

## PIONEER MISSION ENABLER



**Ali Boulton uses her experience of pioneering mission in Swindon to encourage pioneers in SBCA**

It was at a Baptist ministers' cluster lunch in January 2008, that I experienced a call from God to move with my family to a new housing estate in Swindon (at that time unbuilt) to holistically bless and serve the new community and be a Christian presence.

I immediately joined in with what God was already doing locally, by becoming part of an ecumenical group praying for the area, and engaging in a discernment process with a variety of Christians.

The West of England Baptist Association (WEBA) shared the vision and partnered us right from the beginning. They supplemented the money we could raise, enabling us to buy a house on the estate to use as a home and an initial community space - as there would be no community buildings for some time.



Fourteen months after the initial call from God, we were the first to move onto the new estate and, supported by a team, we began to bless the community.

Initially there were no residents, but we began a partnership with the housing association and council. As people moved in, I visited them with a welcome basket, introduced myself as a neighbour and Baptist minister who wanted to serve the community - all faiths and none - and asked if there were things we could do together. This meeting was unconditional. I made myself available but expected nothing in return; people shared and joined in as much or little as they liked.

Over the first year, people from all backgrounds came to me for pastoral support and asked us to help them do all sorts of things, including a community day, games on the green, toddler group,



times for coffee and chat - and a Halloween party, a community Nativity and an Easter exploration! This set the pattern for our holistic community engagement.

We felt that God said we should talk about him - we shouldn't raise the subject - but people chatted to me about faith a lot and ended up asking us to start a kids' *God club* and a year after we moved in we were asked to start a church gathering!

Praise God, people came to faith and have been baptised and some have grown into leadership. We now gather for church in the local community centre and we were welcomed into membership of BUGB at Assembly 2013.



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In September 2014, I accepted an invitation to join the regional ministry team with the Southern Counties Baptist Association (SCBA) as the half time Pioneer Mission Enabler. This involves remaining grounded in local pioneering whilst seeking God and working out how we join his mission across the association.

There are already some great pioneers and pioneering in SCBA, so in these early days in post I have been engaging with churches and individuals across the association to discern new pioneering opportunities and to encourage those just beginning to pioneer.

In praying about how to approach this new role, I have drawn on my experience of local pioneering. I have seen God do more than I could have imagined, and importantly much more than I could have instigated on my own. Learning to discern and join in with where we have seen God's Spirit at work has been fundamental to my work across the association. In a regional context this involves listening to individual Christians in the Baptist family, church communities, ecumenical friends, alongside stakeholders of local communities such as housing providers, councils etc, and noting opportunities, coincidences and people of peace. Working translocally has also involved identifying places into which God is calling us to pioneer within the Southern Counties.

During these first six months, I have been able to visit a variety of contexts within SCBA and join with individual pioneers and established church communities in seeking to discern what God is up to! It's been a highlight of this role to prayer walk through the streets of established and new communities, in towns and villages, around schools, community centres, open spaces, shops and even an allotment in order to pray blessing and listen to God. It's also been a privilege to journey with churches who are seeking to call a pioneer or mission enabler, and to seek and discern God together. It has been so encouraging to witness God's faithfulness already as people are stepping out in faith missionally.

Given my background and networks it is unsurprising that God has been drawing my attention to opportunities on new housing developments. I thank God that through various 'coincidences' I have been able to link community stakeholders with churches and 'faith groups' who are responding to God's call to love the community. These stakeholders are people of peace who are keen to partner and fund groups seeking to serve their local communities. It's great to see these opportunities opening up. There is a great deal of new housing across the Southern Counties area and this feels like a real opportunity to share God's love as people wonder what new life on a new development looks like for them. These new



estates are at various stages of development - it was great to walk through a series of fields with Jacky Storey (another SCBA regional minister) recently and pray blessing into an as yet unbuilt development. It will be interesting to see how God will be at work there in the years to come.

Of course there also challenges, discerning where the Spirit of God is at work can be very tricky! One of the biggest challenges is that we can get very busy 'doing church' which makes it hard to respond to God's missional opportunities - I hope this is something that we will pray into and be able support and encourage each other as we make courageous decisions about how we 'do church' together and use our time.

I'm hugely grateful for the giving of the Baptist family through Home Mission that makes this role as Pioneer Mission Enabler possible - I pray I will remain faithful to God in this and we will continue to see God do more than we can ask or imagine.

**Ali Boulton**

Pioneer Mission Enabler,  
Southern Counties Baptist  
Association



**Please pray:**

- » For Ali and her family as she juggles her work at The Stowe with her half-time role as pioneer mission enabler in SCBA
- » For wisdom and discernment as Ali supports the pioneering ministries in the association
- » For missional opportunities to open up in the new housing developments