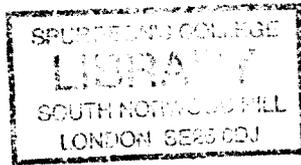


A WORD AND SPIRIT
MAINSTREAM
NETWORK



Magazine Issue 59. May 1997

**Issue Theme:
PATTERNS OF ASSOCIATING (1)**

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The Mainstream Executive in 1997 are :

Chair (North): Glen Marshall, 26 Belle Isle Avenue, Wakefield WF1 5JY
01924 382966

Chair (South): Rob Warner, Wimbledon Baptist Church, 30 Queens Road,
Wimbledon, London SW19 8LR 0181 947 1859

Secretary: Lynn Green, 3 Marks Road, Wokingham, Berks RG41 1NR
0118 962 9350

Treasurer & Conference Administrator: Derek Wick, 12 Barnard Road,
Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands B75 6AP 0121 378 3020

Magazine Editor: Michael Bochenski, The Baptist Manse, 18 Gurney Court Rd.,
St Albans, Herts AL1 4RL 01727 856537

Fax: 01727 765071 e-mail: Bochenski@msn.com

John Lewis - Gorsley, Herefordshire 01989 720312

Roger Sutton - Altrincham, Cheshire 0161 928 0372

Rob White - Poynton, Cheshire 01625 873039

Introduction



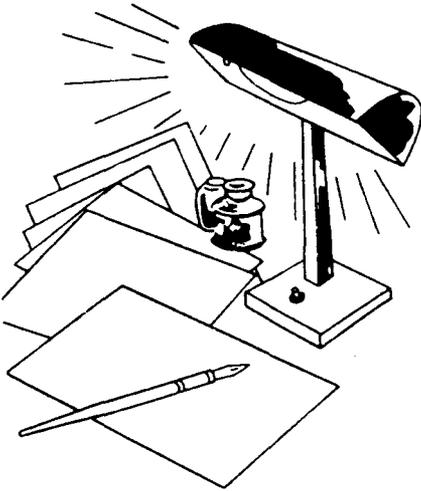
It is now well over three years since the Mainstream Executive organised a series of national consultations which grew into the Word and Spirit networks. The catalyst to these meetings was transparent: a longing for some new wine in Baptist associating. It was clear to us back in 1994 that our next challenge in Mainstream had to be the modelling of some new ways for Baptists to fellowship together. The experiences of associating many of us shared at that time from right across our Union were at times deeply disappointing ... although there were, mercifully, some brighter spots. It does not surprise us at all then to find the Union catching up with our analysis of its major weakness. Since those meetings, the need for new priorities in Association life has emerged clearly in the *Transforming Superintendency* report. This has also become the front runner for action after last Autumn's denominational consultation. Now an Associations and Associating Task Group has been formed by Council. It is being chaired by a former Chairperson of Mainstream, Nigel Wright. We wish him and the group well in their concentrated year of consultation, sifting and reporting. Our prayers will be very much with the group as it helps to shape our C21st patterns of associating.

Issue 59 of our magazine will, please God, be helpful to us all in this context. In it, Fred George reflects on the need for what he calls 'a genuine renewal and restoration of confidence in God, the Gospel, the Church and Ourselves'. Andy Bruce looks back critically on some 8 years trying to mobilise one of our larger Associations for mission. Craig Millward enters the debate on national leadership - fuelled by the Baptist Times recently - and draws on his experiences of associating in the process. David Hall shares some heartening news of good practice from Sussex and John Lewis punches his way through some creative new ideas for meaningful associating among us all. Lest we remain too Baptist and too British in viewing this important subject, Geoff Tyson reminds us of the value of international associating by recounting recent experiences of partnership with Poland. I draw on several experiences of creative ecumenical associating in my article and Davina Irwin-Clark writes for us on a new and interesting Women in Mission network which is emerging in the late 1990s. Our Regional news and update section completes the picture with two examples of what can be achieved both locally and regionally.

Issue 60 will continue the theme of associating with, it is hoped, a closer look at two of our larger Associations and at the views of the Alliance of Baptist Youth (ABY). Good associating

Michael Bochenski (Editor)

LETTER TO THE CHURCHES FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE BAPTIST UNION



One of my earliest recollections of hearing the gospel goes back to my early teens at Cinnamon Gardens Baptist Church in Sri Lanka. The preacher described the call to deny self, take up the cross, and follow Jesus, and explained that it means losing one's life in order to save it. I went home convinced that I was not prepared to take that risk. It was years later that I was guided to faith in Jesus, and found myself captivated by the extraordinary call of God to **take the risk**. My commitment to Christian discipleship through baptism was soon tested by the call to Christian ministry. The invitation to come to Spurgeon's College to train, involved me in taking the risk of leaving home and family. For someone who

had not travelled more than 60 miles from home and was very much loved and blessed by family and church, this was a big challenge. It seemed that the words, "Whoever loves his father or mother more than me is not fit to be my disciple" were addressed to me personally. After some thought and gentle persuasion, I took the risk, and so began the pilgrimage of faith in Christian ministry, which over 30 years has involved me in much risk taking. Hence my Presidential theme, **Take the Risk**.

My study and reflection on the Scriptures have taught me that God is a risk-taker, even if those risks are of a different order to the ones we take. The immense work of creation is entrusted to human beings. The majesty of God's image energises the genes of our humanity. The precious and powerful gift of the freedom to choose is divested in all persons. The covenant love of God is offered to His people, despite their rebellion and failure. Here began a love that was vulnerable in every way, and exposed to much risk. The God of all creation makes himself known to us uniquely in the person of Jesus Christ. He chose to be a servant, sharing our frailty, and entered the muddy stream of our humanity. Jesus, by word and action, challenged the structures and traditions of his day. He is seen engaged in the risky business of breaking down the barriers, of race, class, gender, age, power and wealth, that diminish and divide people. The risk-taking, servant Messiah eventually ends up on a cross, wounded, broken, bleeding, dying, so that all may live.

This Jesus, draws me inexorably to take risks in faith as he did. So much of the teaching of Jesus has this theme of abandoning the secure, safe and familiar, and launching out to take risks in faith. The endowment of believing Christians with Pentecostal power extends the idea of risk-taking to the global task of Christian mission. The gospel is entrusted to the church, which is called to be the instrument of the missionary God. Both the Nazareth manifesto (Luke 4) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28) embody the character of God, the Risk-Taker. The work of the Holy Spirit is most clearly evidenced when ordinary believers exercise extraordinary commitment to Jesus, and become God's risk-takers.

I am convinced that God is calling us to be in partnership with Him and share in the movement of his Spirit in new and sometimes scary ways. Christian discipleship will require our willingness to take the risk of faith again and again, because we have confidence in him. It is here that many of us stumble. Do we have confidence in the things that we believe and proclaim? I wonder about this at times. I have been reflecting on this whole subject of confidence, the lack of it, the need for it, and the object of confidence. Very many of us, as Christians, face a crisis at this point. We know what we believe, but when it comes to putting faith into practice, we tend to lose our nerve. How confident are we really? How willing are we to **take the risk** in faith? For a real partnership in the movement of God in the world today, we need a genuine renewal and restoration of confidence in God, the Gospel, the Church and Ourselves.

1. Confidence in God

The Bible studies prepared for the Denominational Consultation began with this statement: "You would think it the most obvious thing in the world for Christians to begin with God - but the evidence of centuries suggests that we find it hard. Time and again we have started with what is expedient." We have to start with the restoration of our confidence in God. We have to let God be God - the Creator God, whose justice, righteousness, mercy and grace have been disclosed in Jesus Christ. We must know what it is to be loved by God, and sent out to love like Him. We have to risk everything to trust in His purposes. In practical terms it means:

- ▶ being prepared to trust God and take Him at His word, i.e. abandoning some of our juvenile notions of God as the benign man in the sky;
- ▶ acknowledging that He alone is God, the All-holy, Almighty, Sovereign Lord of all;
- ▶ choosing to be owned only by God - voluntarily submitting to Him.
- ▶ Restoration of confidence in God will release us to trust and love Him for who He is, and not just for what we want from Him.

2. Confidence in the Gospel

I was brought into the fellowship of God's love and the family of God's people in response to the simplicity and clarity of the gospel as declared in John 3:16 & 17, "For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to be its judge, but to be its Saviour." Over the years I have had to learn to place my confidence solely in this love of God, uniquely given in Jesus. Everything is in Jesus, personal fellowship with God, eternal life, deliverance from evil, inner peace, contentment, spiritual energy and direction, Holy Spirit presence and gifting, purpose for living - all are in Jesus alone. The reality at the core of the gospel is that only in Jesus is there restoration to fellowship with our Creator. "And eternal life means knowing you, the only true God and knowing Jesus Christ whom you sent." (John 17:3).

The gospel is about being immersed in this relationship with God - to know God, love God, talk to God, worship God, serve God, have joy in God, and understand that God takes immense delight in us. It is only in Jesus that all this is possible. The significance of the cross and resurrection of Jesus is inextricably bound up with forgiveness and restoration of fellowship with the Father. If we believe this to be true, then we have an obligation to tell the world of this love of God. There are implications here for the way we engage in evangelism and social action in Britain, our advocacy and support of Home Mission, and our partnerships overseas through the work of the Baptist Missionary Society.

Only a renewed confidence in the radical and unique work of Jesus will bring the urgency and dedication needed to transform our churches into genuinely mission-centred communities - the kind of confidence that was the driving force in Paul's risk-taking enterprise in Christian mission. "I have complete confidence in the gospel; it is God's power to save all who believe" (Romans 1:16).

3. Confidence in the Church

I am deeply indebted to the community of the church, for it is here that I have been loved, forgiven, nurtured and encouraged to grow in Christ. Every time I have taken risks in faith, it has been good to know that I belong to God's people, and am assured of their love and support. This belonging is not something casual; it is a belonging that is supernatural, because I am chosen, called and set apart, according to the divine purposes of God. This belonging is an extension of the character of God who lives and loves in community as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We need to belong with other Christians (even if we might often wish we could choose who will be our brothers and sisters in Christ). God has made us to live in fellowship with Him in community with others. The two go together.

I long to see a renewed confidence in the Church among Baptist Christians. I am saddened when I see how much the cult of individualism has permeated the thought and lifestyle of our churches. There is an urgent need to return to the Biblical truths concerning God and the Church, which we as Baptists have cherished for generations. "Baptists at their best have owned a deep affirmation of community, an interpretation of church life as interdependence. We have tried to avoid an individualistic interpretation of leadership, authority, discernment, wisdom - all belong to the congregation of God's people and not exclusively to the individuals who exercise them. As British Baptists think about the shape of their life together and of their mission in the coming century, it would be tragic to find ourselves consumed by the individualistic spirit of the age. How can our life together express the community of the Spirit and so be a witness to the world?" (*Beginning with God - The Denominational Consultation.*)

Only a renewal of confidence in the Church as the instrument of God's mission will set us free to trust one another as we explore new and relevant patterns of associating. "Our Union, arising out of our ecclesiology, requires trust, between ministers, churches, superintendents, Associations, Council and Assembly. Trust makes possible partnership. Without it there is no relating at personal and spiritual levels. God, we believe, trusts us with a share in his mission. So, in Christ, we see the risk, the vulnerability, which goes with trust. We are not only called to trust God but to live in trust of each other. We pray that by the Spirit we may be enabled so to do for where there is no trust there is no life in God." (*Dr Brian Haymes.*)

4. Confidence in Ourselves

Too many of us are imprisoned in the dungeons of low self-esteem. We do not believe in ourselves. Lack of confidence here is a result of our inability to love ourselves as Jesus commands, "Love your neighbour as you love yourself." This command to love ourselves is set within the Biblical view of who we are in Christ. Our significance and security is based on the completed work of Jesus on the cross, and not on our individual efforts or abilities. "For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts, but God's gift, so that no one can boast about it." (Ephesians 2:8 & 9). We know these things to be true in our heads, but our hearts do not always beat in tune with this God-centred reality. As a pastor, I see too many people who are trapped by fear, self-pity, failure, frustrations, despair and guilt. These negative emotions mar our relationships with other people and God. Unresolved hurts and unfulfilled expectations remain hidden just beneath the surface of our lives. They are like emotional landmines ready to explode into ugly and painful conflicts when someone or something touches the hot-spots.

The way to freedom from this dungeon is only through forgiveness. Guilt is a most destructive emotion. It robs us of self-respect, crushes our spirit and corrodes our personal significance. Guilt focuses on our fear of failure and rejection, and can never inspire or encourage us to love and live as God's cherished children. Guilt inevitably leads to condemnation all around. We who preach forgiveness are ourselves often desperately in need of it. For renewal of confidence in ourselves, we have to jettison the baggage of past failures and fears, and embrace again the all-forgiving love of God. In my spiritual pilgrimage I know what it means to return again and again to these simple truths:

God loves me unconditionally in Jesus Christ;

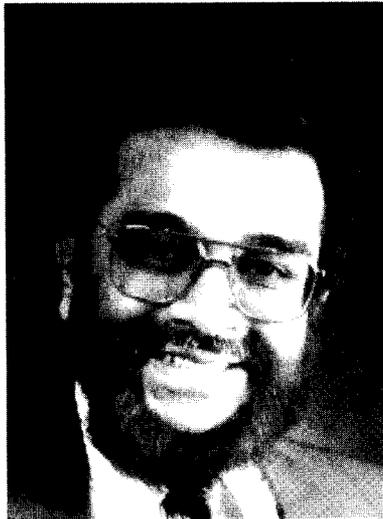
I am completely forgiven and fully pleasing to God by the cross of Jesus Christ;

I am totally accepted by God in Jesus Christ.

The gateway to a restoration of confidence in ourselves is in these profound, yet simple truths.

I have no illusion about what it means to **take the risk** in faith today. It will demand much in faith, love and discipleship. Above all else, it calls me to practise being dependent on God for everything. In the leadership that I am called to exercise within our Baptist family, I want to encourage a renewal and restoration of confidence in God as Creator and Father, in the gospel and its saving power, in the Church as the instrument of God's mission, and in ourselves as God's loved and forgiven children.

Fred George is the Minister of East Barnet Baptist Church and, Hallelujah!, is the new President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain .



The itchings of an irritant

- Reflections on Association life in the West Midlands.

Throughout my seven and a half years as Association Missioner in the West Midlands I found it difficult to explain what the job was about. 'Missioner' as a job title is open to a multitude of interpretations. This is shown by the inordinately high recoil rating I experienced at parties - a phenomenon I attribute entirely to my occupation. On those rare occasions when I did encounter a listener who showed some slight interest in my attempts at a non-technical definition of "facilitating" local churches and groups of churches in their mission, what I most often said was something along the lines of, "Well, I suppose I just scratch where it itches." Perhaps this was what the Chairperson of my Mission Committee had in mind when, at my recent valediction, he declared: "Above all else, Andy has been an irritant!"



The West Midland Baptist Association is one of the larger BUGB Associations, with about 140 churches scattered over an area from Ross-on-Wye to Stoke-on-Trent and Rugby to Oswestry. By virtue of a large Trust Association, it is also blessed with fairly substantial resources, making it possible to employ a number of staff and sustain a well-equipped central office in Birmingham. It is this reasonably, dare I say it, professional set-up that forms the heart of Association life in the West Midlands. Over the years a number of extremely worthwhile mission projects and some very effective individual events have been developed. But all in the garden is not rosy. Most Association meetings are poorly attended and finding gifted people who are willing to serve on committees and in specialist roles is a constant struggle. No-one could be blamed for forming the opinion that the traditional structures of Association are, in many cases, old wineskins that cannot possibly contain the new wine of the Spirit.

The reasons for this *malaise* are no doubt complex, but in my opinion the problem does not stem from the Association being too big. True, whole-Association meetings are often beset by geographical problems, especially given that the M6 stops for two hours in each direction both morning and evening! Local Districts are, though, if anything, more moribund than even Association Assemblies and General Committees! Neither is this because the churches lack a common theological ethos. As in the political scene, the old parties of Baptist church life are scarcely recognisable any more. If I were to attempt a diagnosis, I would say two things:

1) Expectations are catastrophically low, especially in the area of

associating for the purpose of mission. Despite all the rhetoric, Baptists simply do not expect being part of an Association to be about mission!

- 2) With the partial exception of ministers' meetings, relationships with other Baptist churches at whatever level are most often maintained by a small band of loyalists who are often marginal even to the life and movement of their own congregation. Looking back, I find it is possible to grade the fruitfulness of my work in the Association according to the extent to which these twin difficulties have been overcome.

I can think of a District (names omitted both to protect the innocent and to shield me from retribution!) where, quite literally, some of the churches were within spitting distance of each other; where all the stereotypical requirements of a dull-as-ditchwater, dead-as-a-Dodo parochial Baptist institution were rigidly observed and where the prospect of attending a District meeting was enough to drive me to the bottle - paracetamol or worse! My level of despair was only bettered by that of the hapless District Secretary. Definitely no more than an 'E'! In another District I met consistently for over a year with a specially invited group of representatives from over a dozen churches, hoping to encourage ties that could result in a more meaningful sharing both of vision and of resources. In an attempt to add different dimensions to the experience, several special events were staged and a daytime prayer meeting was held once a month. Yet I cannot find it in myself to award more than a 'D' because despite all this energy and hard work it is difficult to see how this moved the churches any closer to each other. The strong still swim and the weak still flounder.

These were both urban experiences. Would a rural District score better? Perhaps all that fresh air and fertiliser would nourish a greater sense of belonging together as a Baptist family? In one small town, the formation of a creative partnership between the struggling Baptist church, set in the middle of a neglected council estate, and the local authority keen to invest its millions in the neighbourhood, gave rise to an ambitious project to re-house the church as the managing agents of a brand new community centre. A combination of Baptist Union and council funding made possible the appointment of a minister who would both lead the church and oversee the community centre. Conception to birth took about five years, during which time the Baptist District really did begin to show unexpected signs of life! Plans were presented at a number of District meetings and a buzz of excitement began among these widely scattered and historically staunchly independent churches. Here was a strategic mission opportunity where God clearly seemed to be at work. Ministers and lay preachers, many of whom had visited the church in question, began to speak regularly of the new opportunities that were opening

up. Groups would think nothing of travelling thirty miles to take part in the prayer walks we planned, and the interest was sustained even during the frustrating times when progress seemed so slow. Surely this is what associating is supposed to be about?

Why then only a 'C'? As the cynics might have foretold, translating goodwill into action proved more difficult! We had never expected very much from the small rural churches, but one of the closest neighbouring Baptist churches is a cathedral city church of 300 members whose ministers purported to be enthusiastic supporters of the Association, and no doubt are active members of Mainstream to boot! Repeated appeals for help - fellowship for a hard-pressed minister, support for a treasurer out of his depth with payroll calculations, volunteers to help with a Holiday Club - all fell on deaf ears. How sad and a salutary reminder for me now that I find myself serving a church of a similar size that having brought a small church to its Macedonian moment where it felt able to lay aside its proud isolation and ask for help, its neighbouring 'Paul' had evidently taken an overdose of sleeping tablets!

Things were certainly more promising, and probably deserving of a 'B', in the District where the rather formal District Meeting had set apart a District Mission Team under the leadership of a congregation-based ministerial student with the express purpose of working with the smaller churches to explore mission opportunities. This led them to work intensively with one tiny Baptist cause, averting closure, strengthening ecumenical ties and substantially raising its profile in the village. Elsewhere they helped with mission surveys, provided consistent preaching support and led church conferences and deacons' retreats. This was good work, and certainly gave a far more positive edge to Association life than would ever have been possible sitting in meetings perusing the seemingly endless stream of discussion documents emanating from Didcot. The hesitation which keeps me from awarding an 'A' is simply that it only involved a handful of individuals. How much more would have been possible if a wider selection of people from this area, where Baptist life is relatively strong, had glimpsed the new vistas that open up when Christians begin working co-operatively in mission. If only they had dared to step outside their own backyards, and taste reality beyond their own evangelical ghetto, then they could make possible initiatives that might otherwise be quite beyond the resources of a small church. In the process, they would reap in their own ministries the rich harvest that springs from practical training on the mission field.

Pride of place, and the only 'A' I have awarded in this end of term report must go to the experience I had in one of the smaller West Midland cities, where the seven Baptist churches had formed themselves into a Fellowship of

Churches as part of a bigger District. They worked hard to ensure effective pastoral oversight for each other. Their leaders had a good and meaningful relationship: they even called themselves a 'Team'! When I suggested the formation of a lay mission team they readily agreed and that group became the catalyst for prayer vigils, acts of witness, numerous fellowship events, an awareness-raising roadshow that toured the churches, a highly effective learning initiative on the spiritual needs of older people and a successful Home Mission application for a minister shared between three of the small churches. Here, as nowhere else in my experience of Association life, the expectation grew that the reason for Baptist churches relating together was to make them more effective in mission. Why, it was almost as if they had read the New Testament! And driving this new understanding and helping to translate it from theory into practice was the active involvement of a large and representative cross-section of members from all the churches. Bingo!

The somewhat barbed comment about how irritating the Association had found me was justified by the analogy that an oyster needs a particle of grit to produce a pearl. Milking this morsel of encouragement for all it is worth, I would venture to suggest that one very positive aspect of Association life is that it makes possible a translocal understanding of ministry. Neither local congregations nor individual ministers are complete in themselves and the gifts of the wider church are a necessary irritant without which pearls will be exceedingly scarce. Another is the potential associating affords for grasping strategic and translocal initiatives in mission. How else can Baptists grasp opportunities that are beyond the ken of any one local church - challenges in education or the workplace, or church planting or church replacement in areas of population change? As I dip my toe into the unknown waters of a new Association I shall hope to find oysters and maybe even pearls, and I pray that, despite the demands of a local ministry that will always be absorbing, sometimes exhausting and frequently completely overwhelming, I shall remember the central truth that gives any Association its reason for being: we actually *do* all need each other!

Andy Bruce, Minister of Mansfield Road Baptist Church, Nottingham was from 1989-1996 the Association Missioner of the West Midlands Baptist Association.

The Renewal of Associating - Yes But How?



I begin by giving thanks for the Denominational Consultation. Not necessarily because I like where we are at this moment in the process or because I am 100% in agreement with the way we have got here. But I do have faith in a God who is able to do far more than we can ask or even imagine, and am also grateful that the Consultation has given us permission to question what currently exists, and dream dreams of what might yet be. The one thing the Consultation has already delivered is an agenda. Perhaps it is incomplete as yet, and maybe many of the points on it will remain as on-going issues for some time to come - but at least most of us seem agreed that at the top of the list is the issue of the way we associate together.

Here in Norfolk - as in most other Associations - we are asking questions about our Association life. We have begun by looking at our Constitution and have noted that the Norfolk Association has just one stated objective: namely to "promote the objects (sic) of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland." On one level this aim is laudable - since the objects referred to are part of what make us Baptists and are worthy of our support. But it is hardly surprising that the way we function is up for review if this is the only way we can find to express our objectives as a local Association. What is more, Baptists are supposed to be 'ground up' Christians and we don't have a hierarchy that tells us how to promote its objectives at a local level. So our Association is apparently seeking to be a faithful servant of a master which has given it autonomy to decide how to make its own decisions! So when these directives fail to emerge from 'on high' all we are left with is a giant committee which struggles to represent churches that struggle to understand its purpose. This has not always been the case in Norfolk since in previous ages we have had a far clearer idea of why our Association exists and what we hope to accomplish. Our Association has been in existence since 1828 and Charles Jewson records one of the first objects as "To prevent any village station, occupied by a minister of this Association, being relinquished for want of assistance."

This apparent lack of purpose was put sharply into focus by a friend from one of the New Churches who was telling me of his experiences whilst travelling with a fellow leader on one of his frequent trips to visit a group of churches he had planted in Mexico. He told stories of how his friend travelled from

Church to Church, each time spending many evenings story telling, laughing, exploring scripture, praying and eating with the local leaders. He told about the depth of relationships and the powerful sense of community and then reflected in an off the cuff manner how this trip had reminded him about the importance of investing much time in making real and deep friendships 'lest we ever become people who can only relate together through committees'. My friend probably didn't notice me hurriedly open my organiser and jot the phrase down, but I needn't have bothered. It stuck.

Let's be clear of one thing before I go on - I have no desire to be destructively critical of my Association. I am one of its officers and am therefore involved in its life and am committed to what it could become. I wish I had the experience to take my illustrations from a fictional amalgam of Associations I have known, but I have no such experience. Sorry Norfolk. But the review we are beginning has left me asking the question 'What are our Associations for?' I assume that there was a time when they met a felt and agreed need and the way they did it was relevant. But if our Associations are again to recover their sense of purpose and identity it will be as churches perceive that what they need matches what Associations have on offer, and that they are doing it in a way that is relevant to their mission. Simply trying to convince people that we need to 'associate' is not enough - especially since we seem to find it impossible to define what the word actually means. Perhaps this is because Christ did not call us to 'associate' but to love God and our neighbour and to obey the Great Commission. If such 'associating' helps in this task, fine. Let's then do it with an energy commensurate with its value.

I fear though, that in reality the way we currently associate is a pale shadow of what it could be and that any attempts to cajole us into associating will fall on deaf ears unless the associating we desire and facilitate flows from a natural desire to worship God alongside each other. True associating is only possible when we can unite in common adoration of our risen and exalted Lord, because it flows as we allow the Holy Spirit to lead us to His feet. And it will only be meaningful and meet with wide and enthusiastic support when that worship leads us to obedience, and we are further drawn together around a common desire to do the one thing Jesus has told us to do - to tell others about Him. Our worship and witness are all of a piece and are the essential bedrock of meaningful associating. I hope it is clear then that if Associations didn't exist we'd be wanting to invent something like them - although I hope we'd call them something different and discover very different ways of achieving what is truly important. But let's begin to be more specific: what benefit is there in grouping Baptist churches together? I believe we need them

because they

1. should be local expressions of Baptist interdependence.

I have lost count of the number of times I have heard us remind each other that the spirit of independence is endangering the vitality of our Baptist life and witness. We all know it is true, but unless it becomes possible for each individual within our churches to look to cherished local models of interdependence of which they are proud and to which they are voluntarily committed, the call to remember our roots and our values will fall on deaf ears and our desire to be interdependent at all levels will be an impossibility. Am I right in recalling that the London Baptist Association came into being to plant a church a year and that it was at its most lively when this aim was owned by each of its churches?

2. should be the best means of serving our churches.

The Church is called to be the primary means through which the Spirit of God fulfils the will of God in this world. We believe that this Church is a universal body with many local expressions, each of which are called to earth the gospel in locally relevant and personal ways. Therefore the 'Baptist Union' is not called the 'Baptist Church' because it is not a church. It exists to serve the churches in a variety of appropriate ways. But if the main aim of the denominational officers at our HQ is to do all they can to strengthen and invigorate the life of our churches, surely the way they will best achieve this is to focus their attention and resources upon strengthening local groupings whose primary focus it is to provide this support and encouragement. These local groups are in the best position to resource and empower local churches to fulfil their calling because it is they who will know the distinct cultural and spiritual characteristics of each area. It is obvious that the kind of church that is relevant in rural Norfolk is not relevant in urban London or multi-racial Birmingham. How often, though, have we looked to churches in our vicinity - and that are probably most like us - to share in the task of shaping our churches to become the bodies our communities need? I suggest that our national leaders have a pump priming part to play in this. This is not because I believe it is they who can miraculously and single-handedly transform the way we associate, but because many of our current Associations are weary and those involved in them need first to recover a belief in themselves and their mission. They need the ministry of love and encouragement to help them become what they are called to be.

3. are the local face of the Baptist Union.

We live in an age of denominational indifference whilst, elsewhere, tribal loyalties are becoming ever stronger. How do we understand this apparent anomaly? Is it not that British Christians are ever more ready to commit

themselves to bodies that have clear stated objectives which are seen to have local relevance and impact, but are less sure they want to become part of an organisation where its structures seem remote and the core values feel fluid? I believe that the decline in enthusiastic support for the historic denominations is more a judgement upon what they have become than an inevitable result of sociological phenomena. The churches that grow are the churches that know where they are going and how they are planning to get there. The same seems true in Acts where we read in chapters 2 and 4 that the Church in Jerusalem grew rapidly, but chapter 5 records that many more were afraid to join because of what they knew it would cost them. I believe that the struggles of our Baptist Union are a result of the lack of life and vision at local level, or the lack of commitment to share what life and vision we have with each other. Revive our associating and the Union will flourish.

At this point I will pause and ask that vital question: *Yes But How?* How will we discover the kind of associating our churches need? One thing is clear - it will not come about by imposing a uniform model on each area. In fact, it seems to me that if we are looking for a relational kind of unity that is flexible and will remain relevant to our needs, the first thing we ought to be looking for is people rather than a structure. And the job description of those people is revealed in the pages of the New Testament. Our Church recently returned to Ephesians 4 and noted that our members and ministry will only reach maturity if it has four/five gifts - each of which come through spiritually gifted people: we need pastors and teachers (or pastor/teachers) to contribute their skills of church building, prophets to keep us focused on God and his will, evangelists to keep us working outwards into the community and apostles to do... well to do what?

In the New Testament the apostle was a trans-local figure to whom churches that he had planted looked to for correction and encouragement. He was able to provide this because he had been so gifted and because the way he worked gave him an objectivity which only those who are not in the middle of a local church can have. He was therefore able to spot potential problems at a distance, whilst also helping each church to support each other and providing a sense of unity between churches, and a wider vision and focus. This was made possible by the fact that he regularly visited and heard from all the churches which looked to him as their apostle and because his consuming desire was to keep on planting more churches. Time and again we note how Paul planted a church and appointed Elders, but that Church still looked to him to bring that extra special something they could not provide for themselves.

I believe that this extra something is what many of our churches are lacking. It is what leaders are crying out for when they say - as they did at our Fraternal late last year - that they are looking for more 'powerful' and inspirational national leadership figures. They were not saying that these people needed to be national figures, but were recognising that it is our national leaders who are currently the closest things to apostles that we have. There is surely, as Rob Warner suggests, a more compelling argument for freeing our national leaders to fulfil the Eldership-type role for which many are so ably gifted. For this role to be more than just a figurehead, however, we also need to recognise and affirm the Apostolic equivalent at the local level. I believe that is why a number of Church leaders are forming links with other church streams and why we feel the desire (or need) to attend so many conferences. We recognise the need to be accountable to each other within meaningful relationships and to position ourselves in places where we can be inspired and taught whilst reflecting on where our churches are (and should be) going. There is no doubt that conferences have tremendous value, but I believe that many of us are also trying to use them to fill the gap that the apostle is meant to fill in the purposes of God.

It may be that this is what the new Superintendents become - but I doubt it if they will. Apostles are not only Pastors of Pastors. If that is what we are looking for that is what we will get. In any case, our current areas are too large for such meaningful relationships to form and develop, and an apostle cannot be imposed upon a church just because it is situated in a certain area. A relationship of accountability has to be entered into voluntarily and naturally. At this point I admit to being a little stuck - not because I can't picture what I am proposing, but because what we need in our part of Norfolk will be irrelevant elsewhere. As I have said before, there is no universally applicable model. I am suggesting that there is a need to associate together, and that it may happen best when churches voluntarily gather themselves around a suitably gifted individual. I concede that this is messy and can't be organised, or managed, or regulated. It has the potential to go wrong; it may result in division as churches of a similar type gather together and it will undoubtedly cause structural headaches elsewhere in the system. It may also be perceived to give a degree of authority to someone over and above the church meeting. There are, though, potential problems everywhere, and they *can* be overcome. We should also bear in mind that similar criticisms might have been directed at the present system when it began. We currently have organisation, management and regulation but little life. In practice, we are operating something that most of us feel has gone wrong. Our churches are all *too* independent.

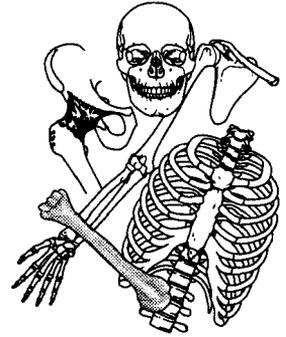
Interestingly, my recent studies into Norfolk Baptist life back in the 17th Century suggest that this is exactly the task we encouraged our "Messengers" to perform in the early days of our denominational life. (Apostle = sent one). So both Thomas Grantham and Daniel Bradford were recognised as having church planting ministries and operated distinct and fruitful trans-local ministries throughout Norfolk. Despite the potential problems I believe that designing new models of associating around figures which the New Testament would call apostles could work. Certainly it is a relational pattern that would go some way to providing meaningful links between churches and would be flexible enough to take on whatever form each region needed.

Just as Apostles travelled in teams in the New Testament, so I envisage the possibility of such a fluid system facilitating the sharing of various kinds of leadership gifts between churches in a locality, thus increasing the depth and value of 'associating'. This is also the kind of thing that many of us are building around ourselves in any case and would love others within the Baptist family to benefit from. I also believe it would not be too difficult to spot those who were already fulfilling an apostolic function in each locality. And if it were deemed necessary to structure any new arrangement - which given the fact that we are not starting with 'an Apostle with no churches' but 'churches with no Apostle' would almost certainly be necessary - we could begin with small units made up of geographically adjacent churches in similar localities. These could discover their own method of associating and of relating to other groups in their areas. I offer these thoughts in the knowledge that they provoke as many questions as answers, but in the hope that some benefit might be derived from them.

Craig Millward is Pastor of Ormesby Baptist Church, Great Yarmouth, Norfolk.

Can these dry bones live?

Introducing the Sussex model of Association life



Can the dry bones of Baptist associating live again? The idealist says they should. The optimist says of course. The pragmatist admits to difficulties not least in tackling perceptions, sadly all too often right in the past. The realist begins by asking is there a need and then, can they? Biblically and historically we have always recognised the imperative to belong together, to fellowship, to work in partnership. The strong helping the weak, the encouraged helping the discouraged. Perhaps the partnership was helped by the sword of persecution and difficulty which herded us together. As late 20th century Christians we respond more according to need than imposed obligation. Maybe, as in the ongoing cycle of church history, established practices need again reform, renewal or revolution. One thing is clear, there is both imperative and need to come closer together. I believe a realistic inclination born out of experience is beginning to persuade us. The process is helped by recognition of three things:

- (i) the need for mission;
- (ii) that we have always been intended as God's missionary people, and
- (iii) that mission itself is no longer regarded as exclusive but rather richly diverse - and infinitely richer and more effective as a result.

Working with other traditions as many of us do, there remains the inescapable fact that it is much easier to do so with those who share the same core values, principles and beliefs - not least about church and Bible. It is common identity, vision and practice that is the best glue to long-term holding together, but are our existing Associations the best format for facilitating this kind of partnership and belonging? The answer has to be as diverse as our Associations are in geography, practice and health. The Sussex Association has grappled with the eschatological hope that there has to be more to associating than committees and institutional dust. If we are not scratching where people are itching then those same people have the right to ask serious questions about what it is we are doing and at the end of the day are entitled to vote with their feet. This they do.

Our first task was to find our reason for being, if indeed there was one. Nobody likes "Rules", least of all the people of Israel, but they can bring illuminating guidance from surprising sources. Working on the established principle that "The object of our Association is to encourage our churches and

ministers in the evangelisation of our county and to foster the establishment and growth of strong local churches" (known to the initiated as Rule 2 in our Yearbook), the Sussex Association moved from employing a part-time General Secretary and a full-time Missioner to the appointment in March 1996 of a Director of Mission as its Chief Officer, supported in his work by the services of a part-time administrator and reinforced with clerical help. It was a clear statement of intent to rediscover our reason ("reason for being" - I hasten to add!).

Replacing the office of General Secretary, the role of the new Director of Mission was to envision and enable the Association in its primary object of Mission, understanding the fostering of strong healthy local churches as the easiest and simplest way to reach a county. To avoid slipping back into old habits of Association life the Director was required to delegate to the Administrator all relevant clerical and administrative tasks. This new appointment released the Association to undergo a period of radical restructuring and renewal. The vehicle had to be saleable to the constituency - many of whom were more than a little wary of "Association life or lack of", and none of whom were ready to invest precious and already overstretched time, money, vision and energy into an old rusty yellow Reliant Robin stuffed full of dry committee papers.

Grasping the dinosaur by the tail, a key shift in emphasis was made from Association to associating, from an organisation or institution to a living organism vitally serving the needs and mission of our churches. Only those structures and supports needed for this new relational and task orientated model would be retained. Duplication and simplification were addressed together with a rediscovery of purpose and integration of new people. The result was striking in the renewed vigour of those already on board, as well as the ease of exciting new people to share in the vision. As in advertising, if the package is right and on closer examination the deal seems a good one, most people will buy in without hesitation.

First to go was the evangelism committee - who needs one when mission is at the heart of the Association and thereby governing the role and agenda for the Executive Committee. We found *that* to be a much better name than the old General Purposes and Finances Committee - rather meaningless to most of us! All other committees went with the exception of our Ministerial Recognition Group and an Association Resources Group that meets twice a year in a mutual news, views and vision sharing format. It is surprising what you *don't* actually need when you take a hard look. Nothing went without good reason and nothing remained without even better reason. Does it work or is it simply the age-old process of rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic? Lets face it, most of us have been around long enough to have seen the video, worn the

tee-shirt, even played the gramophone, and then moved on to the next new thing in the hope it works better.

Well firstly, within less than a year we had to redraw the Administrator's role - whilst not quite disappearing it did however undergo radical pruning. With fewer committees and a generous use of the wastepaper file (i.e. rediscovering the potency of the gift of discernment and its most practical use in church life), the honorarium and expected 10 hours per week became much more realistic. Clerical support, of the uncollared species is absolutely essential if the model was to work. 1997's budget is now able to be less than in 1994! In fact our budget (that hidden and unspoken power in Baptist life) has been transformed in appearance and emphasis to become a Mission Statement of its own. The Director of Mission determines the shape of our budget in partnership with the treasurer. Yes, it still needs a Mission-minded and Mission-excited Council's approval. This we increasingly appear to have. Missioner's, who may struggle to have their priorities and concerns listed as 14.b) on the agenda of the sub-committee to the sub-committee, dream on!

Realigning the budget in partnership with realigned priorities, structures and activities has released monies in new directions. For the curious, our resource comes from our Home Mission refund and a separate Association Mission Fund. Without doubt people will give where there exists vision and clear communication as to what their money is achieving. The real change has been the release of the Director Of Mission - D.O.M. (just the one "O" please) to our 51 churches to envision, enable, encourage, troubleshoot, teach, strategise with, offer counsel and generally get alongside, providing a partnership of leadership and care. Why, oh why do we get so hung up with and threatened by leadership when it is so biblical? This is exactly what many in our churches are crying out for AND it works? The fear, of course, is authoritarianism and loss of control. The model on offer in Sussex is New Testament servant leadership which remains decisive and vision imparting but offered from a right heart and with a right spirit. In any case we are Baptists and know quite well how to gently cut overbearing leaders down to more manageable size!

Twelve months later, over 15,000 miles travelled, a focus on our four geographical Districts with termly District Prayer Events and an annual Association celebration attracting 1,300 evidence suggests it is working. Decentralization has to be the way forward - our churches would otherwise have to relate meaningfully and significantly at distances that include Rye to Chichester, while they struggle to do that with churches two miles down the road. Unless we schism with the strong joining only with the strong, type only with type - that in itself raising fundamental questions of their own - we need to rediscover family, relationship and accountability. This is where the

rubber of being God's missionary people really hits the road, sometimes not without squealing and pain.

Our four Districts offer to all but the unbearably exclusive, resource, encouragement and relationship on a more realistic basis than a county-wide Association ever can. Within this and backed up by the resources of four such Districts combined, can be found a venue for deeper relationships and partnerships - very often where like finds like but occasionally providing surprise - all within the context of the wider family. Importantly it is not exclusive and does not claim to be, recognising there are others who would not claim to be Baptist yet, confusingly for some maybe, Jesus still loves and chooses to bless. It seems to work, although I suspect that there will always be those who for their own reason or following their own agendas find their solace with others elsewhere or in solitariness.

A fundamental principle must be that a church's mission, ministry and concern is its own immediate community - town or village. This has to be the priority or else there will soon be no church, but maybe 5% of the budget total can be helpfully and healthily directed elsewhere, not just to the ends of the earth but to the equally needy Judea's and Samaria's around, in a way that enhances our own church's mission and ministry but also helps reach those parts that others have not yet. Renewed vision, purpose, structures and life are encouraging our churches to "buy in". Everyone recognises we need one another, ideally to stand, work and pray together. New churches are joining, recognising "glorious isolation" is not glorious at all. Church plants view the available options, including the best the New Churches can offer, and are opting for us - not too long ago we wouldn't even have featured on the shortlist! Perhaps that is one of the clearest votes of confidence we can lay claim to. Other churches previously at a distance to our Association life, while recognising there is still much work to be done, are saying if this is what associating is about then count us in. Relationship and accountability amongst us are raising their not too disagreeable heads. Yes, 95% of our church members remain with little idea of what associating is all about, but a key 5% do now know and the osmosis works.

Can these dry bones live? Can anything good come out of Nazareth? All I can say at this stage is that we are a people who essentially are created to need one another. We have been birthed in the same family and we believe in miracles of which Resurrection must count as one of the best?

David Hall is Director of Mission for the Sussex Baptist Association.

THE NEED FOR ASSOCIATING AND NOT ASSOCIATIONS!

Some Pointers for Action

"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity of faith and in the knowledge of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." Ephesians 4: 11 - 12

The Vision

It is vitally important that churches and leaders are freed up to meet regionally - establishing regional networks with national eldership team whose main role would be to implement vision and leadership. These regional networks would then be able to:

- ⇒ plan evangelism, church planting and mission
- ⇒ share resources - music, drama, youth & children's work, training etc.
- ⇒ meet for encouragement - celebration and prayer
- ⇒ facilitate legal issues etc.

The How

There is a need for 'top heavy' association committees and councils to be dissolved as soon as possible to give way to a more flexible, relevant network. An Association General Secretary, Missioner and Youth Worker also needs to be appointed to help churches in their mission. We must avoid bolting on extra structures and, instead, should allow churches to choose the right structures as needed.

The Regional Team Meeting

This is needed to gather ministers from churches throughout the regional family three times a year (February, May and September) and their leadership teams twice a year (May and October) for a 'Celebration/Encouragement event'.

Fellowship and Affirmation

- ⇒ by a commitment to worship and mission
- ⇒ by creating space for prayer and discussion as well as opportunities for building relationships.
- ⇒ by replacing the BU Assembly with a 'new event' that will better meet the needs of churches and leaders - starting in 1998.

Aims of Ministry and Training

- ⇒ to provide good ministry of the word that will build up leaders and their partners.
- ⇒ to provide opportunities for vision casting and dreaming dreams re: mission, evangelism, church planting etc.

- ⇒ to provide a 'showcase' for on-going themes that may relate to everyday ministry
- ⇒ to provide the best in terms of worship
- ⇒ to provide time for the prophetic voice to be heard particularly in terms of social justice issues etc.
- ⇒ to provide up-to-date information on current resources, i.e. BMS/Home Mission, books, literature, legal, trusteeship, financial etc.
- ⇒ to provide a situations vacant board.

Local District Level

District life should be dissolved and replaced by a 'Leaders Fellowship'. The main aim of this would be to provide caring support and prayer within the context of a small group.

Youth and Children

The appointment of a regional minister/youth specialist can help to combine the development of youth and children's work. A local church base could be converted for weekend uses etc. In the process we would again be affirming our smaller churches.

PR and Communication

- ⇒ revamp completely the Baptist Times (again) - it's title doesn't fit a post-denominational church.
- ⇒ do away with the association handbook - it represents needless duplication and is a waste of money
- ⇒ develop an up-to-date corporate image that actually says what associations are about
- ⇒ personalise mailing etc. with signatures, decent cards,
- ⇒ improve personal contact - the association team needs to regularly call (phone) ministers and key leaders at least once a month.
- ⇒ develop an InterNet Web for exchange of 'info', prayer magazines, world and national news etc.

Legal and Trust

these matters should be completely delegated to a sympathetic association solicitor - whose expertise is then paid for.

Change

Recognising and paying tribute to local associations and their histories as I do, I sense that great care needs to be taken in moving away from a council orientated, committee structure. We *must* do so, however, and so move to something that is more of a relational mission minded network. This needs to be prayed about, budgeted for and organisedsoon.

John Lewis is Minister at Gorsley Chapel, Herefordshire.

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Poland - An Association Link



In 1992 the Joint Consultative Committee comprising the BMS, BUW, BUS and BUGB, suggested that instead of one person having to handle the links with all the



European Baptist Unions (in this case Maureen White) the BUGB Associations should each be asked to appoint a person to liaise between a European Union and the JCL. The East Glamorgan English Baptist Association was asked to link with Poland. This request was agreed to at the June Annual Assembly of the Association. Mr. David Chapman, who already had some contact with Poland in the distribution of relief through the Gdansk Baptist Church, and the Senior Citizens Home at Bialystok, was asked to be the link person. The East Glamorgan Association owe David and his wife Betty a debt of thanks for the work they have done in getting the project up, running, and well established. Although I have been involved with the Poland link almost from the beginning through my own church's link with the Baptist church in Szczytno, I have only recently been appointed as the BUGB's representative for Poland. It was following my recent visit to Warsaw to meet with the officers of the Polish Baptist Union that I was asked to write this article concentrating on the activities of the link at present, and how I see it developing in the future. You will find that the two are inextricably linked together.

At the moment there are only seven of the 86 churches in the East Glamorgan Association which have an active contact with Poland. This very much hides the quality and extent of the work that is being carried out from Wales to Poland in our Lord's name. Let me give you a brief excursion through what we are involved in.

The Senior Citizens Home at Bialystok has 44 residents who have a varying need of nursing skills. Through a group called "The Friends of Bialystok" we have been able to provide some expertise and advice on the actual building, its heating system, and its furnishings. The main contribution to the running of the home however has been the payment of the salary of the nursing officer. This we have done for the past two years. We have further committed ourselves to payment for the coming year. The vast majority of the residents are able to contribute less than half of what it actually costs to house, feed, and nurse them. It is obvious therefore that our main priority now and in the future will be to continue to raise funds for the care of the residents and the staff.

The Christian Foundation for Helping Orphans and Abandoned Children is

situated about 150km south of Warsaw and 35km west of Radom, and is the second 'institution' supported by one of our small groups. The orphanage was set up in 1991 by a member of Warsaw Baptist church, who now sees the foundation as his life's work. It is now recognised by the Polish Government which pays about 35% of the running costs. At the moment there are only six children in the orphanage, but there are plans to take on another three in the very near future. It is hoped that the numbers will build up slowly, but in these days of child abuse, and its bad press in Eastern Europe, it is right that this Foundation walks before it runs. Young lives are at stake. It was good to hear that a few of the Polish Baptist churches in the area are also supporting the work with these children through their own financial help.

The third 'institution' we support through the work of a small group is the Theological Seminary at Radosc. It was a great privilege to visit the Seminary and see how the building work is progressing, and hear of some of their plans for the future. We were also able to meet and encourage, one of our Welsh girls who is working there in the language school. There is a constant need for volunteers to teach English at Radosc, and at other centres in Poland. The number of books in the theological library is building up through donations from retired ministers, and gifts from theological colleges. The majority of these books were written in English and therefore much of the student's studying is in English! It was also good to hear the tremendous news while I was there that a new church of twenty members has now been planted at the Seminary.

One of our Polish churches has contact with the local prison - not I would add through the misdemeanours of its pastor or members!! A small group from East Glamorgan, belonging to 'The Prison Fellowship', has ministered 'within those walls' several times during the past few years. This has been a great boost to the morale of those who minister there on a regular basis. There is nothing like knowing that other people care about the work that you are trying to do, and will get alongside you in the doing of it. Along with these small groups several churches in the East Glamorgan Association are directly linked with churches in different parts of Poland. The range of involvement that our churches offer differs greatly according to the expertise and finance available. Several teams have visited Poland to work in the children's summer camps where there is a wide range of events and activities for young people of all ages. Along with the sharing of fun and excitement, in such things as canoeing and volleyball, is the joy of sharing the gospel story. There are many opportunities for evangelism in this work and they are seized upon with great zeal.

Within the whole of Poland there is a great desire to learn the English language.

Many essential text books that students need to study are written in English, and the ability to speak English offers wider job prospects. It is with this need in mind that several of us have been involved with language schools based in the churches we are linked with. Some of the students who come to learn have very little knowledge of English at all. There are others who are quite advanced. The courses that are offered therefore must range from the beginners stage through to an advanced level. The writing of such a syllabus is not an easy one, and it has to be revised each year in order to meet the needs of the students who attend. This usually leads to frantic alterations at the last minute as you try to assess the level that each student is at.

The most valuable church based English language course is one that is taught through the medium of the bible. The things that Jesus talked about can be readily adapted to the things of everyday life today. What must be kept in mind is that 'predominantly' the teacher is there to teach English - not 'thump the bible'. It is therefore essential that alongside the teaching course there is a well planned 'social programme' where the students can meet the teachers in an informal setting. The playing of games together, singing around a bonfire, or just sitting and chatting offer wide possibilities for evangelism. It is usual that about two thirds of the way through the course the students are invited to attend a meeting for singing and testimony after the lessons. These are well attended, and by the last day of teaching there is a strong relationship between the teachers, students, and the pastor of the church. He will take charge of the last meeting and offer the appeal to those who have felt the Lord's claim upon them, and to those who would like to know more about the Christian faith. Many come to faith through this avenue of service.

It is one of the jobs of the representative for Poland to encourage contact of all kinds between our churches. This has sometimes led to East Glamorgan churches inviting (and paying for) the pastor of their link church, and his family, for a holiday in Wales. This of course acts in two ways. It enables the pastor and his family to have a holiday they would not otherwise have had, and it helps in communication and better understanding of each other's culture and way of life. To further strengthen this understanding and co-operation, one of our churches is inviting fifteen young people from their link church to spend some time here in Cardiff this summer. Another church is sending a team to Radom, again to teach English, and also be involved in street evangelism.

It would be wrong to think that it is only the larger churches that can be involved in such church links. In one part of our Association two churches who felt that they could not do much on their own to support a link church have come together to support the ministry, and mission of the church at

Szczecinek. Smaller churches can also support the work of the orphanage, the Senior Citizens Home, or the Seminary. No one need feel left out. The support that we can offer to our Polish brothers and sisters however goes beyond the providing of finance or expertise, as important as these are. Prayer support is vital, and churches large or small can be involved. I would encourage any church to become a link church in order to commit themselves in prayer for the work of The Kingdom. It is a known fact that the finances of the Polish Baptist Union are in a poor state. I learned on my latest visit that Home Mission salaries due to their pastors in December, were actually only paid in February.

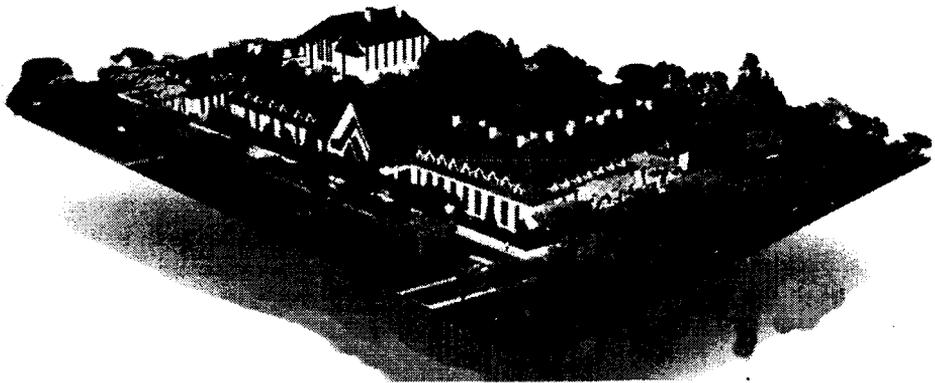
That said, I would not like anyone to run away with the idea that the Poles are opting out of their responsibilities to their pastors. The vast majority of church members tithe their offering. The problem in so many of the churches is that they comprise a sizable number of older people who are very poor, and also a very sizable number of young people who as yet are not wage earners. This latter group continues to grow quite rapidly in the churches I know personally. It is vital therefore that the support work of the East Glamorgan churches continues, and expands. One of the dilemmas that we must address is 'Do we financially support the pastors, who in real terms are well below the average Polish wage? (They receive 600 zloty per month plus accommodation as the Polish BU's basic minimum stipend, which at the moment is about £125). I would add that this basic minimum is reduced by 20% each year. This means that the church must fully support its pastor within 5 years. Or, do we financially support the churches in their mission, evangelism and outreach programmes? I say that this is a dilemma because we have to ask the question "Is it right that some of the pastors receive financial help, while others do not?" Each of our churches must make up its own mind. What *does* seem fair is that if our East Glamorgan churches do continue to support the Pastor 'personally', and this support is an ongoing agreement, then the Polish Baptist Union should be informed so that they can make some (small) alteration to the amount that pastor receives from their Home Mission Fund.

The Polish Union is making a great effort to get its finances in order. They have an enormous task in front of them, and they are implementing cut backs on several agencies which they support. For example, the Senior Citizens Home at Bialystok received in the region of 14,000 Zl last year. This year it will only receive 10,000 on top of inflation running at over 20%. There are many other areas that could have been covered. I have made no mention of the tension between the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Church in Poland. Although there is some co-operation (or at least toleration) in the major cities there is a growing concern about the relationship in the smaller towns and villages where the Priest will openly proclaim (in our case) that

Baptists are not Christians and that they are a sect. I had first hand experience of this while I was in Szczytno last August. In that church the young converts are from Roman Catholic families. I do not have to spell out the problems this causes within their families. Exciting things are happening in Poland, and the Baptist churches there are growing in numbers. Five years ago there were just over three thousand Baptist church members. There are now almost four thousand. It is a great privilege to know them and work with them.

Over the next three or four years the East Glamorgan Association, and the Polish Baptist Union have pledged to increase the number of church links from seven to twenty. I am sure that the way forward is to continue to build up our personal contacts and to continue to grow in love for each other - in the name of Jesus.

Rev. Geoffrey I. Tyson is Minister of Bethany Baptist Church, Rhiwbina, Cardiff and BUGB representative for Poland.



Better Together

Let me begin this article by affirming that I remain committed to my County Baptist Association both in theory and practice and that I look forward to working with our newly appointed General Secretary and that I am impressed to date!



One of the reasons that Baptist Associations are a lower priority for many of us now are the encouraging ecumenical relationships that the new ecumenical instruments have opened up for us. This affects both our energy and expectation levels. This is especially so since the historic decisions reached at Swanwick in 1987. If new wine is being experienced ecumenically and locally then it is all the harder to gear oneself up for an Association Council or Assembly where, perhaps, it is not. Some of us express this pattern of associating through conventional ecumenism and others of us through exciting alliances with the newer churches. No review of Associations and associating is complete without an acknowledgement of these ecumenical realities in the late 1990s.

The city of St Albans has one of the longest Christian heritages in Europe. One of the first European Christian martyrs, Alban, died here in 303AD and the city's magnificent Abbey was built, over many centuries, on the traditional site of his martyrdom. Long before Alban, Roman soldiers colonized the area and named the then occupied town Verulamium. St Albans remains one of the most fascinating cities in Europe for exploring excavations and relics from the Roman era. Its proximity to London makes it a very popular commuter city, especially with its setting in the gentle countryside of Hertfordshire, with its many picturesque villages. Dagnall Street Baptist Church, Saint Albans is one of the oldest Baptist churches anywhere in the world. Its recorded history goes back over 350 years. It is also one of the largest Free Churches in the County. The city also has a very constructive ecumenical history, stretching back to the formative years of the ecumenical movement in this century. That was one of the things that especially attracted me to both the church and the city, when I accepted the call to minister at Dagnall Street.

In January 1993 I was appointed the new Convenor of *Churches Together in St Albans* (CTSA). More than a decade of ecumenical involvement in two local churches had convinced me that the one indispensable way forward for contemporary evangelization was to develop a shared praxis in partnership with other Christian churches. 'Better together', indeed. This conviction had been confirmed by the opportunities given to me by the Baptist Union of Great Britain, whom I represented on the new ecumenical bodies: Churches Together in England (CTE) and the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland (CCBI).

Here now in St Albans was an opportunity to test my conviction out, in a city where some thirty or so different Christian churches had already come together to form the new ecumenical grouping of CTSA.

Open Door.

In October 1992 a significant ecumenical venture in mission began. In the Cross Street Centre, a restaurant and community centre which is a valuable part of Dagnall Street Baptist's ministry, we hosted a public meeting which sought to respond to the needs of homeless people in the city. There were those who claimed that this was not a local problem but really a London one. The evidence of our eyes and of committed Christians working among local homeless and badly housed people told a very different story. Two schemes were explored. One would have seen church halls used across the city on a rota basis for homeless people to use overnight. The other would be more ambitious but aimed to establish a professionally run night and day shelter in the city. It is not exaggerating to say that this meeting led to a *people's movement* in our city. There is no better way to describe the phenomenal support the project received from churches, community groups, the city council, the service industries and all kinds of professionals. A temporary night shelter was established in the former premises of Oxfam in the city and a learning curve began for many of us, volunteers all. By the end of the three months' experiment the evidence was incontrovertible that there was indeed a desperate need for such a project in our city.

Within the space of a few months, just a year or so after that inaugural meeting, a purpose-built city night shelter - Open Door - was officially opened in the city. This was a truly ecumenical project. Alongside professional workers a network of volunteers, many from our CTSA family, became involved: preparing meals, cleaning and laundering and getting alongside some of our city's most needy and vulnerable people. Night-time provision expanded into the day as well. Helped by our CTSA Media Officer - and there can be none better than Peter Crumpler whose book *Keep in Touch* (Scripture Union 1993) is all about Christian communication - 'Open Door' caught the imagination of the whole city. Newspapers in St Albans carried a stream of news about the project:

'All rally to help city's homeless' ... 'New shelter for homeless'... 'Public meeting about the homeless tomorrow night' ... ' £150,000 for homeless base'.... 'Goodwill and generosity has been the key to the success of St Albans' sanctuary for the homeless' ... 'Ordinary folk's army is a winner'..... 'Cold night out aids homeless'.... 'Church backs up plan for homeless' ... 'Sharing plight of the poor'...'Night shelter is open'.

Have another look.

Another ecumenical project was based on the CCBI Lent programme in 1994

'Have Another Look'; as part of this, CTSA joined forces with the vibrant Abbey community in the city to launch an ambitious evangelistic programme called 'From Lent to Pentecost 1994'. The launch meeting and training events were well attended and resulted in the setting up of some 50 ecumenical Lent groups all over the city. The annual 'Unity at the Cross' Service in the Abbey on Good Friday attracted as always hundreds of people. The worship emphasized Christ's own experiences of torture and commended the work of Amnesty International. This was followed by a series of Christian apologetics lectures held that Spring in the Abbey Nave which attracted hundreds of people, and on a midweek evening! Nationally-known celebrity speakers explored different aspects of the Christian faith for the 1990s and were supported by a panel of local Christians who helped to answer questions from the floor. Finally over the 1994 Pentecost weekend, the Abbey was again creatively used. A Saturday Celebration Evening was followed by an all-age programme on the Sunday including drama, music-making, banners, puppetry, arts and crafts, prayer workshops and family evensong to conclude the programme. Some of the headlines in the press over those months ran: *'Invitation to take a new look at faith'...* *'Churches unite for Good Friday services'* *'Abbey Celebrates Pentecost'.....* *'Churches campaign a success'.....*

Youth Matters.

More recently, youth leaders in Church of England, Free Church and Roman Catholic churches within CTSA became disturbed about the increasing gulf between young people and the church. In contemporary Britain it seems that 95% of those in their twenties have no contact with any Christian Church. We determined to make this a priority and began to create vehicles to help improve matters. Dozens of CTSA youth leaders have now combined to form an interchurch youth network. Ecumenical youth services have been planned and held. Something like 200 different people, mainly under 30, have been present at these youth-led services. These have combined drama, music, visual aids, prayers and praise in a variety of creative ways. The pooling of information and some resources is happening. Other achievements have included an ecumenical Christmas youth project in solidarity with the poor of Thailand, and a Christian Rock Concert.

I am writing this article in fact just after a magnificent Unity at the Cross Service, largely led by young people under 20, held on Good Friday evening 1997 in St Alban's Abbey and again attended by hundreds of people. Plans are also developing to make appropriate ministry within local schools a particular focus as the new millennium approaches. Alan Kerbey, National Director of Crusaders, and Sue Trainer, a schools' worker in this area, spoke to a recent youth forum on this important topic. Watch out for a project called Soundnation by the way - you read about it first in the Mainstream magazine!

Alan also visited the CTSA leaders' meeting to outline some of his hopes in this area.

Counselling Directory.

CTSA has also recently completed a directory of counsellors. A small group met over 1996 to explore the needs for a network of counsellors and counselling organisations upon whose services local church leaders might call with confidence. The resulting counselling directory, which we plan to update annually, was introduced to the Autumn CTSA Forum by Dr Mary Groves, a well respected Christian GP and counsellor in our city.

Celebrate Mission 1997.

CTSA will again be co-operating with the Abbey to welcome two of the national pilgrim groups travelling from Canterbury to Ireland. They will be visiting St Albans on Thursday May 29th. In the evening the day's significance will be broadened as Esther de Waal delivers at 7.30pm a Celebrity Lecture in the Abbey on the theme of Celtic Christianity and its relevance in the contemporary world. The scale and organisational detail of this large May June '97 pilgrimage, which is re-tracing the steps of Columba and Augustine, is impressive by any standards. How much we can learn from these saints of old in our contemporary evangelistic challenges!

Mission.

Through the resources of CTSA we have been able to provide food over the weekends for some of St Albans *street people*. Particularly pleasing here has been our partnership with the local Vineyard fellowship which has helped to make this ministry possible. Christian Aid week is always well organized ecumenically here and incorporates competitions, sponsored walks and concerts as well as the vital door to door collections. A 'Good Neighbour' scheme, begun by the churches, has also been run for many years in St Albans now with significant ecumenical support. Please pray for a small group of us working closely with the St Albans Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) to help establish an official furniture recycling scheme in St Albans. The absence of such a scheme has left a sad gap in official local provision for some of St Albans' neediest citizens. As a response to this need the CVS and CTSA launched a pilot project between January and July 1997 with the help and assistance of all kinds of people and organisations. These include the Royal Mail, Social Services, the District Council, the local Trading Standards Department, the Society of St Vincent de Paul and the Homelessness Network.

The millennium.

We are also well into our preliminary plans for a new millennium strategy. Initial plans include the 1997 General Election Forum we have been organising as part of the Council of Churches in Britain and Ireland (CCBI) initiative. Also in our Towards 2000 plans to date are a high profile for the Jubilee 2000

developing countries debt release campaign, a tent mission and a 'Kingdom partnership' with the various wider city events and initiatives. Our determination is, please God, to help our churches to unite as the Body of Christ in this city so as to present a united strategy for and approach to Christian witness into the third millennium.

Please pray for us then as we associate as Baptists in these ways too. We do not think we are alone in enjoying and appreciating ecumenical associating

.....

Michael Bochenski is Minister of Dagnall Street Baptist Church, St Albans.

Come with us on Pilgrimage

*Follow in the
Footsteps of*

SAINT COLUMBA
and
SAINT AUGUSTINE

between 26 May and 9 June 1997

Pilgrims' Way 1997



A pilgrimage, an ecumenical initiative by Christians in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, will start in Rome on 18 May to celebrate the pilgrim journeys 1400 years ago. Pilgrims will arrive in Canterbury from Rome for Saint Augustine's Day on May 26, and they will be joined en route for Derry by many more.

*This is your chance to participate in one of the
journeys shown below!*



For further details please contact:

The Pilgrims' Way 1997 Office, 12 The Close, Norwich NR1 4DH

Telephone 01603 666900 Fax: 01603 766032

Women in Mission

It is said that some devout Jews pray every day, "I thank thee, O God, that I was not born a woman". But for those of us who are Christian women, our thankfulness is for that privilege. How wonderful to have a life-changing relationship with a loving God and how wonderful, too, to have all the opportunities to share our faith which women's outlooks and lifestyles bring.

Relationships

Women's greatest felt needs are in the area of relationships - most counselling rooms hear stories of marriage pain and breakdown, betrayals in friendship or by a trusted colleague, distress in parenting, low self-esteem brought on by the lack of affirmation given as a child. But women's greatest strength is probably also in the same area: empathy, openness, affection, listening, commitment often at a very high cost - these are the hallmarks of many women's relationships. So how natural it is for one woman to share her needs with another and for the reality of the friendship to give rise to a testimony of faith in response: "I was scared going into hospital too, but I found praying really helped". "Oh, two year olds! I know! I had to ask God for extra doses of patience every ten minutes!!" "Thank you for telling me about you and Tim. You know, I was reading a Bible verse this morning that really seems relevant. May I show you?" Such spontaneous loving evangelism goes on in staff rooms, offices, homes and toddler groups all over the country. These are women in mission!

But there are as many styles of mission as there are women of God! Others are writing training courses, running Alpha groups, planning outreach breakfasts, speaking at events large and small, in hospital chaplaincy, prison work, nursing, Bible college, or even using illness at home as an opportunity for their Lord to be encountered by friends who don't know him. "Many women have a real excitement about sharing their faith, but sadly even more feel ill-equipped, lacking in confidence, or suffer from 'I-don't-know-where-to-start' syndrome", says Sharon Anson, a member of Women in Mission. Over lunch one day about four years ago Archbishop George Carey asked Rosemary Green, wife of Michael, "So what's happening for women involved in evangelism?" and this planted a seed. The initiative now known as "Women in Mission" is the result. They are an interdenominational group seeking to equip, resource and support women involved in evangelism in many different contexts. This is how Lady Brentford, past chair of Women in Mission, expresses our purpose:

"We have a vision for encouraging and resourcing all women evangelists; both those in full-time service for whom it is often an isolated role, and those in local ministry in all its diversity. We aim to bring together and affirm

those whose primary task is to enable and train others. We especially want to nurture and train those who feel they are learners. There are many with a lively faith, maybe a new faith, who have not yet found their specific place of calling", They also see the need to give confidence to those who would shrink in modesty from the label "evangelist" but who, nevertheless, gladly give a reason for the hope they have."

Conference Time

So, a second national conference is being held 1-3 July 1997 at The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick in Derbyshire. The organisers say they hope those of you unable to come will hear sounds of joy echoing from there to wherever you are! Reona Joly, affiliated to YWAM, will bring the Bible teaching from 2 Timothy and those who come will also be privileged to hear from Dr Christina Baxter, Elaine Storkey and Jane Grayshon who will share her personal testimony of meeting God in the darkest times. Many women will be thrilled to hear such profound and challenging teaching as these speakers will bring; others will perhaps be most helped by the workshops on such subjects as "Juggling marriage, motherhood and ministry", "Managing stress", "Communicating the Gospel in the workplace" or "Nurturing new Christians one to one". It is always such an encouragement to meet others already in an area one is exploring. A workshop on "Evangelism in an urban priority area" or "How can your church become mission-minded?" may well be the key in the forming of a vision, or even be that heart-stopping time when God definitely puts a personal call on someone's life.

Networking

Some women's favourite time at a conference is between sessions! Catching up with far-flung friends or making new ones, identifying others whose concerns or enthusiasms may be like your own, or those whose whole experience is as different as could be imagined. These encounters make the meals and coffee breaks and walks in the grounds perhaps the richest time of all. However, not everyone can take the time off work or get the childcare arranged to come on a conference. Networking needs to happen everywhere, all the time. So Women in Mission's vision for the longer term is for regional days to bring the support and encouragement they can offer closer to people at home. They would like to tailor what they offer to the needs of an area, liaise with those who are already praying and witnessing there. Such local days could help build bridges where some women are feeling isolated or frustrated in their situation; or provide resources for those who don't know what's on offer. One woman wrote after the first conference, "I was deeply impressed at the number of women there who were managing to do a lot with a little. There was massive vision for growth. I gained great confidence from the conference". That is wonderful to hear about - for her as an individual

and also for her church whose minister wrote that the four women who came were all changed and have continued with much broader horizons than before. But more wonderful still would be for that to multiply beyond anyone's wildest calculations so that every woman whose heart is the Lord's may gain the confidence to share His extraordinary love in her ordinary life.

*This article was written by Davina Irwin-Clark . For further information and booking forms, please contact: Miss Kate Lehane, 9 The Precincts, Canterbury, Kent CT1 2EE
Tel: 01227 784985. Fax: 01227 784985.*

The Mainstream Council of Reference in 1997 are:

John Brewster - Retford	Dave Cave - Evangelical Alliance
Ian Coffey - Plymouth	Andy Cowley - Bushey
Mike Fuller - Coventry	Ian Furlong - Warwick
Stephen Gaukroger - Chalfont St Peter	Jim Graham - Chalfont St Peter
Terry Griffith - Bexleyheath	Steven Hembery - Crawley
Michael Hooton - Ilkeston	Steve Ibbotson - Leeds
Paul Jackson - Paddington	John James - Penarth
Vivienne Lasseter - Burnley	Rupert Lazar - West Croydon
John Lewis - Skipton	Mike Nicholls - Bromley
Peter Nodding - Guildford	Ron Overton - Colchester
Michael Quicke - Spurgeon's College	Lisa Rush - Skipton
Roy Searle - Northumbria Community	David Slater - Kingsbridge
David Spriggs - Evangelical Alliance	Roger Standing - West Croydon
Susan Stevenson - Chatsworth, London	Peter Swaffield - Berkhamsted
Jane Thorington-Hassell - Bow, London	John Weaver - Regents' , Oxford.
Nigel Wright - Altrincham	

The Council meets again at Sutton Coldfield on Wednesday July 9th 1997.

Regional News

Word and Spirit Network Contacts (*)

North:	Adrian Argile	01706 831195
Midlands:	Derek Wick	0121 378 3020
Central Area:	Andy Cowley	01923 441155
South Central:	Lynn Green	01734 786912
Herefordshire:	John Lewis	01989 720312
London:	Roger Standing/Rupert Lazar	0181 681 865
Surrey:	Peter Nodding	01483 572745
East Anglia:	Craig Millward	01493 731009
Bristol:	Nigel Coles	0117 989 2308
South East/Essex:	Ron Overton	01206 549017
South West:	<i>awaiting leadership.</i>	

The Executive are always happy to include new names and groupings here. Please let the Editor know of these ... preferably in writing.

(*) Please note that not all these groups describe themselves as Word and Spirit Networks but *all* share similar aims. Below are two examples of what can be done.

Mainstream - East Anglia Region.

Our group was formed in July 1996 and has begun meeting on a bi-monthly basis. Our last meeting examined the issue of Prophecy in the local Church, and the next will take the title "Patterns of Leadership" held at the Bowthorpe Worship Centre in Norwich. The theme has emerged out of the recognition that many of us have been grappling with the relationship between Renewal and Church Structures. Some churches are considering the role of Eldership. Others are wondering how we ensure that our structures reflect our belief in the 'priesthood of all believers' and are asking how the structures can be changed to encourage 'every member ministry' to happen. We may also be asking where the ministry of the Apostle fits into our model of Baptist Church life. We have two more Mainstream dates pencilled in - this time on Tuesdays: June 3rd, September 23rd. The June meeting will be less structured than the previous gatherings and we will devote more time to worship and prayer. We are also in the process of planning a Mainstream Celebration - probably in mid May. More details will be forthcoming soon.

David Baker (01953 788065) Richard Hughes (01493 661274)

Craig Millward (01493 731009)

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Sutton Coldfield Baptist Church, Trinity Hill,
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Mainstream North - Leaders' Days 1997

We meet at Skipton Baptist Church between 9.30am and 3pm. In February Roy Searle led us on post-modernism - 'New goggles-same gospel'. In April Roger Sutton introduced Seeker Services to us with practicals! On June 19th Alistair Brown the new BMS General Director will share his heart and vision. Then on September 3rd David Coffey will reflect on the denominational consultation a year on. Further information can be had from: Adrian Argile 01706 - 831195.

The Editor is always pleased to receive news and reports of our baby - or is it infant now! - the Word and Spirit networks. Copy date for the September Magazine is Friday July 18th 1997.

The Executive are very pleased to welcome Adam John Stuart Green to God's world and - soon - to our Executive meetings. Our love, prayers and congratulations go to Lynn and Stuart upon God's precious gift to them of a son.



*Stuart and Lynn are delighted
to announce the birth of
Adam John Stuart Green
on Tuesday, 4th March 1997
He weighed in at 8lb 5 1/2ozs*

*We all look forward to seeing
you sometime over the summer!*



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