

Summer 2025

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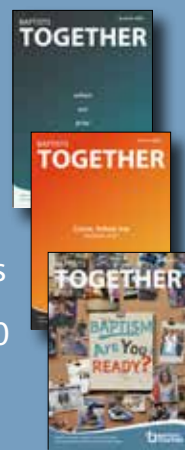
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BAPTISM - ARE YOU READY?

Wouldn't it be amazing if in 2025 every single one of our baptistries is used right across our Union?'

This hope (and challenge) from General Secretary Lynn Green lies at the heart of the latest edition of *Baptists Together* magazine. 'Believers' baptism is foundational to our movement, and baptisms are closely matched to new believers', writes Lynn. 'Surely this is significant. If our hearts are committed to responding to Jesus' Great Commandment and Great Commission, we will be praying and living in ways that see people coming to faith in Jesus and becoming his followers.'

So while there is much to be explored about baptism – just look at 'Delving Deeper into Baptism' on page 45 – this edition is predominantly about encouraging us to be ready for baptism, and what this means as a body of believers.



There are promising signs of an upward trend in baptisms as captured in the latest annual returns, quoted on page 8. A small sample of the stories behind these figures are shared on pages 17-30, which show the variety of contexts in which believers' baptisms are taking place: all around the country, in established churches, pioneering settings, and chaplaincy ministries. Many had not experienced baptism for years. Some have discovered people in their congregations who were yet to be baptised, but responded positively to

an invitation. As Andy Goodliff explains on page 9, Baptists and baptism go together.

What's clear is there is no one way to ensure baptisms in your church. The common denominators, such as they are, appear to be sensitive pastoral care towards those who are searching; a willingness to share our faith in contextual ways; and a practical readiness to baptise. It is our prayer the stories in these pages serve to encourage and spark ideas appropriate to your own context.

Many are reporting seeing people with no faith background expressing an interest in Jesus, or just turning up at a Baptist church. As these seekers learn more about the God who loves them and in whose image they are made, they are prepared to take that next step and make a public declaration in Jesus.

**Could this be at your church?
Are you ready for baptism?**

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BAPTISMS

our hearts cry out, **“MORE LORD!”**

By Lynn Green

Believers' baptism is foundational to our movement, writes Lynn Green. Wouldn't it be amazing if in 2025 every single one of our baptistries is used right across our Union?

Believers' baptism has always been a bit of a no-brainer for me. After I had encountered the living God in my teens, I read in my Gideon New Testament that baptism was the way to demonstrate faith in Jesus Christ and my commitment to follow him. Jesus himself was baptised and so many different passages of Scripture showed that as people discovered who Jesus was they responded by being baptised.

"Those who accepted his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day." Acts 2:41

Following the example of Jesus, then, I too was baptised on 18 January 1981. I vividly remember my nervousness at sharing my testimony with the whole church! A more profound memory that has stayed with me over the years is the sparkling water folding over my face as I went beneath the water. The experience and imagery were so precious and powerful, particularly as our church had a traditional baptism under the floor where you entered one side, were baptised and left the pool a new creation in Christ by the steps on the other side.

Baptism has also served as an anchor point in my life and

discipleship when things have been challenging. After all, such a public and dramatic declaration of faith is hard to explain away, especially to yourself, when doubts creep in and there is the temptation to give up.

While baptism is fundamentally a personal response to Jesus, baptismal services are also an amazing corporate moment in the life of any church. The worship, the testimony, the promises, the drama of baptism itself, the prayer and laying on of hands, the welcoming into membership and sometimes the sharing of communion; all these things create the opportunity to rekindle faith and for the hearts and lives of others to be changed too. The Holy Spirit is very definitely on the move in all sorts of ways!

Believers' baptism is also foundational to our movement, of course. Our Declaration of Principle, which is the basis of our Union includes: 'That Christian Baptism is the immersion in water into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, of those who have professed repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ who 'died for our sins according to the Scriptures; was buried, and rose again the third day.'

This is part of the DNA that we share as a movement of churches, Associations and Colleges. We are Baptist churches and believers' baptism is close to our hearts.

As I have travelled and met people across Baptists Together recently, I have been encouraged to hear so many reports from

our ministers, pioneers and chaplains of people finding faith and getting baptised. From the **79 per cent** of our churches that completed their annual return for 2024, we can celebrate **2845 baptisms**, up by more than 800 from 2023. God is at work and growing his Kingdom right here, right now!

Whatever your experience is at the moment, I hope you are inspired by all that we have been able to capture in this edition of the magazine. I say this because I recognise that, despite the overall figures, some of our churches will have had no baptisms for some time.

As a local minister I had seasons when there were no baptisms and it was certainly disheartening and prompted some prayerful heart searching. But whether you are in a fruitful season or a barren season at the moment, I hope your faith will be raised and your prayer deepened as you hear about what God is graciously doing across his church. In the end, our hope is we might see more and more people declaring they are followers of Jesus through the waters of baptism, and that God's Kingdom will grow.

So, as you read this magazine, I want to leave you with some questions to ponder...

- ▼ **When was the last time you had a baptism at your church?**
- ▼ **Are you praying for God's Holy Spirit to be touching and changing lives?**
- ▼ **Are you sharing Jesus with your friends and family, colleagues and neighbours?**

- ▼ Are you prepared?
- ▼ Have you planned a baptismal service?
- ▼ Is your baptistry baptism ready?
- ▼ Have you preached about believers' baptism recently?
- ▼ Have you offered opportunities to 'Explore Baptism'?
- ▼ If you are a minister, pioneer or chaplain, are you praying in your clusters and encouraging each other; celebrating what God is doing and building each other up in faith?

It is important we ask ourselves, and each other, these questions and do so without judgement.

Our shared purpose across Baptists Together is to be growing healthy churches... We can measure numbers of members and attendees and those who are engaging with our churches and communities, and these are all good and valuable things. But baptisms are much more closely matched to new believers - and surely this is significant.

If our hearts are committed to responding to Jesus' Great Commandment and Great Commission, we will be praying and living in ways that see people coming to faith in Jesus and becoming his followers.

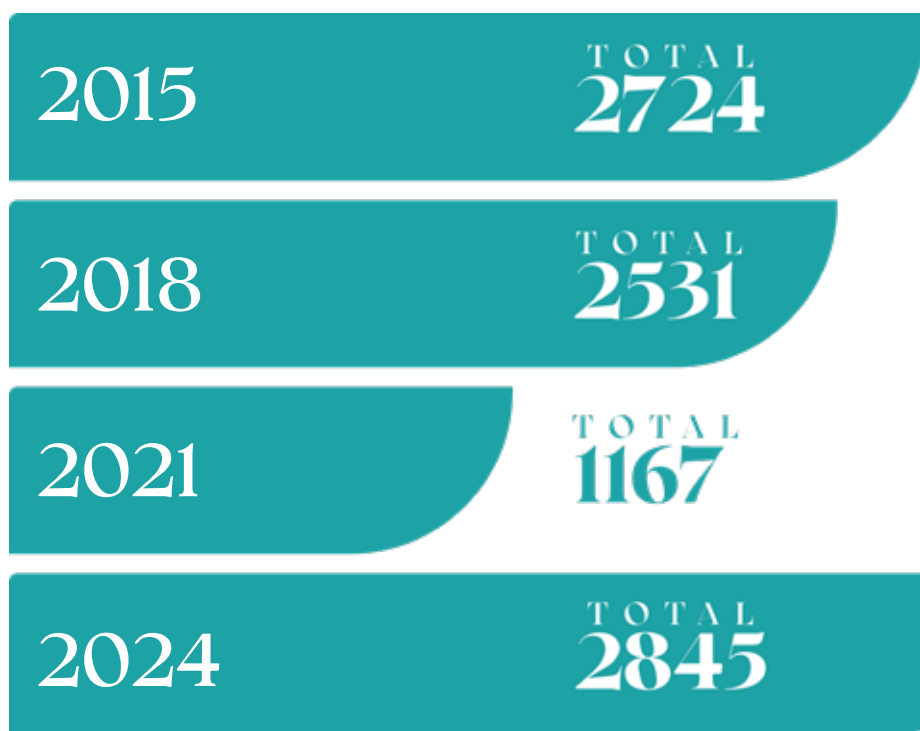
Wouldn't it be amazing if in 2025 every single one of our baptistries is used right across our Union?

Baptism is the beautiful and powerful outward sign of this inward work. It is a divine rendezvous with the Living God. It is a moment of empowering by the Holy Spirit. And so our hearts cry out, "More Lord!", for the glory of his name.



Lynn Green is General Secretary of Baptists Together

Baptism is the beautiful and powerful outward sign of this inward work. It is a divine rendezvous with the Living God. It is a moment of empowering by the Holy Spirit



Numbers of baptisms sourced from the churches that completed their annual return: 2015: 81%, 2018: 92%, 2021: 82%, 2024: 79%

Church attendance has risen by 50 per cent over the last six years, with 2 million more people attending church in England and Wales, according to a new survey commissioned by Bible Society
<https://ow.ly/8REL50Vxxti>

BAPTISTS & BAPTISM

PUBLIC

Baptism is both a simple act... and a profound one. Andy Goodliff traces how Baptists have understood baptism

Baptists *and* baptism go together. It's in our name. It wasn't a name we chose, but a label we were given, and not politely. It was an accusation. It was used in less than positive terms. It was one that we came to embrace and accept though. Baptists are those who baptise believers.

BELIEVERS' BAPTISM – THE WHO, AND WHY THIS WAS A POLITICAL ACT

We should say that Baptists hold more than just a conviction about baptism (for example, we equally hold convictions about religious liberty for the individual and the local church), but baptism holds a special place. Our understanding of believers' baptism is an integral part of what we believe the Bible teaches. Baptists, baptism *and* the Bible go together. It was reading the Bible and with fresh eyes that led John Smyth and Thomas Helwys and others to the conclusion that baptism was joined to the confession of faith and so infant baptism could not, in their eyes, be a true baptism.

These early 'baptists' wanted to reform the Church. While steps had been made in that direction during the 16th century, it was felt by some they had not gone far enough. This trajectory of reform, in the light of how they were reading the Bible, saw Smyth, Helwys and others turn the world upside down.

At the beginning of the 17th century, when Baptists emerged, every child born was expected to be baptised as an infant. This was the law of the Church and the law of the State, joined as they were together. Try and imagine that. As today we have a legal requirement to register a birth, so in Christian Europe there was a convention parents baptised their children in their parish church. Therefore, to reject infant baptism was a deeply political

OUR UNDERSTANDING OF BELIEVERS' BAPTISM IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF WHAT WE BELIEVE THE BIBLE TEACHES

act, which put you at odds with society. The Baptist view that baptism was for believers made them 'social subversives.'¹ What would it mean to consider baptism in these terms today?

It is important to note that as Baptists developed their views on baptism, there were some who did not insist on believers' baptism, and held an open view, not discriminating against in terms of membership. These included John Bunyan in the 17th century, Daniel Turner in the 18th century, and into the 19th century, the likes of Robert Hall, who argued for an open communion table. Many Baptists today, while still holding to believers' baptism as the clearest and best reading of what the Bible teaches, would also recognise and practise a hospitality towards those whose journey of faith has been different, but no less *faith-filled*. Baptists have always had ecumenists in their number.

HOW TO BAPTISE?

If Baptists began arguing for *who* should be baptised, they also argued about how they should be baptised. It is almost certain that John Smyth, baptising himself and then others in the exiled Amsterdam congregation in 1609, poured water from a bowl over the head. Later Baptists would come to understand the NT Greek word 'baptise' to mean 'immerse' and claim that the only valid baptism was one of full immersion. This became the norm. It made better sense of verses like Romans 6:3.

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

Who, why, and a third question, *what* is baptism? This perhaps has been the most vexed in our tradition: is baptism an ordinance (obedience to the command of Christ) or is baptism a sacrament (a reception of grace and the presence of God)? Baptists can be found on both sides. The Second London Confession of the Particular Baptists (1677) has language of 'ordinance', but the Orthodox Creed of the General Baptists (1678) includes 'ordinance' and 'sacrament'.

Those stressing an ordinance, wanting to avoid anything that might be considered 'catholic', held the view that baptism is a *symbol* of something that has already taken place in the believer. Those holding a more sacramental view contend that baptism is not merely a human act, but also a divine one, that something *special* and *unique* takes place between God and the person in the water — in the words of one

scholar a 'rendezvous of grace for faith.'² Again, today many Baptists would see baptism as both ordinance and sacrament, where grace and faith, Spirit and water, are all involved in what takes place.

THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF BAPTISM

It has been said that while Baptists have spent a lot of energy on the *who*, *how* and *what* questions of baptism, they have given less attention to the *meaning* — the theological significance — of baptism. Helwys speaks of baptism 'as the outward manifestation of dying unto sin, and walking in newness of life.' The Second London Confession describes baptism as 'a sign' of fellowship with Christ, of the remission of sins and walking in newness of life.³

In the 20th century Baptists began to think more deeply about baptism.⁴ This took place in an emerging ecumenical Christian world, which encouraged a mutual learning



experience. In the last 30 years, Baptists have written about baptism and biblical meanings of water,⁵ baptism as a sacrament,⁶ baptism as political,⁷ baptism and birth,⁸ baptism as indwelling Christ's story,⁹ baptism as participation in God,¹⁰ and baptism as a dying and rising.¹¹

This is not an exhaustive list, because baptism itself, like the Lord's Supper, is something that is abundant in meaning. Baptism is both a simple act and a profound one.

Baptism *and* Baptists go together.



Andy Goodliff is the minister of Belle Vue Baptist Church, Southend. He is a lecturer in Baptist History at Regent's Park College, Oxford

The Baptist view that baptism was for believers made them 'social subversives.' What would it mean to consider baptism in these terms today?

- 1 David Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries* (2018), 48.
- 2 George Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (1962), 273.
- 3 *A Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining in Amsterdam* (1611).
- 4 For a detailed study see Anthony R Cross, *Baptism and the Baptists: Theology and Practice in the Twentieth Century* (2000).
- 5 Paul Fiddes, 'Baptism and Creation' in *Reflections on the Water* (1996)
- 6 Chris Ellis, 'Baptism and the Sacramental Freedom of God' in *Reflections on the Water* (1996)
- 7 Brian Haymes, 'Baptism as a Political Act' in *Reflections on the Water* (1996)
- 8 Ruth Gouldbourne, 'Story-telling, Sacraments and Sexuality' in *Questions of Identity* (2011)
- 9 John Colwell, *Living the Christian Story* (2001).
- 10 Hazel Sherman, 'Baptized – in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit' in *Reflections on the Water* (1996)
- 11 Sally Nelson, 'The Water Buries Like a Tomb' in *Gathering Disciples* (2017)

TODAY MANY BAPTISTS WOULD SEE BAPTISM AS BOTH ORDINANCE AND SACRAMENT, WHERE GRACE AND FAITH, SPIRIT AND WATER, ARE ALL INVOLVED IN WHAT TAKES PLACE

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WHY baptism & WHY baptist?

Amutha Devaraj was born into a Hindu family in India. Highlighting the significance of baptism, she explains why she became a Baptist minister

I am proud to say that I am a 'Born Baptist' - not because my parents were attending a Baptist church, nor because of my personal decision after attending revival meetings. It is not even because of the in-depth research I did on Baptist theological principles. Although I was physically born into a Hindu family, I was spiritually reborn through water and the Spirit (John 3:5) in a Baptist church. I did not choose to attend this Baptist church because it belonged to the Baptist denomination, but because I reluctantly accompanied my husband as it was close to

the place where we moved to London in 2006. Spiritually speaking, I was going to this church before my rebirth!

I have a great conviction that God's calling begins with everyone even before we were born. He continually equips us as we journey through our life. On our journey, he constantly develops our characters towards his ordained destination. One of the qualities he envisioned in me is to ask questions about everything, not proceeding until I am truly convinced. This has enabled me to embrace Christianity.

If Christianity professed inferiority of gender, discrimination in societal status, or preferences based on ethnic backgrounds, I would not have followed Christianity at all. But I found Christianity fascinating, particularly through

Galatians 3:28. 'There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.' This great love of God embracing all of humanity reveals his impartial nature. It beckoned me to follow Christ. There was no struggle for me to choose Protestantism as the truth depicted in scripture, especially concerning believer's baptism, which is evidently seen in Baptist church practices.

The Christian Church should be a congregation of biblically based, baptised believers. The Word of God and the church's practices should align with one other; without one, the other will fall apart. This alignment is seen in Baptist church practices. While I started reading and reflecting the Word of God, I was convinced to undergo the baptism of immersion. It was my simple response to my Saviour's love

for me - I determined to obey what he has commanded, as he has demonstrated through his obedience.

Nonetheless, when I sensed a call to ministry, I asked myself this question, 'why Baptist, and not another denomination?' A three-part Baptist Declaration of Principle¹ became the foundation of my understanding in pursuing Baptist ministry. This Declaration of Principle is established on Jesus' Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20), which highlights its threefold pattern of *authority, baptism and mission*. Scripture and the Baptist principle correlates the absolute *authority* of God the Father by obeying his commands, identifying ourselves with God the Son by undergoing believer's baptism, and living out our lives for God's *mission* with the help of God the Spirit.

God's commandment of 'going, making disciples and baptising of all nations' breaks down the geographical, racial, gender, societal, and cultural barriers. Baptism is an act of faith that also provides an assurance of belonging to Christ. Baptism is a sign of missional outreach that embraces all of humanity, proclaiming Christ's love for everyone. The Baptist denomination, which portrays this principle, captivated me and convinced me to become a Baptist minister.

Although the ordinance of baptism is not explicitly found in the Old Testament, there are events that point toward and ultimately find fulfilment through Christ in the New Testament. Peter speaking of Noah, says he was 'saved through the water' (1 Pet 3:20-21), and Paul's mentioning of Israelites being 'baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea' (1 Cor 10:1-2),

were, in the Old Testament, the foreshadowing of baptisms.

In the New Testament, when John the Baptist inaugurated the act of baptism, those living in Jerusalem and around Judea - including Pharisees, Sadducees, and later Jesus' disciples - were all Jewish. There may have been a perception that baptism was an invitation to the Jewish community, like physical circumcision. However, the perception of 'repentance-baptism' for Jewish people alone was expanded with believers' baptism when Gentiles were also included in God's plan through spiritual circumcision.

God's authority was unveiled to both the Israelites and Gentiles simultaneously through the act of baptism. Peter (Acts 10) and through him the Jewish Christians (Acts 11) and Cornelius, the gentile Roman centurion, came to the awareness of God's concept of inclusivity - his invitation to every race and gender into his Kingdom through baptism.

Baptism played a significant role as a sign of approval to enter the Christian faith, which was evident through the work of the Holy Spirit. When Cornelius and his household received the Word of God through Peter, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and were speaking in tongues, just as the Jewish believers did on the day of Pentecost. The gift of the Holy Spirit offered to the Gentiles affirmed that God invites all who believe in him. The biblical sign of the Spirit's presence and power of the Spirit can be seen in baptism, as Jesus said, "You will be baptised with the Holy Spirit. . . and you shall receive power." (Acts 1:5, 8)

Christ's calling embraces all of humanity—those who believe in him and follow his teachings. The early disciples proceeded on their mission journey with the inaugural words of Christ in the Great Commission. The prelude to this commissioning - 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus' - encourages us, as his current disciples, to confidently pursue God's ministry with his presence and authority.

Let us proclaim the necessity of baptism, a physical representation of a believer's old life being buried with the Lord Jesus in his death and then raised to a newness of life in his resurrection. Let us prepare our baptistries, as Lynn professed², waiting prayerfully for countless souls to come into God's kingdom.



Amutha Devaraj is the lead minister at Ashurst Drive Baptist Church on the north-east edge of London. She grew up in India, comes from a Hindu background and has a PhD in Materials Science.

Amutha was one of the Project Violet co-researchers. The title of her research was: 'Understanding the journey into ministry for Asian women' - available at baptist.org.uk/projectviolet





Baptism & Body

Baptism signals that we want to follow Jesus, but it does not finish the job of making us disciples. We must 'watch over and walk with' to do that

Reflecting on the baptism of her daughter, who has severe and complex special needs, Sally Nelson explores how we understand the concept of the church as the body of Christ

Reflection on a real situation allows us to inspect our true convictions and perhaps reassess things we have never previously questioned.

In 2018 I baptised my 19-year-old daughter, who has severe and complex special needs. Some friends asked me to write about the baptism in case it is of use

to others who are facing such decisions.

A child of the manse, our daughter has attended church since she was two weeks old. As a family we have been members of five different Baptist churches during her lifetime (of these I have been in pastoral charge of two). At each she has been welcomed into the fellowship as fully as possible, for which we have been grateful.

In these five churches a variety of cultures and opinions existed around the practices of baptism and communion. For example, some allowed children

to receive communion, while others preferred not; some saw attendance at communion as a 'test' of commitment; others did not. When our daughter was about seven, we moved from a church that accepted children at communion to one that didn't. I often wondered what she made of this change, since she could not understand the theological reasons but had to accept the different practice. Children raise one set of 'commitment' questions; those with learning disabilities, another.

However, I want to focus on baptism, not communion, in this article. The key question is

how we understand, and put into practice, the concept of the church as the Body of Christ, which I believe has profound implications for those with learning disabilities. Is the Body of Christ a group of *individuals* who self-selectively coordinate themselves, or is it the *integrated* body of a Person?

As she grew older, our daughter's delight in attending church and joining in worship became evident. The question of baptism and membership became pressing for us. There was never any issue about, or objection to, her baptism in our fellowship but I was anxious to think responsibly through the practical and theological implications.

First, the practical matters, which were the least difficult. She is wheelchair-dependent with physical hypersensitivity. Our church meets in a school and has no baptistry. We considered the options of the swimming pool and of hiring a baptistry (and a hoist!) and decided against both on the grounds of her dignity and the possibility of causing her pain. Pouring water over her would have been another option, but her hypersensitivity made that seem unkind. In the end we settled for sprinkling as the only compassionate way.

What about her cognitive, and speech and language, difficulties? Normally a baptismal candidate can profess his/her faith either by testimony or by standard responses: she could do neither. Here several more questions arose, of relevance to baptistic communities.

- *Did* she understand the commitment of faith to which she was called?
- *How* could she profess her faith? She is verbally unable to testify, and she can't read or write. If I had asked closed questions in the tradition of profession of faith, her 'best' word when nervous is 'No'—not the ideal response when asking if Jesus is her Lord and Saviour.
- *How* could she publicly commit herself to the community of the baptised, this local church?

These matters were resolved as follows.

We decided the cognitive reception of her faith was not, and could not be, a prohibitive issue. There is plenty she can't understand, but she is evidently able to enter the spirit of worship within our community, and she has a heart of gold, hating to see anyone in pain. She thus satisfies Jesus' summary of the commandments: love God and love other people. Had even this level of demonstrable faith been harder to discern because of greater cognitive damage, I still think, on reflection, that I could not have denied baptism to faithful members of the community if the Body of Christ metaphor is taken seriously.

She cannot use spoken language, so during the service we asked others in the body to speak of the faith they saw in her. One was a teacher from her school, also a church member. The other was

my husband, who sat with her at the front and gently 'interviewed' her, talking about church and Jesus and love (she is able to say 'yes' and 'no' accurately, if not stressed). As a whole congregation, we reaffirmed our baptismal promises together and she was a non-verbal part of that reaffirmation: here truly was the Body of Christ.

One of the church leaders helped me to sprinkle the water (something we'd practised at home so that it wasn't a surprise) and to pray for her. Our church secretary presented her with a fine purple Bible (her favourite colour) on behalf of the church, which she brings proudly each week, like everyone else, though she cannot read it.

We had plenty of music, which she loves; a quiz about water and an offering for Water Aid (to connect water with life in a practical as well as a spiritual manner); a lunch for everyone afterwards. Our small fellowship swelled to three times its normal size, with many non-believers present because they loved her. Jesus was glorified.

I believe this baptism took seriously our corporate life as the body of Christ—and in a manner that is truly baptistic.

Her faith was demonstrated and articulated *by the body of which she is also a part*, and she would be supported by this fellowship in her commitment to Jesus. She was a part of our small church in every way.

the Body of Christ is incomplete without the weak, foolish and despised (1 Cor 1: 26-28)
- and perhaps we should examine how we 'gatekeep' joining and belonging



We did this baptism *together*: it was not about an individual's statement or commitment, but about the life of this community of baptised believers, increasing the membership of the body.¹

Three observations, seven years on

Seven years on, and our daughter is 26. In September 2023 she moved to a young adult setting 25 miles away and so she is no longer part of the church in which she was baptised. Physically she has deteriorated and the staff, although willing to take her to church, find that getting her ready for 10:30 on Sundays is impossible: she takes several hours to 'fire up'. I have often thought about the wonderful day of her baptism and reflected on its meaning for her now. I do not believe she has 'left' the Body (indeed, she is still a member and held in prayer and love), and I have three observations.

First, the individualism prized in our society is illusory

Much within our health, education and welfare systems (and indeed wider culture) is predicated upon personal independence, as if that were the gold standard of being human. In fact we have all been unavoidably and totally dependent upon others – each of us was born small and vulnerable, unable to care for ourselves or make decisions; and as we age this may be true again.

During the pandemic we reconnected experientially with our human need for others. Theologically we are created to be in relationship: it was never good to be alone (Gen 2:18), and God is a covenanting, relational God. Baptism is an act by and into the community, not simply a personal decision for Jesus.

Further, Baptists believe they 'watch over and walk with' one another in covenant community. Being in a local church is not just 'our' choice: we're called by the Lord into a community and our commitment is deeper than for a club or society – it is to one another, not to the organisation's focus (like gold or politics).

Second, baptism is not an event but signals a chosen journey

It is a transitional rite, and the baptised person becomes part of a baptised Body. Like a turnstile at the park, the gate won't let us go back. We can't be unbaptised, and we enter a corporate exploration of the Way of Jesus. Logically, we can't individually 'un-Body' ourselves!

At times, too, we may have to support other parts of the Body that are damaged, diseased, or amputated. Augustine 'got' this: he described church as a 'mixed body' (*corpus permixtum*). The church is not perfect but a community of people at different places in their commitment (he spoke of wheat and weeds from Matt 13: 24-30). Baptism signals that we want to follow Jesus, but it does not finish the job of making us disciples. We must 'watch over and walk with' to do that.

My third observation is that our churches do not make the journey beyond baptism easy for someone like my daughter

We do not watch and walk equally well with all people. It is not her fault that she hasn't got the physical ability to be there at 10:30, nor that she finds a 30-minute sermon yawningly dull. Baptists are often cerebral, assuming cognitive ability and that everyone can participate in church meetings and projects.

What if you can't? Are you 'in', or not?

Yet the Body of Christ is incomplete without the weak, foolish and despised (1 Cor 1: 26-28), and perhaps we should examine how we 'gatekeep' joining and belonging. Some will speak of centred or bounded sets; these categories may be helpful in management circles, but neither sounds to me like the Body of Christ, which is a beautiful, coherent unity of diverse parts, characterised by baptised commitment.

Are you an elegant limb or a broken toenail? Who let you choose? Which part of your body is most important? Put like this, we realise that we are not yet the Body of the crucified Christ that we are called to be.



Sally Nelson is a Baptist minister and Lecturer in Pastoral Studies, Trinity College, School of Critical Studies, University of Glasgow

This article is based on A Reflection on a Baptism, which appeared in the *bmj* (Baptist Ministers' Journal), in October 2018

¹ I have written more about my general thinking on baptism in a chapter in the festschrift for Chris Ellis entitled *Gathering Disciples*. See page 41 for more information on this resource.

STORIES

F R O M T H E

LOCAL CONTEXT



There's a preparation and an expectation

After several years of no baptisms, Pollards Hill Baptist Church in south London now intentionally hosts four baptism services a year. Minister Deji Ayorinde shares how, and why

What difference are we making in the Kingdom?

I became the minister at Pollards Hill Baptist Church at the end of 2019, a few months before COVID hit. In this time we explored our identity as church. We asked two questions in particular: What difference are we making in community? What difference are we making in the Kingdom?

Community is easier to see, as it's tangible. How many events, how many adverts, how many activities etc. But for Kingdom, it's less straightforward. As I was thinking about this, I asked about baptisms: when was the last time we had had one in this church? At least five years, it turned out, and I began to wonder why.

I asked the congregation whether anyone had thought about being baptised. A few people hadn't and were interested in finding out more. I like to do things

properly, so I threw myself into creating a three week baptism class curriculum. I took existing material and added some extra bits. It was about helping people, enabling them to understand exactly what they're choosing.

After that first course we had five baptisms, and it was really powerful. The church was full. We had to use the hall for overflow and stream the service there. That was it for me. I thought: "Right - we're doing this!"





Preparation and expectation

We've been continuing ever since. Over time we introduced video and honed the course material. We introduced food into our baptism classes, not just snacks, which has helped that cohort to connect: they're brothers and sisters making a journey together into kingdom, and their bonds are still evident in the church today.

It's related to our church members' meeting, where we officially receive those who've been baptised into membership. These are quarterly, so now we intentionally plan for a baptism service before a members' meeting, so four times a year. We structure the classes around these dates.

We advertise the baptism services in different ways too. One is by using our noticeboard outside the church. Most church noticeboards have general information about services, but I think people can find out that information easily. I believe the noticeboard must tell the community what Jesus is doing. Jesus draws people to himself, not us. So we created a poster that talks about the baptism

classes and service, and it has a QR code linked to a page on our website that says: 'Are you interested in baptism? Fill in this form and someone will contact you.'

In the weeks leading up to the start of the classes we also regularly tell the congregation:

"We're going to welcome people into the kingdom." We encourage them to start praying for those who will be baptised. We say: "You don't need to know them by name. The one you're praying to knows them by name."

So there's a preparation and an expectation.

The baptism service

We see it 100 per cent as an evangelistic event. We ask those being baptised to make a list of whom they're going to invite. This is a public declaration. They are telling people, "My life's going to change."

We've had one family come five or six times as each subsequent member has been baptised. Easter 2023 there were 200 people, standing room only. There was a huge hallelujah about this, because so

many people were greatly impacted by what they saw. To be baptised on Resurrection Sunday, with what that meant for the onlookers, what that meant for us as a church in the light of his Word, was absolutely phenomenal.

We'll have some songs, some prayers and a short message; 10 minutes – more an exhortation than a preach.

When that message is done, we go straight to the baptisms. The individual comes forward, reads their story and is prayed over. As they're going into the water we sing their chosen song of worship. We sing it as they go in the water. After their baptism, they come up. We say, "Hallelujah!" We go back into that song as a resounding chorus of praise as they leave. For each candidate, it's about 10 minutes.

At the end we will have all the candidates at the front. I will typically ask the congregation to stretch out their hands toward them, symbolically, as we bless them, welcome them and send them.



"Hey, the water's still warm..." The 'eunuch' baptism

We also make sure there is a call to anyone else after the scheduled baptisms. From my Pentecostal background we call this a 'eunuch baptism', after the Ethiopian eunuch who was baptised by Philip in Acts 8. We say: "Hey, the water's still warm. You've seen what's happening here. Maybe the Holy Spirit's tugging at your heart? Come, get up, come."

And we make provision for that. We've got jogging bottoms, t-shirts in various sizes, male and female, so they can change. And every baptism service, bar one, we've had a eunuch baptism. Wow.

Support for those baptised

All baptism candidates are buddied up with a mentor. That's one of the things that helps them in their journey and their understanding of the spiritual and lifestyle disciplines they will seek to grow and develop. They're making themselves accountable to someone who's a Christian - someone who's walked that journey, who understands and can help, guide and counsel them, correct

them if need be, but crucially, encourage them.

The mentoring period lasts two months with weekly check-ins. The mentor checks in with me monthly to ensure accountability. The mentor is by their side when they are baptised, and prays over them.

They also go on the prayer list for three months. So on the one hand, yes, they're being prayed over for three months. But also, you always grow closer to the one you're praying for, so that has helped with connection and engagement.

We make sure there is follow-up. Two weeks after baptism it's a communion service and the

members' meeting afterwards. Those who have been baptised are welcomed into membership. We have them sit at the front, where they get served communion first. We big them up.

And the number of people who come to me after a baptism service and say "Can you put me down for the next one?" Baptism has been a trigger for growth – both in terms of our numbers, and the depth of our faith.

**Deji Ayorinde is minister of
Pollards Hill Baptist Church in
London**

Pollards Hill advertises its baptism classes to the wider community on the noticeboard in front of its building



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On a leap of faith, we opened up our baptistry

Chenies Baptist Church hadn't conducted a baptism in almost a decade - but without a candidate in sight, decided to open its baptistry on Easter Sunday. Minister Jon Bishop explains more



On Christmas Day 2023, we wanted to inspire and encourage our church family to be hopeful and have a vision for Kingdom growth. And so, on a slight whim and a definite leap of faith we said we'd be having baptisms on Easter Sunday 2024, and if anyone was interested to please come forward. We were also seeking to encourage people to share their faith in the hope that again we'd be able to share the love of Jesus with more people.

I had been at the church since the summer of 2022 and really wanted to encourage people who have faithfully followed Jesus. As I prepared for Christmas 2023 I was convicted that opening up the pool on Easter Sunday was the way forward. Our connections and outreach are small, but something deep down told me we could see God at work.



Throughout the early months of 2024 we kept reminding and offering people the chance to come and talk about baptism. We had a few conversations, but nothing led me to believe we would have anyone. Finally Palm Sunday came and we still didn't have any candidates.

I was naturally disappointed and started to question whether I had heard right from God. On the Wednesday I took one of our deacons, Andy, for a walk along the canal in Hemel Hempstead and we talked through our options. We could open it but not fill it, and just repeat the invitation for a later date. Maybe we could partly fill it, just in case someone comes forward on the day, or not do anything and just accept this time round it wasn't to be.

The more we talked, the more strongly I felt it was still right to go ahead and plan to fill the baptistry in the early hours of Easter Sunday. We can not fill which makes the process quicker, although I was not looking forward to getting up at 5am (which was actually an hour earlier due to the clock change that day). But at the end of the walk that was the decision.

At the end of our Good Friday service, one gentleman, Ray, who has been on the edge of church for some time, but well known to us, was sat in front of the now open, but not yet filled pool.



For many years he had been aware of Jesus in his life, sending him help through the kindness of strangers. Although he had made a commitment as a youngster, this Good Friday he was convicted that he needed to get baptised.

And what a joy it was to baptise him on Easter Sunday morning and share in his desire to follow Jesus with his life in new ways.

A year on, it has been a joy to see Ray grow in faith and walk with Jesus more deeply. Reflecting on the whole process, it was exciting and a roller coaster because of the lack of candidates until Good Friday, but as a church it has inspired us to be hopeful and to believe God is at work.

**Jon Bishop is the minister of
Chenies Baptist Church in
Rickmansworth, Bucks**



Not owning our building means we've had to be inventive

Castle Donington Community Church has baptised people in a variety of unusual places. It has led to miracles of salvation, says Roy Monks

Castle Donington Community Church was established in 2018. The journey began after a group of Baptist ministers in the Soar Valley started to explore the possibility of planting a new church. After much prayer, talking and consulting, Castle Donington was identified as the place: the town is near East Midlands Airport and is expanding rapidly with hundreds of new houses being built and new industries being attracted.

A small Baptist community has been worshipping in the town for decades, but it was felt a new church would better serve God's purposes. I was called to be its first minister.

Since then I have baptised more than 30 people. Not owning our own building has meant we have had to be inventive in where we hold these services. The Lord has used them to reach out to the unlikeliest of people in some of the most unusual situations.

The various places include:

- The Sailors and Soldiers Club
- The Light Station building - our drop in centre
- The Donington Manor Hotel
- The village hall
- The village hall playing fields

We have had good crowds at all of these, including bar staff and customers, relatives and friends, and even dog walkers when we baptised on the playing fields. One man walking his dog when we were filling the pool asked what was happening. When we told him, he decided to come to the service and made a decision for Christ after hearing the gospel.

One man we baptised at Donington Manor Hotel was an atheist for more than 50 years. We invited him to a men's breakfast at the hotel and a few months later baptised him there on the hotel patio.

While it is joyful to be able to baptise in a purpose-built facility, John the Baptist baptised in the open air and Jesus himself was baptised outdoors. The UK of course can be a challenge with our climate. Breaking the ice on a pool before a baptism would certainly not be attractive to anyone! However, in the warmer spring and summer months, possibilities can present themselves and be very useful, as they have been to us.

Perhaps we all should consider taking our baptisms out of our buildings from time to time and engaging with our wider communities. Miracles

of salvation can happen in some of the most unlikely places - especially with something as powerful as a baptism service.

Roy Monks is the minister of Castle Donington Community Church



A baptism in the sea

Baptisms are always a time of rejoicing, and this was such a joyous occasion: being baptised in a beautiful calm sea, with glorious morning sunshine and Nina's family and friends celebrating with her. By Ann Marie Fradgley



Alongside Anne Jackson (co-pioneer), I had the privilege of baptising Nina, a member of our 'Table Sanctuary', in the sea off Huttoft Beach in Lincolnshire last August.

The baptism was appropriate for Nina, who is a free spirit and very connected to nature.

Nina came to faith through Sanctuary at the Hub, (an opportunity for prayer and pamper set up by Anne before I arrived in the village). Table Sanctuary, where Nina grew in faith, is based on John 21:12 'Come and have breakfast'. That's what we do. We come, we share breakfast together around the table, we focus on God. It's rooted in hospitality and love, and we look at Scripture, we listen to music or worship, we break bread together. People can ask questions. There is space to be vulnerable. It's made up of people who have had a faith

and lost it and have come back to faith. Others have not had a faith at all, and some have been alienated from church. Nina had never really settled in an established church, because people have tried to put constraints on her, and she found that difficult.

I also started something called Soul Space, which grew organically for those wanting to go deeper with God. It is about stepping away from the busyness of life, and exploring different ways of prayerfulness. Through this Nina has grown, appreciating there's more than one way to pray. And Jesus is so evident in Nina's life. Her love of Jesus just shines out!

Both Anne and I spoke separately and independently to Nina about baptism. It turned out Nina had been thinking about baptism too, but didn't like the idea of being baptised in a church. Because

we do things differently, we felt free to imagine what was right for Nina. Previously I would have offered a baptism course, but this is not who Nina is. It would have put her off.

So, we had a cuppa and a talk. We heard how Jesus had impacted her life. We looked at examples of baptism in the Bible. We helped her understand the covenantal nature of baptism and its significance. She was ready.

We knew baptising in the sea was right for Nina. A key aspect of her growing faith is how she now really understands God isn't asking her to change who he's created her to be. Creation and nature are part of who she is.

I have baptised in a baptistry and in a paddling pool, all special occasions. But this was the most indescribable experience, and not just because we needed to be aware of the jellyfish!



It was just totally different and almost felt like we were in the River Jordan - so profound and powerful.

Most of Nina's friends and family are not Christians, and Nina says everybody who came was so impacted. It really moved them, because they'd never seen a baptism before.

I think we've learned with the Table Sanctuary, and especially Soul Space, the value of looking at different ways of connecting with God, helping people to understand and use the spirituality they have (as long as it's not heretical) to connect with God. It doesn't have to be in a set way.

As for Nina, she is flourishing. Baptism affirmed to her that God is in her heart. She sees her work as God's work and is happy to tell

others about Jesus. There's a real sense of God being in every part of her life.

As a Baptist minister Ann Fradgley's first pastorate was in Fleet Meadow Baptist Church, a missional-hearted community church in Didcot.

In moving to Nettleham, Lincolnshire the hospice chaplain role Ann initially undertook developed into more of a pioneering role. In June 2023 she took a leap of faith and is now exploring pioneering in the village as she follows God's call to create places of sanctuary: God-centered spaces in which people of faith, or no faith, can be themselves and experience the love and presence of Jesus and explore their spirituality.



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In difficult times, people began to turn to God

Igor Bandura, Vice President of the All-Ukrainian Union of Evangelical Christian-Baptists, reports on an increase in baptisms following the Russian invasion of 2022



The war in Ukraine has brought unspeakable suffering yet, at the same time, it has been a turning point for many seeking hope and answers to the hardest questions. In difficult times people began to turn to God. An open heart to spirituality became one of the consequences of the war and churches quickly responded to this need.

Local churches actively opened their doors to refugees and those affected by the military actions, and were transformed into centres of aid and support. Through humanitarian assistance, organising events for the population, and simple human care, churches have become important centres of not only spiritual but also social influence. The authority of the Church has noticeably increased as it became a place where people find not only physical but also emotional support.

The results of this work are evident: during the war, the number of baptisms increased from 2,600-2,700 to 3,000-4,000 annually. Despite the mass emigration of Ukrainians, new communities are being formed at a noticeable pace—50 new churches appeared in the first two years of the war, while another 25 are in the process of formation. At a time when human strength is depleted, evangelism through churches

bears abundant fruits, reminding people of the source of true hope—the Lord Jesus Christ.

Baptism in a frontline city on the eve of occupation

Baptisms to the sound of explosions in Selydove, Donetsk region, took place in the summer of 2024. Before the frontline city was captured and destroyed in October, the church conducted water baptisms there in July.

On 6 July 2024, five people testified about their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and were baptised. Until the end, the church gathered non-churched people around the Word in the city. Looking at these photographs, it is hard to believe in such a reality.

Vladimir Semenov, the pastor of the local church, gently calls the baptised 'children of war.' All of

them began visiting the church after the full-scale invasion.

"There hasn't been such a desire for God and the church in 25 years of missionary work as there has in this war.

"The war has pressed people against the wall: they have felt alone, in constant anxiety. There has been no need for us to advertise or invite new people to come to services. We sow, and God does his work."

A couple with alcohol dependency

On 20 August 2024, the First Belgorod-Dniester Baptist Church held a baptism. The church family grew by 32 people! Most of those baptised came to the Lord during the full-scale war.

Mykola and Violetta are a young couple. Their lives were far



from piety: both had alcohol dependencies, bad relationships with each other and with neighbours, and lost parental rights. They came to the church to receive humanitarian aid. And they stayed.

Over time, both Mykola and Violetta repented of their sins, overcame their dependencies, and allowed God to change their lives. The first thing they did after repenting was to officially register their marriage. Violetta restored her parental rights and brought her child home.

Mykola also transformed before everyone's eyes. He no longer used foul language and did not bother people around him. On the contrary, he began helping a nearby neighbour. This neighbour, Tatyana, learned that these changes happened under the influence of the evangelical community. She became interested: what kind of church is it where people change so much? Tatyana came to see, started attending a home group, and also repented of her sins.

All three made a covenant with God and became members of the local church.

Baptism through evangelism of a football club

For about 20 years, a Christian football club 'Penue' has been operating in Kryvyi Rih. A group of Christians consistently works with 300 children and young people. Consisting of 18 teams of all age groups, the club's participants play at city, regional, and national championship levels. Importantly, they are brought up on Christian principles and values.

Last year, regular services began on the stadium grounds, which serve as the club's base, alongside football activities. They are primarily focused on the club's pupils and their families. This year, the first baptism took place here.

Mostly, these are young guys and girls who came to God through the club's work. Besides the football players and coaches, a couple of displaced persons from Kherson region, whom God led to the community, were baptised.

Moreover, a military man who came from the frontline literally for a few days joined the eleven people preparing for baptism at the last moment. Considering the good testimony of pastors

from another church, he was also included among those baptised. This was a reminder of the story of the Ethiopian eunuch baptised by Philip.

Overall, it resulted in a very symbolic number - 12 new people who are now in covenant with God!

Mykolayiv

On 7 December, six people received baptism at the Church of God's Grace in Mykolayiv.

Among them was a young guy, Danylo, who was raised in an orphanage. A family of evangelical Christians took him under their care. When they took him, the couple was warned that he was Orthodox and should not be taken to gatherings of other churches. Danylo said this about himself.

On the Saturday before Sunday, his foster mother, Maria, offered him to go with them to the Baptist church in the morning and to the Orthodox one in the afternoon. He agreed. After his first visit to the church, Danylo decided to stay. Soon Danylo entrusted himself to the Lord Christ, and he is now a member of his church.





The testimony of a displaced person from Donetsk in Poltava

"I am Bubnova Kateryna Oleksandrivna, 40 years old.

"We are an ordinary displaced family from Donetsk. We have two children: a 5-year-old daughter and a 15-year-old son. Our story is one of faith, trials, and God's support.

"In 2014, to save our children from shelling, we left our native Donetsk and moved to Kharkiv. However, the war again forced us to leave our home. Leaving Kharkiv under shelling was difficult, but the Lord protected us every step of the way.

"We are now living in Poltava. It is a bit calmer here, but daily air raids remind us that peace has not yet come.

"One day I learned about a meeting programme for internally displaced persons at the 'Salvation' church. It was Divine providence—I registered and gladly joined the meetings. At that time, we temporarily lived in Poltava region, and the road to the church took 2.5-3 hours. But even that did not stop me, as

the desire to be at every meeting was incredibly strong.

"Six months after moving to Poltava, I reached out to the moderator who invited us to a home group. This decision changed our lives.

"A year after we began attending the home group, my husband and I repented and were baptised. It was a moment when we realised complete trust in God and gave our hearts to him.

"Today I am involved in church housekeeping ministry, and my husband independently leads a home group. We see how God uses us in his service.

"We are sincerely grateful to the 'Salvation' church for support during the hardest moments of our lives. You helped us discover God, know his love, and find peace in our hearts even in times of war.

"Glory to the Lord for everything! His mercy and care are always near."

Igor Bandura is the Vice President of the All-Ukrainian Union of Evangelical Christian-Baptists





A baptism that provoked many questions

Bread of Life, a micro-bakery, coffee shop and community hub led by Baptist minister John Western, conducted its first baptism this year

If you go to a coffee shop," notes John Western, "you probably don't expect to see a baptism there." Yet that unlikely combination is precisely what happened one Thursday afternoon in Darnley Road, Strood, Kent earlier this year.

John, an accredited Baptist minister and passionate baker, leads the Bread of Life project, a micro-bakery, coffee shop and community hub. Bread of Life launched in 2022 and its overall vision is "to see church emerge among people who, sadly, would be very unlikely to go to one of our regular churches," he explains.

It is run by volunteers, and one of them, Lauren, became the first person to be baptised in late January. Lauren had found faith the previous year. Although connected with two churches, she had requested her baptism at Bread of Life.

"I think she was perhaps a little nervous about choosing one over the other, but we were certainly one of the influences in her finding faith," says John. "Lots of conversations went on as we were washing up or just doing the practical stuff together, which is very much the way things happen at Bread of Life".



Baking course

The Baptism



John set up a paddling pool and led a short service before baptising Lauren. Though Bread of Life has provision for 24 covers, around 40 people attended the baptism. ("Standing room only," according to John.) They heard Lauren share her testimony, and the event has become quite a talking point.

"A good number of the regulars from the coffee shop who are not yet people of faith came along and heard what God had been doing in her life," John says.

"Lauren is very down to earth and told her story in a very relatable way. Her testimony centred around in coming to Christ, how she'd really found peace, a peace she hadn't known in her previous life.

"There was a lot of joy. And so, after the baptism, I had people asking lots of questions about the baptism and what it means to be baptised.

"They're not at the point where it would be appropriate to say, 'Oh, you can jump in the pool now.' But it was just really encouraging. People who had never witnessed a baptism before were clearly thinking about it."

Those present included one man who had confessed to John how he was anti church and religion due to a bad experience many years ago. He had noticed a change in Lauren, but 'didn't have a clue what was going on'. It was only in attending her baptism that he began to understand it. "I was so encouraged by that conversation," says John, "it was one of the advantages of having a baptism in a more public way."

As well as the coffee shop, bakery and breadmaking courses, Bread of Life has hosted special events, including baking experiences for Cubs, Beavers and Squirrels. A Thursday afternoon group has started after a customer came with many questions after starting to read the Bible. John has also had the privilege of conducting two funerals for customers.

Neuro café – one of the groups that use Bread of Life's premises for a support group for people with neurological conditions

He adds: "Church is emerging in ways that I'm not expecting. Yes, it's unconventional, but that's really exciting."

"Running the coffee shop forces me to rely on the Holy Spirit; to pray each morning, give me what's needed for the people who will come today. It's just that intentionality – and isn't that how we should all be living, day by day, before Jesus?"

Find out more about Bread of Life at breadoflifestrood.co.uk

John Western is the project manager and chief baker at Bread of Life. John has a background as a scientist and small business manager. He has more than 20 years experience as an accredited Baptist minister. He is a passionate baker, who trained at the School of Artisan Food.



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Baptisms in my local prison

By volunteer Prison Chaplain and retired Baptist minister
Pam Bryan

When I retired from church-based Baptist ministry, I moved back to my hometown of Leicester and a friend took me along to a Sunday service at a young offenders' institute in Leicester. I found it very moving and so I went to see the chaplain and asked if they needed volunteers. He said he yes, that would be good, but to come back in six years' time, as they were knocking the place down and building a larger prison for 1700 adult men.

So six years later, and well into retirement, I did!

Even as I was driving along the road which led to the prison and could see the buildings in the distance, I felt drawn to ministry. When I arrived to see the managing chaplain, I found I was there before any prisoners had arrived. I went to the second ever service. There were 12 men in the chapel, as at that time there were only 128 men in the prison.

There are now more than 60 men worshipping in the Protestant service on a Sunday and others at the Saturday Catholic service, plus midweek activities such as Bible studies.

I've been taking one service a month since then, with someone from my church leading worship and we offer the men prayer at the end. We have been privileged to pray for so many things going on in their lives.

One of the people who takes a service on a different week is an evangelist, and she leads people to the Lord. There is also an *Alpha* course and others have come to know Jesus through that.

When people ask about baptism, they come to me - the Baptist minister. The first baptism was in June 2024, when the prison had been open for about a year and four men were baptised. The second was in December just before Christmas, when two men were baptised. There had been three, but then one had early release.

When I ask their stories, some are rekindling faith from their childhood and others have no faith background but have found their way to the chapel and then to Christ. We use *Christianity Explored for Prisons* as the baptismal classes, then we can be sure people are grounded in their faith, as they work through Mark's gospel. It was so good to hear from someone recently that he could see God changing both the way he thought and the things he did, and was anticipating how life would be so different in the future.

Baptismal day is exciting, as we borrow a small pool from a local church and baptise by immersion.



Pam with Garry, another volunteer, on baptismal day. The portable pool is in the background.

I run some other courses at the prison as well and I often say I wish I had known about this ministry 40 years ago, the harvest is so plentiful and the workers few! I say to anyone praying about what God is calling them to next, contact the Prison Fellowship and see how you can be involved in what they are doing in a prison near you.

Pam Bryan has served with BMS in DR Congo (Zaire) training Baptist ministers. She is also a Baptist minister and spent 13 years as Community Minister at Purley Baptist Church before returning to her home town of Leicester to retire.

Find out more about the Prison Fellowship on their website: prisonfellowship.org.uk



A baptism in a JCB – A further reflection

In 2018 army chaplain Gary Birch conducted a baptism that went viral, with the short video clocking up more than one million views on social media. He explains what happened, and offers further reflections



***WE DO WHAT WE FEEL CALLED TO DO AT THAT TIME AND PLACE,
AND LEAVE THEM IN GOD'S HANDS.***

It was 2018 on exercise in Canada when three young service personnel approached a colleague and me about baptism. We'd been holding short prayer and communion services during the month-long exercise and they had been coming to most of them, as well as chatting about their faith and beliefs during those weeks.

Having been in Baptist church ministry for 12 years before entering Army chaplaincy full time, my immediate instinct was to run a 10-week course and schedule an Easter Sunday service with all their friends and family in attendance... but of course that wasn't practical or remotely possible. If my time as a chaplain has taught me anything, it is to be flexible and realistic

about supporting people's spirituality, and not to hold on too closely to traditions and ways of doing things that in all honesty aren't even necessarily biblical.

So in all good conscience, with some of their friends and slightly confused comrades watching, a video rolling to be able to share with family back home (and a million others on social media as it turned out), we baptised them in the bucket of a JCB because that's what we had at the time.

Where they are now, I don't know, and that's another distinct difference in chaplaincy to church ministry – most of the time we can't follow up with a discipleship course because we and they move around so much.

Sometimes we have the blessing of bumping into people we've introduced to Jesus, baptised, confirmed, married etc, and even occasionally stay in touch with some of them, but lots of the time we do what we feel called to do at that time and place, and leave them in God's hands.

My colleagues and I continue to baptise service personnel in rivers, oceans or wherever we can find water. There is a spiritual hunger in many of our troops that we as military chaplains are privileged to help them explore.

**Gary Birch is a chaplain
stationed at Jellalabad
Barracks, Tidworth, Wiltshire**



Preparing YOUNG PEOPLE For the church meeting

Our story from Wokingham Baptist Church, by Clare Hooper

When someone is baptised, they're baptised into the church. As a Baptist, one expression of that membership is participation in the church meeting. At Wokingham it was never in question that, once baptised, a young person would become a member and discern the mind of Christ along others in the church meeting.

Yet I was aware our church meetings at that time were very adult shaped. For instance, we used business language, words and phrases they weren't familiar with. Empowerment is a key value in youth work, so to put a young person into a space where they'd be disempowered would not be fair or right. We wanted to at least give them a chance to have their voice heard.

Empowering them was a step-by-step process. We introduced having a meal together before a meeting. Here we would just look at the church agenda, making sure it was understood.

We changed the layout of the room for meeting, from rows to round tables, each with some food to create a more informal tone. We helped them sit together, because that gives a sense of safety.

We introduced more creative facilitation, and included someone actually named as a facilitator. There's quite an art to facilitation, to be able to hear what's being said and draw out the conversation, enabling all of the voices around the table to be fed back fairly. People have a right to have their voice heard.

It was very important how we held that space. It wasn't about leading them to a particular answer, but ensuring their voices were heard. It's their discernment that enriches us.

There are young people who really want to participate in the full life of the church*, in the decision making, in the pastoral care, in the mission and ministry of the church. They don't want to just attend, they want to belong. Making our church meetings places where they are genuinely empowered is one way of making that happen.



Clare Hooper is Regional Minister Co Team Leader with the Southern Counties Baptist Association, representing it on the national Children, Youth and Families (CYF) Round Table, and supports the Association's CYF workers/ministers

* 'Young people want to be taken seriously and included in decisions, lead events and services, and see existing structures accommodating and empowering them', CYM (the Institute for Children, Youth and Mission), *Taking the Pulse of Ministry Amongst Children, Youth and Families* research, October 2024



Still MAKING A SPLASH

The baptism preparation booklet has been the best-selling item on the Baptists Together online shop over the last decade. Author Nick Lear shares the thinking behind it

Despite the title of the Baptists Together book *Making a Splash*, believers' baptism is so much more than getting wet. It's even more than simply making a public declaration of faith in Jesus – you can do that without getting wet!

Something spiritually significant happens as we are immersed not only in water but into the community of faith. It's as if the booming voice from Jesus' baptism echoes through the ages at our baptism: "This is my son/daughter, whom I love. I am well-pleased with them." There is a blessing and affirmation that we are children of God and part of the forever family. That's why it's such an important distinctive for Baptist Christians.

I was baptised as a believer aged 13 in 1981. I attended 'preparation classes' and was given a book to help me understand what I was doing but it wasn't aimed at someone my age. I wondered if there ought to be, and that thought lodged in the back of my mind. Until... in 2006 I was working at Baptist House as a Mission Adviser: supporting churches working with children, young people, young adults, and families. I felt I was ideally placed to create a resource for young people preparing for Believers' baptism.

I shared my idea with others in the team and was commissioned to write a guide for baptism for young people. I wanted a slightly silly title so decided to call it 'Making a Splash'. I contacted several youth specialists I knew from my job and they kindly acted as a

sounding board for me as well as contributing to the resource. (Thank you again Helen Bellamy, Claire Earl, Andy Levett, and Gary Bott).

My idea for *Making a Splash* was to explore the promises that people make when they are



baptised. After all, you ought to know what you're agreeing to if it's to mean anything. The baptism questions cover so much of what Christians believe that I felt they would provide the framework for the initial part of resource that explores what we believe. I also wanted to have some practical sections about what to wear, about what to say in your testimony, and I felt it was important we also had a section on Church Membership, since baptism is also about belonging.

YouTube wasn't really a thing back then but I wanted to have a video of someone being baptised included in the resource somehow. Including a CD would have been too expensive so I came up with the idea of a 'flickbook' – having a sequence of photos taken from someone being baptised in the bottom corner of the pages so that if you flick through you can see someone being immersed in the pool and raised back up again. It works surprisingly well (and if you reverse it you can dry the person off!)

I also wanted it to have some levity – after all being baptised is a happy event. We approached Dave Walker (of cartoonchurch.com) and sent him the text of the book. He came up with some funny cartoons that reflected the content brilliantly.

I was really pleased with the final version and hoped it would be useful to churches. I was thrilled when I discovered that the books were flying off the 'shelves' of the Baptist Union online bookshop. It became the bestselling book. And, to my surprise, I got feedback to say that churches were not just using it for young people, but for all ages.

If I was starting to write the resource today I wonder if it would be a book at all? Would it simply be a website with videos embedded in it? Would there be much text at all, or would it be more of a podcast / vlog? It could be any or all of those things, but it feels to me that there is something significant about it being a book. You can give a book to someone and it's a tangible gift, where sending someone to a website is not as special.

Eventually Baptists Together ran out of copies and, rather than another print run of the original version, I was approached by the team at Baptist House to ask if I would be willing to update it. This would be a second edition that would be 'a guide for baptism' for all ages, not just young people. The structure remained the same, although I refreshed the content. We kept the flickbook baptism and the cartoons, but it was made to look a little more conventional.

Making a Splash was republished in June 2015 and continues to sell well (so I'm told). It's immensely encouraging to think how many thousands of people have been prepared for their baptisms using that little

book! But what gives me most joy is that I have been able to use it preparing people to be baptised in churches where I have ministered, including my eldest daughter and I pray that it remains a spiritual landmark in the lives of all who are baptised.

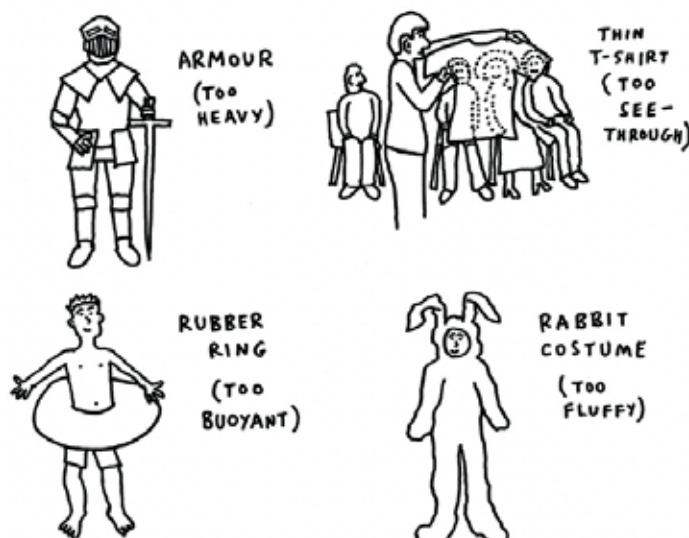


Nick Lear is the minister of Mutley Baptist Church in Plymouth

4869 - The number of copies of *Making a Splash* bought from the Baptists Together online shop since the shop's launch in 2013

Making a Splash has been the shop's most bought item every year since 2013
baptist.org.uk/shop

WHAT NOT TO WEAR FOR YOUR BAPTISM





sharing my Faith

How would you respond if a non-church member asks about baptism?

Together Magazine put some commonly asked questions to Seidel Abel Boanerges, whose varied role at Spurgeon's College involves teaching apologetics.

Tell me about baptism – how important is it?

Baptism is a powerful, public declaration of one's faith in Jesus Christ. It does not save you—only faith in Jesus does that—but it shows the world that you belong to him. It is an outward sign of an inward transformation.

Think of it like a wedding ring: the ring does not make you married, but it is an outward sign of your commitment. Baptism symbolises dying to your old life and rising to a new life with Christ. It is also an act of obedience since Jesus himself was baptised and told his followers to do the same.

Can I be a Christian and not be baptised?

Baptism does not make you a Christian—faith in Jesus does! However, Jesus told his followers to be baptised as a step of obedience (Matthew 28:19). It is a way of saying, "I belong to Jesus!"

Imagine receiving the greatest gift ever but never telling anyone about it. Baptism is a joyful, public way to show what God has done in your life. While it is not required for salvation, it is an important step in your faith journey. If you believe in Jesus, baptism is a beautiful way to follow him.

I'm from a different tradition. Can I be baptised?

Absolutely! If you have come to faith in Jesus Christ and want to be baptised the way the Bible describes—by full immersion in water as a public profession of faith—you are welcome. Baptism is not about a particular church

tradition; it is about your relationship with Jesus.

If you were baptised as a baby, but want to make your own decision now, we would love to walk with you through that. What matters most is that you understand and embrace your faith personally. If you have questions, we are happy to talk and help you in your faith journey.

Why do you have that hole in the floor?

That 'hole' is our baptistry! It is where we baptise people by full immersion in water—just like Jesus was baptised. Baptists believe baptism should be done the way it was in the Bible: fully under the water, symbolising death to sin and resurrection to new life in Christ. It is a powerful picture of what happens when someone gives their life to Jesus.

The baptistry lets us do that right in our church. It is a place of joy and celebration where people publicly declare their faith. Every time someone gets baptised, it is a reminder of God's amazing grace!

Is there anything special about the water?

Nope! It is just regular water—nothing mystical or magical. The power of baptism is not in the water itself but in what it represents. The water is a symbol of being washed clean by Jesus.

When you go under, it is like leaving your old life behind; when you come up, it represents your new life in Christ. What makes baptism special is not the water but your decision to follow Jesus and publicly show your faith. It is a simple act with a profound meaning—one that transforms lives, not because of the water, but because of Jesus!

Is baptism just a symbol, or is something else going on?

Baptism is more than just a symbol—it is a sacred moment where we encounter the triune God. As we step into the water in faith, God meets us with his transforming grace.

Our relationship with God begins before baptism, but in this sacred moment, it deepens in a unique and a profound way. Just as a wedding seals a couple's commitment, baptism marks a profound step in our faith journey. Baptism does not save us—Jesus does—but through it, we encounter the Holy Spirit, who strengthens us and affirms our new life in Christ.

I'm quite shy – can I be baptised by myself?

It is completely okay to feel shy, but baptism is meant to be a public declaration of faith. Think of it like graduation—you would not walk across the stage alone in an empty room because the moment is meant to be celebrated. While baptism is public, it does not have to be overwhelming.

Some people prefer a smaller setting with just a few loved ones; at least one other believer should witness it. We can make it as simple and comfortable as possible for you. You won't be alone—we will walk with you every step of the way!



Seidel Abel Boanerges is the Dean of Ministerial Formation at Spurgeon's College and the Moderator of Baptist Union Council

Seidel has authored this year's Whitley Lecture, entitled: *Holistic Apologetics: Re-Imagining Apologetics for the 21st Century*

For more see page 40, and baptist.org.uk/whitley25

The importance of Christian camps and festivals has been a recurring theme of young people's baptisms as reported to *The Baptist Times* News Round-up

Meghan, Max, Dan, Sophie and Ellie highlight factors that led to their baptisms in 2024

"I built friendships with other Christians my age across the country"

"One major factor that led to my baptism was attending Christian summer camps throughout my teenage years, specifically Ka'zoo and Christians in Sport," says Meghan. "These gave me the opportunity to explore what being a Christian meant and an open space to ask questions and build friendships with other Christians my age across the country."

"Another major factor would be being brought up in a Christian

household and attending a church together - this meant I had the support and encouragement from my parents to support me in growing my faith, and a wider church family who had a big impact on me through events such as youth bible studies on a Sunday evening.

"And Big Church Festival (formerly Big Church Day Out) was an amazing festival that blew me away when I was worshipping with 25,000+ people who all believed in the same incredible God I do.

"Christians in Sport is another stand out for me as it has helped me not to just be a Christian at church on Sundays, but on the netball court too; helping me to live out my faith, to see my sport as an act of worship and an opportunity to share the gospel."

"It helped me find my huge passion for the Lord"

"I felt called to being baptised after accepting Christ into my life and thinking how I could make a public declaration of my faith," says Max.

"Some key factors that encouraged me to find this calling are, attending Tent Revival - a Christian event which really helped me find my huge passion for the Lord. Spiritual mentors also guided me towards a deeper understanding of the Lord and what it truly means to be baptised."

"After being baptised I then went to Satellites. This helped me gain more knowledge about the gifts of the Spirit, where I actually encountered one in prophesy. I had a vision during worship about me going out and evangelising with the good news of Jesus Christ."

"I was able to worship with 30,000 other Christians!"

"Growing up in a Christian home it was always on me that I would get baptised at some point," says Dan. "I wanted to, but I didn't quite understand just how much Jesus had done for me. It was around March 2024 where everything started to click.

"A big factor that helped was worship. I've always had an interest in music, and going to events like Big Church Festival

YOUTH BAPTISM &



was so powerful: it helped me find music of all genres to shape how I lived my life, for the Lord and not for the world.

"I've been to Big Church Festival for the last two years. I not only found new music to worship on my own but was able to worship with 30,000 other Christians!

"I have also been to Christians in Sport camp every year for the last four years. It introduced me to being able to do two of my favourite things; worshipping Jesus and playing sport, at the same time."

"They gave me a chance to see that God is at work in our world"

"I decided to get baptised because I felt ready to make a public declaration of faith to my church, friends and family," says Sophie.

"Lots of wonderful people, books and Bible studies helped me reach this decision. I started going to a Bible study with lots of other young Christians my age who also had big questions about faith. Getting the opportunity to look really in depth at God's word was great because it helped with these difficult questions, and helped me get to know more of

God's character and his will for our lives.

"Going on Christian camps also helped a lot with my faith. They gave me a chance to see that God is at work in our world, and experience the Holy Spirit in powerful and exciting ways. It was also great to see lots of other young people completely on fire for Jesus."

"Going to these festivals has changed how I see God, the Bible... and everything"

"I grew up in a Christian family, but the main decision in getting baptised came through going to Christian festivals," says Ellie. "I went to New Day at the start of the summer. New Day is a really massive Christian youth event that takes place in Norfolk. It was inspiring to see so many people my age who felt the same way I did. There are some Christians in my school, but never on that kind of scale.

"I then went to Wildfires, smaller but also amazing. When I came back I felt different. Going to these festivals has changed how I see God, the Bible and everything.

And I felt like God was telling me to get baptised.

"I was baptised in December, and since then I've joined a Bible study at my school, which is great. It's with people who are passionate about their faith. I don't think I would have been baptised if I hadn't gone on a Christian camp."

Meghan, Max, Dan were baptised at Ampthill Baptist Church in Bedfordshire

Ellie and Sophie were baptised at Haddon Hall Baptist Church in Bermondsey, London



YOUNG PEOPLE FESTIVALS



PRAYERS

A PRAYER FOR THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN BAPTISED

By Lynn Green

You Lord are the God of hope
– we worship you.

You Lord, are the God of love
– we delight in you.

You Lord, are the Prince of Peace
– we praise your name.

You Lord, are our rock and
salvation – we rejoice in you.

Lord, we thank and praise you for
all those who have been baptised
as believers in this past year.

Thank you for all the ways that
you are graciously touching and
changing lives through the work
of your Holy Spirit and for the
celebration and encouragement
this brings.

We pray that each one will grow
as a disciple, deeply rooted in
love and exhibiting the fruits of
the Spirit in the whole of life.

We pray too that the seeds
sown in people's hearts through
baptismal services would flourish
and bring to birth new followers
of your Son Jesus Christ.

Lord, we pray that, by your grace,
every church in our Union would
be able to open their baptistry
and experience the joy of
believers baptism in this coming
year.

Where there have been many
baptisms recently, we pray for
more, Lord.

Where there have been few or
none we pray that a fresh and
gentle move of your Holy Spirit
will surprise us.

Give us all a fresh anointing to be
witnesses for you in the places
that you have put us – through
steadfast prayer, through our
Christlike words and actions and
through our invitations to 'come
and see'.

Lord, help us to experience and
share the joy of our salvation.

Holy Spirit, by grace draw people
to Jesus.

Heavenly Father, may many,
many people discover their true
home in you.

For you honour and glory, we
pray.

AMEN

BLESSING from *Prayers for all
Seasons: Book 2*
by Nick Fawcett

May the word of God guide your
footsteps,
the power of God equip you for
service,
the grace of God constantly
renew you and the love of God
surround you always

May your vision be clear,
your commitment strong,
and your faith constant.

May peace flood your soul and
light shine from your heart.

May Christ be your constant
companion on the path of
discipleship, until your journey is
over and you meet with God face
to face, secure in the joy of his
everlasting kingdom.

The Lord bless and keep you,
now and for evermore.

AMEN

PRAYERS FOR BAPTISTS TOGETHER IN THIS SEASON AND WITH THE STORY OF BAPTISM IN OUR MINDS.

These can be used corporately
or individually as we rejoice
with those who have been
baptised, with those baptising
and as we pray for those who
are still hoping and expecting
to baptise. (Bold words said
together)

We thank God for all who are
expressing faith in the Lord Jesus
Christ and are experiencing God's
love in new and deeper ways.

*Pause to pray for someone known
to you*

Lord, we give you thanks
Lord, we give you thanks

We thank the Lord Jesus Christ
and give him the glory for the
immeasurable greatness of his
power promised to us.

*Pause to think about the places
where we live and the places to
which we have been called and
give them afresh to God.*

Lord, we give you thanks
Lord, we give you thanks

We thank God for the Spirit of
wisdom given to us and pray for
a further outpouring of insight
that all may know the hope to
which he has called us.

May we continue to share the
incredible love God has for all,
that all may know how high and
deep, how long and wide God's
love is for us.

*Pause to reflect on God's love for
us and for those around us*

Lord, we give you thanks
Lord, we give you thanks

We pray, for those for whom your
blessings seem far off and feel
discouraged on their journey

pause

We pray, for those for whom the
storms rage

pause

We pray, for those for whom love,
hope and joy seem distant

pause

We pray, for those who believe
they are not seen or heard or
loved

pause

Lord, we pray...
**for your Spirit that encourages
and walks with us to be present
with the people and places we
have named before you.**

**Lord, we pray that all would
know the riches of your
mercy, your great love and the
enormity of the grace you have
shown us in Jesus Christ.
To him be the glory.**

AMEN

PRAYERS WRITTEN BY THOSE WHO HAVE RECENTLY BEEN BAPTISED

A PRAYER FOR CHURCHES WANTING TO SEE MORE PEOPLE BAPTISED

by Emma

Heavenly Father,
we thank you for the gift of life,
we thank you for the access to
which you have granted us to be
in relationship with you.

Lord, we come before you today
in request to ask you to equip us
with what is necessary to further
expand your Kingdom.

Use us as vessels to shine your
light upon others and draw them
closer to you.

Bring to us, and lead us to, those
who desire to know you and
those who don't know you.

Guide us in helping others
navigate taking that next step of
baptism with you.

Thank you in advance for
entrusting us to help nurture
your children.

Let your will be done.
In the name of Jesus we pray,

AMEN

PRAYING FOR THOSE CHOOSING BAPTISM

By Claudia

Dear Lord
I pray for everyone who is
choosing baptism this year.

I pray that they will be able to
boldly declare their choice to
follow the Lord.

I pray that their testimony will
spread the love of God far and
wide.

That it will plant seeds of God's
love that will flower in the years
to come.

AMEN

*Nick Fawcett, Prayers for
All Seasons: Book 2 - is a
comprehensive resource for
public worship written in
contemporary language, and
published by Kevin Mayhew*

**Emma and Claudia belong to
Baptist churches**

**For more prayers on baptism,
see the baptism section
in *Gathering for Worship*
- published in 2005, and
available in hardback or
Ebook from Canterbury Press:
[canterburypress.hymnsam.
co.uk](http://canterburypress.hymnsam.co.uk)**

**Baptist minister and spoken
word poet Mike Sherburn
has created new pieces on
baptism to go alongside this
edition. Access them here:
baptist.org.uk/baptismword**



RESOURCES



Slow wisdom - Baptist discernment at the Church Meeting

An offering of qualitative research to our denomination by Baptist minister Ruth Moriarty, which shows how Baptists can discern together well and identifies positive opportunities change at the Church Meeting. *Slow Wisdom* is both a book, and a free five-session video course to help Baptists engage with the topic.

baptist.org.uk/slowwisdom

Radical Roots

A series of films and accompanying course from the Baptist Historical Society and Church from Scratch telling the stories of five Baptist figures from the past.

Discover Baptist distinctives and examine themes of continuity and change in our history.

Six sessions, each including a dramatic video featuring a character from Baptist history, accompanying questions and activities.

www.radicalroots.uk



Whitley Lecture 2025

Holistic Apologetics: Re-Imagining Apologetics for the 21st Century, by Seidel Abel Boanerges

A lecture (also available as a book) arguing that contemporary apologetics must move beyond the intellectual side of apologetics, and instead include and actively demonstrate the value of:

- Spiritual apologetics (healing, miracles and prophecy)
- Artistic apologetics (literature, painting, drama and film)
- Action-oriented apologetics (fighting injustice, solidarity, compassion) in our contemporary practice of apologetics.

Access the book and lecture dates here (Online lecture Monday 13 October)

baptist.org.uk/whitley25

Doing Church Differently

A new video-based resource designed to help Baptist churches reflect on their mission and ministry through the lens of other churches.

It highlights the stories and reflections of three churches and a chaplain - it is hoped there will be something that speaks to your context.

scba.org.uk/differently



Visions of Colour



A resource designed for Baptist ministers and Baptist ministers in training to develop an awareness of, sensitivity to, and action towards issues of racial, ethnic and cultural discrimination in Baptist churches in Britain.

baptist.org.uk/visionsofcolour

DELVING DEEPER INTO BAPTISM

Want to explore more about baptism?

Some of the books highlighted in Andy Goodliff's article on page 9

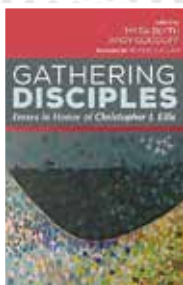
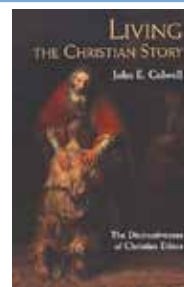


Baptism in the New Testament
by George Beasley-Murray (1962)

Prominent Baptist scholar George Beasley-Murray presented a critical defence of the doctrine of believers' baptism on the basis of the New Testament evidence.

Living the Christian Story
by John Colwell (2001)

Aims to consider and set out a theological basis for Christian ethics in today's world. Includes a section on baptism as indwelling Christ's story.

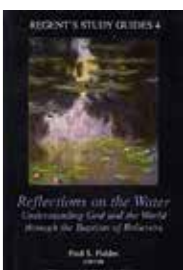
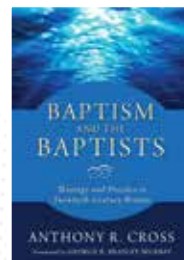


Gathering Disciples - Essays in Honour of Christopher Ellis (2017)
See essay: 'The Water Buries Like a Tomb' by Sally Nelson

Fourteen essays, each beginning with one of Chris's hymns, which address one or more of the themes touched on by the song. Explores our Baptist way of being church.

Baptism and the Baptists: Theology and Practice in the Twentieth Century, by Anthony R Cross (2000)

A definitive work which examines the theology and practice of believers' baptism among 20th century Baptists. Emphasises the sacramental understanding of baptism.



Reflections on the water: Understanding God and the world through the baptism of believers (Regent's study guides, 1996), edited by Paul Fiddes

See essays by:

Paul Fiddes, 'Baptism and Creation'

Chris Ellis, 'Baptism and the Sacramental Freedom of God'

Brian Haymes, 'Baptism as a Political Act'

Hazel Sherman, 'Baptized – in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit'



Baptist Union Council: March 2025

Discussions about the future of ministerial and leadership formation, how to effectively enable the Baptist voices in the public square, and the return of public resolutions to the Baptist Assembly all took place at the latest gathering of Baptist Union Council.

Members of Council also voted to adopt a new timeline for the Financial Model Review (FMR).

Committing to the formation of ministers and leaders

Why so few people are coming forward for training for accredited Baptist ministry – and possible ways forward for how this might be addressed – was explored by Council. There is a desire to see a culture of lifelong learning for ministers and leaders across Baptists Together and a Baptist-specific 'formation ecosystem' is being explored.

Baptist voices in the public square

The challenging realities in our world can be overwhelming. There are many current issues impacting the most vulnerable people in both our communities and the wider world. What as UK Baptists could we, and should we, be saying? And what role does Baptist Union Council have in this? That was the premise of a session 'Baptist voices in the public square - a cry or a whimper?', led by Public Issues Enabler Steve Tinning.

Assembly resolutions

Council members were asked to reflect on the role of resolutions and national discernment at Assembly.

The discussion came about because a resolution has been

received from Mission Forum to Assembly 2025, as part of Assembly's focus on mission, with a view to articulating a shared understanding of mission across Baptists Together.

However, in recent years resolutions at Assembly have slipped into disuse, with the last one being in 2011. Council members expressed a desire to have conversations and hear the concerns of local churches.

Assembly is at the start of a three year mission cycle. Members voted to present the mission resolution for reflection at Assembly 2025 and for decision at Assembly 2027.

New churches, closures and more

Five churches which have joined our Union were welcomed and prayed for, while members were also informed of four church closures, one new Local Ecumenical Partnership, four churches ceasing membership of BUGB, and four amalgamations.

The five new member churches are:

- Ocean Church (SCBA)
- Windrush Church (SCBA)
- Airport Revival Baptist Church (LB)
- Rivers of Life Community Church (SEBA)
- The Ark Church (YBA)



The closed churches are:

- Porton Baptist Church (SCBA)
- Glebe Farm Baptist Church (HEBA)
- Fenton Baptist Church (HEBA)
- Hope Baptist Church, Hebden Bridge (YBA)

For more details on all these items and the discussions that took place, visit baptist.org.uk/march25

UK Baptist churches invited to be part of global mission initiative from the Baptist World Alliance

UK Baptist churches are invited to join a global effort that seeks 'unprecedented collaboration in God's global mission' to mark the 2000th anniversary of the Church.

The Acts 2 Movement is an initiative of the Baptist World Alliance in anticipation of the anniversary of the birth of the Church in 2033.

The aim is to 'mobilize the whole of the Baptist family in prayerful pursuit of a global Pentecost, that in the Holy Spirit, overflows in church renewal and holistic Gospel witness in every language around the world'.

At the core of the initiative are five paths, each drawn from Acts 2. Each path has a particular goal to which Baptists are encouraged to contribute.

The paths are:

- Witness path - which is drawn from Acts 2:41 'Those who accepted his message were baptised'
Goal: 450 million shared testimonies
- Bible path - Acts 2:42 'devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching'
Goal: 1159 languages engaged through prayer and Bible translation support
- Care path - Acts 2: 44-45 'give to anyone who had need'
Goal: 1 billion intentional acts of service
- Neighbour path - Acts 2:46 'they... ate together with glad and sincere hearts'
Goal: 500,000 neighbourhood lay chaplains, focusing on praying for and serving neighbours

- Freedom and Justice path - Acts 2:47 'the favour of all people'
Goal: 1 million signatures on the covenant of religious freedom

For more, visit:
baptistworld.org/acts2



The Acts 2 movement is supported by **Everyone Everywhere**, the Baptist collaboration that seeks to equip Baptists to share Jesus fully.

Simon Goddard, part of the *Everyone Everywhere* steering group, said: "For the *Everyone Everywhere* initiative, this Witness Path perfectly aligns with our vision. Sharing our stories is essential for church planting and evangelism, as personal testimonies are often the most powerful way to communicate the Gospel to those who may not yet know Christ.

"This emphasis on witnessing encourages UK churches to cultivate a deeper, more intentional approach to evangelism - one that empowers

individuals to speak boldly about the impact of faith in their lives.

"While the Witness Path remains at the heart of the *Everyone Everywhere* initiative, the other pathways are vital too.

"Together, these pathways create a holistic approach to mission, one that empowers churches to not only witness through words but also through deeds, service, and prayer.

"UK churches can be encouraged by knowing that their church planting and evangelism efforts are part of a global initiative.

"This is a moment for us to join our Baptist brothers and sisters around the world in sharing the Gospel, building relationships, and reaching out with love, service, and prayer."

Missional strategist Alan Hirsch and Dot Tyler, National Director of 24-7 Prayer GB, will be part of the next *Everyone Everywhere* national event - a day of prayer and strategic conversation on Friday 23 May at Kings Cross Baptist Church.

The event is designed for those who long to see:

- More people finding fullness of life in Jesus
- More believers speaking openly about their faith
- More expressions of Christian community emerging

For more visit:
baptist.org.uk/ee23may

BAPTISMS

BAPTISTS

Each month the *Baptist Times News Round-up* email shares stories of recent baptisms. This is both to celebrate how God is working among us, and encourage prayer for those newly baptised. Here is a snapshot of the messages and stories we have received in 2024-5:

I was delighted to baptise six people at **Greenfield Church**, Urmston, Manchester, on Sunday, 17 November: the first baptisms we've had at Greenfield in more or less 20 years! Those being baptised were: Bethany, Isabella, Oliver, Paula, Mike and Margaret - they ranged in age from 12 to 81.

It was an especially proud moment for me, as Bethany is my youngest daughter, so baptising her was a particular privilege.

The whole service was very special: the church was filled with regulars and visitors who'd come to support the six people being baptised; and all six spoke powerfully and often movingly of the different ways Jesus has changed their lives and brought them to the baptismal pool. We thank God for the work he's done and is still doing in their lives and in the life of this church.

Stephen Smith, minister

At **Great Missenden Baptist Church** on 19 May, Laura was baptised in our church with approximately 60 people present, a mixture of our faithful congregation, her family, friends, and work colleagues, the majority of whom either have no faith or it has lapsed. Baptisms are always a time for rejoicing, but this was extra special as this was the first baptism undertaken by our minister in training, Nicki. A wonderful, wonderful day for everyone.

Nicola Pitt, minister in training

At **Weymouth Baptist Church**, we have baptised 11 people in the last few months, all sharing in their testimonies how their lives have been transformed by their belief in Jesus as their Lord and saviour. Some have renounced former religions, others were atheist, but the saving grace of Jesus has brought new life and new hope.

Liz Tripp, secretary

On 21 April 2024 we had the joy of baptising Mac and David at **Woodmansterne Baptist Church**, Banstead, Surrey. It had been a while since we held a baptismal service.

It was wonderful to hear how God has worked in their lives bringing them to this point. We welcomed a number of family and friends who joined us for the service.

Doreen Rowland, secretary

On Saturday 8 March, we were delighted to baptise six of our church family at **Berwick Baptist Church** - one new believer, and five who have been Christians for many years but each had decided the time was right for them to go through the waters of baptism. We were very pleased to welcome the families and friends of those being baptised to share in the special event. The service was a wonderful, happy, Spirit-filled celebration of Paul, Chris, Davy, Wayne, Ross and Jane's commitment to their Saviour. A truly special occasion.

Linda Blenkinsop, secretary

On Easter Sunday (31 March) at **Potters Bar Baptist Church** we used our new baptistry for the first time and four people were baptised. Each story was poignant and powerful and we welcomed many visitors to our service as well.

Adrian Wood, minister

It was with immense joy and lots of tears that Simon was baptised at **Earlsfield Baptist Church**, London on 5 May 2024. Simon shared his journey from addiction to recovery through AA and his faith in Jesus. His journey with Christ is just beginning!

Keith Parr, minister

A C R O S S TOGETHER

We were delighted to baptise three members of our congregation at **Eastwood Baptist Church**, Nottingham on Sunday, 30 June. As is often the case, each had their own unique journey leading to their decision to follow Christ. Some had experience of other denominations while another had none.

One came to faith recently through the personal recommendation from a member of a church in another town; the next person got to know him over more than a decade as a result of their child's involvement with our past youth work; while the other began their walk into faith by building on a relationship that began with a visit from one of our church members to a sheltered housing facility just a couple of years ago.

Their stories are a delightful encouragement to our community, and bring to five the number of baptisms we have seen since the end of the pandemic. Welcome Carolyn, Anya and Sally. God bless you all.
Martin Shaw, secretary

Recently we had the pleasure of baptising Angela, Victoria and Michael, who along with mum Ihuoma and dad Michael were welcomed into the membership of **Oldham Baptist Church**. A truly blessed morning was enjoyed by all.
Arthur Janes, minister

Millom Baptist Church was delighted to baptise Violet in December. Our plans were changed when she was admitted into hospital, but a simple baptism, with friends to hear her testimony, took place in her hospital bed. She has now died and is with the Lord she loved and trusted.
Rachel Street, minister

Muswell Hill Baptist Church, London witnessed a baptism on Sunday 24 September - Hamed, an Iranian who has found the Lord and rejoices in his new found faith.
Rosemary Pettman, secretary

It was a privilege and joy to witness the baptism of Malachi on Trinity Sunday (26 May) at **Norbury Baptist Church**, London. The church gathered together with his extended family for a very uplifting service, for which we give God praise.
Maggie Jones, secretary

City Road Baptist Church, Edgbaston, celebrated the baptism of three of our regular attendees on 5 May. A wonderful occasion.
Pearline Mills, secretary

If you would like to share news of a baptism in your church, please do so via: baptist.org.uk/btcontact

We have been so blessed to have had four baptisms in the space of four months at Old Colwyn Baptist Church, **Old Colwyn** (near Colwyn Bay) - and all young people who God has spoken directly to.

- **Amanda**: turned from JW teaching to come to our church and has really moved on with her faith journey.
- **Miles**: Spoken to directly by God, whilst living a life of drugs etc. He is on fire for the Lord
- **Ellie**: Miles' fiancée who, having seen the change in Miles, has come to accept Jesus into her life
- **Alex**: A friend of Miles' and who also was lost in the world. His life has turned around and he is a blessing to us all here at Old Colwyn.

Karen Scullard, secretary

I wish to inform you that on Sunday 23 February 2025 at **Ferring Baptist Church**, West Sussex, we are conducting five baptisms during our morning service. In each case the person has been a Christian for many years and was previously baptised as an infant in another church tradition. Each one now wishes to be baptised by full immersion as a believer!
Robin Brenchley, minister

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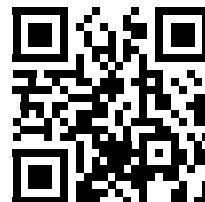
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