



Executive Summary

December 2015

This review was established by BU Council at its meeting in March 2015. The key brief was to establish a small team that would consult as widely as possible on all aspects of ministry among Baptists Together. The Project Team was appointed by the Baptist Steering Group (BSG) after a process of public advertisement via the BU website and email link. BSG also appointed a small oversight team to guide and hold the process to account. The project leader has reported regularly to BSG throughout. The team included a specific researcher and as well as engaging in widespread consultation and statistical research, has also sought to draw together various reports and consultations going back for some years. This has included a general invitation for ministers and leaders to “share their story” along with significant discussions with colleges, Regional Ministers and the Specialist Teams at Baptist House.

This executive summary seeks to provide an overview of the report that follows, and a narrative which introduces the key aspects the emerging proposals.

We were invited to explore three key questions:

- What sort of ministries will we need in the future?
- What support will these ministries need?
- What of this should be done nationally, regionally and locally?

These are not questions that we sought to address in a vacuum:

- We have a longstanding tradition of recognising and affirming ordained ministry in our Union, through which we have often reflected theologically on the nature of ministry in Christ's Church. One of the foundational documents, which has informed and underpinned much of the thinking of this report, was a paper prepared by an already appointed working group. This is included as appendix 1. Our work has also been informed and inspired by the paper on mission and leadership, written by Roy Searle, which was another of the foundational documents commissioned in preparation for this review. This report can be downloaded from the Baptists Together Website.
- There has been a number of extensive ministry reviews in recent years.
- We have a clear commitment to defining our Union as “Growing healthy churches in relationship for God's mission.”
- Through the Futures Review, the basic principle of accredited ministry was affirmed as a feature of our shared life.

What have we discovered?

Ministry is Changing – our mission context is changing; the way in which churches express and experience ministry is changing; the technology available to us is changing; the kind of people offering for ministry is changing; the roles to which they are eventually called is changing; the way in which our churches support ministry is changing and so we could go on.

We could easily respond by seeking to take a snapshot of the situation as we see it and devising a model of ministry to fit that. We have deliberately chosen not to do this, but rather to ask, “How can we develop a vision for ministry and ways of supporting it that can continue to adapt and be responsive to those changes, while at the same time retaining meaningful continuity with all we have understood and experienced as ministry in our journey thus far?”

We would suggest that this requires three key shifts:

- To re-affirm what we understand by ministry.
- To re-imagine how we recognise and develop ministry.
- To re-define how we support ministry.

Re-affirming our understanding of ministry

At the heart of this is one simple question

“For all the changes and realities that we acknowledge, what will continue to define Baptist ministry in future decades?”

We would offer four key responses to this:

The Marks of Ministry – deliberately attempting to shift the emphasis of ministry identity away from any particular “job to be done” towards the development of an understanding of the wide variety of roles, in a way that reflects who we are and what we understand by ministry as a Baptist People. Our vision is to enable an increasingly diverse community of ministers to be embraced, while maintaining a common sense of identity amongst them.

Personal Development – building into our Newly Accredited Minister (NAM) programme a deliberate investment that enables individual ministers to explore their future support needs after that period, so that they become equipped to reflect on their context and identify their on-going needs.

Continuing Ministry Development – introducing an intentional programme that enables all ministers to reflect on their experience and future vision in order to identify their on-going needs. This includes offering a tool-kit to Regional Ministers, ensuring that Associations have the capacity to offer this programme, and perhaps looking at other events (eg Refresher Conference) as having a key, enabling role.

Introduction of a Ministry Covenant – taking seriously the idea that ministers are members of a covenant community. Ministry can therefore be defined less in terms of achieved standards and experience, and more in terms of a forward commitment to “walk together and watch over one another in love”.

In short, we need ministers who:

- Display consistent character and behaviour
- Are equipped to recognise their developing needs
- Are engaged in active Ministry Development
- Are engaged in a defined covenant relationship

Re-imagining how we recognise and develop ministry

There can never be a “one size fits all” approach to recognising and developing ministry. We need to explore how to introduce greater flexibility, while maintaining a clear consistency of standard. This could be achieved by:

Integrated Ministerial Recognition (MR) – consistently using the “Marks of Ministry” as the benchmark for affirming an individual’s call to ministry, we offer a series of proposals that will enable a far closer working relationship between Association and National MR Committees. This will ensure a consistency of standard

and explore how a more localised approach to National MR can be developed. As a result an individual's character and calling can be taken into account more fully, **even** where candidates do not seem to "fit" traditional perceptions of ministry.

Formation Partnerships – celebrating and affirming the work of our Baptist colleges and their vital contribution to ministry formation, we also recognise the partnership between London Baptist Association (LBA) and Spurgeon's College in developing a "portfolio" approach to formation. We would urge that such approaches might be developed and become accessible throughout BUGB.

It is important to emphasise that key to any portfolio route is an effective relationship between an academic community and those who support ministry on the ground. There is already a great deal of effective collaboration between our colleges, associations and other groups such as Urban Expression or Pioneer Collective. Our vision is for "Formation Partnerships" to be established in order to recognise and develop this kind of collaboration.

We would also look to the National MR committee to provide a framework of accountability and oversight. This would allow partnerships greater flexibility and freedom to commend ministers in a way that maintains consistent standards.

Residential Selection Conference (RSC) – currently offers a route into ministry through an intensive three-day assessment programme. Whilst this provides flexibility, it has limitations, not least that a great deal depends on a very short, intense process. There is limited scope therefore to respond to those who offer less traditional expressions of ministry. We do not propose to abolish RSC. However the introduction of portfolio formation and greater local decision-making could significantly reduce the need for it. Although where there is still a need for a nationally operated route to accreditation, this could be devolved to a Formation Partnership.

Bi-vocational Training – We sense a growing need to particularly embrace a pattern of ministry which has come to be described as "bi-vocational ministry" (recognising that in reality this refers to a variety of approaches and that for some the term "bi-vocational" feels inappropriate) By embedding flexibility into our processes, we enable diverse expressions of ministry to be embraced. Bi-vocational Ministry should be seen as a vital option and an intentional choice, in missional or emerging contexts and traditional church settings. We commend further exploration with our colleges, and proposed Formation Partnerships, to develop relevant approaches to ministerial formation that:

- can be readily accessed and fulfilled by those who remain in some form of paid employment.
- explore the particular and unique challenges of providing ministry alongside some other recognised role or employment.
- provide bi-vocational training in likely areas of application (eg theology and business studies; theology and community development).

Our current "youth specialist" category offers a template for this, combining ministerial formation with a recognised youth-work qualification. We recommend that the Specialist Team includes someone who is clearly recognised as a point of contact for specialist ministries including "bi-vocational".

In summary, we need Recognition and Formation that

- Is consistent and responsive
- Integrates accreditation, learning and local practice
- Relies on local assessment as much as possible
- Welcomes and supports specialist ministries

Re-defining how we support Ministry

Whatever structures and partnerships we develop as a Baptist community, we have to recognise that the key foundation of ministry support is the local church. A minister's relationship with a calling church is crucial to on-going effectiveness, and it is within the life of the local church that ministry develops within every Christian disciple. We are therefore considering the support of ministry from the perspectives of the local church and the wider Baptist community.

Supporting ministry in the local church - Not every church will experience leadership through the appointment of an accredited Baptist Minister. Our future vision needs to recognise and embrace this. At times the varying expectations of a church and minister can result in misunderstandings, tensions and difficulties. Therefore we recommend the following:

"Foundation in Christian Leadership" – our colleges and associations already offer a variety of training opportunities for local leaders, including courses developed through the Baptist Training Partnership. We believe that these should be more proactively affirmed and encouraged across Baptists Together, and as much as possible given a common identity that is recognised and meaningful throughout our movement. There is clearly some inconsistency at present both in the availability of this type of training and formation, and the way in which it is recognised and promoted. Our intention is that, as a result, a greater diversity of local leaders would be identified and released to serve, thus further strengthening and equipping healthy local churches.

If this is also shaped by "Marks of Ministry" there is greater possibility that our expectations of leadership however provided, will remain consistent. This could also be the basis of a "foundation for ministry" by which an individual is able to begin ministry formation without making the significant life-changes that are often required once full-time formation begins. This offers greater opportunity for reflection and assessment at an early stage.

Local Church Code of Practice – to enable ministry to flourish, the culture of a local church needs to be such that individuals feel adequately supported and empowered to exercise their calling. By introducing a voluntary "**Code of Practice**" we can assist churches in understanding their responsibilities towards a minister and provide an objective basis from which a Regional Minister or other office holder can operate effectively in situations of difficulty.

We commend the development of a suite of resources to enable churches to identify the skill-set they require and to help them to ask the questions which would enable a church and minister to better identify whether they are suited to one another. (There are many examples of these already being provided by Associations and Specialist Teams – these would offer the basis of any such provision).

Leadership and inter-personal skills – are crucial to effective ministry. We recommend an analysis of current recognition and formation models to ensure that such skills are being highlighted and developed. We also recommend instituting a "leadership academy" that can draw together the insights and experiences of leadership development that already exist within our Baptist community. In particular we encourage the development of a vision for leadership that is grounded in our understanding of congregational governance and servanthood. One particular expression of this would be an exploration of ways in which full-time ministers can become "leadership mentors", supporting individuals who are offering leadership in neighbouring churches that do not have access to an accredited minister.

Interim Ministry – Our discussions have included some engagement with other denominations that have introduced training and recognition of "interim ministers". These are individuals who have training and experience in being able to oversee transition within the life of a local church. We commend further exploration of this in a Baptist context, creating a recognised ministry within our community, which can provide expertise in training and appointing interim moderators during pastoral vacancy.

Exploring Ministry with young adults – Many of our young adults take part in various gap-year and intern schemes. This presents us with a challenge and an opportunity to consider how an intern scheme might be developed within our Baptist community, and how this might help participants to explore their longer term calling and vocation. There are several creative schemes currently operating and some of our associations and other church networks are also exploring this. We recommend some investment in bringing such people together to explore how an intern scheme could be further developed and integrated into our overall ministry vision.

In summary, we need Local Churches where

- Leaders value and have access to quality training
- Ministers are properly valued and supported
- Effective Godly leadership is developed
- Support is available through transition
- Young adults are mentored and inspired

Supporting Ministry as Baptists Together

We cannot fulfil this vision without appropriate support and administrative structures. To help this become reality we commend:

On-line multi-user database – much of our current capacity to support ministry is absorbed by operating systems of record keeping that could be made significantly more efficient. The introduction of a multi-user database with appropriate protocols would enable much greater collaboration across BUGB. We welcome the “Collaborate” database project and highlight *its strategic importance and its potential for fulfilling the needs, both present and future, of ministry support*. We also recommend that the development of this project should consider and include how key information and data can be collected and stored so as to assist us in monitoring key ministry and mission trends, and in particular our performance in relation to our various justice commitments.

The role of MR Moderator – The role of MR moderator is crucial within our ministry structures. While the day-to-day operations and processes might lie with the Ministries Team, it is vital that they are seen to act on behalf of an independent and separately accountable MR committee. We would encourage that the time-investment required for MR moderator is properly measured, and that consideration is given to making this a remunerated secondment. We recognise that the operational side of ministry discipline is the responsibility of the Ministries Team, co-ordinated through the Baptist Steering Group (BSG). However we sense that the regulatory aspect of ministry discipline (the actual decision making rather than the arrangement of interviews etc.) needs to have a degree of independence, enabling it to truly reflect the disciplines of a covenant community rather than a regulatory body. The working reality of this needs further working through, but we commend the principle as something to be affirmed.

Appointment of a Formation Co-ordinator – Many of the proposals above require an on-going investment in developing our understanding of ministry and devising appropriate responses. We believe that this would be most effective if made the responsibility of a recognised post-holder, employed within the Ministries Team. This might be a part-time appointment, and needs to be someone who can develop key peer relationships among college principals and other stakeholders. We believe that this post can be funded by savings made through the introduction of the database. There may be value in “forward funding this” pending full implementation of the database.

Integrated Ministry Process – Many of our processes require the interaction of associations, National MR Committee and Specialist Team members. We recommend that these are reviewed and documented in a way that defines them from the perspective of the various stakeholders involved.

Maintaining a forward vision for ministry – The task of the IGNITE team has been to implement an intensive review of our approach to ministry. In so doing we have become aware not only of the breadth and depth of this task, but have also had to consider how much capacity there is to introduce change at any given time. We offer the recommendations of this report as those which we consider most appropriate and necessary in our immediate future. It is of course now a matter for the established structures of our Union to consider these and take things forward for implementation.

However, we should not lose the sense of needing to continue to look forward, and to recognise that this is often best done collaboratively. While BSG holds the overall strategic and operational brief for our Union, we believe there could be significant value in a collaborative group being established to work more directly alongside the Ministries Team, through which BSG might exercise that more general oversight.

In summary we need a Union that:

- Stays in touch through effective and efficient sharing of information
- Has accountable leadership
- Invests in Ministry Development
- Has clear and transparent support and disciplinary processes
- Continues to develop a strategic vision for ministry

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