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Larger Churches' Conference

With this issue of *Baptists Together* magazine focusing on leadership, we asked **Ken Benjamin**, one of the steering group for the annual Larger Churches' Conference, 'What is it you are getting from going?'

Imagine that you are trying to navigate your way from 'A', where you are now, to a destination that is new to you, which we will creatively call 'B'.

Along the way there are some people who you could potentially ask for help.

I'd suggest that there are three groups of people who are actually helpful.

The first, most obviously, are the people who have been to 'B', and have been sufficiently recently that their experience is still helpful and their directions still work.

The second group are those who are also on their way to 'B'. Even if they don't fully know the way, their insights are helpful, their company will encourage and you stand a better chance of working out the best way together - 'two brains are better than one'.

Thirdly, least obviously, are those who are also looking to get to 'B'. They don't yet know the way, but they can tell you, from experience, some ways that are definitely not the right direction!

Church leadership is so often about navigating a way forward and help along the way is vital. I value the annual Baptist Larger Churches' Conference because all three groups described in this illustration are there, ready and willing to share, in the most affirming environment I have experienced.

For me, this conference is my highest priority outside of my own church events. The box of comments opposite from recent participants show that I am not alone.

As a Union, we gain so much from meeting up with ministers with a variety of styles, approaches and sizes.

At other times, we gain by spending time with others where there is common ground including meeting with ministers leading similar size churches.

The Larger Churches' Conference is specifically designed for leaders of the larger churches in our Union (typically a membership of more than 180). The programme is intentionally planned to be relevant for the challenges the leaders face in leading churches. The aim is to encourage, to empower, to envision and to refresh the leaders in their roles. It takes place each autumn.

I've never found a sense that those who go to this conference think their churches are more important than others. In fact, I've rarely been in a group with less delusion of grandeur, but often there are unique characteristics that go with larger congregations and memberships.

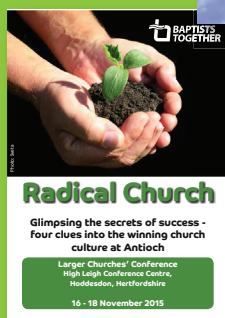
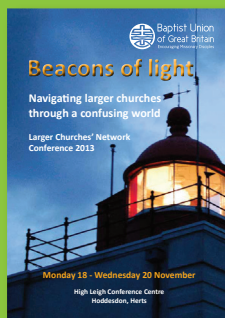
It's so valuable to gain insight from others who, for example, have the joys and challenges of staff teams, or who are also working out the dynamics of enabling participation in larger meetings. There is a wide variety of ways in which ministers of larger churches have unique leadership responsibilities, vulnerabilities and opportunities, and the chance to think and pray through these areas is what this conference is about.

Some of the most helpful navigation pointers are found around informal conversations over meals or at the bar at the end of the day.

We value the fact that the conference is always supported by Lynn Green and coordinated by Tracey Vallance, Team and Events Coordinator at the **Faith and Society Team** at Didcot.

Every year at this conference I find leadership challenges, encouragements and ideas that make a positive difference to my ministry.

Ken Benjamin is pastor of **Chichester Baptist Church**



Recent comments from ministers attending the Larger Churches' Conferences

Always come away encouraged. It is an environment where nothing has to be explained or apologised for, we understand where we are coming from.

This is so valuable, sustaining and empowering particularly because of its nature in serving pastors of larger Baptist churches.

Amazing levels of vulnerability, honesty, openness and safety to be real!

The opportunity for authentic open warm fellowship with great teaching, genuine sharing and inspiring worship with others who get my own context of service is such a helpful combination!

It is a great opportunity to discuss things I can't discuss with anyone in my congregation and which only pastors of larger churches are familiar with. I get to learn from the experiences of others in a similar position to me and I also get to make important connections and friendships with other ministers in my denomination.



2016
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