

CARRIERS OF GOD'S FUTURE

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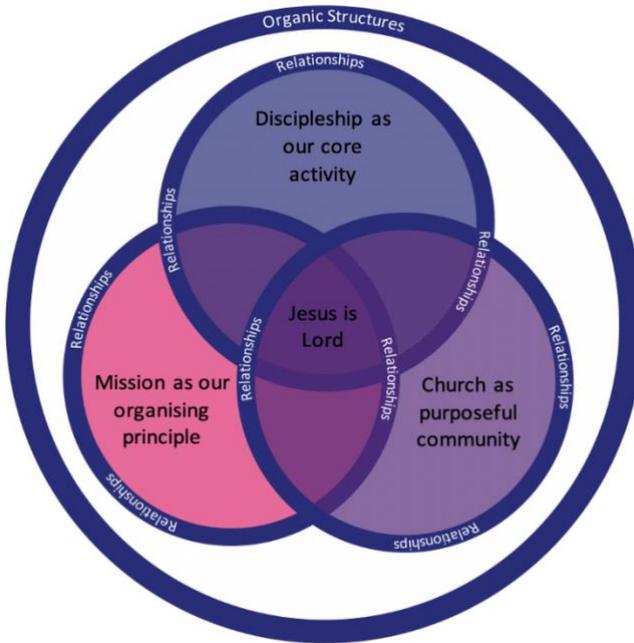
The Webnet Trustees development framework document, Carriers of God's Future: 2020-25, was prepared prior to the dawn of the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst this year has had a massive impact on everything, rather than change our thinking and planning significantly, it has served to highlight and accelerate the sense of urgent need for the UK Church to adapt to the missional era we are living in.

Together we make up the West of England Baptist Network: disciples, leaders, leadership teams, churches, missional communities, as well others who carry a regional responsibility. Together we are carriers of God's future.

Our Trustees and Regional staff developed this new strategic framework document to guide us for the next period (approximately a three-year cycle). This outline provides a flavour of our planning and our new framework document which we hope will provide a catalyst for our prayers together.

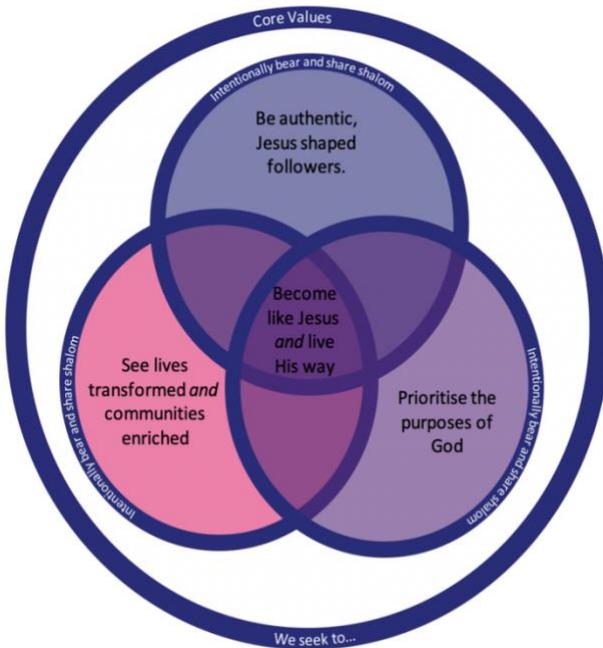
CORE CONVICTIONS:

Webnet aims to live out our core beliefs and values that enable us together to be the people of God with missional intension.



CORE VALUES:

Our Core Values will guide our regional strategy and practice, as well as holding us accountable to the whole of our network.



NETWORK OUTCOMES TOGETHER

To become reality, fine words (albeit convictions and values) require action. As Sunday preaching calls for a response in living Monday through Saturday and the word of God calls for faithful obedience, so strategic direction calls for implementation in practice.

We are now more self-consciously a 'network'. The new logo, however, is merely our language finding expression to our true way of being. Networks, however, are strongest when each component reflects the whole. As local churches are assessed on the basis of the individuals, so our regional network will be on the basis of our churches. We all have a part to play, as Carriers of God's Future.

It is the nature of our Baptist DNA and the evidence of our history, if nothing impacts locally, nothing is happening. As we live through this time of upheaval, we are seeking to bring greater alignment within our regional and national structures, as well as through each of local churches. As a regional team, we are looking to put even more of our time and energy connecting and facilitating the network, to nurture discipleship and embed our core convictions more deeply.

As local churches, we encourage one another to be distinctly Christian communities, who pray and encourage everyone we engage with to become drawn towards the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

As a regional team we seek to embody our convictions and values and call upon everyone across our network towards the same. Far from creating uniformity, we shall nurture confidence to proclaim and demonstrate the gospel within the diverse communities, which make up the West of England. We live in times, both exciting and challenging. We call everyone to

re-imagine their future, as 'carriers of the God's future', and put their hope in God.

We believe ... Jesus is Lord.

We seek to ... become like Jesus and live His way



We all seek to express our convictions and values, to encourage one another in proclaiming *and* demonstrating Jesus Christ is Lord.

Belonging within a network of churches who uphold Jesus Christ as Lord and the Bible as God's Word is becoming increasingly counter-cultural in our society. Today we need one another more than ever. We need the encouragement and strength of one another. We need to be open-eyed, as well as warm-hearted towards our whole Baptist family, regarding the future. As a Regional Team we share the conviction, deeply held among our churches, we are at our best when local churches are encouraged, equipped and enabled to pursue the mission of God where they are placed and any hope of becoming a missional movement in the 21st Century will only be as effective as local fruitfulness reveals. We shall continue to advocate for national and local Baptist structures serving our local churches.

We are carriers of the hope of God. Jesus Christ remains the hope of the world and we share the privilege of proclaiming and demonstrating his life in all its fulness.

We rejoice at the examples, across our network, where the proclamation of the gospel and demonstration of holistic mission is resulting in people finding Jesus Christ, who remains the 'way, the truth and the life'. Covid-19 has revealed the general 'hope-less-ness' and the deepest and most desperate needs of human beings are only met in Christ.

We want to encourage a deeper reliance upon our God and encourage more widespread prayer for the renewal of the church and the transformation of society.

We believe ... Discipleship is our core activity
We seek to ... Be authentic, Jesus shaped followers.



We desire everyone who considers themselves to belong to one of our churches in our network to pursue growth towards the likeness of Jesus Christ.

One of the lessons from Re-imagine is 'the leadership begets the church'. As we are, so they will be. Any church, which does not nurture growth towards the likeness of

Jesus, is defining its future.

The style of leadership is changing, as indeed are the cultural frameworks in which we live. The presumption of our forebears - it was sufficient to preach the truth, remain unconvincing for too many, beyond the influence of the Christian gospel, in our present missional and post-Christian context, unless supported by lives marked by Christ-like distinctiveness.

The world is being shaken and we believe God is in the shaking. The shift away from the institution of the church (along with every other institution in the western world) towards something more relational and 'move-mental', plays into our mindset as a Baptist people.

Becoming a missional people is merely an up-to-date expression of our Declaration Principle, which states: *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.*

Our Re-imagine process is encouraging more churches to re-activate this practice.

We believe ... Mission is our organising priority

We seek to ... See lives transformed *and* communities enriched



Becoming a missional people is merely an up-to-date expression of our Declaration Principle, which states: *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.*

We are living in a new missional era. At the same time the wider societal cultures are increasingly dismissive, ambivalent, or antagonistic towards expressions of the Church and Christianity. We need to urgently learn the lessons of persecuted and marginalised churches from around the globe. The numerical decline, which we are in danger of accepting as our normal, must not be allowed to vaccinate us against the growth of the gospel, apparent around the globe.

In our present missional and post-Christian context, our lives must be marked by Christ-like distinctives. Can we rely on a leadership, which simply tells people what to do and how to live? – facilitatory and empowering leadership will be increasingly essential if we are to re-equip the body of Christ.

In a generation where relationships are so significantly valued every member is of vital importance and shares the responsibility to be Christ's ambassadors.

Re-imagine has been helping a growing number of our churches through the transition from simply doing mission, towards becoming missional in everything we do.

We remain committed to helping as many of our churches as possible through the essential transitions to be fit for God's purposes in this generation.

We believe ... Church is a purposeful community
We seek to ... Prioritise the purposes of God



'Incarnation' is an important principle for missional engagement. This is both true for individual Christians, as well as churches, within our network.

We aim to encourage and support every church to be contextually relevant and able to share the Good News of the Kingdom faithfully and effectively.

We desire each of our churches to be signposts of the kingdom of God. As Regional Ministers we shall continue to make ourselves available to encourage each and every church to fully engage with the mission of God.

We shall continue to explore appropriate means of training to equip one another for the task more effectively.

We share the importance of encouraging 'continuing ministerial development', as well as the proposed development of a renewed covenant of the national accredited list, as Baptists Together. However, the primary relationship is between the local church and in 'association' with its regional network. We shall be seeking to advocate a renewed covenant between and across our churches.

We want to empower each and every one of our churches to nurture disciples who are intentional about making disciples. In a generation where relationships are so significantly valued

every member is of vital importance and shares the responsibility to be Christ's ambassadors.

We believe ... In cultivating an equipping and releasing environment.

We seek to ... Intentionally bear and share shalom



We commit to looking beyond ourselves for the sake of the world.

We want to empower each and every one of our churches to nurture disciples who are intentional about making disciples.

Over the medium-term future, we anticipate our Regional Ministry Team ... needing to become:

- More engaged with the formation and training of a new generation of missional leaders.
- More balanced in 'Ministry' terms, so more attention on the 'apostolic, prophetic and evangelistic' elements of ministry, without neglecting the 'pastoral and teaching' elements.
- More engaged with facilitating and encouraging churches and leaders through transition towards being missional communities appropriate for the mixed cultures we connect with.

In turn, we anticipate the need for a re-addressing of the balance of local Ministers to reflect the breadth of missional leadership seen in the NT.

We believe ... Organic systems best reflect our Baptist DNA.

We seek to ... Partner and network for the cause of the Kingdom of God.



The shift away from the institution of the church (along with every other institution in the western world) towards something more relational and 'move-mental', plays into our mindset as a Baptist people.

We anticipate signs of the kingdom being seen wherever and among whoever.

We belong to Jesus. We are called, first and foremost, to be followers and communities of Jesus Christ. Jesus is our Lord and our lives, churches and every aspect of our network needs to reflect and uphold him as our way, truth and life.

Over the medium-term future, we anticipate our 'Network' and 'networks' (small groups of churches collaborating together) needing to become:

- More facilitatory, releasing and outwardly empowering than our recent history.
- Less institutional in its 'feel', whilst paying appropriate attention to legal and institutional frameworks (e.g. property, trust and accountancy).
- Providing more support for local churches, more of whom may become disempowered by legislative requirements.
- More locally focused, more flexible, more fluid.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

We do not wish to be simply reacting to fashionable, or popular present trends, so wish to flag up some of the areas for consideration we shall need to work through:

REGIONAL MINISTERS:

Over the medium-term future, we anticipate Regional teams needing to become:

- More engaged with the formation and training of a new generation of missional leaders.
- More balanced in 'Ministry' terms, so more attention on the 'apostolic, prophetic and evangelistic' elements of ministry, without neglecting the 'pastoral and teaching' elements.
- More engaged with facilitating and encouraging churches and leaders through transition towards being missional communities appropriate for the mixed cultures we connect with.

NETWORKS:

Over the medium-term future, we anticipate our 'Network' needing to become:

- More facilitatory, releasing and outwardly empowering than our recent history.
- Less institutional in its 'feel', whilst paying appropriate attention to legal and institutional frameworks (e.g. property, trust and accountancy).

- Providing more support for local churches, more of whom may become disempowered by legislative requirements.
- More locally focused, more flexible, more fluid.

HM FUNDING:

Over the medium-term future, we anticipate HM funding:

- It is expected that the national Home Mission system will come under even greater financial pressures and there will be less finances available to support local missional engagement through the present system.
- We are committed to supporting our national network of Baptist churches and seeking to maintain and develop the central resource, but see a need for more emphasis to be placed on facilitating local mission through the regional networks.
- Currently the present Home Mission is a national 'system', which allocates resources to regional bodies, to support and empower local churches and missional communities. It is our view that it would be more appropriate to our Baptist DNA and more effective to reverse this understanding:
 - i. local churches give at 5% of general income, as at present, to support the regional and national frameworks, as well as mission grants elsewhere.
 - ii. The national resource (based at Didcot) focuses on providing national resources, either not available, or benefitting from economies of scale, such as, safeguarding, legal and accreditation frameworks. Plus facilitating and equipping regional teams to equip local leadership and churches.

This provides greater local accountability and helps create 'movement', rather than any sense of a central control.

- Emphasising regional ministries which equip and empower local.
- Emphasising more local mission funding, which remains accountable to its purpose.

SUSTAINABLE STRUCTURES:

Over the medium-term future, we anticipate our Webnet structures needing to become:

- Better aligned with our purposes in the missional era.
- More streamlined to reduce 'bureaucracy' where possible. (Legislative requirements continue to grow apace, and we are mindful these can easily become a drag on energy for regional, as well as local leaders).
- Specifically, we need to address the amount of time and energy required maintaining two overlapping structures (Webnet Trustees and Webtc).
- Better aligned with serving our greater purposes. For example, the Webnet Payroll company can contribute more significantly to our missional funding requirements.

CHURCHES:

Over the medium-term future, we anticipate our Webnet churches needing to become:

- Less reliant on having a full-time, stipendiary, Minister.

- Developing leadership, made up of healthy teams, as normal.
- More outward facing and intentional in terms of their mission.
- Deeper in terms of their discipleship.

OUTCOMES

Wouldn't it be great if, over the next season:



Ten of our weakest churches, who've struggled the most, discover their future as the people of God.



Ten of our churches develop to become recognisable 'resourcing churches', as hubs for developing leadership, making disciples and planting churches.



The significant majority of our churches re-imagining, not simply their future, but living out their present as God's special people in an increasingly 'strange land'.



The vast majority of our churches reflecting the ethnic mix of their local community and peoples of all nations, who dwell in the West of England, finding Jesus Christ as Lord.



Every one of us, as well as the organisations we hold some responsibility for, demonstrating care for our creation and exemplifying sustainability.