

Under Christ's Rule

6 studies in Contemporary Baptist Living

Rev Dr Stuart Blythe



baptist union
of scotland



Foreword

“Communities of Conviction” was the title of the Scottish Baptist Assembly in 2010. It led to a fresh interest in Baptist convictions amongst Scottish Baptists, and a desire to explore the colour and vibrancy that those convictions would bring to our churches if understood and practised.

Many delegates at the assembly asked for materials to help explore these themes and to help share this fresh passion with others.

I am delighted that Rev Dr Stuart Blythe of the Scottish Baptist College, a key note speaker at the 2010 Assembly, has been willing to create this resource.

Stuart's challenge has always been that our practices should reflect our principles. This study guide allows participants and churches to consider how they put Baptist principles into practise in contemporary Scotland.

The title "Under Christ's Rule" is central to the Baptist Union of Scotland's "Invitation to a Journey." It is hoped this study guide will help churches engage with the concept of being creatively rooted, bringing new life to our individual expressions of Baptist church.

**Rev Alan Donaldson
General Director
Baptist Union of Scotland**

Introduction

In 2011 the Baptist Union of Scotland National strategy Team produced a document called 'Invitation to a Journey'. Central to this document was the idea that as Baptists we seek to live 'Under the Rule of Jesus Christ'. This particular booklet has been produced to allow congregations through Bible study and discussion to explore further six 'convictions' mentioned in that document as a way of helping make a common vision a reality.

Convictions

The Baptist theologian James Wm. McClendon Jr. states 'convictions' are 'persistent beliefs' which make people 'who they are' and as such are expressed in what we say and do¹.

This booklet considers six 'Baptist Convictions'. To call them 'Baptist' convictions is not to claim only Baptists hold these. Neither is it to claim all Baptists have held or hold all of these convictions equally. Rather they are described as 'Baptist' convictions because the practice of them is evident in the history of our tradition as Baptists have sought to work out in their own context, in the light of Scripture and power of the Holy Spirit what it means to follow Jesus Christ. In turn through the deliberations of the National Strategy Group they have been identified as important for our own contemporary context as we seek in our life together to be 'salt and light' before a watching world.

Shaping Practices

In each section of the booklet the conviction discussed has associated with it a number of 'shaping practices'. The idea of practice is important because if our beliefs are convictions they will show themselves in practice or they are not by definition convictions. The practices offered are intended to be communal and related to the nature of our corporate life under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and in relation to the world. They are described as shaping practices, however, because there is a dynamic relationship between what we claim to believe and what we do. To be sure, practices express

¹James Wm. McClendon, Jr. and James M. Smith, *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism* (Oregon:Wipf and Stock, 2002), 4-13.

convictions. In turn, however, as we engage in these practices we are shaped into a particular form of people. In relation to the above I find the analogy with music helpful. Musicians practise because they are musicians. It is through practise, however, that they become musicians or certainly better musicians. Moreover when a musician joins a band or orchestra it is through practicing and performing with that group, learning to interpret the musical score with their particular emphasis, that they become identifiable members of that group. They are shaped into community through practice and performance.

In this booklet not all of the shaping practices offered may resonate to the same extent with your context nor carry the same weight. Others, such as developing practices of forgiveness and reconciliation as an expression of living faithfully as 'believers' church are more explicitly Scriptural. It will be however, for each congregation to work out the value, or not, of these practices and the best way to develop them.

Using this Material

As indicated above this material is intended for corporate study and discussion although hopefully individuals may find the information interesting and useful. Each section contains 'Activity' ideas for discussion and study in relation to the material presented which includes: 'Scripture', 'Theology', and historical and contemporary 'Examples'. The activities stated are simply suggestions. It is hoped that each leader and congregation will use the material creatively as best suited to context. Some material could be developed and presented by leaders, some read at home in preparation, some carried out together. There is no prescribed way for doing this. Although there are six sections the consideration of these issues need not be confined to only six week. A slower walk through the material, like that of an astronaut, may bring more progress in the long term (see section on Communal Discernment). The 'Theology' material is included only in some sections. It is hoped, however, that this will not be omitted as it is included precisely to challenge the idea

that theology is only for academics and pastors. This notwithstanding the material is offered in the spirit of the some of the convictions discussed, hoping that a congregation, in the light of Scripture and presence of the Holy Spirit, will seek to discern what the living Jesus Christ may be saying to them in terms of how we should now live.

Sources

The material in this booklet is the result of the input of a variety of 'voices' over a number of years. The individual convictions included were originally identified by Andrew Rollinson and discussed in various groups. I have now developed them in my own way, often though in conversation with others who have commented on draft material or responded to requests for illustrations, original research, and information. To these people I am particularly grateful. Specific written material used is referenced in footnotes and can serve as further reading for those interested in following through particular themes.

Rev. Dr Stuart Blythe
(Scottish Baptist College, September 2011).

Conviction
One
Living
Authentically
as a
'Believers'
Church'

Definitions:

Authentically - conforming in practice to the fact

Believers' Church - one of the terms used along with others such as 'gathered church' and 'community of disciples', to describe the 'Baptist' way of being the church. In this understanding each local church is perceived as consisting of those 'voluntarily' joined together as believers, by Jesus Christ, into communal life under his Lordship

Ecclesiology - the biblical/theological understanding of the church

Scriptures:

Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31;
Ephesians 4:1-16; 1 Peter 2:9-12.

Focus: Matthew 16: 13-28

Various church traditions understand this passage in different ways as they develop their own particular ecclesiology

From a Baptist perspective four aspects of this passage can be highlighted:

1. The church is built upon the confession of believers in the Lordship of Jesus Christ (v13-20)
2. The resurrected Lordship ([Acts 2:36]) of Jesus Christ is established through his way of the cross (21-28)
3. The Greek word for 'church' (ekklesia) as used here (18) and in Matthew 18-15-20 indicates a gathered, called out, community of confessing believers
4. Believing and confessing Jesus Christ involves active discipleship in the way of the cross (24-25)

Shaping Practices:

- ◆ Reinforcing shared rituals of 'believing/belonging' including baptism and the Lord's Supper
- ◆ 'Procedures' and 'processes' for modelling Christian reconciliation and forgiveness among believers

- ◆ Active member participation in all areas of church life

Examples:

Covenanting Services as a Reinforcing Ritual

The Baptist Union of Great Britain's publication: *Patterns and Prayer for the Community of Disciples*¹ includes orders of service congregations can use for 'Covenanting Together' or 'Reaffirming Fellowship'. Such covenanting services enable participants to actively and publicly commit, and recommit, to God and one another in the context of a worship service. A particularly appropriate time for such an event can be the annual church Anniversary.

It is a matter of discussion and debate what the relationship of such events to formal church membership might be. This notwithstanding, paying attention in worship and word to the various ways in which people can and do belong to a congregation, and the processes of becoming and remaining a member can help reinforce the believers nature of the church.

Dealing with Grievances

Some churches have Matthew 18:15-17 stated in their church Constitution or an equivalent document indicating the process which believers are to follow in personal disagreements (See section on Communal Discernment for an exposition of this passage). Bearsden Baptist Church has helpfully developed this in a policy included here in full:

Should an incident occur in the church which causes concern, upset or offence, then the following steps should be followed:

1) Prayer - Honestly and with humility consider whether this is a matter that should go further. Perhaps there has been a misunderstanding or maybe your own reaction has been conditioned by your personality and background. Pray and ask God if your response has been a fair one and whether you should take the matter further. Pray for grace and a forgiving attitude. Remember Paul's words in *Philippians 2:3-4*: 'Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than

¹Gathering for Worship: *Patterns and Prayers for the Community of Disciples*, ed. by C. Ellis and M. Blythe (Norwich: Canterbury press), 2005.

yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others'.

2) Personal Matters - If the issue that has arisen is personal, just between you and another person in the church, then you should follow the process established by Jesus in Matthew 18:15-17. In the first instance, following prayer, discuss the matter with the individual directly with a gracious attitude and a readiness to forgive. Avoid being confrontational, which could aggravate the situation.

If the person 'refuses to listen', that is, doesn't respond with a mutual desire to discuss and deal with the issue and to restore the relationship, then speak to your spouse, a trusted friend or your deacon, not to gain sympathy and support, but to invite their honest and wise counsel. If, after further prayer, it is felt that a further meeting is appropriate, then take one or two of these people with you to seek a resolution of the matter and restoration of the relationship.

If the person still 'refuses to listen', even after this joint approach, then refer the matter prayerfully for the consideration of the leadership through your own deacon. They will then review the circumstances and advise what further action should be taken. The biblical process allows for such personal matters to be taken ultimately to the church meeting and the potential for the expulsion of the person concerned, but clearly these options would only be entertained in extreme circumstances, and then only after considerable prayer and every other avenue had been explored.

3) Church Matters - If the issue that has arisen is a church matter, that is, concerning the conduct of services, the children's and youth work, home groups, prayer meetings, overseas work or some other area of the church's ministry, then the matter, in most cases, should not be raised directly with the person concerned, since they are acting under the authority of the church. It can be hurtful to the individual and damaging to the church's ministry, when someone, who has put in time and effort in the Lord's service is criticised, especially just before, during or immediately after a service or meeting. This is not the case for positive and encouraging words, which are always welcome.

After a period of reflection and prayer, approach either your own deacon or the deacon responsible for that particular aspect of church life or the pastor, if the matter relates to the conduct of Sunday services, with your concern. Following an initial verbal approach, by telephone or in person, it is helpful to set out the matter in writing, either my letter or email. The matter will then be discussed where appropriate by the leadership as soon as is practicable and a response given. Keep in mind that no concern can be discussed on a 'no names' basis.

In certain circumstances, a meeting may be suggested to explore and clarify the matter further, face to face. If no resolution is achieved at this stage, the leadership may advise raising the matter at a church meeting, for wider discussion. It is also possible for a member to request this, if they feel it would be beneficial.

The church meeting only considers matters that have been placed on the agenda in advance, to allow prior thought and prayer. It is inadvisable to attempt to raise such matters without any prior discussion, since this can easily lead to misunderstanding, a loss of trust and division.

4) Wider Discussion - Members may find it helpful, for the purpose of prayer and counsel, to discuss personal and church matters with others in advance of an approach to the person concerned or the leadership. This can be helpful, but does pose risks. There can be the temptation to seek sympathy for one's own upset from close friend's, which has the danger of descending to the level of gossip or slander, which is extremely damaging and hurtful. There can also be the temptation to seek to investigate the level of support for a particular viewpoint more widely within the church, which has the danger of being divisive and can lead to disunity.

Therefore, the discussion of such matters should be limited to one or two trusted friends, and then only for prayer and counsel.

Collaborative Preaching

At Viewfield, Dunfermline, the student pastor with explicit attention to the Baptist way of being the church encouraged congregational participation in a new way. He invited a number of the congregation to engage in what is generally called 'collaborative preaching'. In his

approach, at the point of preparation he asked a number of people to contribute to the interpretation of the passage he was preparing to preach. This was done through an e mail questionnaire. The responses then fed as 'voices' from the congregation into his own preparation. Post-sermon contact was then made with those who had contributed regarding their experience of the preached sermon. Interestingly while only a few of the congregation were directly involved others were indirectly drawn in the activity. This happened through the networks of relationships that participants had with others in and beyond the church and which influenced their contributions.

Activities:

Identify the various ways in which people can and do 'belong' to your church fellowship e.g. as children, visitors, etc? How does the practice of 'formal membership' in your church relate to these other and different ways of belonging? Is 'membership' a useful concept in maintaining the idea of a believers' church or is 'church membership' an outdated and unhelpful concept? What would you consider to be the strengths and weaknesses of a regular 'covenanting' approach?

It can be claimed that God wants the way in which believers live to be a model for other social relationships. In this respect do you consider the way in which your congregation deals with disagreement and conflict offers gospel 'light' and 'salt' to the watching world? To what extent do you think a policy such as the one described above would be beneficial in describing and defining a believing church's way of dealing with conflict?

Collaborative preaching is a creative way of encouraging wider participation in the life of a congregation. What do you make of this as an idea? Can you think of other creative ways of encouraging multi member participation in the worship, mission, and ministry aspects of your congregational life?

Conviction
Two
Communal
Discipleship

The German Christian theologian and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) noted: "'Follow me' are Jesus' first and last words to Peter." Perhaps they are Christ's first and last word to any and every disciple.¹

Definitions:

Communal - the participation of the believing community together

Discipleship - active adherence, attachment, commitment to a person or ideology

Christian Discipleship - commitment to Jesus Christ

Scriptures:

Matthew 16:21-28; Matthew 28:16-20; John 13: 1-17, 34; Acts 2:42-47; Ephesians 4:1-16; Colossians 3:1-17

Focus: Matthew 4:17-22:

The call was a summons to 'follow' (19). Discipleship is commitment to Christ. Jesus takes the initiative in making this call. Here we may read the theological implication of the saying made in John 15:16². It is a call to be with him and to be like him in the world as co-workers in his ministry and mission (19). It is a call to participate and imitate. It is a call based upon his announcement that the 'kingdom of heaven' is near (17). This kingdom is God's dominion, rule, 'as in heaven so on earth', breaking into the world as embodied in the words and actions of Jesus himself. Response requires 'repentance' (metanoia) (17). As illustrated in the lives of the disciples, repentance is more than a change of heart or mind but a change of lifestyle demonstrated concretely by their leaving of established social and economic ties (18, 20, 22). Later events demonstrate such social breaks were not final. The immediacy of the response, however, indicates the fundamental radicality of discipleship which involves transformation rather than mere modification. In responding to the call of Christ individually we respond to a call to be with and join with others. In these verses we have 'the founding of

¹David Augsburger, *Dissident Discipleship* (Michigan: Brazos Press, 2006), 46.

²Douglas R.A. Hare, *Matthew* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), 30.

the messianic community', the embryonic Christian Church.³ Accordingly discipleship is an activity located in the life of a community of learners.

Some Theology:

The Baptist theologian, the late James Wm. McClendon, Jr. speaks of 'Discipleship' and 'Community' as two of the key features of the 'baptist vision' of the Church. He relates each of these features respectively to the 'powerful remembering signs' of believers' baptism and the Lord's Supper.

On the relationship between believers' baptism and discipleship he writes:

New Testament baptism was neither a benign welcome to human existence, nor a rite of passage to adolescence, nor a viaticum offering safe conduct to the afterlife, but rather was the commissioning of those who by resurrection light took up the way of Jesus of Nazareth - the way of the cross.⁴

On the relationship between the Lord's Supper and community he writes:

the meal is part and parcel of a practice, which we might call, until a better name is found, the practice of establishing and maintaining Christian community.⁵

Moreover, McClendon brings discipleship and community together arguing that the character and convictions of disciples are formed and expressed in the communal life of believers. Accordingly, in relation to the Church he argues that God calls us into his way 'in relation to one another'. As a consequence we have a responsibility of 'watch-care' to one another. This watch-care involves 'mutual aid and service' and finds expression in such things as breaking bread together and in mutual admonition and forgiveness. For McClendon this 'watch-care' is a critical strand in enabling people to walk in the way of life which they have embarked upon through the Spirit and expressed in baptism.⁶

Shaping Practices:

◆ Making much of the discipleship and communal aspects of baptism and the Lord's Supper

³R.T. France, *The gospel of Matthew* (Eerdmans:Cambridge, 2007), 144-148.

⁴James Wm. McClendon, Jr. *Ethics*, rev. ed (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 269.

⁵James Wm. McClendon, Jr. *Ethics*, rev. ed (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 220.

⁶James Wm. McClendon, Jr. *Ethics*, rev. ed (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 51-52.

- ◆ Developing 'accountability' groups and mentoring relationships where people can talk openly and honestly about the challenges they face in seeking to follow in the way of Jesus and learn from one another
- ◆ Regular teaching/preaching programmes which emphasise the relationship between right thinking, feeling, and doing.

Example:

Renewing Communion

For the past 10 years Denny Baptist Church has celebrated Communion every Sunday morning at a 10am service prior to the morning worship service. Before this it had been 'tacked on' at the end of the morning services.

Following the 2010 Assembly and their reflection on **Communities of Conviction**, and what it means to be a believers' church, the congregation scrapped the 10am service which served only a few (10-15 people out of 80-90 average Sunday morning attendance). They now have Communion on the first Sunday morning and the third Sunday evening of each month but with the whole service shaped around Communion.

In this way, despite reducing the frequency, the congregation have increased the significance of Communion in their gathered life together. Explaining the changes the pastor highlighted among a number of concerns the following:

- ◆ **Our Communion practice should in some way shape our community life.**⁷ The Last Supper was a '...acted out a parable about [Jesus'] life-giving love, broken and poured out like bread and wine.'⁸ It is in re-enacting that story of Jesus at the table that we are shaped into a community of life-giving love being 'poured out' for one another. As we see the broken bread we should be broken for a lost world and as we see the wine poured we should be willing to be poured out for that lost world.
- ◆ When Jesus says 'do this' it is not simply a command to repeat the ritual, it is a command to incarnate in our community life what the ritual means.
- ◆ Paul's use of the term 'body' in 1 Corinthians 11 refers

⁷Eleanor Kreider, *Given For You: A Fresh Look at Communion* (Leicester: IVP, 1998), 17.

⁸Eleanor Kreider, *Given For You: A Fresh Look at Communion* (Leicester: IVP, 1998), 21.

to the Church as the body of Christ and so 'He means that they should consider the mystery of their relationships in Christ, see what is going on, perceive the meaning of their actions, and catch the implications of their behaviour. This is what discerning the body means.'⁹ The Lord's Supper was an example of the generosity of the mercy and kindness of God which was meant to shape the Church into a community which reflected that generosity, mercy and kindness in their relationship with each other.

◆ By participating in Communion together as a whole church we believe that the church will be shaped by the meaning of Communion so that it will 'demonstrate in all of its relationships, with brother, neighbour, and enemy, the incarnated love of Christ.'¹⁰ Participation in Communion together calls each of us to become conformed to Christ's own way of sacrificial love.¹¹

Activities:

Take one or more of the Scriptural passages suggested, identify and list in your own words the features of discipleship it teaches under the heading: 'Discipleship involves...'

Do you find the language of 'watch-care' helpful for describing our mutual responsibility towards one another in developing discipleship and why? What practical actions do you think would constitute 'watch-care' in practice?

Do you find the notion of 'mutual accountability' a liberating or threatening idea and why? Dietrich Bonhoeffer, referred to in the opening quote, encouraged his students to confess their sins to one another - is this a step too far? What safeguards are required to make mutual accountability work?

In what ways do you think our worship services and acts such as Baptism and the Communion can be developed to make them formative of communal discipleship rather than simply a response to what God has done for us?

⁹Eleanor Kreider, *Given For You: A Fresh Look at Communion* (Leicester: IVP, 1998), 21.

¹⁰Eleanor Kreider, *Given For You: A Fresh Look at Communion* (Leicester: IVP, 1998), 62.

¹¹Eleanor Kreider, *Given For You: A Fresh Look at Communion* (Leicester: IVP, 1998), 64.

Conviction
Three
Communal
discernment
of the voice
of God

The primary calling of God's covenant people is to be attentive to the voice and will of God. Such radical listening lies at the heart of both Israel's vocation, where listening (Heb. sham'a) implies both a hearing and an obeying, and the calling of the Messianic community - 'This is my Son, whom I have chosen, listen to him'(Luke 9:35). There is something profoundly and attractively countercultural about a group of God's people humble enough, united enough and still enough to sense the promptings of God's Spirit in a world of fads, fashions and formulas. True listening, like the attentiveness of lovers, requires sensitivity, awareness, patience and commitment. It is the delicate art of discernment not the cut and thrust of democratic processes.¹

Definitions:

Communal - the participation of the believing community together

Discernment - attentiveness, listening, hearing, agreeing, deciding, and obeying

Voice of God - the directing of the living Christ, head of the Church, as witnessed to in the Scripture and applied by the Holy Spirit

Scriptures:

John 16:7-8, 12-14; Acts 6:1-7; 11:19-30; 15:1-35; Romans 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 2:9-16, Philippians 2:1-11.

Focus: Matthew 18:15-20

This particular passage is concerned with issues of discipline, reconciliation, and restoration. Perceived personal offence is treated in relation to an ever widening circle of participants. Importantly although perhaps not obviously, the involvement of others exposes to critique the one who feels grieved as well as the one who is accused. Presumably if one cannot find supportive witnesses or they are not prepared to support the claim the matter should be allowed to fall.

For the purposes of this study, however, the matter to

¹Andrew Rollinson, *The Attentive Community: Recovering God's Gift of Communal Discernment (Sabbatical Study, March 2009)*, 2, available from <http://www.scottishbaptist.org.uk/downloads>, accessed 4/7/11.

note is that in the end it is the gathered community, the 'church', which as a result of listening carries out the appropriate action (17). Such a deciding, however, is not a matter of democracy but a kingdom issue related to the 'heavens' (18) and a deciding and declaring of what is considered to be the right way and what is not (binding and loosing). The fact that the teaching of verse 18 is a virtual repetition of Matthew 16:19 indicates that this principle of congregational deciding and declaring has a wider application than simply matters of discipline but is to be understood as a more general practice in the life of the church. This is supported by verse 19 which appears to broaden the range of situations for which such a practice is appropriate as well as locating it within the context of congregational agreement and prayer (19). In such a process the presence of the risen Christ is promised (20). The authority is His. Accordingly the phrase 'in my name' indicates the expectation that the deciding and declaring is based upon a discerning what Christ would want. On this bible commentator Ben Witherington III states:

In v. 20 a promise is given that wherever two or more come together in Jesus' name, he will be present with them (cf. 1 Cor 6:1-6). The phrase 'in my name' assumes that the community has submitted to the guidance and teachings of Jesus, and indeed the whole saying assumes the community would not make a decision that would besmirch the name of Jesus. This saying is meant to make clear that the community must always act as though Jesus is present guiding the decision-making, as in fact he is.²

In the light of this passage communal discernment is the process of a congregation talking and listening together in the light of the Scriptures and in the presence of the Holy Spirit in order to agree what they believe the risen Jesus Christ is saying to them in order that they should move forward to the glory of God the Father.

Shaping Practices:

- ◆ Regular preaching and teaching on communal discernment, its nature, purpose, and processes, as an expression of Christian discipleship and worship
- ◆ The creation of a disciplined and well led context in

²Ben Witherington III, *Matthew* (Georgiasmyth & Helwys, 2006), 351-352.

which people are open to speak, open to listen, and open to change their minds

◆ The nurturing of depth relationships within the church family beyond the context of 'church business meetings

Examples:

Progress Meetings

Dumbarton Baptist Church has sought in a variety of ways to change the 'culture' of their meetings from 'business' to 'progress' and from 'democracy' to 'discernment'. Changing culture has been a journey which has meant not simply changing procedures but, as significantly, changing attitudes in order to 'liberate' the members of the congregation to speak publicly 'without fear of criticism or judgement'. Accordingly, the church holds 'progress meetings' in order to allow people to express and discuss the opinions which they had on a range of subject with the purpose of discerning God's 'way forward' for them. At such meetings the feelings, perspectives, and experiences of others are valued equally with care taken to ensure that no-one is overlooked and no-one is allowed to over power or demean others. In this way people have learned how to listen to each other and to honour and encourage each other. The Pastor reports that the simple act of offering sweets at the beginning of the meetings broke down, not all but most of the stuffy, formal business, 'ready for an argument' mentality that people can associate with church meetings. At a deeper level this also challenges the notion of people taking themselves too seriously or assuming that 'formality' and 'reverence' are necessarily the same things.

At these progress meetings depending on what's on the 'agenda' someone other than the Pastor may be invited to lead a discussion. Quite often an invitation is made where people are encouraged to express ideas, impressions, inspiration, and experiences. If things get stuck, difficult, or heated time is taken to stop for purposes of clarification, to digest what's being said, to pray, or to sit momentarily in quiet, private reflection. If, through discussion no way forward is discerned, a matter may be postponed until the next 'progress' meeting.

Summaries, not minutes, of the meeting are kept and provided to the congregation to keep them up to date with the progress. This notwithstanding, people accept that real progress may only be achieved by the 'slow walk' of the 'deep sea diver' or 'astronaut' rather than by a hurried decision making concern. Experience has shown haste can lead to mistakes with lasting consequences. In turn, to demonstrate that meetings can take place when there is nothing in particular to be decided they are sometimes held with no primary agenda.

The Pastor of the church strongly resists being formulaic but suggests the following ideas can be important in the transition from business to progress meetings:

- ◆ Intuition.
- ◆ Openness with each other.
- ◆ Explore and identify 'necessity.'
- ◆ Sight of the long term
- ◆ Daring
- ◆ Humility to listen and learn from each other
- ◆ Mutual value respect, building each other up, in love
- ◆ Determination to create some 'momentum,' see something (progress) happen.
- ◆ Belief that a change of culture is often all that's required

Activities:

What 3 practical steps could be taken to encourage attendance, participation, and discernment in relation to your own church meetings?

Dr Parush Parushev speaking on the topic of 'Communal Discernment' at the BUS Assembly in 2010 gave this warning: 'For the expediency of this busy life, for the sake of pragmatic consideration, we are very easily giving up the right of this discernment to some individuals we call leaders'. Recognising that the authority is Christ's discerned by the congregation how in practice can this be integrated with the legitimate role of leadership in a congregation? (It might be interesting for those who are called leaders and those who are not to discuss this separately before coming together).

List a number of ways you think that trusting relationships between church members can be developed and nurtured beyond the gathering of church meetings? Which one of these could be implemented easily and how and when would you plan to do so?

Pushing Further

'Jesus is not interested in the colour which we paint the hall!'

How does this statement make you feel? Do you agree with it? Should such matters be discussed at church meetings as requiring communal discernment, does this devalue the process, or for those who feel that their participation in the life of the church is minimised does it give them the opportunity to take part? What matters and issues require discerning the mind of Christ?

Conviction
Four
*Inter-church
resourcing*

Definitions:

church - a local congregation which exists as an expression of the 'Church' universal

Resourcing - providing the means and help required to meet a situation

Scriptures:

John 13:34-35; Acts 15: 1-34; 1 Corinthians 12;
2 Col. 1:24, 1 John 3:17

Focus: 2 Corinthians 8-9

Paul's concern in this passage is a monetary collection he is gathering for 'the poor' in the church in Jerusalem. We can note a number of things about this as an example of inter-church resourcing:

- 1.** It was a priority activity in Paul's ministry. Paul devotes two chapters of 2 Cor. to encouraging participation. The collection is also mentioned in some of his other main letters: 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, Gal. 2:10; Rom. 15:25-28. In addition, it was something to which he gave 'obsessive' attention for nearly two decades.¹ Scholars suggest that for Paul his concern with the collection was to provide a tangible example of unity in the Church made up of diverse congregations.
- 2.** A wide range of churches were encouraged to participate in this inter-church resourcing. In these chapters he directly appeals to the Corinthians, the congregation who were not without their own troubles to seek. He also mentions the churches in Macedonia who gave out of a situation of 'severe trial' and 'poverty' (8:1-5) and the other churches in Achaia (2 Cor. 1:1).
- 3.** He encourages generous involvement on theological grounds. Paul describes the collection with reference to key theological terms including: grace, participation/fellowship, service, love, generosity, freedom, righteousness, good work, obedience and confession. (See discussion activity below).
- 4.** Paul contends that ultimately participation is a matter of the gospel (8:9). The example of Jesus in his saving sacrifice for others is offered as the pattern and

¹S. McKnight, "Collection for the Saints", *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 143

motivation for the loving response of the Corinthians to the needs of other believers.

5. Paul's concern in this inter-church resourcing is for equality (8:10-15). Paul is not arguing that the Jerusalem church should have a priority at the expense of others but rather that all should share equally in their common resources. Accordingly it appears that Paul considers the resources of any one church are the resources of the whole Church, and not something meanly or self-servingly held by any particular congregation.

6. Participation involves the exercise of faith in the ongoing provision of God (9:6-11). To share resources may seem to be a perilous activity. For Paul, however, it is the way of faith in God's provision and the blessing of helping others.

7. Participation leads not simply to the relief of the poor but to the praise of God (9:12-15).

Example:

In the seventeenth century, English Baptists took seriously not only the 'competence' of individual churches but the 'interdependent' nature of the congregations. At the second meeting of the Western Baptist Association in June 1655, the messengers (church representatives) agreed the statement:

[we] do mutually acknowledge each other to be true churches and that it is their duty to hold a class communion each with other according to the rule of his word and so be helpful each to other as God shall give opportunity and ability . . . and are faithfully to hold such communion each with other and to endeavour to be helpful each to other.²

Shaping Practices:

The ways in which these early English Baptist churches could be helpful to each other in association was set out in their minutes with reference to shaping practices:

First, giving advice in matters of controversy which one particular church cannot settle alone, according to the pattern of Acts 15, the Council of Jerusalem. The Abingdon church, in Berkshire, took this approach to the question regarding the testing, election and ordination of elders and deacons.³

Second, alleviating the poverty of any church suffering

²B.R. White (ed.) *Association Records of the Particular Baptists of England, Wales and Ireland to 1660* (London: The Baptist Historical Society, 1971-77), 20-21.

³ARPB, 172

financial want, according to the example of Romans 15.26.⁴ Indeed specific reference is made to the principle of 'equality' in the use of finance to support ministry in other congregations.⁵

Third, the Midland churches agreed to send gifted persons to provide ministry in churches which lacked able leaders. This was deemed biblical on account of the example of Barnabas in Acts 11.22.⁶

Fourth, where 'any work of the Lord that is common to the churches' might be undertaken jointly, this would be done, as was taught in 2 Cor 8.19.⁷

Fifth, there was an agreement to watch over each other, to provide mutual watch-care, in order to maintain the 'purity of doctrine, exercise of love and good conversation,' since the churches are all members of the one body of Christ, as described in 1 Cor 12.12, 29.⁸

Some Theology:

Baptists recognise that the ultimate authority over all things is the 'rule', the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In the local church we live under that rule. The rule of Jesus Christ, however, extends beyond the local. In this sense, interdependency under the rule of Jesus Christ is a theological given. To deny our interdependency is to limit this rule.

The above can be expressed differently in relation to the image of the Church as 'body'. The local church is a concrete manifestation of the universal Church over which Christ is Head. Individual churches relate to one another as parts of the 'one body' in the same way in which individual members of a local congregation relate to one another as part of the 'one body' (1 Cor. 12:-31). With reference to this and a warning not to fail to 'discern the body' Nigel Wright states: 'The competence of the congregation was never meant to be an omnicompetence which removes the need for interdependence'.⁹

Examples:

King's Park Baptist Church has 'sent' one of their experienced and trained leaders and his wife to the small Baptist church at Dennistoun in order to provide some leadership and ministry for a designated period of

⁴ARP, 21.

⁵ARP, 174.

⁶ARP, 174.

⁷ARP, 21.

⁸ARP, 21.

⁹Nigel G. Wright, *Free Church Free State: The Positive Baptist Vision* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), 183.

time. Other members of church have also participated in practical work activity and in the music ministry at Dennistoun.

In the Border towns of Selkirk, Galashiels, and Hawick there is a considerable sharing of personnel, expertise, equipment and resources not only to support regular ministry in the surrounding towns but to develop mission events and activities including work among children and young people. At present the associate minister from Selkirk is actively involved in supporting a 'missional expression' in Hawick called Open House and in their words is: an informal congregation which meets once a month round a meal...aimed at people who would not normally come to 'Church' on a Sunday and is attended by a wide variety of the Hawick Community.

Activities:

Individually, read 2 Corinthians 8-9, list and reference to the appropriate verses the various ways in which Paul describes participating in the collection for the church at Jerusalem. Join with others to compile a common list so that all can see the reasons and nature of inter-church resourcing as described by Paul in these chapters. Describe the ways, if any, in which this exercise has changed your view of the importance and nature of participating in inter-church resourcing.

In 2 Corinthians 8-9 Paul seems to be trying to address what he perceives to be a hesitation in the church at Corinth to participate in this offering. Identify together possible reasons why individual congregations may be reluctant to engage in inter-church resourcing. These again could be listed for all to see. Does the passage address these hesitations in any way? For example do verses say anything to the hesitation that you have too much going on in your own situation to be bothered about others?

Try and imagine ways in which the practice of inter-church resourcing could be implemented in relation to your nearest Baptist church or churches. Consider what you could offer as well as receive. Pray for these churches, send them a card or letter saying that you have been doing so. Discuss other practical ways in which relationships could be built avoiding 'the way things used to be'.

Conviction
Five
*Building
missional
relationships*

Definitions:

Missional - relating to, or connected with, a religious mission; missionary (Oxford English Dictionary)

In current Christian parlance 'missional' is an adjective which is used to define the essential nature of the thing which it qualifies such as 'church'. A missional church, therefore, is not simply a church that does mission but whose whole existence is shaped by the missionary task. As consequence according to writer Alan Hirsch Missional church is a community of God's people that defines itself, and organizes its life around, its real purpose of being an agent of God's mission to the world. In other words, the church's true and authentic organizing principle is mission. When the church is in mission, it is the true church. The church itself is not only a product of that mission but is obligated and destined to extend it by whatever means possible. The mission of God flows directly through every believer and every community of faith that adheres to Jesus. To obstruct this is to block God's purposes in and through his people.¹

Relationships - the condition or fact of being related, associated, connected

Scriptures:

Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 24:45; John 20:19-23;
Acts 1:7; Acts 17:16-34; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23;

Focus: Matthew 9:9-13

Mission done in the name of Jesus should be done in the way of Jesus. These verses are concerned with Jesus' 'mission', with what he came for (13). One of the striking features of this incarnational mission was his seeking out and willingness to place himself among those labelled as 'sinners'. 'Sinners' as used here is a term which included not only the wayward, non-observant Jew, and Gentiles, but also the notoriously immoral. Significantly, Jesus not only went to such people maintaining a respectable distance but 'ate' with them (10). This was the particular focus of the Pharisees criticism (11). The reason is that it is one thing to be concerned to reach the wayward but

¹Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church*, Brazos (2007), 82.

quite another to eat with them for in the ancient world such eating was an intimate act that suggested acceptance, welcome, and identification. Furthermore to have such a close contact was regarded as risking your own purity through becoming contaminated by them. We note therefore that it was actual 'friendship' with tax collectors and sinners that was the accusation levelled against Jesus (Matt. 11:19). Jesus located himself bodily and physically in social contexts that allowed him to interact with those for whom he had come. Expressing such friendship and association was not so much a 'means' by which he hoped he would later be able to reach people with the good news, it was reaching people with the good news by extending to them in his actions God's mercy (Matt. 9:13). It was the gracious call to Matthew that led to his following not an explanation of his sinfulness.

Shaping Practices:

- ◆ Creative ways of explicitly sharing the Christian message in relation to context and culture
- ◆ Ensuring church members have time to contribute to and participate in the relationships of family, work, and local activities
- ◆ Offering help and hospitality to other groups within the local community including those marginalised by others.

Example:

Novel Communication

One of the historic streams which formed contemporary Scottish Baptist church life was the Baptist churches which emerged through the evangelistic endeavours of Robert (1764-1842) and James (1768-1851) Haldane. These two wealthy brothers, influenced by the evangelical revival in England, and denied an opportunity to serve as missionaries turned their attention to evangelism in Scotland in the late eighteenth century. At the heart of their work was the evangelistic open-air preaching of the younger brother James.

Of the two brothers Haldane, Robert, the elder, as he had the deeper purse, had also the more powerful brain. Yet his munificent scheme for the evangelisation of Scotland,

which led to the formation of the Congregational and Baptist bodies, and helped also the formation of the Evangelical Union was conditioned upon the remarkable preaching ability of Mr. James Haldane, his brother, or Captain Haldane, as he used to be called in those days.²

To be sure, open-air preaching was not completely unknown in Scotland before James Haldane began this work in 1797. Yet the geographical and numerical extent of his open-air preaching activities, its controversial nature in directly challenging the sermons of Established Church ministers, the fact that Haldane was a wealthy un-ordained layman, the announcement of sermons by the town crier, his powerful and bold personality, the distribution of tracts, his direct and sincere manner of speaking, all meant that his open-air preaching in context was a novel and creative means of communication. As expressed by one writer:

Its novelty, hazard and daring made it very attractive to multitudes. That a man would brave the changeable Scottish weather, use the vast spaces as a temple and a dull or shining sky as a sounding board and stand up at almost any hour of the day or night to preach was magnetic and appealing.³

Multi-contact Witness

Wigtown Baptist Church is located within a small, close-knit unpretentious and friendly community and so no place for stand-offish church. With a long term ministry the congregation seeks to place itself relationally in the heart of this community in a number of ways:

- ◆ Long-running youth work which many of today's young parents were members of in their youth.
- ◆ Community Coffee afternoon, not for fundraising, simply as a community facility and a way of getting to know the church building without (or before) going to a service.
- ◆ Various community groups use church premises for committee meetings/speakers - from dance classes to health groups to the Brownies and Guides - building is warm, comfortable, reasonably-priced, not too churchy, and a good venue for smallish groups.
- ◆ Annual Summer and Book Festivals hold some

²"The Origin of Congregationalism in Scotland", *The Evangelical Repository*, 3:10 (1884), 74.

³D.E. Wallace on James Haldane, "The Life and Work of James Alexander Haldane" (unpublished PhD thesis, Edinburgh University, 1955), 308.

events in church buildings and gardens - with the congregation playing their part in the community along with everyone else.

- ◆ Welcoming to people out-with the church who request special services - weddings or blessings/ dedication services for babies - and where possible these are held as part of normal Sunday services.
- ◆ A fortnightly art class run by one of members which provides a drop-in for older people, with some painting, board games, tea and a blether - another non-service way of getting inside the building.
- ◆ Meeting special needs such as opening the building after a local tragedy for young people to come in have a place to go, talk, pray, or be prayed for.
- ◆ The relaxed café-style of evening service has proved very popular and numbers are similar at night to the morning attendances - around 35. Deliberate effort to make service more accessible - comfortable relaxed surroundings, different lighting, different styles of music, preaching in distinct blocks rather than one session, nothing startling, just enjoyable.

Activities:

As individuals write down what you understand 'mission' to be. Discuss your ideas with one other person and together come up with a more developed and shared understanding. Contribute your various ideas to the wider group. Would you describe your congregation as missional - if so why and if not why not?

In context, Haldane's open-air preaching was a creative and novel way of communicating the Christian message. It provoked a strong negative reaction among some Christians but was welcomed by others. What novel or creative ways of mission are you aware of?

In what ways do you think that as individuals and as a congregation you can practice 'hospitality' to others in your local communities?

The Wigtown example is context specific. However, what features of the Wigtown example raise questions, appeal, or stimulate thinking for your own future practice in building 'missional' relationships?

Conviction
Six
*Prophetic
and Dissident
socio-political
engagement*

Definitions:

Prophetic - those with the 'double vision' of the way things are and the way things can be from the perspective of the Kingdom of God

Dissident - those who actively challenge established opinions, policies and institutions from the perspective of the gospel and the separation of Church and State

Political - the ordering of a society in relation to its organisation and power structures

Engagement - involvement through word and deed

Scriptures:

Micah 6:8; Amos 5:2; Matthew 25:31-46; Luke 1:46-55; James 1:27

Focus: Luke 4: 16-30

In these verses Jesus outlines his own mission/ministry manifesto. It is this manifesto which he goes on his way to fulfil (4:30) in the face of already 'deathly' opposition. This manifesto, in nature and content, places Jesus firmly within the OT prophetic tradition. He draws from the prophetic text of Isaiah 61:1-2, about a Spirit empowered prophetic figure and applies this to his own ministry (4:18-19). In turn, he also refers to the examples of the prophet Elijah (4:25) and Elisha (4:26) as foreshadowing his own ministry.

The nature of his ministry and mission as defined in Luke 4:18-19 is one of holistic and transformative salvation. The controlling and dominant images are those of the 'poor', and of 'release', and neither with due attention to their original context can be reduced simply to a 'spiritual' interpretation that denies the significance of Jesus' ministry for the whole person in relation to their physical, material, social, and political situations. Undergirding the Isaiah prophecy, and in turn Jesus' appropriation of it, is the OT Jubilee legislation (Leviticus 25) that involves the release of slaves, the cancellation of debts and the return of land. This

allusion is captured in the phrase 'proclaim the year of the Lord's favour' (4:19).

Jesus may have been more than a prophet but certainly he was not less. It is by this Jesus that the Church, which carries on his work, is empowered and equipped by the Holy Spirit to 'bear witness' to (Acts 1:8). Indeed, Luke 4:16-21 can be regarded as a Lukan 'great commission' to the Church with respect to its own ministry/mission.

Example:

John Clifford (1836-1923)

John Clifford is one of the great figures in nineteenth and early twentieth century Baptist History. He was a contemporary of Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892), the renowned Baptist, 'Prince of Preachers'. He was minister of Westbourne Park Baptist Church continuously between 1858 and 1916 and recognised widely by contemporaries as one of the most prominent non-conformist clergy in Great Britain, making an influential contribution on religious, moral, and industrial questions. With his commitment to social reform and individual freedom Clifford supported a huge number of causes: these included workers rights, defending freedom of conscience even those of atheists, women's suffrage, the temperance movement, Irish Home Rule, trade unions, peace rather than war including strong opposition to the Boer War. He was a strong and active opponent of the 1902 Education Act that meant part of the taxes raised were used to support Anglican religious education. Clifford was among those who refused to pay the tax and faced fifty seven summonses to appear before magistrates as a result. For Clifford, both the cross and the incarnation pointed to the concern of Jesus Christ, the Lord over all things, for people and the nature and status of their lives in its material and social reality: We keep him out of our politics, and go on in wrong; out of our trade, and make bad paper, bad clothes, bad buildings; out of our social life, and grind the poor and stop our ears with cottonwool so that the cries of agony and misery may not disturb us, and we let drink and harlotry flourish; out of our pleasures, and allow them to debase and sensualise our fellows; out of our churches,

and so perish of our conventionalisms and respectabilities. The incarnation of the Christ of the Cross is the one thing needful; ... the Christ of our Galilee and Gethsemane, the street preacher, the comrade of the working man, the friend of the fallen women, brought into actual touch with the real life of the dwellers in the cities and villages.¹

Jubilee 2000

Early on the 16th May 1998 a bus left from Kirkintilloch Baptist Church filled with people of all ages from a variety of churches in the town. The destination was Birmingham and the purpose was to participate in the Jubilee 2000's Campaign's plan to form a human chain around the Birmingham International Convention Centre to coincide with the meeting of the G7 leaders.

Jubilee 2000 was a campaign concerned with agitating for the cancellation of debts owed by some of poorest countries in the world. From the activity of a range of debt relief campaigns it developed as an international grass roots movement.

The official report contains the following description of its beginnings:

Peering through the door of a shed on the roof of Christian Aid in October 1996, a passer-by would be surprised to see three people crammed in amongst boxes, wearing thick woollen socks to cope with the cold draught blowing under the corrugated plastic walls. If you had suggested then that this shed would eventually develop into a massive international movement, forcing debt onto the political and media agenda, you would probably be met with stunned silence or hysterical laughter. Yet this is exactly how Jubilee 2000 started its life.²

As implied here, the impulse of the Christian faith was central in this movement, as acknowledged further in the report as it writes about the participation of churches as follows:

For once they resisted the temptation to privatise the Gospel. They insisted it was not just about their souls and their sins and their individual relations to God. It was also about their relations with brothers and sisters all round the

¹G. W. Byrt, John Clifford, *A Fighting Free Churchman* (London: Kingsway Press, 1947), 128-129, cited Hart, 'John Clifford', 232.

²'The World Will Never Be the Same Again', Report by the Jubilee 2000 Coalition, ed. by Marlene Barrett (2000), available from: <http://www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk/Hitsotry3720Jubilee3720Debt3720Campaign+281.twl>, accessed 1/9/2011, 18.

world and the structural sins that deny so many of them a chance. And they seem to have discovered in a new way that Jesus and his followers are anointed by the spirit to bring good news to the poor.

So the churches went into glorious overdrive with a public and political mission to cancel debt and change the world in favour of the poorest. They became as biased as God. Perhaps they were inspired by that word 'Jubilee'. The Old Testament Jubilee practice of simply returning land to the poorest, freeing slaves and cancelling debts was always a non-starter especially in the complex modern world. But the Old Testament Jubilee principle of finding ways to reserve the relentless flow of resources from the poor to the rich and narrowing the growing gap between them - of which vicious, unjust and inhuman debt repayments are a modern example - was as relevant as ever.

More than once I have sung, rather forlornly on a Sunday **O Church of God, Awake**. On this occasion it did! I am glad so many are determined to keep on making such a noise about debt and justice that it won't find it easy to get back to sleep.²

As with the Kirkintilloch church this was a campaign that many Baptist churches became actively involved with in co-operation with others in a common cause of prophetic engagement.

Shaping Practices:

- ◆ Preaching and teaching which gives attention to the socio-economic dimensions of the Scriptures and the Gospel.
- ◆ Engaging with issues of socio-political concern at a local and national level for action as an expression of being followers of Jesus Christ and including such in our worship services and business meetings
- ◆ Seeking (through prayer, word, solidarity, involvement, etc.) peace and justice on behalf of others, particularly the marginalised as in Luke 4 (e.g. the elderly, prisoners, asylum seekers, enemies, etc.)

²"The World Will Never Be the Same Again", 19.

Activities:

Initially, with one other person and after that in a larger group or groups, discuss whether or not you agree that socio-political engagement is an expression of the Scriptural witness centred on the message of Jesus Christ.

Identify together, and list for all to see, international, national, and local issues of socio-political concern you feel require engagement as an expression of being followers of Jesus Christ. See if you can group these concerns in categories e.g. issues of life and death, environmental etc. Discuss whether your list represents the breadth of human life and daily concerns.

Choose one issue and draw up a suggested worship service in relation to readings, prayers, etc., that would allow this matter to be explored in the context of a worship service.