



# An Introduction to Accredited Baptist Ministry

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As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” At once they left their nets and followed him.  
Matthew 4:18-20

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The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you,” Mary answered, “I am the Lord’s servant. May your word to me be fulfilled.”  
Luke 1:28, 38

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### Welcome

**T**hank you for opening this document to discover more about accredited Baptist ministry. You might already feel a strong impulse to serve God as a church minister, chaplain, children’s leader, youth worker, or mission pioneer. Perhaps you are taking your very first tentative steps in exploring whether God is calling you to a new vocation. Or, maybe you are investigating options on behalf of someone you wish to encourage towards ministry.

Whichever is true for you, we hope these pages will provide practical information that will help you discern God’s calling. More than this, we want to inspire you with a picture of the adventure that ministry can be. And we wish to be honest about the cost of that adventure so that you can balance head and heart in your decision-making.

Throughout the document you will find some stories from a diverse range of Baptist ministers. They share how they discerned that God was calling them into ministry and about the subsequent journey from their first inklings through to accreditation as a Baptist minister and beyond.

## What does the Baptist Church get up to?

**B**aptist churches are at the forefront of spiritual and social support for villages, towns and cities across the UK. They serve their neighbourhoods with food banks, lunch clubs, mental well-being cafes, toddler groups, refugee drop-ins, children's clubs, family centres and youth work. They act as gathering points for hustings and hobbies, parties and public meetings, and for rituals that mark life's most joyful and sad events. They help communities to note the seasons by proclaiming the gospel message at Easter and reclaiming the stunning story of Christmas. They act as a voice for society's marginalised and as advocates for the victims of injustice. They provide one of the few places outside the home where different generations learn to live together and appreciate one another. And, of course, churches introduce Jesus to people through their worship and evangelism; and people to Jesus through their prayer.

And that's just the established churches.

Baptists also take the presence of Jesus into prisons, hospitals, workplaces, shops, sports clubs, schools, universities and the Forces through the work of chaplains. Chaplains embody Jesus' compassion and grace in everyday settings.

And then there are the Baptists who seek to build a Christ-shaped community where there is none. They are the pioneers and church planters who set up shop, sometimes literally, in places or among people groups that the church no longer reaches or has never reached. They root themselves in their locality by, perhaps, buying one of the first completed houses on a new estate; or by establishing a bakery as means of presence on the high street; or by gathering as a small community in homes on an inner city estate; or by running a support service for the vulnerable out of a redundant shop. They seek to provide safe places where life can be shared, people supported, and faith explored. They aim to be catalysts of change.

### Lisa Holmes

**F**rom a very early age I loved church – I even used to plead with my mum to take me to the evening service. Inspired bible teaching, worship and a good dose of transforming mission became my passions. At 18, I sensed that God had something particular lined up for me. I was almost involved in a very serious accident on my bike and began to ask, "Why has God kept me alive?" I changed direction, studied at the London School of Theology and then worked for 4 years among students which developed my skills in teaching, training, leadership and pastoral care. Towards the end of this period I felt a call to consider Baptist Ministry. To be honest I wasn't that keen on the idea or sure that it was actually theologically sound. But I felt increasingly sure that it was on God's agenda for me and so began the process that culminated in ministerial training at Spurgeon's College and a Masters in Theology from Heythrop College, London. After a tough few months seeking a church willing to call a young woman, I was called as associate minister to Skipton Baptist Church in North Yorkshire. On arrival, I was treated as an equal by the senior minister who always encouraged and affirmed me. After 18 years as associate minister I wondered – time to move on maybe? But it seemed that God had other ideas and the church called me to be the lead minister in 2013. This recent season has been a really fruitful time for the church. Our team has grown, and we are increasingly engaged in our community and seeing people coming to Christ. I have appreciated being able to serve the wider church on the leadership of Spring Harvest, speaking at church weekends and regional events.



Mind you, apart from some formal chaplaincy settings, any or all of the above church or community ministries can be undertaken by anyone, formally qualified or not. But they often thrive best when led by those who can reflect theologically, who are well-connected with the wider Baptist family, and who have the time to give themselves to the work. In other words, by accredited ministers.

Can you see yourself as a minister in one of these settings?

Because accredited Baptist ministers come in all shapes and sizes. The youngest are in their mid-twenties whilst the oldest are still serving the church in some capacity well beyond retirement. They are women or men and from a wide variety of social and ethnic backgrounds. They include those with disabilities alongside the able-bodied. They might have been born and brought up in the Baptist family or come to faith in Jesus later in life. They may exercise a full-time or a part-time ministry. It's a real mixture. Not everyone shares the same passions or giftings or even theological priorities. But all have been set aside and recognised as those with a particular focus on serving the kingdom of God and witnessing to Jesus in the world.

So, let's think overleaf more about what a minister is.

## Dave Tubby

I came into ministry very reluctantly, to be honest. I had worked in finance – banking, then insurance broking – for seven years, before I felt God calling me into pastoral ministry. Initially, I ignored it because I was happy doing what I was doing, but it became clear very soon that God had other ideas. Over several months, there were a number of clear signs this was His plan for me, so after discussion with my minister and church leadership, I took the step of faith to follow this call. I trained at Regent's Park College in Oxford, with my week split between working for my placement church and studying in Oxford or writing essays. The greatest blessing of my training was undoubtedly the group of people I trained with – journeying together through the ups and downs of ministry with friends has proved invaluable over the years. I am currently Senior Minister at Heaton Baptist Church, in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and am greatly blessed with a very gifted team who work alongside me. It is a great privilege to lead such a passionate group of people in serving Jesus here. Ministry can be tough. It can be a lonely path and it can bring many challenges, but I have always counted it an enormous privilege to see the impact of Jesus transforming lives close-up. And to walk closely with people in their most significant life moments is always deeply humbling and rewarding.



## What's special about being a Baptist minister?

**B**aptists have a distinctive flavour. We are committed to the freedom of each gathering of believers to determine for themselves the direction in which Jesus would lead them. We reserve baptism for those who have consciously and freely decided to follow Jesus. We believe that everyone one of us is called to share our faith in Jesus with the world around us. These distinctives (which are more properly spelt out in the Baptist Union's Declaration of Principle) help shape a Baptist approach to ministry and leadership.

### A Baptist minister exercises spiritual oversight

A minister is someone set aside by the church to serve by exercising spiritual oversight. But every term in this sentence needs explanation.

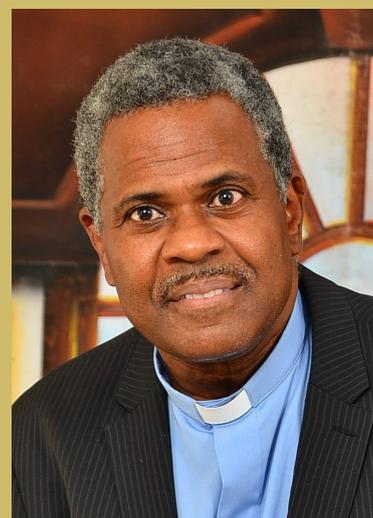
Each one of us is a **minister**, technically-speaking. The verb 'to minister' means to care for another. Jesus' command in John 13:34 to, "love one another as I have loved you," is for all his followers. We are all called to minister in the body of Christ. Yet almost every style and flavour of church through the centuries has recognised that some are called in a particular way to this task.

In Baptist understanding, those called ministers are **set aside** for the task of spiritual oversight. They are not elevated to a new position, but sit alongside everyone else they are in fellowship with. Their role is recognised as particular, but no more special than any other.

This recognition comes from the **church**. Baptist ministers are not ministers because they decided to be. Nor because they have been trained in a certain way. Nor because an elder or grandee of the church appointed them to be, but because the calling of God on their life is recognised and tested by the church at large. Their local congregation must recognise this calling. For those who wish to be accredited, this recognition must also be

### Bryan Scott

**M**y parents, coming from the Caribbean, had a very strong conviction of God which they wanted to instil in me, so I was sent to the local Baptist Church from an early age. But it was not until after I joined the Royal Air Force, aged 16, that I became a Christian. I was an engineer in the RAF for 24 years, where I had an awesome time. If I was being called by God to be a minister, I dismissed it at first. I thought, "I am not good enough to be a minister!" But I eventually realised that God uses ordinary people like me. It became clear and apparent that God was calling me to train for Baptist ministry, and both the minister and members of the church I attended confirmed it. So, after leaving the RAF, I started ministerial training at Bristol Baptist College, aged 40. It was brilliant timing! As a young boy my concentration levels had been very short. By doing my studies later on in life I was more developed and mature. I had life experience and was able to apply myself much better. Now, as senior pastor of a black majority church in a racially diverse community in Birmingham, I lead by example with zest and enthusiasm. The body of Christ has many parts and once you find out what your part is, it is very fulfilling and rewarding. The highlight for me is that ministry is a vocation and not a job! Yes, there are good days and bad days. Where I minister, I am seen as a pillar of the community like it or not, and people expect a lot from me and my family day and night! But I think my biggest obstacle is having too many expectations of myself – which can bring unnecessary pressure and burdens.



offered by a regional association and (usually) a Baptist college. Ultimately, it is affirmed at the national gathering of Baptists at the annual Baptist Assembly.

They are called to **serve**, but not necessarily to serve a local congregation. First and foremost, they serve the ministry and mission of God. This might involve teaching and pastoring a congregation. But it might be by pioneering a new work where there is no existing congregation, or acting as a chaplain in an institutional, industrial or public space. But in every setting they are called to, they resist self-inflation in order to serve God by serving those around them.

They are called to **spiritual oversight**. They take particular responsibility to help others follow Jesus more closely through their example, teaching, mentoring, spiritual direction, encouragement and prayer. Similarly, they are concerned with inviting other people to begin the journey of following Jesus. The way spiritual oversight is practised takes many forms according to setting and personality. Some ministers are visible leaders who shape a Christian community by exhortation. Others

influence from a less prominent position by enabling those around them. All are called to work in partnership with others, sharing out the tasks of ministry and leadership according to each person's skills and gifts.

## A Baptist minister might not look like what you imagine

There are plenty of Baptist ministers, most of them in fact, who do look something like what many people expect a minister to look like. It's not that they wear a dog collar (though some might) or preach terribly long sermons (though some might...) But they do work in a church setting, taking part in teaching, leading worship, offering pastoral care, engaging in evangelism, officiating at baptisms, weddings and funerals, supporting the surrounding community and so on. In other words, their focus is the life, health, and mission of the local congregation.

## Susan Myatt

I first felt God calling me into ministry when I was attending a hearing church in Tamworth, but I felt that as a deaf person, it would be impossible. But when I visited a deaf church, I knew the Holy Spirit was calling me to work amongst the deaf community. After that day everything changed! I studied at Northern Baptist College. I felt initially that I couldn't cope. It was a new experience for me, the tutors and my peers, and we all found it challenging. One of the most difficult aspects was translating academic language into a visual language, but with willingness and perseverance, we were all able to overcome the barriers. God taught me that the word 'can't', which had overshadowed my life up to that point, he had transformed into 'can'. I saw time and again the abundance of His provision for me. I couldn't deny that he wanted this for me and had placed me there. When I finished my training, I began working in my new roles as a minister in Rising Brook Community Church and advisor to the Diocese of Lichfield. Looking back, I wasn't sure where God was leading me, but as the months went by, things started to emerge. I set up deaf café in the church, a place for deaf people to meet and learn about Jesus through an informal Bible study. I began building relationships with more deaf people through my work in the regional Baptist association and the Anglican diocese. Then God gave me a vision. I felt him tell me that it was time to set up a church. Open Hands Signing Church was launched. I am very proud to say that the church is about empowering deaf people, showing them they can lead and that God will provide for them. When I look back, I realise he had big plans for me, and I would say the biggest lesson I have learned is just to trust Him and let Him lead the way!



And the local church, if defined as a gathering of believers who covenant together to walk with and watch over each other as disciples of Jesus, remains an essential element in Baptist thinking. Ephesians 3:10 talks of the church as an expression of “the manifold wisdom of God.”

However, the type of ministry exercised within the local church has extraordinary breadth. Church ministers can be leaders of substantial staff teams with a town-wide or even city-wide profile. They can be neighbourhood pastors working faithfully and effectively in the smallest community. They can work in the inner-city or in rural villages, or with multi-cultural or single-ethnicity groups. They might be renowned for their preaching or known for their passion and projects to address injustice. They might be fantastic at helping a church through transition.

They might be ground breakers who challenge the status quo in a church before moving on, or they might faithfully minister in one place for a couple of decades or more.

They might be pastors to all types and ages of person, or they might have a specialism to reach the elderly, the youth, the children, the deaf, the refugee, the sick, the artistic, the business community... the list goes on.

This breadth only gets wider when we consider ministers whose primary focus is beyond the local church as evangelists, pioneer ministers and chaplains. These ministers especially must be ‘bi-lingual’, learning both the language of Christian theology and the language of the people and places where they serve.

### A Baptist minister models a way of being

Given the breadth of what Baptists now call a ‘minister’ – church pastor, evangelist, chaplain, pioneer, children’s, youth or families worker – you might wonder what is common between them. After all, they can hardly be defined by a universal set of skills. Great preaching skills won’t much help the pioneer working on an unchurched estate. Nor will the ability to enthuse 5-year olds much benefit the ministry of a prison chaplain.

## Nikki Jenkins

**M**y first experiences of Christianity were as a child when I was sent to Sunday School at the local Christian Brethren chapel. The 12-year old Nicola would never have expected to have been ordained as a minister (ordained ministry! a woman!!) let alone become a mental health chaplain. But here I am in my 60s, feeling more than ever that this is where I can best be used as myself for the Kingdom of God. I have always felt a strong sense of wanting to serve; taking seriously God’s love and the implications of that inexplicable warm generosity – despite how unfair life can seem for so many – and bringing something of God’s love and light to whoever, wherever they are. I have been able to do that over the years in many ways, in many places: as a ‘minister’s wife’; as a primary school teacher for over 25 years; as an active church member in all the churches where we served; as a Mum again when our older boys were 13 and 15. Then, around 50 I had a major re-think. What mattered most to me? Could I be living my life more in tune with God’s cause? Others saw this development in me too – husband; regional minister; Baptist college principal – and so it was I found myself a full-time minister in Northampton. Then God surprised me again, using all my experiences, the person I’ve become, to work as a full-time NHS chaplain with mental health patients and staff. I’m more aware of God’s presence than I’ve ever been, more aware of God at work in our broken world than I ever could have imagined.



A different skill set is required for each context, even if we call all those we accredit for such roles by the common term, 'minister'.

In the next section we will look at how accredited Baptist ministers have their selection, preparation for ministry, and qualifications in common. But more important than these is the common commitment to a way of being. Accredited ministers enter a covenant "to live in conformity with the way of life their high calling demands." They seek "to serve Christ through ministry in church and world in ways that faithfully embody the gospel of Jesus Christ." (These quotes are taken from our Ministerial Recognition Rules.)

In recent years, we have come to describe the features of this way of being as the 'Marks of Ministry.' Ministers exhibit the **Marks of Ministry** when they are:

- M**ature as disciples of Christ
- A**ccountable to others
- R**elational in approach to leadership
- K**ingdom-focused
- S**ervant-hearted and sacrificial

An expanded version of these can be found on the Baptists Together website. You will find once again a strong emphasis on the expected humility and grace of a Baptist minister. They are to be accountable to others, committed to ongoing learning, gracious in approach, and committed to shared leadership. We say it once again: ministry is not about status or dominance, but service.

All this is not to say that skills are unimportant. For example, being 'mature as a disciple of Christ' presupposes that a minister is a praying person and skilled in interpreting the Bible. Skills are important, but the toolkit of skills each minister has may well be specifically tailored to the context of their ministry.

## Lee Jennings

**A**s I began training, I was told that the years ahead were 'formation' for ministry. I didn't know what formation meant but having already been called to minister in a medium-sized Baptist church, I assumed formation meant ticking the Baptist boxes and jumping through holiness hoops. The financial cost was high, the workload tough, yet the process was richer than I could have imagined. Northern Baptist College offered a pathway which fitted around leading a church and having a young family. I studied theology at St. Hild College (which hosts the Northern Baptist College hub in Sheffield) each Monday and joined with other ministerial students from Manchester and Durham over a number of weekends every year to grow in our Baptist heritage. After a busy Sunday in church, college on Monday felt like a weekly retreat. The times of worship, prayer and group discussions, mixed in with theology and Scripture, became a lifeline in busy seasons. Cost was the biggest hurdle to training. Having already studied, I wasn't eligible for student loans, but my sending church paid part, and God provided the rest. If you're called to accredited ministry, don't let finances put you off – God will provide. Following training, I began as a newly accredited minister more confident in communicating the Gospel in the changing culture we live in, more rooted in our Baptist tradition and more equipped to come alongside others in challenging pastoral situations. I still couldn't define formation, but I finished with a greater picture of who God is, equipped to freely serve and lead in the ministry to which God has uniquely called me.



## Do I have to be accredited to be a Baptist minister?

**T**he short answer is, no, it isn't necessary to be accredited. Baptist churches can, and do, call all sorts of people to be their minister.

But accreditation identifies those whose calling to spiritual oversight is broader than to just their local congregation. An accredited minister shares in the oversight of the whole network of churches, associations and colleges that make up Baptists Together, even if their own focus is a particular church, project or institution. It follows that their ministry is recognised nationally and that they may be commended to all our churches across England and Wales. Accreditation reassures churches and communities that a minister has gone through a measure of testing and ministerial formation (see more below). It confirms they are accountable to others and engaged in ongoing development. It means they can think biblically and theologically,

as attested by their academic qualification. And it implies they share a commitment to their fellow Baptist ministers, agreeing to 'walk together and watch over one another', as the Baptist saying goes.

So, we trust those who are accredited to exhibit the character, calling and competence that enables them to minister wisely, diligently, creatively and faithfully.

Accredited ministers also have one or two other advantages. They have access to the Baptists Together Settlement Process that enables ministers to find churches and vice versa. Once they have been in ministry for a while, they will be able to apply for regional, college or national roles for which accreditation is a requirement. More materially, accredited ministers usually join the Baptist Union's employer's pension scheme, and later on, can apply for the provision of retirement housing where necessary.

### Beatrice Anayo

**M**y call to ministry started at the age of 14, in a country where women were not given the opportunity to become ministers. I heard the Lord speak to me loud and clear, so I told my pastor. He told me that I was called to ministry and prayed for me, but I laughed. In order to run away from becoming a pastor, I pursued nursing. I served as a nurse for five years when God gave me the opportunity to come to the UK. Once here, I pushed all the doors of becoming a mental health nurse, but God had his own plan for me. In the church I went to, people were asking if I had been a pastor before and others outside the church would approach me to ask if I was a pastor. After running away for a long time, I finally yielded in surrender to the call of God. It happened like this; our church minister never gave up on my calling, so one day she asked me to just give this ministry thing a go. I said I will just test the waters by placing a call to a Baptist college and if they do not answer that will be it and she agreed. I placed a call to Bristol Baptist College and – guess what! – I was told to come in at 11am the same day. I asked to start a course for lay pastors to see if God was really serious with this call. It was very obvious, all the staff at college could testify to my calling. So, after a year I switched to a ministerial formation course. As a black woman, I was told of the possible difficulties in gaining a placement church as a minister-in-training. I decided that nothing will rob my call anymore, so I became a college-based student. I had a wonderful time at college with such loving staff who gave me all the support I needed. I am now an accredited minister in a mixed church where we are family, regardless of our race or gender. So, my beloved in the Lord, be encouraged. If God has called you, just follow his lead and guidance and know he is there to see you through. Only do not be discouraged over obstacles, because even our call is to be tested just like everything else.



To manage all this, the Baptist Union's Ministries Team holds a Register of Nationally Accredited Ministers, sometimes known as the 'Accredited List'. It is maintained by the National Ministerial Recognition Committee. They determine who is to be welcomed onto, retained upon, or removed from the Register. By this we protect the reputation of Baptist ministry and the gospel as presented by Baptist churches.

community is in addition to their main occupation. If, however, you feel God is calling you to make ministry the primary focus of your life and work, then you should seek to become an accredited minister.

For the sake of completeness, we ought to note here that we have another category of ministers who are called Recognised Local Ministers (RLM). They too undergo a measure of testing, theological education and spiritual formation, but it is less rigorous than for accredited ministers. The RLM programme enables them to increase their competence in ministry and mission for their particular local setting. Recognised Local Ministers might be church pastors, volunteer chaplains, community evangelists, church youth workers and so on, whose ministry is probably not their primary vocation. Usually, their service to the church and

## Sandra Crawford

**M**y calling into youthwork began at about 14-years-old. I had the privilege of growing up with two outstanding role models, a Christian schools' worker and a church-based youth worker. Over 25 years I have trained at various colleges studying theology and youthwork with JNC recognition, but my formation as a minister took place at Northern Baptist College. I was ordained as a Youth Specialist Minister which at the time was a recognised joint calling as Baptist minister and qualified youth and community worker. For almost ten years as a youth pastor, I wholly focused on children and young people in both church and community, accompanying and exploring faith with young people as they navigated their teenage years. One major frustration was the realisation that many young people didn't fit well into the model of traditional church. Once they reached 18, they failed to make the transition from youth work into what was to them a different congregation and not the one in which they had been nurtured. So, the focus of my ministry became wider. I could see the need for the whole church to be engaged. Youth, children and family ministry cannot be a bolt-on to traditional church, but must be integral in all we do. How do we hear the voice of the child or young person in our worship or in our decisions about mission and finances? My youth work background has led me to a much more collaborative approach to leadership; to different ways of exploring faith together in the wider congregation; and to ensuring the voice of those on the margins are heard. After 25 years of full-time Baptist ministry with a huge bias to youth, children and families, I'm still learning my craft and discovering new and exciting ways.



## What does preparation for ministry involve?

When we talk about how we prepare women and men to be accredited ministers, we usually talk about ministerial formation rather than training. Our Baptist colleges offer theological education and we expect accredited ministers to attain a diploma or a degree in theology. But in addition to any academic learning, colleges seek to form the minister as a person. This will involve you in learning some practical skills – how to lead a funeral perhaps, or how to start a community from scratch, or how to nurture the faith of children – whatever is appropriate for the intended type of ministry. And you will gain hands-on experience in a placement church, chaplaincy, or mission setting. But the colleges are also concerned for your spiritual and character development. They want you to grow in grace towards people; in wise engagement with culture; and in confidence to live and share the gospel in fresh ways in an ever-changing society.

So, you will take part in the worshipping life of the college community. You will be encouraged to reflect on all you are learning with a tutor, in peer groups, and on your own.

All this is to form you into the person God wishes you to be, ready for the ministry he has called you to.

Exactly how you experience this ministerial formation can vary enormously.

For a start, though there are five Baptist colleges to choose from, a couple have learning hubs, so it is possible to access formation in Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Durham, London, Oxford, Manchester and Sheffield. All of these will educate and develop those wishing to be church ministers, but they also variously offer more specialised programmes for pioneers, evangelists, chaplains and children's, youth and families' workers.

### Lucy Wright

Why am I a Baptist Minister? The honest answer is I cannot imagine doing and being anything else! I first felt called to full-time ministry at the tender age of eight, and it never left me in my teenage years. God used my openness, and slight naivety, as well as the support of my church and parents to explore this further. I was given opportunities to lead worship, give talks, and shadow others in Christian work. At eighteen I went to Bangor University to read Theology. Part way through the course I wanted to explore this sense of call, but I was unsure. Firstly, some of my friends believed that it was not biblical for women to preach, although I disagreed. Secondly, I was afraid I would not be taken seriously, and others thought I needed 'life experience.'

The principal of Bristol Baptist College gave me some wise advice. We learn from experiences by living and reflecting well. It's not the number of experiences we have, but the capacity to learn from them. I transferred the last year of my degree to Bristol Baptist College where I spent a further three years exploring the missional challenges and opportunities facing the church in the 21st century. Aged 23, I started as minister of my first church. Eleven years on, and into my second pastorate, I can honestly say there is always more to learn. I have had opportunities to share in the deepest moments of people's lives, seen doorways open to me in the local community, and made lifelong friendships within the Baptist family. I can't imagine being and doing anything else!



Ministerial formation can be:

**College-based**, for which you will live in or near college in order to study. Alongside this, you will spend several hours each week in a church, chaplaincy or mission placement alongside an existing minister.

**Congregation-based or mission context-based**. You will spend around half of your time as the minister of a church or in another ministry setting. You will spend the remainder of your week in study and learning, coming into college for one or two days a week, or for several weekends throughout the year.

**Bi-vocational**. You study at college and gain experience in a church even as you continue in your current profession or vocation on a part-time basis. This route is challenging but opens up an increasing number of future ministry and pioneer opportunities where a full stipend cannot be provided.

Full-time students for the first and second of these options usually complete their preparation for ministry in three years. But it is possible (and usual for bi-vocational students) to study part-time over a longer period.

If you already have a diploma or degree in theology, it is still likely that you will join a college for a period in order to pursue further learning and take part in the ministerial formation programme.

There is more information on the 'College Overview' pages of the Baptists Together website, but there is no substitute for contacting a college directly when the time is right (see below) and talking with them about your options.

## Craig Sweeney-Essex

**W**hilst walking past a Baptist church as a child, I declared that I wanted to be a vicar! However, when I was growing up, I was encouraged to fight back against people who tried to bully or hurt me. This escalated from self-defence to being the instigator and I was involved in fights on a regular basis. I left school with lower than expected GCSEs. As an adult, I worked as a bouncer. I became a Christian in 2007 in a Baptist church and simultaneously secured a job working in education helping to progress young people with complex needs. This combination influenced my life and I finished my bouncer work. I had a passion for sharing Jesus and served in different ministries before I was encouraged to preach by my minister. I gained valuable experience from preaching at different churches. I looked at several colleges before starting an Applied Theology degree at Moorlands College. Whilst exploring different routes from there into Baptist ministry, I attended a minister's induction at the same Baptist church from when I was a child. In the service I received a word that 'I was seeing something of my future.' In year three of college, I shadowed an experienced Baptist minister. This was an invaluable experience. We have an ongoing mentoring relationship which is a great source of support, guidance and challenge. I was called to be minister of a church in 2017 having gained First Class Honours in my degree. I then successfully applied for accredited Baptist ministry through a Residential Selection Conference. But this was only after I had attended the regional Ministerial Recognition Committee... which happened to take place in the same Baptist church I had walked past as a child. I now have the joy and challenge of helping people to grow and deepen their relationship with Jesus and enabling them to serve as the church in the world.



## How do I know if I am called to be a Baptist minister?

**D**iscerning God's guidance can sometimes be daunting. You may worry that you will get it 'wrong', the more so when a decision has far reaching consequences. Leaving settled employment, uprooting a family from their community, losing a steady wage – any or all of these might be the outworking of following a call into and beyond ministerial formation. It is a comfort to remember that, as for all of us, your primary calling is not to a role or a ministry or any type of job. It is to a relationship with the living God, and to belong to Jesus. You are his disciple first and foremost. You may trust him to hold onto you through the consequences of any decisions you make, especially those that arise out of your prayerful conversation with him. Even if you later look back and wish you had taken another route, you can recall that God works for the good of those who love him (Romans 8:28).

Nothing is beyond his redemptive reach. So, to be confident of God's guidance, you should first be attentive to your relationship with him.

However, we need to say more than this. We look for a **persistent sense of calling** in those who wish to prepare for ministry. Some would say that a feature of a call to ministry is that it just won't go away. Over a period of time, an inner conviction grows within you that this is the right course of action. You might wait a while and ponder on it. You might even try to run away from the idea. But if God is calling you, then the feeling will persist, as did his voice to Samuel in the tabernacle.

Alongside this we look for broad evidence of calling. For example: your sense of calling is affirmed by other mature Christians who know you well; you already have some gifts that lean towards the spiritual oversight of others; you have gained experience in some of the areas in which you hope to serve, whether in evangelism, preaching, pastoral care, or church leadership; you have had prophetic words given to you; or you can point to

### Pam Davies

I used to work for a police service in a town that had a large homeless community. Sadly, we saw a significant number of overdoses due to bad batches of heroin, and I started to question what the church's role might be in helping people transform their lives. It seemed to me that even with all of the local services trying to engage people, something was still missing. I shaped my student dissertation around this reflection and, as part of this, interviewed community members at 57 West, a church plant among rough sleepers and vulnerably housed adults in Southend. During this time, I was exploring a call to ministry and became a minister-in-training at Regent's Park College with 57 West as my placement. Training brought its challenges because I had to spend a lot of time translating the practices that exist in inherited models of church into a context that didn't always look very 'churchy!' Thankfully, on the Master's programme I had the opportunity to write my own research questions which meant I could focus on relevant themes like gang culture, addiction and atonement and the overlap of rituals in faith and sport. While I knew that my setting was quite different from those around me, I was surrounded by people who shared experiences I could learn from and who hopefully learnt something from ours as well! I love that we're a radically different expression of church. We hold Saturday services with brunch, run a weekday community drop-in centre, host the winter night shelter and organise all manner of other activities around these core things. Creative prayer is really important to us, along with our weekly communion.



circumstances that have led you to a point of decision. A combination of some or all of these can help you as you seek to discern God's call.

We said above that the Marks of Ministry describe the characteristics and behaviour we expect to observe in accredited Baptist ministers. To help us determine who should start the journey of ministerial formation, we also have the Marks of Calling. These can act as a useful checklist for you as you think about ministry. No single candidate for ministry is likely to have all these characteristics fully formed. Rather, you should be able to show that you are growing into several of them:

- Clear evidence of a call to Baptist Ministry that originates from God.
- A personal maturity and deepening relationship with Christ.

- A clear sense that God's purposes matter more than personal goals and aspirations.
- A proven ability and adequate humility to listen and learn.
- Tenacity and character in the face of disappointment and struggle.
- A sense of belonging to the Body of Christ in all its diversity.
- Clear evidence that others naturally trust and follow you.
- Measurable leadership potential.
- A growing ability to communicate.
- Fruits of ministry in the here and now.

A fuller explanation of each of these characteristics can be found in the Marks of Ministry document on the Baptists Together website.

## Denzil Larbi

My call to ministry began at the age of seven. My mother would take me to church every Sunday and one time the minister called me to the front and prophesied over me. He said I would become a minister at a very young age and travel to many nations to spread the gospel. Aged seven, I had no idea what this meant but I began to pay attention to pastors. I started telling people that I wanted to become a pastor when I grew up and I even picked out a name for my church! However, when I started secondary school, I quickly realised that pastors were not cool, rich, famous or powerful. So, I changed my mind. I decided that I was going to be a cool, rich and famous rugby player. Christianity became a non-factor in my decisions until I was 14. Whilst on a family vacation to Ghana, the Holy Spirit convicted me of my sins, I repented and gave my life to Christ. This time, I was certain I wanted to serve God wholeheartedly for the rest of my life. As soon as I returned to London, I started preaching the gospel to my peers at school. I was blessed with several opportunities to travel and share the gospel in various settings. By the age of 18, I knew that God was calling me to study and deepen my knowledge of him. With severe dyslexia, study was going to be extremely challenging. Nevertheless, I was sure that God would guide me and I proceeded to study theology at Spurgeon's College, London. My whole life changed during my time there. I went through many challenges. People often dismissed me because of my young age and my background. It took a while for me to realise that the anointing of God was upon my life, irrespective of the opinions of others. The more I understood the gospel, the more I realised that God's grace was sufficient for me and strong enough to cover all my weaknesses, flaws, doubts and fears! At college, the Holy Spirit moulded me, and he moulds me still, to become the man God was calling me to be. I now know that the challenges I faced in the past enabled me to become the minister that God desires today. I now work as an Associate Minister in South Croydon, with a focus on evangelism and mission.



## How do I start the journey to become a Baptist minister?

There are several important informal steps you should take if you are thinking of applying for Baptist ministerial formation.

- First, if you are not already, become part of a Baptist church community! We expect all candidates to have the backing of their local church when they apply, and this is only possible when you are known by the congregation. Usually, candidates must have been a member of a Baptist church for two years prior to application, though exceptions are made for those who get involved in church more intensely through, say, an internship.
- Second, discuss the matter with your own minister or church leadership. Do they affirm your growing sense of calling? Please note here that some women find their church leaders deny their calling because they do not agree that women should be ministers at all. If this is your experience, we encourage you to press on anyway with the steps below, especially talking to your regional minister.
- You might also like to talk to those who already minister in the area you can imagine yourself wanting to work. If you are thinking about children's, youth and families work, then arrange to meet, talk with or shadow a minister who is already in this field. The same is true for each ministry type. Find an existing practitioner and ask them to be honest about the joys and challenges of their role.
- Next, you should arrange to meet your regional minister from your local Baptist association. They will discuss your calling and then outline your options, such as whether to study full-time or part-time; which college might be most suitable; the types of courses available; funding and so on.

- It might also be wise early on to talk to or visit one or two of the colleges. Please be courageous and just ring them up or email them to ask for a conversation – they would love to hear from you. Contact details for all the colleges are available on the BaptistsTogether website.

If after all this, you feel it is the right thing to proceed, the process is as follows:

- 1 You should complete application form AM1-1. Your regional minister will supply this and help you complete it.
- 2 You should seek confirmation from your church that they support your application. This confirmation should be by formal vote at a church meeting. At least two-thirds of those present and voting should affirm your calling. A guidance booklet will be given to your church by the regional minister to help them.
- 3 You will be given a date to attend your regional Ministerial Recognition Committee, or MRC.
- 4 One member of the MRC will arrange to come and hear you preach or lead an event. The purpose is to enable the MRC member to assess the content and the style of your communication and how you enable others to engage with God and his word.
- 5 You then attend your regional MRC. This usually takes a whole day, and in some locations includes an overnight stay. It involves a few interviews and scenarios, maybe a presentation, and a chance to meet the committee members informally. At the end of it, the MRC make a judgment based on their notes from the day, the preaching or event assessment mentioned above, and the commendation from your church. There are four possible outcomes:
  - i They affirm your call and recommend you begin ministerial formation at a college.

- ii They affirm your call and recommend you begin ministerial formation at a college, but they name some specific issues they feel should be addressed before or during your time at college.
  - iii They defer a decision, believing that you may be called, and ask you to gain specific experience or address particular issues before being invited back to the MRC.
  - iv They do not believe God is calling you to serve him as a Baptist minister. In Baptist thinking, this is not in any way a measure of your value. God calls the vast majority of Christians to be disciples and witnesses for him primarily in schools, colleges, hospitals, offices, factories, businesses, public service, neighbourhoods and families. If a calling to accredited ministry is not discerned by the MRC, it means only that God is calling you to a different role.
- 6 Finally, you attend an interview at the Baptist college you wish to attend. Given the prior testing demanded by the stages above, this should be a confirmatory step regarding

your calling. But it is a very necessary step to establish the type of course and academic qualification that will be most suitable for you.

If all these steps are successfully navigated, then you are ready to start your preparation for ministry. If the above process sounds somewhat arduous... it is! Ministerial formation should not be undertaken on a whim or without good grounds for believing it is an achievable end. We owe it to you to be rigorous before we encourage you to take the next radical step and begin.

There is technically one other option. If you already have a diploma or degree in theology; have undergone ministerial formation in another setting; and have gained extensive ministry experience, then the MRC can recommend that you do not attend a college at all, but instead attend a Residential Selection Conference, or RSC. You will know that this is the route you are applying for before you meet with the MRC. If the MRC send you to RSC and you are successful, you become a newly accredited minister straight away.

## Pam Searle

I am a black British-born African woman, with a strong African heritage. I became a Christian through attending a C of E Church and I first realised I had a call to ministry soon after completing my A-levels. My West African upbringing focused on providing me with a solid education, a good career and a good husband, so when I mentioned that I wanted to become a vicar, my father looked at me and said “men don’t marry vicars.” So, I tucked my call away and went off to university, got the good career and a good husband and had my three children, all in keeping in line with expectations for my life. But every now and then I wondered what life would have been like if I had become a vicar. By this time I was attending a large Baptist church in South London and I arranged to speak with my minister to see what he thought. If I am honest, I was expecting him to laugh me out of his office, but instead he encouraged me and committed to pray for me to test the call. So, I enrolled at St Mellitus Bible College and studied for a Certificate in Theology, which to my surprise I completed, having been out of formal study for over 20 years. Very soon after I was commended by the church leadership and the church recognised my calling into Baptist ministry. I then started my formal ministerial training at Spurgeon’s College. I cannot say that my entire journey went smoothly, because it didn’t. During the time even friends said that I was a token to tick the diversity box. But I carried on, conscious that I had a call on my life. So how can a black woman called into Baptist ministry make a difference? Get involved as much as you can in Baptist life, stick to your call. Keep short account and pray.



## Who pays for my ministerial formation and how much is it?

**T**he cost of preparing for ministry at a college varies greatly depending on your own circumstances and the type of course you do.

The Baptist colleges, as higher education providers, charge university tuition fees. If you have not previously accessed student finance, the government will offer a student finance loan to cover tuition fees, as they would for anyone studying for a first degree. Depending on your circumstances, you can also get a loan for living costs.

Ministerial students who have no access to student finance tend to fund their college course in a variety or combination of other ways. Some receive bursaries from a college; some draw on their own savings; some are supported by spouses,

family members or their 'home' church; some spread their learning over a longer period and work part-time alongside their study.

Those who undertake the church-based route are paid half the standard stipend as well as having accommodation provided.

It is also possible to arrange a loan from Kingdom Bank with the Baptist Union acting as guarantor. And you can set up a partner account with Stewardship so that individuals can add Gift Aid to their donations to you.

To help you explore these options, there is a guidance document, 'Funding Ministerial Formation', on the Baptists Together website.

However, cost should be no barrier to your initial enquiries. We encourage you to have an honest conversation with your regional minister and then speak to your prospective college who will explain the costs and the options in full.

### Phil Craven

**A**s I was growing up, I had no desire to join the military. It was not on my radar at all! From an early age I felt called to serve God in local church ministry. But God, as often happens, had different plans. After training for ministry in Glasgow and serving a Baptist church in Scotland, I felt that God was calling me to minister to a displaced people. I found myself working as a hospital chaplain for many years. But the displaced people in hospital would hopefully return home. I began to sense a call to the displaced community found in the military. All within the armed forces are displaced in some way: they are far from their friends and family; far from their normal networks of support; far from their home. Being a chaplain in the RAF has enabled me to minister to these displaced personnel and their families. Most service personnel would never visit a church or book an appointment to chat about their struggles with their local vicar. But they often think nothing of visiting the chaplain – the 'padre' – and sharing their lives and their stories. Padres are an integral part of the armed forces, and have the type of access to people in their place of work that would be hard to imagine in civilian ministry. This access is one of the biggest joys of this ministry, but also the biggest cost. Engaging with and sharing in the suffering and loss of others is costly. I have wept with personnel through loss and tragedy and I have been on my knees in pained prayer whilst on active operations in hostile locations. By the nature of the armed forces, mortality and death are never far away. This often brings into sharp focus our need for meaning and purpose. Into this, as a padre I have a wonderful opportunity to share my own faith and my fundamental belief that our lives matter to God.



## Will I be disadvantaged because of who I am?

**M**any people have an image of a Baptist minister that is a stereotype – white, male, married, conventional, cerebral. We must admit that it is a stereotype that is not wholly without foundation. Despite the Baptist church being one of the first Christian denominations to accept women into ministry as far back as 1918, this promising start has still not translated into equal numbers of women and men in ministry. Today, women make up only 20% of our active accredited ministers. And despite the large number of people of colour in our congregations, especially across some of our cities, this proportion is not reflected among our ministers. Further, those below the age of 40 make up only 10% of our accredited ministers; most ministers, anecdotally at least, come from predominantly middle-class backgrounds; and there are only a few disabled people who are accredited ministers.

None of this has to be the case. We want to do all we can to have a body of ministers that reflects the diversity of our nation.

If you feel God is calling you, yet you are hesitant lest you face discrimination, then please still put yourself forward. It is up to us to humbly discern that call with you. We will attempt to dismantle all barriers that discourage or prohibit under-represented groups from ministerial formation. As a broad family of churches that determine their own understanding of Scripture, we in repentance confess that we have not successfully abandoned all our prejudice in every place. We hope, however, that if you feel you are likely to be disadvantaged, you will press ahead and be part of the solution to this. You have our permission to tell us where you find that disadvantage remains.

### Dave Ellis

**B**orn in Wolverhampton to Jamaican parents, I gave my life to God when I was 18 and an engineer. He promised me an adventure. A year later my pastor said to me, “The West Midlands needs black Baptist ministers”. I was amazed, I thought he was speaking to someone else. After all, I’d never seen a black minister before. I had no role models. In 1982 I went to London Bible College, where, at the age of 22, I would see my first black preacher. My calling was further tested by the London Baptist Association. They sent me to Spurgeon’s College to train. I would meet my first accredited black Baptist pastor in 1987. Fortunately, at both colleges I met brilliant people from around the world including black British, Africans and Caribbean people who would become Baptist ministers. Over the years I would see more ministers of colour emerge. I can’t say it’s been plain sailing. In the late 1980’s I changed my opening statement on my ministerial profile – a sort of CV for ministers – to “I am black.” This was to avoid the disappointed reactions I used to get from a few churches I visited. I hope I wouldn’t have to write that on a CV today. Finally, after many years of serving the Baptist family in local church ministry, I’m now a Regional Minister in the Heart of England Baptist Association. God promised me an adventure, my skin colour has never held me back and God has not finished my adventure yet. Start your adventure today.



A word also about age. Many years ago, it was common for Baptist ministers to begin their ministry in their twenties. In more recent days, the average age of those preparing for ministry has risen. We rejoice in those who discern God's calling later in life, but we would love to see an increase in the number of younger candidates for ministry. You might consider studying theology at a Baptist college as your first experience of higher education. It is possible to join the ministerial formation programme at the same time, even if you have not had a call to ministry tested by your church or regional Ministerial Recognition Committee. The college can assess you in the same way as all their ministerial students. If you complete a ministerial formation programme as part of your studies in this way, you then have four years in which you may apply to a Ministerial Recognition Committee. The advantage of this pathway is that you will be able to access student finance during training, as would any first-time university student. And we commend theology as a broad discipline that will give you a respected arts qualification even if you later decide that accredited ministry is not for you.

Finally, you might have come to the UK from overseas and hope to be an accredited Baptist minister. If this describes you, we would love to explore your sense of calling. We have a range of ministers from overseas who train here, or who have trained in their home country, moved to the UK and then transferred their accreditation to BUGB. If you want to be among them, please speak to your regional minister in the first instance.

Please note that if you have come from overseas you will need an overseas police check. This also applies if you are British but have worked or lived overseas for more than 12 months during the last ten years. If you apply for accredited ministry, we strongly advise you to pursue these checks sooner rather than later. The Ministries Team can give you information about how to do this.

We also hope that the stories throughout this guide reveal the diversity of others who have gone before you into Baptist ministry.

## Ez Lucas

I do not come from a Christian background and had only been a Christian for a relatively short time before I sensed a call to ministry. This calling was shared with my husband Ben and a year after being Christians we were training at Bristol Baptist College. I trained as a Youth Specialist. We were both called into church settings and enjoyed ten years of helping the churches to reach our community. We always had a heart for those who were lost, who didn't know where they fit in life, the people who struggled. I especially felt my ministry was focused on those outside of the church. After ten years in church ministry and a lot of thinking and praying, God called us to be missional listeners, a pioneering role which allowed us to be with people, build relationships and work together for community renewal in Dorset. The hope is that fellowship will arise in the community from us simply being part of it. There have been so many opportunities to build friendships, and be fully part of the village we live in. We spend time listening and waiting on God on behalf of the community, and we are building a core 'family' to support each other. It is amazing that the Baptist Union could see the vision we held, and that the Baptist family saw the potential in two people who had only been Christians for a year. This role allows me to be 'fully Ez'!



# What happens after I have prepared for Baptist ministry?

## Finding a place to minister

During your time with a Baptist college, you will be helped to think about the detail of the ministry God is calling you to. The college will direct you to the academic modules and practical experience that will best prepare you for your calling. During your penultimate year in college, you will start to work on your 'ministerial profile' – a sort of standardised CV for ministers. You discuss and refine this important document with the staff at your college. Once it is agreed, your profile is then formatted by the BUGB Ministries Team. Assuming you are on track to complete your academic studies and after a successful interview with your college, you are then given access to the pastoral vacancy list that contains the details of all the churches seeking new ministry. Each church entry includes a date by which they wish to receive applications. You send your ministerial profile to any churches you wish to be considered by. You can of course talk with your regional minister about the suitability of possible situations in order to help in our discernment. Once a church has a list of names, they are free to consider, contact, meet with and interview whom they wish.

## Newly Accredited Ministry

At the end of your time at college, and if you have received a call from a church, chaplaincy or pioneering project, you can enrol with the BUGB Ministries Team as a Newly Accredited Minister (NAM). Once enrolled, your time as a NAM lasts for three, or sometimes four years from the date of your induction into your first substantive ministry post. During this time, you will take part in a programme that is overseen jointly by the association in which your first accredited ministry is situated and one of the colleges. It includes a mixture of mentoring, further reading, study, and personal and group reflection. The aim of the

programme is for you to embed the five habits of continuing ministerial development (please see below) in the pattern of your ongoing ministry. Your progress is monitored by your regional MRC who will interview you at the end of the programme. On their commendation, you become a fully accredited minister, a milestone that is marked for you and your NAM peers in a ceremony at the annual Baptist Assembly.

## Continuing Ministerial Development (CMD)

The habits we try to instil in Newly Accredited Ministers are the habits we wish to see every active accredited minister practice, regardless of their age, experience or type of ministry. They help us to nurture our own well-being and growth and ensure that we all look out for each other as ministers. There are five of these habits:

- **Learning** – by gaining new understanding and new skills
- **Attentiveness** – to our spiritual, physical, emotional and relational health
- **Accountability** – to a trusted companion outside our ministry setting
- **Connection** – to our fellow Baptist ministers and the wider Baptist family
- **Review** – of our work as ministers at least once every three years.

We each choose a fellow accredited Baptist minister with whom we meet annually to discuss our progress in the practice of these habits in the year just gone and our plans for the coming year. Holding each other accountable like this helps us to make real our covenant together as fellow ministers. Simply put, this covenant is a joint commitment to:

- Jesus, his gospel and his church
- Our own ongoing discipleship, development and well-being
- The support and well-being of our fellow Baptist ministers and their families
- The unity, welfare and mission of our wider Baptist family, its associations and Union.

Full details of the CMD framework can be found on the Baptists Together website.

## Naomi and Jon Dickerson

**W**e both studied at South Wales Baptist College but via different pathways due to the way we each discerned our calling. Naomi had been employed as a children's and families' worker and as the role grew, a sense of calling to wider ministry began. After completing a graduate diploma in theology at Bristol Baptist College, she answered a calling to be associate minister at Ararat Baptist Church in Cardiff. So she transferred to South Wales Baptist College to become a minister-in-training and begin a MA in practical theology. Meanwhile, Jon was already at South Wales Baptist College having started to explore his calling as an 'open option' student. He completed a degree in theology and transferred onto the ministerial programme. So we ended up in ministerial training together for which we are grateful to God as we were married in 2017. This did make for a few tense moments when Jon entered settlement as that could have thrown a large spanner in the works. Though Jon was hopeful of being called to the church in which he had a student placement, he was open to going to go wherever God would call him, and his name was also sent to churches across the UK. It turned out that God did know what he was doing all along and Jon answered a call to Griffithstown Baptist Church, just twenty miles from Cardiff. It has been interesting ministering in two different churches but it has allowed us to support one another in our different callings. We have also had a few opportunities to minister together which we have enjoyed such as leading a bible study for the Welsh Baptist Assembly. Ministry hasn't been without its challenges but we have both seen God at work within our communities and consider it a huge privilege to walk alongside people in their journey with God.



## What's next?

To recap, the journey to ongoing accredited Baptist ministry involves:

- 1 Exploring ministry options informally with your own church, regional minister and maybe a college or two
- 2 Undergoing a testing process with your church, a Ministerial Recognition Committee and the college of your choice
- 3 A number of years of ministerial formation at a Baptist college and a church or mission placement
- 4 The start of your first substantive ministry alongside a programme of further formation for newly accredited ministers
- 5 Affirmation of your full accreditation at the Baptist Assembly
- 6 The practice of five habits of Continuing Ministerial Development for, well, as long as you are a minister!

All the steps along the way towards and beyond initial accreditation are administered by the Ministries Team. There are, inevitably, some 'Ministerial Recognition Rules' around the behaviours expected from accredited ministers and what happens when things go wrong, as sometimes they unfortunately do. These aim to give clear guidelines to ministers and to maintain standards so that accreditation is a meaningful category. These rules can be found on the Baptists Together website.

However, there is plenty of support for you in the journey ahead. At any point, you can seek the advice of your regional minister. And there are many networks, conferences, events and programmes that exist to support and sustain Baptist ministers along the way. There is even a subsidised and confidential counselling service exclusive to ministers and their households. We also trust that you will make lifelong friends who will journey with you through the years. We at the Ministries Team at the Baptist Union will do our best to provide resources and wise guidance at a national level.

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God has made us what we are, and in  
our union with Christ Jesus  
he has created us for a life of good  
deeds, which he has already  
prepared for us to do.  
Ephesians 2:10

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Ministries Team December 2023

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