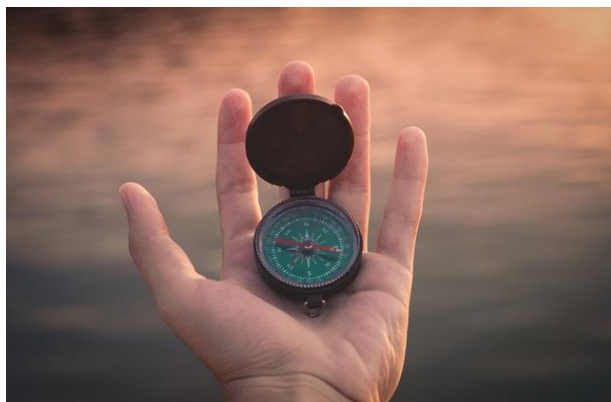




Empowering Missional Disciples



Why on earth join the West of England Baptist Network?

A brief leaflet providing answers to this vital question from both the local and regional perspectives:

How would our Church benefit?

How could we contribute?

The Baptist Union Declaration of Principle

The Basis of the Baptist Union is:

That our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and that each Church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and minister His laws.

That Christian Baptism is the immersion in water into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, 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.'

That it is the duty of every disciple to bear personal witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to take part in the evangelisation of the world.

Core Convictions

Our growing understanding of how the relationship between local churches and a regional network is worked out in practice is shaped around six Core Convictions:

Jesus...at the heart

Mission...as the priority

Church...as purposeful community

Relationship...as being crucial

Discipleship...as core activity

Organic structures...as most helpful

Jesus...at the heart

Is Jesus at the heart of both everything we seek to do and how we do it? It's challenging enough as an individual, but together ... it's complicated!

It's very easy to say something like this, but still become accustomed to the behaviour of individuals and practices of Christian communities and then accept them as 'just the way it is'.

"Jesus is Lord" is the oldest Christian declaration of faith, but also the most all-embracing and challenging. Baptist Christians began by gathering around this declaration and we want to re-calibrate our life together for today around the same understanding.

Our understanding of the Church is based upon the fact that Jesus is our authority – not a Minister, elders, webnet, or anyone else. "Seeking the mind of Christ" is how Baptists understand the heart of any local decision-making. It does not remove the necessity of leadership, but means we are all accountable to 'Christ who is the head'.

Any church can adopt its own statement of faith if it wishes, but as stated in the declaration of principle, each church has responsibility and liberty here.

Mission...as the priority

Mission needs to be the “organising priority” if we are to truly engage with our communities and the people within them.

Mission is not the only priority for the church today, but we in the UK are now living in a missionary context. Together, therefore, we need to ensure the church is appropriately positioned to make a difference.

If we organise everything around anything else, doing mission quickly becomes the last thing on the agenda. If we “think missionally”, however, it makes our worship, ministry, fellowship and discipleship all the more meaningful, relevant for today, and fruitful.

We recognize that most churches are a long way from this in practice and, therefore, far more of our time as a Regional Team is now invested in helping churches in this area.

We believe most Christians today are hungry to make a difference in the name of Jesus Christ but are frustrated about the impact churches are making beyond the church.

“Encouraging missionary disciples” is the Baptist Union’s strapline at present – webnet enables this to become more of a reality.

Church...as purposeful community

The New Testament idea behind the word “fellowship” was more like the idea of being partners together in a business – both being committed to a common purpose.

We want you to be part of a movement to make a difference within our region, rather than become another religious institution.

Sadly, many members of our churches do not have a real sense of purpose in belonging to their local church. We believe we should all be able to give a united voice to answer “why do we exist together?” God has put us together for a reason. Churches are finding a new lease of life as they discover more of the divine handprint upon their fellowship.

If we are to truly make a difference for God and His Kingdom throughout the West of England, it will only be to the extent our churches take responsibility for wherever and whatever God has called them to.

Growing healthy churches is at the heart of our sense of purpose as webnet.

Relationships...as being crucial

How do we remain accountable to our purposes?
How easily do we revert to the status quo? These are crucial local questions only you can answer.

Healthy churches are based on three facets of relationship:

- Healthy relationships with God
- Healthy relationships with one another
- Healthy relationships with those beyond the church walls

We also see the relationship between each local church and the regional association as crucial relationship. Whilst authority rests within each local church we are here to consult with and offer advice, so please do take the initiative if we can help you. The local church has always been the overwhelming strength of the Baptist movement. In order for this to remain true in our present context we need to ensure local means what it used to mean – churches accessible to local people.

webnet is essentially a network of relationships, which is nurturing a whole range of ministries for the blessing of all.

Discipleship...as core activity

Are people being helped to grow into the likeness of Jesus? Am I?

It is easy to agree with the idea of disciple-making being at the core of church life. However, this is often the elephant in the room. When all is said and done, there's a lot more said than done.

It is often said that we as individual Christians are likely to be the only Bible some people will ever read. Clearly, among today's generation, words such as "integrity", "authenticity" and "holiness" are crucial if we are to be identified as followers of Jesus Christ.

Leadership is crucial, but leaders must first and foremost be followers. How we support, encourage, and equip those in leadership among our churches has to be a vital challenge we must rise to.

Believer's baptism is about beginning to follow Jesus in the whole of life – Monday through to Saturday, as well as Sunday, distinctly Christian lives are those which make a difference.

Organic structures...as most helpful

How do we hear and respond to the call of Jesus?
How do we make decisions? How flexible are we?

Baptists originally broke the mould, but are now so easily restricted by it. We want to help you find structures which work, church meetings which open doors for gospel and kingdom opportunities, leadership teams which release and empower the whole church for ministry and mission.

There needs to be a far greater appreciation that one size does not fit all. We welcome and affirm all shapes and sizes. However, small churches should not need to pretend to be large ones. Small is where we start from, not what we need to assume. Neither should large become a refuge from our individual responsibility to the call of Christ.

Our Regional Ministers are here to empower and help all explore appropriate structures, which we hope will enable every church to pursue its potential in God.

Why these six Core Convictions?

Relationships

They blend together to produce Growing Healthy Churches.

Relationships with: God (discipleship), one another (purposeful community), and those beyond the church (mission), need to be part of the DNA of any growing healthy church. It is clearly crucial Jesus is at the heart of all we are about. How these relate together is important – hence the need for organic structures. Finally, the relationships which cultivate this are what enables an “apostolic environment” to propel the church out into the world.

Movement

They constitute what we believe correlates to the facets true of any movement – as opposed to something purely institutional.

Jesus says “go into all the world” – the missionary imperative is something we are called to respond to in every generation, but there is no denying the church in the UK has struggled with this, and consequently paid the price, over the last century.

When you read the Baptist Union's "Declaration of Principle" you'll soon realise:

Every individual Christian and every church can start a movement – we are called to multiply our impact in the name of Jesus. Webnet is seeking to be a catalyst for this to become the case for each church within the West of England.

We all accept some structures and formality are necessary in today's society, but do you want to be part of a movement, or something merely institutional?

What are the Benefits?

Jesus...at the heart

Being part of a larger mainline denominational network means identifying with a credible evangelical Christian movement.

Mission...as the priority

Our Regional Ministers are committed to helping every church in webnet realise its potential and participate in the mission of God. Home Mission provides grants which enable ministry and mission which are making a difference in webnet churches.

Church...as purposeful community

We can help you both discover and keep yourselves accountable to your purposes. Because the Association is made up of churches you too have an input into shaping future policy and patterns of relationship.

Relationships...as being crucial

Ministers and churches meet in small cluster groups for whatever purposes they discern to be appropriate. Encouragement and support for our mutual journey are crucial for us all.

Discipleship...as core activity

We want the desire to follow Jesus to be in every decision and relationship throughout the web of webnet. In that sense we hold one another accountable.

Organic structures...as most helpful

We'll help you find structures which work. We hope you'll find our structures useful for your purposes. Webnet directly, or indirectly via national resources provided through BUGB, can provide legal, financial, child protection, Trust, and building expertise, which takes the burden off some local people – we need your best energies to be invested in mission.



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