

Christward

The magazine of



March 3rd–April 28th
2013

~ From the Minister's Desk ~

I thought that for this edition I might submit 'a conversation from the Minister's Desk', well part of a possible conversation anyway. Neil Brighton is the minister at Poynton Baptist, one of the larger Baptist churches in the region. I have only been to Poynton once, and met Neil on only a couple of occasions, so I don't really know him – but I often read some of his helpful and well-considered musings from his blog 'Distant Reflections'.

Many of you will know that this has been a time of change for the Baptists in this country, there has been much talk about the future, and it would do us no harm to have some of our own conversations. Neil writes as follows, and my initial (Union Chapel-centric) responses are in italics; as you read you might want to consider what your input in to the dialogue might be...

A baptist future: nightmare or sweet dreams?

The problem with advertising is that half your money is wasted - the challenge is working out which half. Pondering what the BUBG might be like ten years from now I'm sure at least half of what follows is rubbish but these five areas will be important.

1. Local church size. A number of commentators suggest churches will get smaller and the UK church scene will see a few big churches, many small ones and few in between. It will be a bit more complex, because most big churches will have multiple outlets (think of retailers like Morrisons, Sainsbury's and Tesco's with their range of store sizes). The question for us is will any of the large churches be Baptist?

This is a valid observation, and one that I have mixed feelings about. From a purely personal perspective I am wary of large churches; in my view it is almost impossible to 'be church' when the numbers of people involved get beyond a certain number. I must concede however that they do have their place. They clearly resonate with certain people; perhaps those who appreciate being

able to become anonymous in a larger crowd, those whose nature resonates with a more emotionally driven worship style which would just be naff and embarrassing in smaller numbers. And there are pragmatic reasons; certain projects require funding and resource and coordination that would be difficult to replicate with smaller contributors, voices in the public sphere are more likely to be heard when they represent more people, and perhaps most importantly the more affluent churches help fund the smaller ones through the Home Mission Fund. So, I hope there remain some large Baptist churches, you just probably won't find me in one!

2. Discipleship and church membership. As social media and networking rather than geography define people's relationships identifying with church may be less about local congregations and more about the larger movement (and its subsets). Being part of something that inspires and resources people for daily life and gives a sense of mentoring/spiritual growth. Likewise, the idea of 'membership' and clear definitions of who is in or out will seem increasingly anachronistic. What is less clear is the importance people will give to being part of a congregation where they can encourage each other, join in worship together and engage in mission to the local community. The challenge for Baptists is to be in front of this networking, resourcing curve not reacting to it.

I want to have my cake and eat it here. I recognise the increasing need for networking, and it is something we need to work on. There are exciting opportunities here as increasing numbers of organisations base themselves on a networking model without the overbearing demands of membership. For example, Union Chapel could become part of the Anabaptist Network – not because we want to be Anabaptists or change our identity or practice, but because we resonate with the general ethos of our dissenting forebears and wish to avail ourselves of new resources and support. But I don't want to lose the importance of the local, and especially membership. If membership ever becomes about who is in or out then it should rightly be scrapped, but I hope that membership retains the deeper association with covenant. We are a covenant community, we make promises to support one another,

to see God in each other and be God-like towards one another. At its core, church must remain a 'gathering' or 'assembly' – although, rightly so, we might have to become increasingly creative about how we facilitate this.

3. Patterns of ministry. We will see fewer full time posts, a growth in bi-vocational ministry and a move away from pastoral ministry. Not least because smaller churches with bi-vocational ministers and larger churches with a mix of part time / specialist posts have one thing in common: they are not looking for traditional church pastors. This will significantly change our patterns of training with more regional and part-time formation and, with part-time specialist posts, raise the question of whether Baptist Colleges are the best training routes for evangelists, community engagers and mission enablers.

I wholeheartedly agree! We will increasingly be lead back to an 'every member ministry' model, or 'multi-voiced' church which is increasingly reliant on the gifts and service of everyone – and this should be celebrated. Of course full-time ministers will be missed, and perhaps the most difficult function to replace will be the academic theological training which should facilitate the learning and faith development of the community. But perhaps as our training and formation become increasingly flexible and imaginative we will be able to build an increasing pool of equipped laity. And of course we benefit from close links with the most progressive thinking Baptist Learning Community!

4. Church engagement with society. Most churches will be known for what they contribute to the community. Toddler groups, after school clubs, youth groups, seniors work; debt, stress, marriage and other counselling; food banks, street pastors, social enterprises to name a few will all become more important. This will be a challenge if some of the other changes happen but three things may help. First, if gift aid is restricted to activities with clear 'public benefit' and not to activities connected with gathering for worship or proselytising; churches will gain proportionate financial benefit in providing them. Second, by being one of the few institutions able to provide them, others from outside the church will be willing to help

and support. Third, because fewer people in society will have residual Christian knowledge, these activities will become central to our mission; a way of demonstrating following Jesus matters and that being a disciple makes sense in a world of militant atheism. It will also make it easier to speak into the public arena.

I think church was always supposed to be for the 'public benefit', we are just prone to distraction! This is why we must value the work of O&A and retain strong links with their activities and relationships. This is why Union Chapel must continue its move towards increasing social and political engagement within the area. I suspect the greatest challenge will come in the third point; how do we communicate our Christian motivations in a way which makes sense? And there are other challenges; for example, how do we guard against serving with ulterior (or just bad) motives? Is there a danger of simply becoming an arm of the State? But these should not paralyse us. Union Chapel is already known as a place where 'good things' happen. I would certainly not want to lose our identity as church, but I think I am happy if that is something people discover second.

5. Denominational change. Changes to the church landscape mean our links with non-denominational groups, Pentecostalism and wider evangelicalism will grow in importance compared to the more traditional free church links. Our finances will also change: we currently have an ageing demographic and either we will get smaller as people join the church triumphant or change to reflect the cultural assumptions of people now in their 20's and 30's. As fewer people identify as being 'baptist' and more prefer to support designated projects rather than general giving to organisations, Home Mission will see radical change.

Perhaps Union Chapel's 'looser' association within the Baptist world means we will see less of this denominational change, and our willingness to partner with a wide range of organisations and individuals can only be a good thing. I would not however want to become disconnected with our heritage. The dissenting tradition, Baptists in particular, have much to offer us; lessons and inspiration from the past, identity and confidence for the present, and direction

and hope for a possible future. Financial questions, and how we encourage giving to churches is a subject we will shortly be discussing, but again idealistically there is a certain combination of covenant responsibility to one another and future generations, and a call to bring about kingdom transformation – which is hopefully (but not necessarily) mediated through church.

Over to you...

Ian Geere

~ Looking Back ~

John Nicholson, a former minister of Union Chapel, has recently published some reminiscences of his ministerial career. They first appeared in the 'Intouch' magazine of South Parade Baptist Church, Leeds. I am grateful to Matthew Newman the magazine's editor for sending me a copy of the reminiscences and to John for permission to quote from them

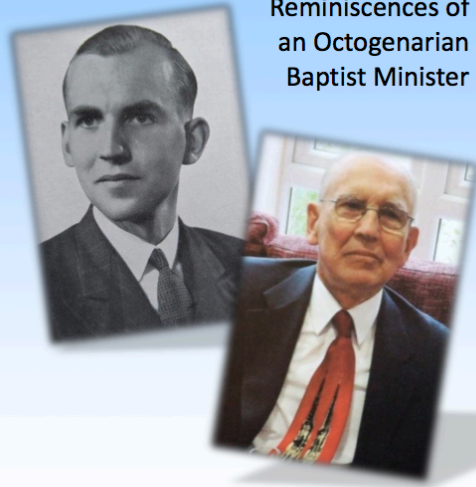
John started his ministry at Potter Street Baptist Church , Harlow in 1954, moving to Union Chapel in 1959. He was our Minister for seven years and then became the Senior Minister in the North Cheshire Fellowship. In 1971 he was appointed County Ecumenical Officer for Greater Manchester and in 1975 became Ecumenical Officer for England, a British Council of Churches appointment. From 1979 to 1986 John was Association Minister/College Tutor with responsibility for the pioneering Alternative Pattern of Training which had just started in Manchester. In 1986 the BU Council appointed John, General Superintendent of the North-Eastern Area of the Baptist Union in which post he remained until his retirement in 1994.

Printed below is the section in the memoir dealing with John's time as Minister of Union Chapel. In a future issue of Christward I hope to print excerpts dealing with John's involvement with the Ecumenical Movement.

Editor

Looking Back

Reminiscences of
an Octogenarian
Baptist Minister



John Nicholson

Union Chapel Fallowfield (Baptist), Manchester 1959-66

In February 1959 we moved from Harlow to Manchester – and we have stayed in the North ever since! The church we moved to was an amalgamation of two Baptist Churches. Union Chapel dated from the 1840s when a group of Baptist Christians decided to form an open-membership church (practising only believer's baptism but with membership open to any believer). It grew rapidly during the 19th century during the 60 year ministry of Alexander Maclaren, one of the three Baptist pulpit giants of that century, the others being Charles Haddon Spurgeon and John Clifford. His sermons were in great demand especially in the USA, and he was the first President of the Baptist World Alliance in 1905.

During the 1930s the main activity was the Gay Society! This had no reference to the sexuality of its members but the fellowship it had created meant that its members were the leaders of the church by the time I arrived. The other activists were widows or fiancés of men killed in the First World War, so the church had quite a pacifist tradition. During the Second World War its building was destroyed by an incendiary bomb, and the fellowship moved to the suburbs and joined Fallowfield Baptist Church. The legal formalities had only

just been completed by the time we arrived, so Pam and I were the first members of the united church.

The morning congregation was quite small, but the evening was over 100. The afternoon Sunday School had decided in principle to move to the morning, but was waiting to find out the views of the new minister. As my last act at Potter Street had been to persuade the large Sunday School to move to the morning, I can claim to have closed two afternoon Sunday Schools in the same year! With the introduction of Family Church the morning service soon grew and by the time I left had outstripped the evening attendance. The 60s saw the introduction of the Stewardship Movement and this made a great difference to the finances of the church, which henceforth were based not on “efforts” but on the regular giving of members to a unified budget, which was part of an annual renewal of promises of Time, Talents and Treasure. It is interesting to note that South Parade made the same two fundamental changes (to Family Church and to a unified budget) during the same decade.

The church was in the University residential area, and I was appointed Baptist chaplain. An ecumenical chaplaincy team was formed, which under the leadership of the visionary Anglican chaplain began to draw up plans for a chaplaincy centre, which eventually emerged as St Peter’s House.

I was also involved in the Manchester, Salford and District Council of Churches, and soon became its Youth Secretary, being responsible for organising an Annual Conference. We had a flourishing Youth Club, through the efforts of a young teacher and a middle-aged woman, and this provided a steady stream of candidates for baptism and church membership. Sadly not all of these persevered, which taught me the importance of constant post-baptismal care.

In many ways this was my happiest pastorate, perhaps because of the challenge of ministering in what has become known as the Swinging Sixties. In preaching I was faced with the “Honest to God” debate when John Robinson, the Bishop of Woolwich, challenged traditional ideas of God, and in pastoral care with the sexual

revolution when homosexuality became a live debate amongst students and many Christians were challenged concerning sex before marriage. Amongst the students I married was Andrew Stunell MP who was Liberal Chief Whip for many years and a junior minister in the Coalition Government from 2010-12.

Let me share with you two amusing stories from Fallowfield days, both involving one of my members, Dr HH Rowley, the world famous Old Testament scholar. He invited us to tea to meet his daughter and family. After a sumptuous meal we were leaving when our 4 year old son, David, said “Mummy, are we going home to tea now”! “Come with me, young man” said the Professor, and filled a doggy bag with cakes.

Sometime later Pam was talking to Mrs Rowley and commented how difficult it was to get Christopher’s hair cut, because as a rhesus baby the sight of a white coat (the standard uniform for barbers in those days) caused him to start screaming. “Bring him to me” was the reply “I always cut the Doctor’s hair, I started doing it when we were missionaries in China, and if he has an important meeting in London [*he was chair of the BMS twice during a very difficult period for the Society*] he will ask me at midnight to give him a trim”!

~ Wealth ~

Over the next few months there will be three ‘Second Sessions’ looking at various aspects of the Christian attitude to Wealth. It seems right that the first of these discussions takes place in the season of Lent when the minds of some people at least are focussed on giving up things.

From the beginning of the Faith the issue of wealth has loomed large in Christian debate. How should we take the story of the rich young ruler and Jesus’ remarks about the camel and the eye of the needle? Is the widow’s mite really the equivalent of the large donation? Does giving away your wealth, which rusts and is

susceptible to moths, actually give you riches in heaven? If so then does the more you give up the greater the heavenly riches? Can any rich person escape the judgement of Lazarus so graphically depicted in the story of Dives and Lazarus?

The members of the early church in Jerusalem tried to solve the problem of wealth by selling up and holding all things in common. This solution does not seem to have lasted long and certainly as new churches were established in other locations people like Paul were quite prepared to accept financial help not simply from churches but from individuals.

What to do with wealth became a major problem with the conversion of Constantine. The problem was not what should the Church do with its new found wealth because the churches did not immediately become rich. Indeed it would be two centuries before the western Catholic Church entered the realm of the super rich. But what should be the advice given to the rich person who wanted to become Christian?

For Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, stirring the rich to action to care for the poor was the key.

For Jerome it was not so much to urge the care of the poor but to reproach the rich by drawing a contrast between their life style and that of people like Paul the Hermit -

‘You drink from jewelled cups, he from a natural stream. You sew gold thread into your robes, he wore clothes that not even the most exploited of your slaves would wear..... Covered with the meanest dirt, Paul lies at rest, sure to rise again in glory. The stones of carefully constructed tombs rest on you, with all your riches - sure to burn in Hell.’

Augustine believed that private wealth was essential to a normal properly ordered human society but when it came to the monastic life the abandonment of private wealth was an essential prerequisite for the building of the City of God.

For some it was necessary to renounce their wealth and give it to the church to be managed by the Bishop on behalf of the poor. For others it was to act as patrons for theologians such as Jerome or to build wondrous churches and shrines to the glory of God.

However we want to use our second sessions not for a history lesson but to explore, for our time, the same questions faced by these early Christians. Do you consider yourself wealthy? How much wealth do you think you need? Is it possible to make the eye of the needle a bit wider by using your wealth for others? Should our first call on charitable giving be to the church? What is the right balance between spending on yourself/family and giving to charity? How much wealth do you want to pass on to the family at your death? Should the church have a call on your estate?

The debate on these and similar questions has been going on in the Church for two thousand years so we cannot expect definitive answers but perhaps we might clear the air a little and generate a flicker of light.

Alan Redhouse

**~ Minutes of the Church Meeting
of Union Chapel Fallowfield (Baptist)
held on Sunday 20th January 2013
at 11.20am. ~**

Present: Ian Geere (chair), Gwyneth Heritage Roberts, David Garner, Anne Phillips, Sarah Geere, Margaret Garner, Margaret Redhouse, Irene Roberts, Ted Land, Eileen Land, Owen Jones, Lorna Richardson, Steve Roberts, Jonathan Roberts, Andy Howes, Margaret Edmonds, Nicola Hamilton, Brenda Marston, Michael Welford, Harry Fleming, Alan Redhouse, Gwen Mattock, Martin Hamilton

Apologies: Enid Welford and Carmen Bowman (with children), Alan Dobbins (late arrival)

The Minutes of the November 2012 meeting (in Jan/Feb 2013 magazine) were approved.

Matters arising/updates/information:

- (a) Confirmation of Ceilidh arrangements – Sat 23rd Feb 7pm. Offers of door stewarding invited. Must be prepared to ask for donations. Having a live band is not cheap.
- (b) Ministry Annual Review has taken place – IG in conversation with EW LR & HF. Good, thorough and encouraging process.
- (c) Noted that there are ongoing email communication problems within the church between PC and Apple users because of incompatibilities between the systems.
- (d) Awayday booked for 27th April at Platt Community Church – volunteers for organising group and suggestions for programme needed. Open agenda at present. No decision yet on whether or not it will be an all-age occasion.
- (e) Fabric jobs list has appeared in magazine – any comments to the Fabric Committee please - Signage now up by doors - Ramp at back door not being replaced for time being
- (f) Easter Services & celebration – proposed arrangements:
Maundy Thursday – Evening Communion
Good Friday – Morning Service at Withington Methodist
Easter Sunday – Early Communion/Breakfast/10am
Celebration Service

[Possible variations:

Combine breakfast and communion? (Bearing in mind the clocks go forward in the early hours of Easter Sunday morning)

IG & Jane Wild of Withington Methodist contemplating organising a group to watch the sunrise (at 6.45 am approx that day).

Left with Deacons and IG to decide.]

- (g) Church weekend 2015 – venue suggestions invited. Beechwood Court will not be suitable as their planned alterations are unlikely to be finished by then.
- (h) Report re donations made – Water Aid (approx £200) and Christian Aid Christmas appeal for Palestine (approx £400)
- (i) Communication between Deacons and Church Meeting – felt by Deacons that neither a written summary of proceedings on a noticeboard nor a verbal report in a service is appropriate. Will endeavour to ensure that Church Meeting is kept abreast of what is going on by more detailed notification of business in advance and subsequent updates with discussion where beneficial. AJH commented that this is a two-way process and the congregation must be prepared to give input.

Notification of AOB - none

Notification of Deacons' Agenda rotating topics for February & March –

February: Christian Aid Week (including door to door collection) and Union Chapel activism in issues of social concern and its role in the life of Fallowfield/South Manchester

March: Review of “who does what” eg catering, flowers, rotas etc, admin review

Comments on these topics invited – to be made to any member of the Diaconate prior to relevant meeting.

Food Bank:

Do we agree that in principle a Food Bank would be a good thing to initiate and run from Union Chapel? A group comprising IG, AR, MR, LR, ME & CMS has been looking into this. Food poverty is now a real issue in this country and in the Manchester area. The coverage of Food Banks in South Manchester is very sparse at present. A Food Bank stores and banks food with long sell-by dates. About 1 – 2 tons of food need to be stored at any one time in a suitable place. A proper distribution system is required. People come to the Food Bank from known referrers with vouchers and are given emergency supplies for 3 – 4 days. We would also be looking to signpost people onwards to other local groups who may be able to help.

A pool of about 20 volunteers is needed to start and run a Food Bank. We would be looking to open twice a week. Four people are needed per session. The time commitment can be very flexible. We hope that the Union Chapel congregation will only supply a quarter to a third of the people to be involved. People are hopeful that it will not be too difficult to get recruits from outside the congregation. It was noted that the scheme will require a lot of administration time.

We would be looking to affiliate with the Trussell Trust or another organisation with expertise in the field who can provide infrastructure and support. The initial set-up cost payable to the Trussell Trust (if we go with them) will be approx £1,500 and we will need to commit to at least 3 years' running. We would need to decide at an early stage what geographical area to cover and would aim to begin with 10 – 12 referrers.

Resolved: in principle at this stage Union Chapel approves moving to the next stage of planning for the facilitation of a community Food Bank. Passed nem con.

Date of Next Meeting: Sunday 17th April 2013

The Meeting closed with the Grace at 12.18pm

~ News of the Family ~

We were sorry to hear of the death of our former minister **David (DSB) Jones**. David was our minister from the late sixties and throughout the seventies. We remember him with great affection as a minister who was able, through word and example, to bind his congregation harmoniously together. Our thoughts and sympathy are with Anne, Katherine and Dorothy.

Our congratulations to **Irene and Scott** on the birth of a son, a brother for Iris.

Phyllis Kaissack has hurt her arm making it impossible for her to drive. Phyllis has been a regular attender at O&A meetings and Open Tuesday Film Nights as well as helping in the organisation of the guitar concerts. We hope that her arm will soon improve and look forward to seeing her again at Union Chapel.

~ An Evening of Flute Music for Spring Time ~

Saturday 2nd March at 7.30pm
in the Amani Centre, Moss Lane East, Moss Side, M16 7DG.

Entry is free but a retiring collection will be taken to support the work of the Hideaway Youth Project

Everyone is welcome to tea/coffee and cakes after the concert.

The Union Chapel Fallowfield Church Weekend 2013

June 21st to 23rd 2013

(starting with Friday evening meal at 7.00pm)

Pilgrims need Passion not Programmes

Led by Mark Janes

Minister, Plaistow Memorial Baptist Church
(and previously of Northern Baptist and Union Chapel)



(Who looked like this at the time!)

Mark will seek to help us ask searching questions about the kind of culture we create within our churches and the way this forms everyone who participates in them; and to explore this with an eye to some of the significant cultural changes that are occurring in British society.

Some of the ideas will come through John Westerhoff's book 'Will our Children have Faith?', and will be explored creatively through a variety of media and experience.



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~ Talking to Each Other ~

If you would like to comment on any of the articles in this magazine and so start a discussion or if you would care to write an article for us on a topic of your choosing such contributions would be welcome. Please send them by email to alan.redhouse@virgin.net or by post to The Editor, Christward, Union Chapel Fallowfield, 2b Wellington Road, Fallowfield, Manchester, M14 6EQ.

Alan Redhouse

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