

Tim Presswood

Poet, climber and keen if not particularly proficient guitarist, I have spent the last thirty years re-inventing the church in one of the most deprived inner city communities in the country. Today we are the Urban Expression Team in Openshaw, east Manchester.



In 2014, much to my surprise, I was invited to join the staff of the North Western Baptist Association. I was privileged to lead the team through a *transition* process and am now enjoying leading the Church Life Team at NWBA half time, whilst acting as College Manager for Northern Baptist College and continuing in ministry in Openshaw.

I am excited to have been asked to stand for election to follow Hayley Young as President of Baptists Together. Hayley's theme of building a bigger table has already captured my imagination. I was privileged to have a three-month sabbatical last year in which I spent time reflecting and studying food. If Hayley wants us to build a bigger – more inclusive – table, then, as President, I would want to ensure that everyone at the table has the opportunity to share in Christ's great feast – in all its fullness.

We have always had a focus on inclusive worship. What does worship look like when over half the community are under the age of 10? On one notorious day, Deborah, my wife and Clara, my colleague took the children out, leaving me to preach the sermon to a congregation of one! He insisted that my sermon preparation should not go to waste, but we realised that things had to change. A few years later this was confirmed when our church building was demolished under a compulsory purchase order.

Today, we worship around the kitchen table – or, as Forest Church, Manchester – outside in God's creation. I did once make the mistake of suggesting to someone in a church I was visiting that it is possible to worship without singing. It turned out that I was speaking to the church organist, who did not respond positively to my suggestion! Increasingly, though, churches are finding new ways of expressing their love of Jesus. Drama, music, poetry, art – and yes, even cookery can all be part of our worship.

In a small church, it is much easier to ensure that everyone has a voice. Children, for example, have opinions about what church should look like. Some of their home truths may be difficult for us to hear, but if we do not listen to them, they, like most of our society, will vote with their feet.

As we emerge from the trauma and pain of lockdown, many churches are already beginning to reflect upon what their mission and ministry will look like. As President, I would encourage them to listen to the variety of voices within their community. Some of those voices will have things to say which we will find painful and troubling.

Inner city ministry has led me into a variety of unexpected roles, working amongst many who have been marginalised and whose voice has not been heard in our society. A pacifist Quaker friend twisted my arm to become treasurer – then Chair - of Beswick and Openshaw Credit Union which then had 83 members and around £14,000 of assets. Today the credit union has over 32,000 members across Greater Manchester and issues over a million pounds worth of loans per month. Estimates are that we save our members over £5m per year in interest to high cost lenders and loan sharks.

I have chaired the largest regeneration programme in Europe, as well as the local primary care trust and a nearby hospital trust. Today I serve as a trustee and director of a charity supporting asylum seekers and refugees.

I am firmly committed to a gospel which is inclusive of all irrespective of race, age, gender disability or sexuality. I am proud to belong to a denomination which celebrates diversity and would strongly support the Declaration of Principle that “each Church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer [Christ’s] laws,” even where I disagree!

Both as a church with no building and as a regional minister, one of my greatest joys has been to experience something of the rich diversity of Baptist life in this country.



Certain
that he knew
the student
finds wisdom
in those he came to teach
listening
to the still small voice
of God
in the faithful
community
the rainbow
community
the rapidly changing
community
listening
the poet
gives voice
to those who have long been silenced
silencing
the poet
hears the voices
of those whose jubilation
leaves no room for difference
leaves no room for dissent
leaves no room at this inn
I hate
I despise
your festivals
Take away from me the noise of your
songs;
I will not listen to the melody of your
harps.
But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing
stream.