2020. Prior to that the church, without a minister since 2013, opened its building just a couple of times a week. Fast forward two years and it’s now a hive of activity, both with its own groups and other organisations such as Slimming World, a history club and others using its premises.

One example is its partnership with The Bread and Butter Thing, a national charity which receives surplus food from supermarkets to provide affordable weekly groceries through a membership scheme. The charity approached Headland Baptist Church to see if it could be one of its distribution hubs in Hartlepool.

The area has high levels of social deprivation, and Fiona said the church wanted to do something to help. Similar to a pantry, but without the start-up expense, it costs the church nothing apart from time and effort. Volunteers from Headland and the nearby

Anglican church help unload the van, pack the bags and then distribute the food.

Around 65 people use the service each week.

Fiona says she and the volunteers have been able to build relationships - a couple of children have started coming to the church groups, and people have been prayed for. The partnership is meeting a practical need, developing community, and showing the love of God in action.

“It’s just been amazing really,” says Fiona, “and God just put that on our doorstep.”

Fiona left a career as a professional musician after sensing the call to ministry at Headland. “It was a big drop in income. But the way I explained it to people was, it’s not that I fell out of love with music – I just fell in love with God more.” The fellowship strongly backed her call and are supporting her through ministerial training, including through a Home Mission grant.

At the outset she sensed a powerful burden to pray, and had soon set up a regular morning prayer meeting. The church opened its building for prayer, and the prayer stations Fiona created are still on show and being used primarily by the church community but

are also seen by those from the wider community who use the church building.

“Prayer has been the bedrock of everything, really. We prayed about being used in the community.”

Its youth and lunch clubs have grown and are thriving. A Christmas carol service was hosted outdoors for the first time, and with much prayer, saw more than 200 people come,



including many representatives of the different groups now using the building.

ITV even filmed in the church building there for *The Thief, His Wife and the Canoe*. It gave Fiona the opportunity to chat faith with actor Eddie Marsan, who played John Darwin in the production. ("I didn't actually know who he was beforehand. I said 'Are you one of the extras?' But we had a really good chat about God for about an hour.")

"At the start of my ministry here I prayed about us making a noise outside our building, being of use to the community, sharing God's love," Fiona continues.

"It's been two years of being shocked."



## Providing Baptist Ministers with a peaceful and secure retirement in their own home

[rbmho.org](http://rbmho.org)

If a retiring minister does not have access to, or any other means of providing accommodation themselves, RBMHO may be able to help. We also help BMS missionaries who have primarily served abroad and spouses of ministers who have died whilst in service.

### WE NEED YOUR HELP

We are an independent registered charity, which receives no central funding from the Union. Our work is only made possible by the generosity of Baptist Churches, their fellowships and individual friends who make donations, bequeath properties or leave legacies.

If you need further information about our work or are able to make a donation please contact us on **01202 548890** or email [admin@rbmho.org.uk](mailto:admin@rbmho.org.uk)



RETIRED BAPTIST MINISTERS  
HOUSING ORGANISATION

Retired Baptist Ministers Housing Organisation is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) registered with the Charity Commission under charity number 1177649.



# SHARING FAITH IN RELEVANT AND REAL WAYS

Chris Duffett shares reflections from 123GO, an evangelistic outreach that took place in Easter 2022 – and is happening again next year

Last Monday we stood in my kitchen as I made coffee and he talked. He was bubbling with enthusiasm as he told me of his adventures going two by two with his daughter to do some 'treasure hunting' on Easter Sunday, seeking to find the treasure (a person) that God wanted them to share his love with and for my friend to offer prayer to. His daughter took the lead and my friend sceptically followed. He wanted to head to some of the local parks, but ended up following in the opposite direction. They reached a park he hadn't visited before and, surprise, surprise, they met two people, both matching the description of the clues that he had believed the Lord had given them. Both were in deep need of help and prayer. Both accepted prayer, full of appreciation.

As my friend told me about his 123GO experience with his church in Stony Stratford, I felt encouraged once more as, to be honest, I had been wondering whether 123GO had been worth all the effort, time and resources.

At times it feels like my call as an evangelist is like holding a prodding stick and my task is to try and awaken the sleeping giant of the body of Christ to go and do something, anything, to let others in on the gospel. Easter seems like an 'invite only' private celebration. My heart is to see the Church embrace the season as a public party, letting others in on the best news this world has ever been graced with: Jesus is alive and has conquered sin and death!

Jesus taught his first friends that the fields are *white* (ripe), in other words there are plenty who are ready and willing to respond to the good news of Jesus, but the problem remains: the labourers are few. This year's 123GO could be looked upon as a failure; not many churches across the UK took part, there weren't thousands as I had prayed or even hundreds of Christians

going out into their communities to bring the gospel two by two.

But then again, some did. And it's important to focus on those who did and not on those who didn't and leave the heartache of the workers being few rightly in the hands of the one who says "ask the Lord of the harvest to send out the workers!"

It's also important to focus on those who connected with the good news of Jesus for the first time. We live in a time where the vast majority of people simply haven't got a clue about Jesus, and over Easter 2022 people heard for the first time something real and credible of the gospel.

Like my new friend Karin who met four people to share the gospel with. She came along to the prophetic art day, a morning of training followed by putting it into practice. Her rather nervously prophetic paintings ended up being like dynamite! I think of the young man who strutted down the street, beer can in hand, shirt hanging around his waist as he showed off his toned torso.

"Excuse me", Karin boldly asked him, "are you broken hearted?" He stood wide-mouthed as she held towards him one of her paintings with a message of God binding up the broken hearted.

"How did you know that just by me walking down the street?" he asked.

"I didn't", was the reply, "but I believe in God who knows you and loves you." A good news conversation followed.

Some people prayed to become followers of Jesus over the weekend too. In Reading at The Gate there was a festival in a city centre park with worship and fun activities for families to enjoy. Here some people also decided that they too would follow Jesus! This is good news!

In the market town of March, the churches engaged in creative ways in loving and serving their community by listening and helping people. The presence of the church 'out there' was seen and people heard about the Christian faith for the first time in relevant and real ways. This is good news!

I could keep writing about the people who *did* meet willing Christians who had perceptions changed about the Christian faith as well as those who heard for the first time the good news. My prayer is that this experience over Easter in the coming few years will multiply.

What is it that you could do to take the 1 gospel, 2 by 2 over 3 days in Easter 2023?



**Chris Duffett has a wealth of experience in Chaplaincy, Theology, Culture and the Arts. Chris is a former president of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and an author of four books, his latest a novel on the life of his hero Philip the evangelist. He is an evangelist and artist, and the original founder of The Light Project.**



**123GO is the vision of evangelist Chris Duffett in partnership with Simon Goddard (RiverTree) and Yinka Oyekan (minister of The Gate in Reading). It encourages Christians across the world taking 1 gospel, 2 by 2 over 3 days at Easter, simply GOing into the streets and public spaces to demonstrate the good news of Jesus.**

**In the months leading up to Easter 2022 Christians were given a selection of online workshops to attend or watch to help get them ready to go in twos to bring good news. Workshops included The Turning; prophetic art; praying for the sick; acts of kindness; servant evangelism; praying for your community and prayer evangelism.**

**On Easter Sunday the gospel was preached live online for any who had been given invites or encountered people 2 by 2 out on the streets and wanted to know more.**

**123GO is taking place in 2023.**

**Visit <http://123go.life>**

**123GO is supported by a grant from Baptist Insurance Company**



# WE DON'T BEGIN WITH CONFRONTATION.



**Why evangelism is best done 'up close' and not from a distance.**

**By William Wade**

**I**n a previous role as a missionary to British Forces, I would often lead churches on how to share their faith. I found that one of the great difficulties people found (apart from thinking they need to know every answer to every perceivable question) was the idea that they needed to begin their evangelistic foray with a confrontation. In other words, the way in which we engage people with the message of Jesus is to start by telling people they are wrong and here is why...

I always found it a great joy to see relief in people's faces when I was able to say, "We don't begin with confrontation." It was almost as if everyone took

a collective exhale and realised that evangelism is not a combat sport. It's more of a country walk or a coffee with friends. The reason I say that is because evangelism is best done 'up close' and not from a distance. Let me try to explain what I mean by that...

I would suggest that we start with incarnation – the power of simply being present and involved. That means taking time to get 'up close' to the unchurched. This could be through being a member of a local club or community group, through already established friendships, or by being intentional about developing new friendships. However we decide to be incarnational, it will involve being with people, and preferably those who are not churchgoers. I once went cage fighting with Paratroopers in order to break into their circle,

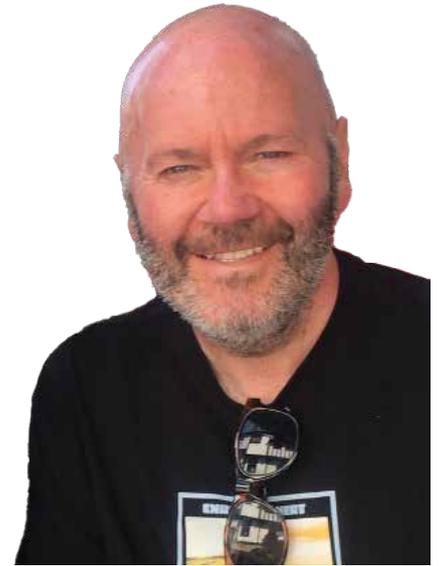
and it really did work. You might not need to go that far or that extreme, but choose your 'tribe' and gently attempt to break into it in a winsome, non-threatening way. You will soon, with a measure of prayer, find yourself being an incarnational presence in the group.

Next, I would suggest being conversational in your slow-burn approach to being a witness to those around you. Being conversational means exactly that – you are not the expert, you are a friend. It means to listen, and probably to listen again, to those in your circle. It means to be empathetic to their beliefs, their struggles and to their hopes. It means offering your own stories of struggle, your own hopes and, in time, your own beliefs. If you become conversational with someone, or with a group of people that you have been journeying with

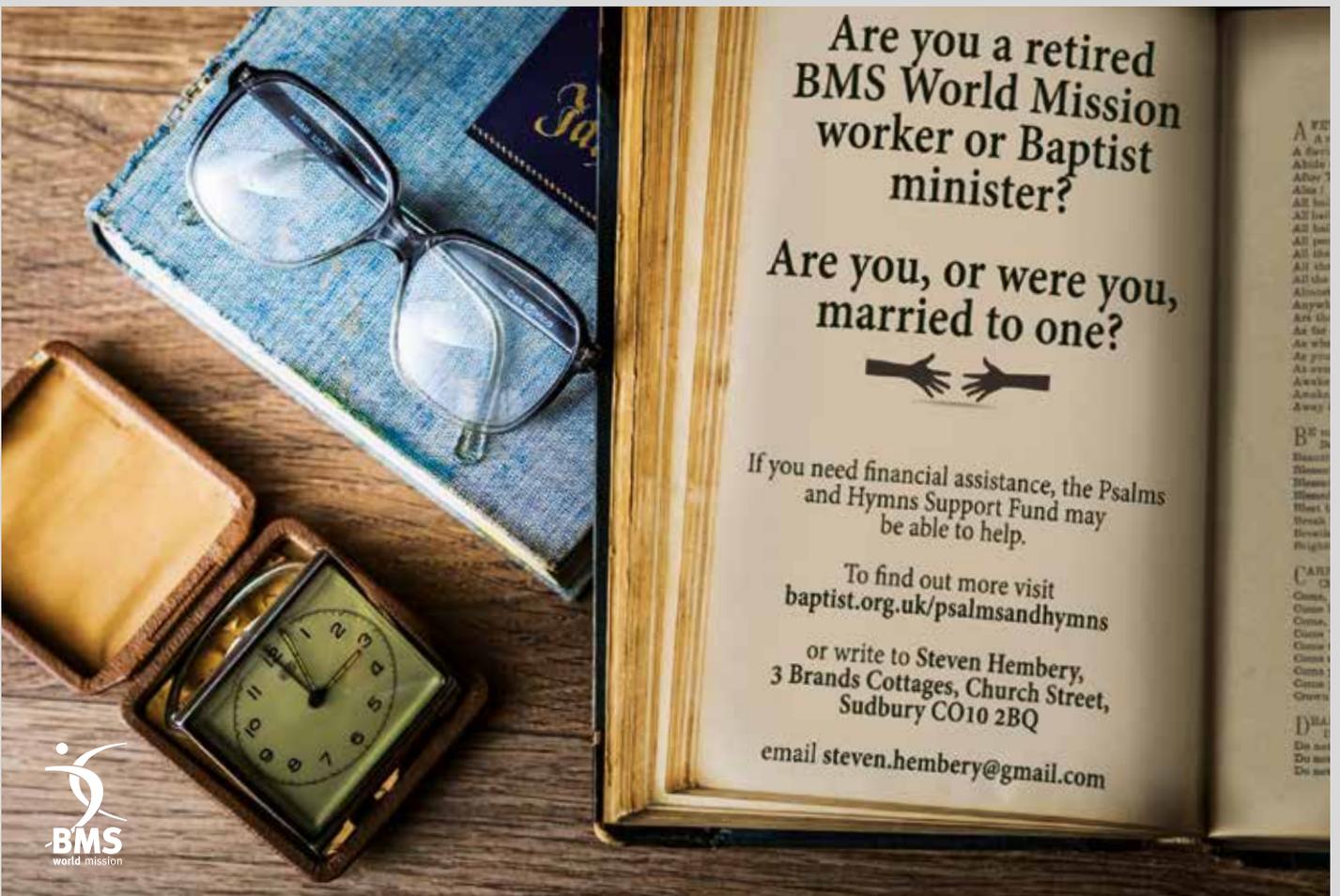
(or cage fighting with), you soon realise that you have a valid voice in their lives, rather than trying to shout from a distance. Even in the differences you might hold, your relationship is still within the missional posture of conversation, rather than confrontation.

So, if it is at all helpful, go and tell the world about Jesus. After all, we are called to do so. But try to park the confrontation from a distance and instead, get up close; become an incarnational presence and, with the help of the Holy Spirit's timing, share something of your story with those around you – but maybe only after you have asked them to share their stories with you, first.

**I WOULD SUGGEST THAT WE START WITH INCARNATION – THE POWER OF SIMPLY BEING PRESENT AND INVOLVED.**



William Wade is a Baptist minister, leader of Life Church in Cuffley, Hertfordshire. He has previously served as an evangelist with the Soldiers' and Airmen's Scripture Reading Association (SASRA) and as minister of the International Baptist Church of Dusseldorf



# CONVERSATION STARTERS

A range of people representing different aspects of Baptist life were invited to give short presentations at this year's Baptist Assembly on the question "What is the conversation you would like the Baptist family to have together over the coming year?"

The presentations were powered by Pecha Kucha, an engaging, visual format where a presenter shows 20 slides for 20 seconds of commentary each. They are all available on the Baptist Assembly website and YouTube channel.

We would encourage you to reflect on each presentation and, if you sense appropriate to your context, share it with your church or home group, along with the accompanying questions to discuss.

## Children, Young People and Families

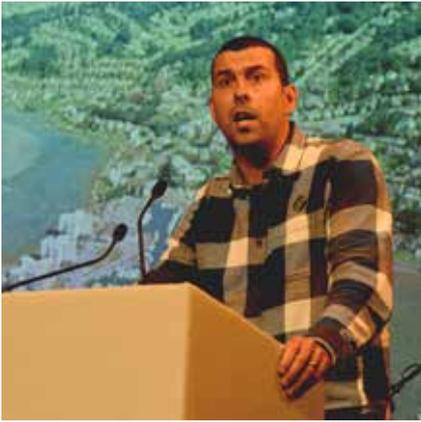


Amie Buhari, CEO and founder of Hebe Foundation, represented the Children, Young People and Families Round Table (CYF).

Highlighting the case of Child Q, the 15 year old schoolgirl strip searched by police while she was on her period, she explained how the scales in society are tipped against black and brown young people. Young people are in a fight for their rights, Amie said, and asked churches to journey with them on the road to equality.

Amie's question was:

*How will my/our church be intentional in breaking our silence and complicity concerning racism, particularly in connection with children and young people?*



## Pioneering

John Good is a pioneer minister in Hamworthy, Poole. He spoke about new ideas for church and kingdom when money and people are running out. There are lots of new ideas that could become as reliable as our old ways, if only they were given a try.

John's questions were:

*Churches, and regional teams, would you be prepared to send more people into more 'ball ponds' so together we can find brand new reliable ideas for church and kingdom, into the future?*

*How are we going to develop new ministries to reflect Christ in the new world we are always moving into?*

## Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT)

Steve Tinning, Public Issues Enabler spoke on hospitality and welcoming the stranger.



He explained how his previous church had welcomed a family from Syria, and how transformative that had been. He highlighted the six hopes that underpin the work of JPIT, which include welcoming the stranger, working for justice and peace.

Hospitality is a choice, Steve said, a divine privilege, a defining characteristic of God's coming Kingdom.

Steve's question for discussion with your church is:

*How are we explicitly and intentionally embodying hospitality in this church?*

**Another way to phrase it is this:**

*Do you consider the striving for such a just, peaceful and hospitable society a fundamental part of the church's mission?*

## Hospital Chaplaincy



Sarah Crane leads the chaplaincy team at Milton Keynes Hospital. She spoke about ministering to those whose beliefs were different from her own, and of seeing "the love of God mediated to me through them as the guest in their space."

Sarah's questions were:

*Is what we give up, in responding to people in a person-centred way, worth it?*

*In other words, can we as individuals and communities cherish our own identities and yet open up to others with different beliefs as bearers of the divine image, who regardless of their beliefs can teach us something about the love of God?*

## Racial Justice

Margaret Gibbs, minister of Perry Rise Baptist Church in south east London, was joined by Karen Campbell of the United Reformed Church in representing the National Racial Justice Hub.

Their talk highlighted the slave trade, the involvement of Christians in it and the colossal profits made in Britain. While compensation was paid to slave owners when slavery was abolished in 1834 (a debt only cleared in 2015), none was ever paid to enslaved people. But in the present day reparations for historical injustices are becoming a defining issue, with some institutions committing to it.

“Can we afford it?” Margaret asked. “Of course not. But we can’t afford not to.”

Margaret and Karen’s question was:

*When and how shall we make reparation?*



## Disability Justice

Craig Millward of the Baptists Together Disability Justice Group spoke about how different we all are - yet how we often act to fit in.

Jesus didn’t do this - he refused to play the social games that would have endeared him to others. Fear of being different paralyses, Craig said, yet Jesus calls us to choose ‘different’ like he was.

“People who accept their difference can be a gift,” said Craig.

Craig asked a series of questions, which included:

*Do you hide your differences - or might they be a gift to the world?*

*Do the social settings you live in or the institutions you’ve built have a place for different people?*



## Baptist Union Environment Network

Joe Egan represented BUEN, the Baptist Union Environment Network. Joe is one of the ministers of High Street Baptist Church, Tring, the first Baptist church to achieve the gold Eco Church award.

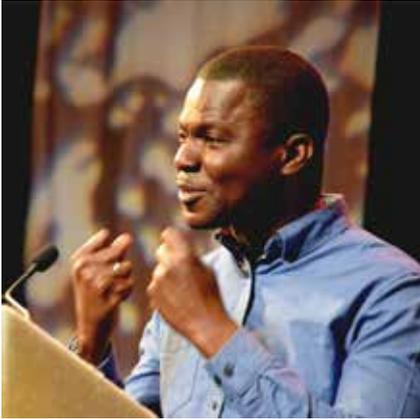
He shared a conversation BUEN would like Baptists Together to have ‘around the place of creation care in the gospel - and therefore its place in the ministry of our churches’.

Joe’s question was:

*How can my church take a bigger view of creation care and live out the gospel truth that God so loves the world?*



## Making Disciples



Kwame Adzam is a pastor at Trinity Baptist Church and the evangelism and discipleship lead at BMS World Mission. He explained that making disciples the Jesus way is about investing in the life of one disciple at a time, which may lead to the multiplication of disciples over time.

He highlighted the story of Ben Francis, the Big Life/Disciple Making Movement, and their desire to share what they learn about Jesus. Making disciples is not a silver bullet to all the church's challenges, Kwame said, but it is a missional lifestyle.

Kwame's question was:

*What would happen in the church if making disciples becomes the lifestyle of being church?*

## The Digital Revolution



Hayley Young and Carl Smethurst spoke about the Digital Revolution, a core priority for Baptists Together as discerned by Baptist Union Council in 2018.

There are several digital missionaries in associations helping us explore how we might share our faith in word and deed in the digital spaces. Engaging people in the digital world is a valid form of ministry and mission. If we choose to acknowledge the reality of the digital space, there are opportunities.

Hayley and Carl's questions were:

*What does the digital revolution look like to you and your church?*

*In your context how does the Kingdom of God influence and impact the digital world you inhabit?*

## Young Adults / Emerging Leaders



Isabella Senior is Baptists Together Young Leaders' Development Coordinator, and Claude Halm is the pastor of International Praise Centre Baptist Church, a church pioneered 10 years ago for young black British millennials in east London.

Their address focused on developing an active mission agenda to reach the younger generations to be our future leaders, one of our priorities identified by Council in 2018. While 16.1 percent of the UK population are young adults, only 7.2 percent of our Baptist church attendance is made up of this group.

Isabella and Claude's questions were:

*What are we willing to invest?*

*If the young adults are not in our churches, where are they and what will my church do to engage with them?*

## Hong Kong Response Project

Sharon Shek, the Baptists Together Hong Kong Response Co-ordinator, highlighted how almost 100,000 Hong Kongers have been granted British National (Overseas) visas. Following the implementation of a new security law on 1 July 2020, a wave of mass migration is happening of people with broken hearts and forsaken careers, and who have limited knowledge and information about the UK.

Sharon explained that their needs and limitations have made a gap in their hearts and lives, and encouraged Baptist churches to offer support.

Sharon's questions were:

*Our Baptist family - are you ready to welcome people from Hong Kong and fill the gap?*

*What can we do to help them?*

[Unfortunately, a traffic accident prevented Sharon from delivering this presentation at the Assembly.]



To view all the Pecha Kucha 'Conversation Starters' as well as the other areas of Baptist Assembly 2022 scan this QR code, and it will take you to the YouTube Playlist





# LISTENING TO OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

Listening and feedback played an important role during the youth stream at the Baptist Assembly. A couple of listening exercises took place during the programme, and everyone who attended was invited to feed back on what worked well, what didn't and ideas for the youth programme going forward.

The space was facilitated by Clare Hooper from the Children, Young People and Families (CYF) Round Table and a team from Southern Counties Baptist Association, and the emphasis was on connection - connecting with each other and connecting with God.

These are some of the themes which emerged.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF TIME TOGETHER

A consistent theme which emerged throughout was the value of simply being together. There was a real sense of wanting to connect. This was more important to the young people than the more formal aspects of the event, such as the Bible studies.

It's a very relational response. A number (but certainly not all) are the only people in their age group at their church, and they value being able to spend time with Christians the same age as them. The Assembly is a great opportunity: being with people who are going through similar things helps to give them the sense they are not alone, share experiences with their peers and strengthen their faith. That sense of connecting with their friends was overwhelming, and they value being part of Baptists Together.

We need to trust that God is at work through their relationships. Building in that free time is really important – that's where a lot of work is done!

## SMALLER GROUPS, DEEPER FRIENDSHIPS

Those who attended the Assembly valued the opportunity to discuss ideas and have conversations with a smaller number of people. They wanted to listen more deeply and get to know each other in more depth. They really appreciated the format, which gave them space to do that. This also chimed with the wider Assembly theme of connection and conversation.

## JUSTICE AND MISSION

Our young people want next year's Assembly to have a focus on justice and mission. Environment justice is particularly important to them, but they want to live in a society that has justice concerns at its heart. They want to learn more about the theological underpinnings.

I'm really excited they want to talk about mission. I think sometimes we project our thoughts onto them, and feel they aren't confident about sharing their faith. But recent research<sup>1</sup> amongst young Christians in the UK shows the picture is different. They don't have the hang-ups about sharing their faith that we might think they have. Youth clubs aren't as popular, so the onus is on the young people to share their faith – and they're wanting to learn more about this.

My sense is their understanding of mission and evangelism is holistic – it's something that permeates the whole of life.

<sup>1</sup> Visit: [youthscape.co.uk/research/influencers](https://youthscape.co.uk/research/influencers)

## CREATIVITY

Many of our young people love to be creative, and all the most popular workshops that we offered were the creative ones, such as making prayer beads, drama or stress balls. It helped them explore and express their faith in different ways. Our faith is often so word based that we can be in danger of forgetting the other senses and different approaches by which we learn.

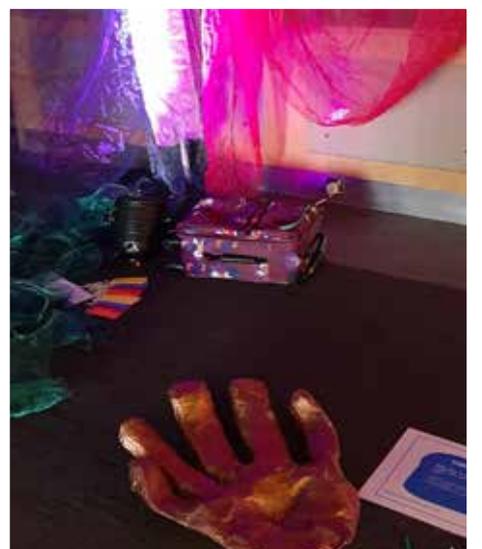
## THE FUTURE

This is the beginning of a five-year plan in which the CYF Round Table will oversee the youth stream at the Baptist Assembly. Bournemouth was the start, so we will think about what worked well, what didn't and build something together. The young people have given us some fantastic feedback to help us going forward.

We'll think about what it means to listen to their voices, and help them find their voice – the piece in the last magazine (Summer 2022) was the start of that. How can we integrate our young people's voices more fully in Baptist life?



Clare Hooper is a Southern Counties Baptist Association regional minister with a particular remit to support churches and pioneers in their mission with children, young people and families (CYF). She serves on the Baptists Together CYF Round Table, and co-ordinates the CYF input at Bristol Baptist College as one of the tutors.



# PRAYERS

## AROUND THE TABLE

COMPILED BY AMANDA PINK

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Amanda Pink is a Baptist minister and Team Chaplain at Milton Keynes University Hospital

Access more of her writing on her blog:  
[onelifesliturgy.blogspot.com](http://onelifesliturgy.blogspot.com)

Jesus,  
There is a lot going on right now.  
I don't know how this is all going to play out.  
It feels like we are on the edge of something and I'm not sure how I feel about it.  
This not knowing, this tension in the air -  
It's hard to bear well.

You see that, don't you?  
How I am caught between temptations to flee, temptations to fight, and temptations to betray you  
in order to force a resolution.

Apparently you see the goodness in me also;  
the family likeness that is woven into my DNA  
and is not to be denied;  
the potential for being part of growing something good that you saw when you called me;

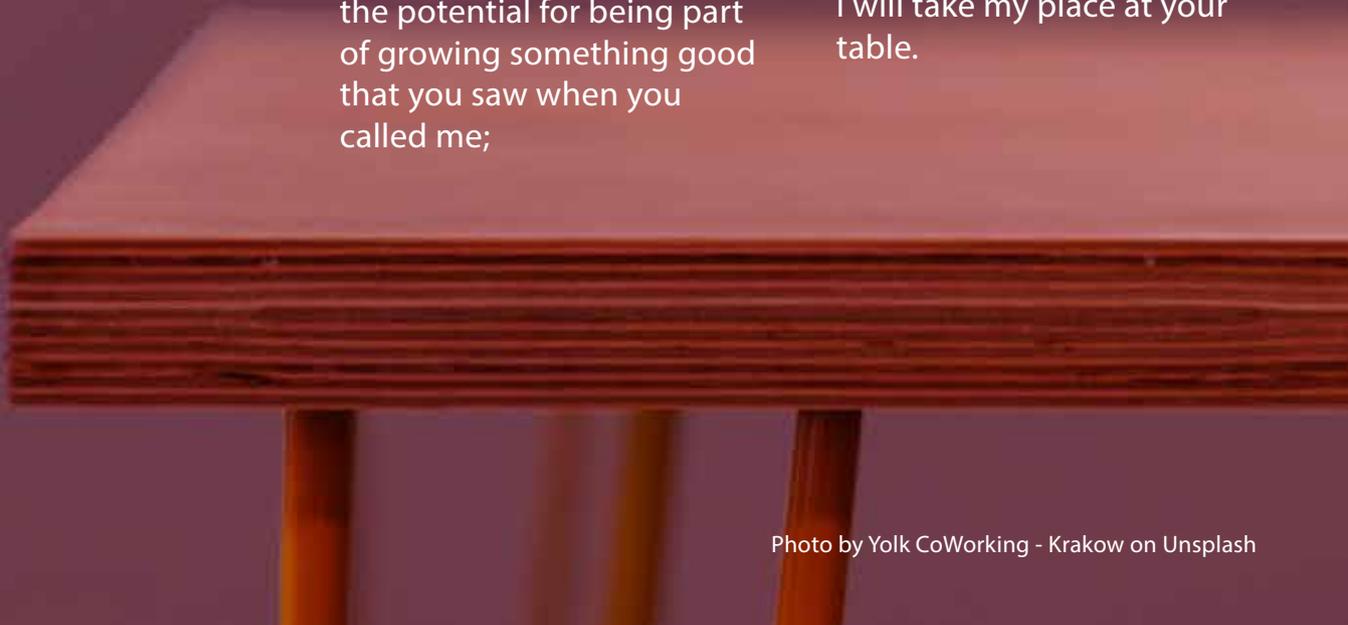
and all the ways I have matured in love  
as you have been leading and guiding me  
in our time together so far.

Knowing me as you do, here you are now, inviting me to this, your table, making a space for me here.  
In the midst of all this you open out your hands and offer me gifts that I sometimes forget I need:

Nourishment  
Thanksgiving  
Humility  
Conviction  
Forgiveness  
Fellowship  
Yourself

Thank you, Jesus.  
Thank you, thank you, Jesus.

Yes,  
I will take my place at your table.



---

Thank you, Jesus, for these,  
my companions.

I know you see them, too:  
your image in them which  
glows  
when they flourish and  
serve in love,  
and the wounds and wants  
with which they walk and  
sometimes fall.

Thank you for all we have  
gained  
from walking this way  
together so far.  
The inspiration, the  
sharpening,  
the physical, emotional,  
spiritual solidarity,  
the benefit and challenge  
of each others' gifts and  
mistakes;  
we would not have grown  
nearly so much if we were  
on our own.

We are different.  
This moment is not the  
same for each of us.  
We feel its impact and  
respond in the uniqueness  
of who we are and what we  
have experienced.

As I pray for myself, I pray  
for them -  
May they too receive the  
grace they need:  
Nourishment  
Thanksgiving  
Humility  
Conviction  
Forgiveness  
Fellowship  
Yourself

Thank you, Jesus.  
Thank you, thank you, Jesus.  
That they have a place at  
your table.

Here we are together, then,  
Carrying all that has been,  
Unsure of what is to come.

"One of you will betray me",  
you say.  
Who do you mean? It could  
be any of us.  
Lord, have mercy.

And mercifully here you are,  
laying the table -  
A big, growing, messy,  
beautiful table.

Around it we share:  
Nourishment  
Thanksgiving  
Humility  
Conviction  
Forgiveness  
Fellowship  
Yourself

Thank you, Jesus.  
Thank you, thank you Jesus.  
May many more  
find their space  
at this table.

Amen

# EVENTS

## Education Sunday

11 September

A national day of prayer and celebration for everyone in the world of education on the theme 'You are not lost!'

[cte.org.uk/educationsunday2022](http://cte.org.uk/educationsunday2022)

## Peacemaking Sunday

18 September

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

[for.org.uk/peacesunday](http://for.org.uk/peacesunday)

## Prisons Week

9-15 October

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

[prisonsworld.org](http://prisonsworld.org)

## Christian Resources Exhibition (CRE)

11-13 October

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

[creonline.co.uk](http://creonline.co.uk)

## Baptist Union Council

12-13 October

[baptist.org.uk/council](http://baptist.org.uk/council)

## Thrive 2022 Conference: All for Jesus

14-16 October

Conference encouraging networking among the spouses of UK Baptist ministers, with main speakers Ken and Sue Benjamin

[baptist.org.uk/thrive2022](http://baptist.org.uk/thrive2022)

## Anti-slavery Day

18 October

A day to raise awareness of human trafficking and modern slavery

[antislaveryday.com](http://antislaveryday.com)

## Sam Sharpe Lecture

19 October

10th anniversary lecture 'Bringing Down the House' - delivered by Kehinde Andrews, Professor of Black Studies at Birmingham City University

[baptist.org.uk/samsharpelecture](http://baptist.org.uk/samsharpelecture)

## Bible Sunday

30 October

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

[biblesunday.org](http://biblesunday.org)

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

## International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church

6 November

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

[idop.ca](http://idop.ca)

## Baptist Women's World Day of Prayer

7 November

[bwawd.org](http://bwawd.org)

## Remembrance Sunday

13 November

## Interfaith Week

13-20 November

Aiming to strengthen inter-faith relations and increase understanding

[interfaithweek.org](http://interfaithweek.org)

## Advent Sunday

27 November

## World Aids Day

1 December

[worldaidsday.org](http://worldaidsday.org)

## Human Rights Day

10 December

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

## International Migrants Day

18 December

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

# RESOURCES

A selection of resources which relate to some of the themes explored in this edition, as well as helpful new material for churches released in 2022



*Biglife* is a Disciple Making Movement (DMM) with its roots in Asia, but seeking to serve the church around the world in the area of discipleship. Its training is all about the basics of making disciples - getting back to the basics of making disciples who go and make more disciples right where they are.

The Yorkshire Baptist Association has been in partnership with *Biglife* since September 2019 and has seen a number of discipleship groups spring up across Yorkshire. One example is Crossgates Community - read more here:

[baptist.org.uk/crossgates](http://baptist.org.uk/crossgates)  
[big.life/training](http://big.life/training) and  
[yba.org.uk/resources/biglife](http://yba.org.uk/resources/biglife)



*The Sanctuary Course* is a new small-group resource designed to reduce stigma, raise awareness, and engage communities in meaningful conversations about mental health and faith.

Download the resource free of charge from Sanctuary's website.

[sanctuarymentalhealth.org/uk](http://sanctuarymentalhealth.org/uk)



Want to motivate your whole church for mission and service? *Jesus Shaped People* is a comprehensive and all-embracing programme, with resources for adults, children and young people. It can benefit a wide spectrum of churches from different traditions and contexts, especially smaller urban, inner city, social housing estate churches, churches with few or no children or young people, or churches without a minister.

*Jesus Shaped People* builds on five key priorities in the life and ministry of Jesus:

- People
- Teaching
- Team Building
- Prayer
- Prophetic Challenge

**Baptist minister Brendan Bassett is Jesus Shaped People Team Leader.**

[jesusshapedpeople.net](http://jesusshapedpeople.net)



This new course encourages churches to lead the way in welcoming arrivals in the UK from Hong Kong on the Government's British National (Overseas) Visa scheme. *The Welcome Course* is an interactive six-week *Alpha*-like series all about the culture of the UK.

Presented by Krish Kandiah, founder of UKHK, it has been developed to help new arrivals find friends and feel supported as they settle into their local churches and communities.

[ukhk.org/welcome-course-for-churches](http://ukhk.org/welcome-course-for-churches)



*Embracing Age* is a Christian charity working towards a world where older people are valued, connected and full of hope. They have recently launched the following helpful resources for churches:

- *Making Moments* series - free resources for caring for a loved one with dementia
- *How to adopt your local care home* - a free e-book and resources to help churches support their local care home.

Find out more here:

[embracingage.org.uk](http://embracingage.org.uk)



## Latest Talking Jesus report now available

The Talking Jesus research was first published in 2015 for a group of leaders from across many denominations.

The original partners always intended to track the results to measure the churches' impact in evangelism. This was planned for 2020 but put on hold due to the pandemic.

The report shows the state of faith in the UK, how people come to faith in Jesus and how we, as the church, can talk about Jesus more effectively with our friends and in our community.

Seven years on, the research puts 'a wealth of insights in the hands of the UK church to empower evangelism and inform strategy,' say the report's authors.

The latest research was carried out by Savanta ComRes, which conducted 10-minute online surveys among 4,000 UK adults.

The findings include:

- 45 per cent of the UK population believe in the resurrection
- 20 per cent of the UK population believe that Jesus is God
- Only 6 per cent of UK adults are practising Christians (a similar percentage to 2015). 42 per cent identified as non-practising Christians; 52 per cent as non-Christians

- 'Growing up in Christian family' was the most common route to faith, followed by 'reading the Bible' (24 per cent), and 'attending a church service' (19 per cent)

- Non-white ethnic minorities make up 25 per cent of practising Christians

- 26 per cent of non-Christians would go to Google search as the place to find out about the Christian faith, closely followed by reading the Bible

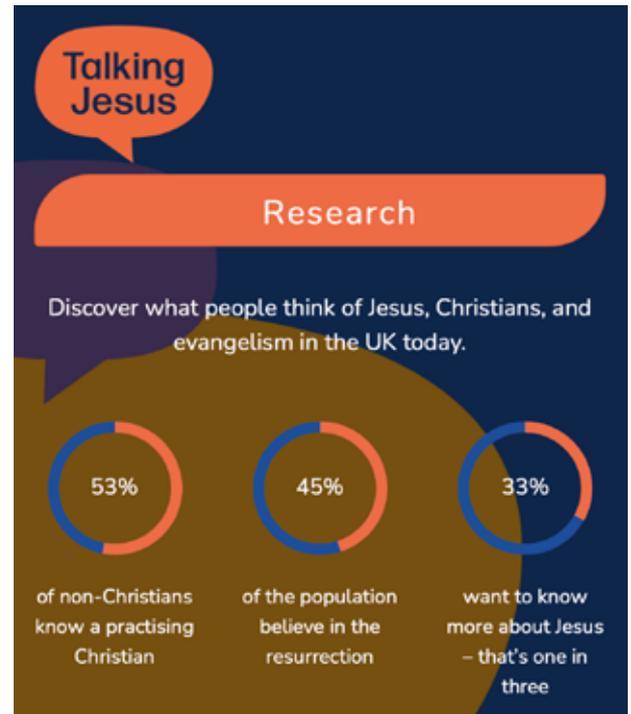
- 40 per cent of Christians found the biggest barrier to sharing faith was difficult questions

- While many non-Christians perceive the church as hypocritical and narrow-minded, many perceive their Christian friends as caring and friendly

- 4 per cent of Christians came to faith through seeing Christian content on social media, a higher percentage than in 2015

- One in three non-Christians, after a conversation with a Christian, want to know more about Jesus Christ – up from one in five in 2015

'We are passionate about this research because we know that facts can change people's understanding and behaviour,' the report's introduction states.



'This research can bring confidence to the Church and to all of us who follow Jesus and who long to see others come to faith.'

The report was commissioned by *Alpha*, the Evangelical Alliance, HOPE Together, Luis Palau Association and Kingsgate Community Church.

In an email to supporters, Evangelical Alliance CEO Gavin Calver wrote, 'I hope this report will challenge, encourage and inspire us all, that the UK as a mission field is ripe for harvest and we all have our part to play.'

**The report can be accessed here:**  
[talkingjesus.org/2022-research](https://talkingjesus.org/2022-research)

**The Evangelical Alliance has produced a blog series to explore what the new research means for evangelism today. Access the blogs at:**  
[bit.ly/talkingjesus](https://bit.ly/talkingjesus)

## A united year of mission: Hope 23-24



Christians are being encouraged to unite as a church across denominations to offer the hope of Jesus for a year of mission starting in September 2023

Hope 23-24 is a call to the Church to offer again the hope of Jesus Christ to everyone in the UK.

The idea has come from Hope Together, which provides support, ideas and resources to equip Christians to put faith into words and action to make Jesus known.

Hope Together began when evangelists Mike Pilavachi, Roy Crowne and Andy Hawthorne conceived a year of mission in

2008 - Hope 08. Around 1500 churches participated in Hope 08, with many young people taking the lead.

All three appear in a video to explain why they're encouraging a similar year of mission beginning in 2023.

The video begins with Rachel Jordan-Wolf, Hope Together's executive director, explaining that events of the last two years have led to people questioning their life's foundations.

*"The question most of the population are asking in the UK right now is: 'Will everything be okay?'"*

*"The foundations have been shaken and have been found to be wanting. We know there's only one foundation on which to build life, and actually even world peace, and his name is Jesus."*

*"That's why right now is the time to offer Jesus in the UK in Hope 23-24."*

A launch event took place at the end of May, which was attended by General Secretary Lynn Green and Webnet Regional Team Leader Nigel Coles, our Hope Together representative.

They said, 'We wholeheartedly endorse mission and evangelism across Baptists Together and our prayer is that God would use this year of mission in 2023-24, in and through every one of us.'

'Working together is at the heart of what we seek to do and we pray our partnership with Hope Together will be fruitful for the kingdom of God.'

The Hope 23-24 website highlights a variety of ways people can participate.

Find out more via the website: [hope2324.com](http://hope2324.com)

## God saw that it was good

A Baptist environment project that helps people encounter God through creation has won additional funding.

The Baptist Union Environment Network (BUEN) and The Fuelcast have received funding from Scientists in Congregations to widen the 'God Saw That It Was

Good' display launched at the Baptist Assembly in May.

The funding will allow the display to be made available to churches and conferences across Baptists Together, along with the development of supporting discussion material to help shape discipleship in an age of climate and environmental change.

In addition, with The Fuelcast, the images will be developed into short videos exploring both the science they express, together with encountering God through creation.

The project is led by Dave Gregory and Andy Thomas, two Baptist ministers who share a concern over the climate and environmental crisis.

Are you interested in hosting the 'God saw that it was good' display at your church or association gathering?

Contact BUEN: [buenvnet@outlook.com](mailto:buenvnet@outlook.com)



# How accessible is your church to people with sight loss?



Sunday  
**16th**  
October



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[torchtrust.org/SLSunday](http://torchtrust.org/SLSunday)

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