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How one Association is partnering with its churches in mission

“It is still early days, but the best way to describe what is happening is that churches are being ‘nudged’ in mission,” says Joth Hunt, Regional Minister Team Leader South of England Baptist Association (SEBA). “Simply raising the profile of mission and changing the conversation has begun to bear first fruits.”

In 2025 SEBA launched its Partners in Mission initiative, which sees the Association offering greater support to its churches, pioneering and church planting initiatives wherever possible. It is inspired by Paul’s expression of gratitude for the church in Philippi.

‘I thank my God every time I remember you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the Gospel’ - Philippians 1:3-5

Partners in Mission is about “partnering in the mission of God together as we serve and support each other,” explains Joth.

“We recognise many local churches and pioneering initiatives are often limited with the resources available to them. But by partnering with the Association our hope is that a wider resource becomes available and even greater possibilities realised.”

Each partnership is unique and prayerfully discerned by the local church. SEBA's role in the partnership is to walk alongside, offer support and advice to help the church find the best mission tool to become more effective in mission. This could be mission companions, partnering with other churches, seminars, workshops or mission grants.

It is particularly for churches who would value the support from the wider association in a variety of ways, whether they are local churches wanting to be more effective in mission, churches who want to support other churches, or churches in danger of closure.

There has been an appetite for this kind of support. More than 300 people attended the Partners in Mission launch events in March and May 2025. "These were intense, full-on days involving keynote speakers, seminars, and the presentation of Partners in Mission as a concept," says Andy Twilley, Regional Minister. "Often people leave these events looking weary, but here you sensed a real energy had been generated."

Over the summer, the Association saw a steady flow of churches reaching out to explore what this could look like in their local context. At the time of writing more than 40 churches had engaged.

"We are deeply committed to mission being bespoke," continues Andy. "It isn't about us dictating how mission must be done; it's about allowing the Holy

Spirit to help a church discern God's shape for mission at this specific period in their journey. "While every path is different, we have been involved in several discernment processes that are already yielding fruit."

One church hadn't seen a baptism for some time, but its involvement with Partners in Mission coincided with 12 baptisms on a single Sunday. While that number might be extreme, a general increase in baptisms isn't.

"We are seeing a similar trend in other churches that are now dusting down their baptistries after years of inactivity," says Joth. "We are leaning into our identity as Baptists and talking more about the importance of these public declarations of faith."

For instance, Partners in Mission has reshaped the relationship between the Association and its Home Mission supported churches. The initiative has opened an appetite for a deeper conversation, and for the Association to come alongside to facilitate intentional mission. Initially some churches were surprised by the higher level of accountability and intentionality this entailed, but it too has led to baptisms.

One aspect of the partnership has seen SEBA work with several churches to create succinct mission statements, says Andy.

"The statement itself is almost secondary; the key is that leadership teams are talking about mission," says Andy.

"They are asking: "Who has God called us to be?" and "How can we be a relevant expression of church in 2026?"

Another development is the exploration of partnerships between large and small churches. In one part of the Association a large church is currently in conversation with a small church a few miles away to develop a covenantal partnership, a conversation generated specifically because of Partners in Mission.

"The full story is yet to be known, as it is early days, but we do have over 40 churches that have begun some kind of Partners in Mission story," says Joth.

"It's all about exploring how we can be more effective together for the Kingdom, than we can be in isolation."

For more, visit seba-baptist.org.uk

The following two stories feature Partners in Mission churches by: [Ewhurst Baptist Church](#), & [Westvale Baptist Church](#)

The further story of New Life Church, Blackboys can be found online: baptist.org.uk/newlife