

the baptist ministers'
journal



October 2022 volume 356

A Foundation for CMD

Tim Fergusson

Held Together in Trust

Margaret Gibbs

Why Did I Sign up for CMD?

Chris Hawley

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Anonymous

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Reflections on CMD

Trevor Neill

CMD Workshops

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Interview: My Baptist Life

Paul Goodliff

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Of Interest To You

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October 2022, vol 356, ISSN 0968-2406

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The baptist ministers' journal is the journal of the Baptist Ministers' Fellowship.
Useful contact details are listed inside the front and back covers.

(all service to the Fellowship is honorary)

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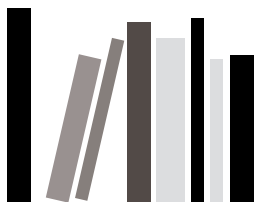
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bmj's design and layout is provided by Micky Munroe

Printed by Keenan Print (keenanprint@btconnect.com)



from the editor

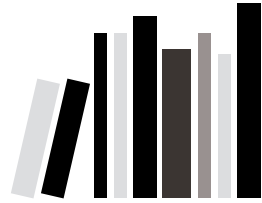
Resilient and centred on Christ

One of the highlights of my year was being invited to the Baptist Scholars International Roundtable (BSIR) in Oxford this summer. It was of course interesting and challenging to give and to hear academic papers, but for me the best thing by far was being with Baptists from multiple other countries (we had representatives from the US, Brazil, Ghana and Australia as well as the UK) – something I have never had the opportunity to do before. We were able to ‘talk Baptist’ without becoming embroiled in any current domestic issues. This was encouraging and hopeful and reminded us that we share a special dissenting heritage that is a gift to the global church.

The key theme of BSIR this year was Baptists and Higher Education understood quite generally, but several papers naturally focused on how we prepare Baptists for ministry today. Listening to friends from places affected by colonialism and entrenched racial tension, by the pandemic and by postmodern indifference, highlighted the need for ministers and leaders who are flexible, resilient and Christ-centred to meet the challenges of the 21st century. This goal of resilience and spiritual discipline is also the reason for CMD, the focus of this issue of *bmj*. CMD, or Continuing Ministerial Development, is now open to all of us throughout our ministries and helps us to avoid ‘getting stuck’ and isolated; it is a way we can keep learning, growing and returning to Christ. In these pages we can read articles by several ministers from different places on the CMD journey. We also have an interview with Paul Goodliff, past Head of Ministry at Didcot, focusing on his own ministry journey and featuring some great insights into ecumenism and OBM.

Finally, may I draw your attention to the launch of the *bmj* Essay Prize for 2023, another CMD opportunity. The BMF Committee has been delighted at the number of great essays submitted to this annual competition, which closes each year on 31 March and is an opportunity to submit an essay of 2500 words to win a prize of £250 (see p 35). It was particularly difficult for our judges to choose a winner this year – there were some excellent entries.

You are also invited to the AGM of the BMF on 4 November – this will be held on Zoom, so please join us if you can (see p12 for details). *SN*



A foundation for CMD

by Tim Fergusson

Author: Tim Fergusson is Ministerial Development Adviser, BUGB

At a ministers' conference earlier this year, someone asked me to explain the biblical and theological basis for the Continuing Ministerial Development (CMD) we now ask ministers to practise. It was a good question. And I floundered a bit. I admit that my motivation in constructing the CMD framework two years ago was pragmatic—I thought it would work. I took as read the biblical and theological reasoning behind CMD, not least because in the creation of the Ignite report, many hours had already been spent in deliberation. However, the *bmj* has kindly asked me to write an article, so here is a good opportunity to spell out some of my assumptions.

First, so that we remember what we are addressing, the CMD framework encourages every one of us as ministers to practise five 'CMD habits.' These are:

1. Learning—by gaining new understanding and new skills.
2. Attentiveness—to our spiritual, physical, and relational health.

3. Accountability—to a trusted companion outside our ministry setting.
4. Connection—to our fellow Baptist ministers and the wider Baptist family.
5. Review—of our work as ministers at least once every three years.

Each of us determines for ourselves how best to practise these habits, given our context and season. To facilitate this, we meet annually with a fellow minister to discuss honestly how we are doing and to plan for the coming season.

Continuing apostolic development (CAD?)

A facetious response to the request to offer a biblical foundation for CMD might be, 'Do you need one?' The first three, if not four, habits mentioned above might be described as self-evident aspects of discipleship. Luke-Acts describes the development of the women and men who became leaders of a new movement and

ministers within the emerging church, following the example of Jesus. As we read the story, the habits are not hard to find.

Habit 1. The disciples' initially steep and sometimes shocking experience of **learning** from the words and actions of Jesus continued after the ascension under the guidance of the Spirit. Sometimes, the learning was unsolicited and still had the power to shock, such as for Peter in his vision in Acts 10. Sometimes it was deliberately sought and methodically delivered, as when Priscilla and Aquila enhanced the already 'accurate' teaching of Apollos by explaining to him 'the way of God more adequately.' But it is back in the gospel of Luke that we find two of the most beautiful examples of intentional learning, in the thirst of Mary drinking in the words of Jesus in Luke 10, and in the hunger for understanding in Cleopas and his companion during their interrupted journey to Emmaus in Luke 24.

Habit 2. Luke's gospel is especially rich in references to Jesus' active **attentiveness** to God. He repeatedly withdrew to solitary places of prayer and communion with his Father. (See Luke 4:1-13, 4:42, 6:12, 9:18, 9:29, 22:39-42.) Disappointingly, this habit of retreat is one element of Jesus' ministry that does not seem to have been embedded in the practice of the apostles in Acts. For sure they prayed, but in Acts prayer serves a less reflective purpose, being instead a means of invoking the dynamic activity of God's mission. Broadly speaking, the people prayed, and the purposes of God were furthered. (See Acts 4:31, 6:6-7, 9:40, 10:2-4, 12:12, 13:3, 14:23, 16:25-26, 28:8.) Prayer in Acts seems to be more expedient than

attentive, as demonstrated in 1:24 when, having prayed for a replacement for Judas, the apostles drew lots. Nevertheless, this does not negate the example of Jesus' pattern of prayerful listening.

Jesus was also attentive to his own needs. Though veiled by Luke, this is evident in the references to weariness that the other gospels include. It is Mark who mentions Jesus' search for rest in Mark 6:31, as well as the touching detail in 4:38 of Jesus finding comfort in a cushion. John 4:6 adds the unique contribution of a tired Jesus stopping for rest and refreshment. The attentiveness that drove Jesus to carve out restorative time and space for himself extended to those nearest him—he invited the disciples to share in the rest he sought.

Habit 3. If we define **accountability** as the open and honest sharing of one's life and ministry with another, then I scarcely need to list particular texts. From the moment the disciples were called, the women and men who followed Jesus experienced communal and accountable ministry (Luke 8:1-2). No-one acted in isolation. They travelled, ate, learnt, prayed, preached, delivered, and healed together—as far as we know always in pairs at the least (Luke 10:1, cf 9:1). And, significantly, those sent out as part of the 12 or the 72 reported back what they had seen. Today we would call this reflective practice (Luke 9:10) and, for the 72, it generated both learning and celebration (Luke 10:17-21). Mutual accountability in ministry continued in Acts, albeit that the close group of disciples was replaced by smaller partnerships—Peter and John, Paul and Barnabas, Barnabas and Mark,

Paul and Silas, Paul and Timothy, Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 15-18). In some of these examples, there are clear indications that one party in the relationship mentored the other.

Habit 4. **Connection**, as a CMD habit, is about our relationship with and support for other sisters and brothers in Baptist ministry. I will explain below why this definition is so tightly constrained. But there can be little doubt that the narrative in Acts commends connection between the variety of evangelists and pastors ministering in Jesus' name. Barnabas bravely sought to bring Paul into relationship with the Jerusalem apostles (Acts 9:27). Paul subsequently built a network of congregational overseers, sending both men and women to learn from each other and to minister in a consistent manner. Setting aside arguments about authorship, Paul remained connected through his letters and leant on his connections when he himself was in need (2 Timothy 4:9-13). The story is not all glorious of course. Barnabas and Paul parted acrimoniously (Acts 15:39) and the epistles tell us of ministerial rivalries and competition, most especially in 2 Corinthians 11. But perhaps these stand as a warning and an encouragement to do better.

Habit 5. The biblical case for submitting one's ministry to **review** is, I admit, harder to make. The formality of today's typical structured review is at odds with the organic accountability of the New Testament relationships. But both Peter and Paul did submit their ministry for evaluation by the wider church leadership (Acts 11:1-18, Acts 15:1-21). Luke includes

these accounts primarily to legitimise mission to the Gentiles rather than to demonstrate how the church reviewed its gospel workers. But I wonder whether these are two examples of what happened much more frequently. Did the early missionaries all have to explain themselves to a nascent missionary board?

Baptist ministers together

I hope, then, that we can agree that the biblical case for CMD is not hard to make, because the CMD habits are by and large simply expressions of ongoing discipleship. But perhaps this obviousness reveals what really lies behind the original question. If CMD is just discipleship, why formulate and demand it (well, strongly encourage it) among Baptist ministers?

My answer leans heavily on the oft-touted but oft-ignored covenant relationship between accredited ministers. As Baptist ministers we have extraordinary independence of belief and practice, one from another. We may, and do, differ hugely from each other in the way we preach and pastor, how we lead, and what we prioritise. The shape of our ministry is often determined by the immediate covenant relationship we have with the church we pastor, or, for chaplains and seconded ministers, by the expectations of the organisations that employ us. With local demands pressing upon us, we sometimes forget the fact that we are additionally accountable to one another and to the Union. (In writing for the *bmj*, which is the journal of the Baptist Ministers' Fellowship, no doubt I am writing for those who remember.)

The preface to the Ministerial Recognition Rules spells out this covenant. Ministers enter:

a covenant with the Baptist Union to live in conformity with the way of life [their] calling demands and to receive from the Union such support, recognition and trust as befits those who serve Christ in this way...This covenantal understanding is one of mutual submission to one another as sisters and brothers in Christ (Ephesians 5:21), seeking to serve Christ through ministry in church and world (2 Timothy 4:1-2, 5) in ways that faithfully embody the gospel of Christ.

The emphasis on discipleship mentioned above is clearly present—serving Christ appears twice, alongside embodying the gospel of Christ. Any covenant between us as ministers sits within the larger covenantal space we share as fellow disciples, as sisters and brothers in Christ. It is an expression of our common participation in the life of God.

I suggest that CMD simply seeks to make this covenant real. That's all. Each one of the five habits—learning, attentiveness, accountability, connection, and review—aims to take seriously our 'covenant with the Baptist Union to live in conformity with the way of life our calling demands.' My calling is not divorced from yours, nor *vice versa*. We carry *collectively* the holiness, capability, wellbeing, and reputation of Baptist ministry. I might minister in a different place and context from you, but you and I share a commitment to witness to Christ in word and deed in a manner that is distinctive to our tradition and principles. This is,

as I see it, inherent in our accreditation. Accreditation is not akin to the attainment of a qualification which, once gained, acts only as proof of an initial hurdle cleared. Rather, it is a relationship entered. Like any relationship, accreditation carries attendant responsibilities and benefits, namely our mutual accountability and our mutual support.

This is why, for example, and as mentioned earlier, the habit of connection is defined as connection with our fellow *Baptist* ministers and the wider Baptist movement. There is no attempt here to denigrate either ecumenical relationships or belonging to other Christian networks. These are no doubt both helpful and good. But if CMD is an expression of our ongoing accreditation, our connection with our fellow accredited Baptist ministers and the institutions that support us ought to be non-negotiable.

CMD, then, is not merely an attempt to re-cast simple discipleship in a more complicated mould. Rather, it makes concrete our common commitment to walk with and watch over one another, as *Baptist ministers*.

A cultural change

It would be nice to imagine that the CMD framework is unnecessary. It probably is for anyone taking the trouble to read this article—many of us already practise all five habits without being encouraged to do so. But I know myself. I can easily drift in the care I take over my own development and wellbeing. An annual audit with a friendly colleague seems a small sacrifice to make to address this. It helps me consider how I might adjust my pattern

of ministry or the shape of my week so that I best remain refreshed, engaged and in relationship. And then there are the ministers for whom, sadly, these habits are far from already established. If I may pick just one habit, too few ministers practise accountability in that they are not accompanied by anyone outside their immediate setting. They have no mentor, pastoral supervisor, spiritual director, or equivalent and I worry that this is to the detriment of their own wellbeing and, by extension, their work as ministers.

So, I end as I began, which is with pragmatism. I think I can make a biblical case for CMD from the story in the gospels and Acts. I think I can make a theological case by re-asserting that accredited ministry is covenantal. But I also think CMD will work. If it becomes an accepted norm for all accredited ministers; if it encourages us to accompany one another so that no-one is isolated; if it is fully funded by churches or by grants; if it is thoroughly embedded within our ministerial culture—then we will be the better for it.

Held Together in Trust

by Margaret Gibbs

Author: Margaret Gibbs is minister of Perry Rise Baptist Church in South London and Edifi Online Learning Coordinator for NBC.

I remember, when I was a schoolteacher, being sent off regularly to a range of Professional Development courses and events through which continued learning and good practice was maintained. A wide range of caring professions in the UK today also require regular revalidation of accreditation, including membership of and fees to professional bodies, constant upgrading of skills with set hours of practice, reflection and discussion with colleagues, attendance at key learning events and very high levels of demonstrable accountability often through mountains of paperwork. Setting these requirements alongside those of accredited Baptist ministry, it is striking how relatively unregulated our vocation remains in comparison.

In Baptist churches, whereas calling and appointment to minister originate in a local setting which may not seek formal accreditation at all, national accreditation as a Baptist Minister is rooted in a much wider expression of the Baptist family including local church, association, college and the Union. In a world of constant change and increasing scrutiny, significant requirements for maintaining such accreditation do not seem unreasonable. Rather they benefit and safeguard members, as well as protecting those for whom they are responsible. As a minister in South London I find that many in my congregation work within the NHS. Supporting them through professional requirements and their implications is part of my regular pastoral task. Ministers

may feel extremely grateful to be spared the endless box-ticking our fellow professionals often face, but in a world where expectations of those in positions of responsibility are appropriately high and the penalty for mistakes is catastrophic, ministry could be said to be very much behind the curve. Even with the recent emergence of a Continuing Ministerial Development programme from the BUBG Ministry Department, very little is required of ministers in return for their continuing accreditation.

Practically speaking, the development of CMD adds to ministers' responsibilities and requires some extra effort in an already busy timetable. It could even feel a bit threatening at first, as with any change to an inherited understanding of a role. Genuine accountability must carry some risk. Perhaps the move to a formal expression of accountability implies a lack of trust in ministers or the office they have fulfilled faithfully for so many years? On the contrary: true accountability can only function effectively in a setting where there is already an atmosphere of trust. Where trust is lacking or cannot be built, then however carefully thought through it may be, a new CMD programme will fail through nominal participation or absenteeism.

To survive in ministry, with its many competing requirements, I imagine that many of us develop ways to tick off some of the peripheral tasks with just enough effort to 'manage', but without investing deeper involvement. However, within a vocational community committed to ministry and service, initiatives such as CMD which aim to stimulate mutual learning,

question and real listening, invited and uninvited challenge, corporate Spirit-led discernment about the changing nature of our environment and the attendant development of our understanding of the minister's calling and role, deserve more dedicated attention.

We have all seen in the past year how trust in public leaders and consequently their trust in one another have been eroded. Christian ministry, of all vocational roles, is properly defined as one that is held in trust, primarily from God and secondly (as Baptists), from our congregations or the key group we serve. Does the extent of this trust end there? Are ministers on an accredited list not also accountable in trust to one another as a body, including those who accredit us? This is one implication of our new CMD approach, which requires us to work with other ministers through its processes. Our personal ministerial development is being encouraged in ways which not only strengthen us as individuals but which should also develop our shared trust as a community of ministers.

In *Leading out of Who You Are*¹ Simon Walker examines the nature and importance of developing our understanding and practice of trust in forming a healthy ego and therefore unthreatened and effective Christian leadership. He cites John Bowlby's work² which reveals the extent to which our ego is actually formed by our experience of trust and continues, 'Trust is, to put it simply, the extent to which you can rely on a relationship. It is like a rope between two people: how strong the trust is, determines the weight it can bear.'³ To reject on one

hand the minister's perennial fear of failure and on the other the temptation to look good, and instead to invest in relationships of genuine trust with other ministers, is a lifeline for developing and maintaining healthy ministry. At best there are degrees of understanding, help and acceptance that can be found among ministers as nowhere else. True, it is not always easy to identify such relationships locally but through the pandemic we have learned all kinds of ways of being in touch within and beyond the local circle.

Baptist ministry by its nature can be isolating, and ministers have a responsibility to do what they can to mitigate this. We need each other, and the form of CMD offered to us now encourages the development of at least one trusting relationship through mutual audits, and the formation of a trusting community through 360 degree reviews. Simon Walker again: 'Freedom to lead depends on finding a source of unconditional approval that is not jeopardised by our performance. Leadership...is a threatening activity, one in which we may be observed or evaluated by a host of critics. As long as we fear the reaction of this audience we can never be free in our leadership... The secret of effective leadership is the freedom to live an undefended life.'⁴ Robust accountability is a vital tool to aid this kind of freedom in any authentic expression of leadership.

The particular arena in which I found a trusting partnership that would work effectively for CMD was through membership of the Order for Baptist Ministry.⁵ OBM brings together groups of Baptist ministers to share in a regular order

of worship and cell review, with questions based on Baptist ministry ordination promises. It has proved a great way to meet reasonably like-minded (though I hasten to add not similar) ministers and above all to be encouraged to be truly accountable in the key questions of our lives and ministries in a completely confidential and voluntary way.⁶

I especially appreciate being asked regularly in cell review about specific aspects of the promises I made at ordination, as my personal circumstances and ministry setting change year on year. It is a blessing to be held to account for these shared values and practices by trusted colleagues who understand our task and calling from within, but who just happen to be members of my regional group and were not selected by me to say what I already agree with or want to hear. (This latter can crop up within some of the circles we may choose to participate as ministers through a most natural human tendency to cleave to those who agree with us especially in divisive matters.) My experience in OBM presented me with a whole range of people who could have acted as my CMD accountability partners. Together we have developed mutual trust through sharing the big questions regularly, however I trust that cell members are not so similar to me in age or experience to have the same likely blind spots. Looking back, I find that participating in the OBM cell group reviews helped to cover some of the targets aimed at by the CMD programme now, as well as preparing the ground for a better understanding of its intention and outworking.

To conclude, from The Undefended Leader once again, 'You are safer than you realise...The route to freedom is no quick fix, but instead is a settled, determined choice to restrain the impulse to cut and run when people appear to be disloyal or hostile. This takes courage —courage to confront your fear and not give in to it, to choose to take the risk of believing in others and yourself and offering your best. It involves accepting criticism without simmering with rage (or boiling over). It involves not withdrawing, but continuing to offer yourself to be known.'⁷ Our emerging CMD programme may not be perfected yet, but with full participation it offers opportunities to

improve, work together, be strengthened and encouraged and ultimately to grow in trust as a community of accredited ministers.

Notes to text

1. Simon Walker, *Leading out of Who You Are, Discovering the Secret of Undefended Leadership*. Carlisle: Walker Piquant Editions, 2007
2. *Ibid*, 54
3. *Ibid*, 54
4. *Ibid*, 103
5. <https://www.orderforbaptistministry.co.uk/>
6. <https://www.orderforbaptistministry.co.uk/cell-review-process-and-structure/>
7. *Ibid*, 110

Baptist Ministers' Fellowship AGM

Friday 4 November, 12.15 - 1pm

All members are invited to join us for our AGM.

At this meeting, you can meet the committee, share in the election of officers, hear about our financial situation and learn more of the work of BMF.

Join us on Zoom: <https://bristol-ac-uk.zoom.us/j/6634810414?pwd=Zm43cmxSNWJvQng4S2ZRTFhXdIJBZz09>

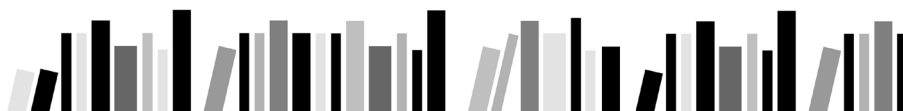
Research into Baptist life

Did you know that there is a free-access archive of all available past *bmj* issues, including its predecessor, *The Fraternal*?

These journals provide a lens into the life of Baptist ministers and their churches back to 1907, and could help you in your research. Our friend Rob Bradshaw, librarian at Spurgeon's College, scanned all the back issues that we have been able to locate and hosts them for us on Theology on the Web, which itself is an amazing resource and worth a look. The *bmj* archive does not include the most recent year or two, but is updated periodically.

You can find the archive here:

https://theologyontheweb.org.uk/journals_baptist.html



Why Did I Sign up for CMD?

by Chris Hawley

Author: Chris Hawley is minister at Hillsborough Baptist Church, Sheffield.

I remember when I heard that the Baptist Union was planning to introduce Continual Ministerial Development (CMD) for its ministers. I have been a Baptist minister for over 20 years and I have to confess that my initial response to the news was mixed. On the one hand it seemed like a good idea. It always seemed odd to me that you would spend 3 or 4 years training and then go through the NAM process, and then 'that was it' in terms of our training. On the other hand, it is unusual to receive an instruction from outside the local church regarding how I should be using my time. My fear was that I would need to add lots of things to my 'to do' list, with no extra time (or money) to do them. I was also concerned that the scheme was trying to produce a church version of something you would find in a business or educational context, which in my experience doesn't always work. However, I was happy to read the initial documents and find out more, before making any decisions.

Why did I decide to engage?

Having read the initial information, including the handbook, I decided for a number of reasons this was something that would be good for me to engage with.

First, I felt a real connection to the mention of the MARKS of ministry (Mature as disciples of Christ, Accountable to others, Relational in approach to leadership, Kingdom-focused and Servant-hearted

and Sacrificial) and the importance of the covenantal relationship in the handbook (p3). When speaking about our call as ministers, the handbook says that,

Once our call has been tested by the wider church and we have undergone ministerial formation, we enter a two-fold covenant:

1. to live in conformity with the way of life [our] high calling demands and to receive from the Union such support, recognition and trust as befits those who serve Christ in this way.

2. of mutual submission to one another as sisters and brothers in Christ, seeking to serve Christ through ministry in church and world in ways that faithfully embody the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Secondly, as I read through the five habits of CMD I recognised a number of things that I felt I was missing, and would benefit from having in my life again (eg organised study) as well as things that I had never had before (eg a spiritual director). At the same time, I was encouraged by the fact that I was already doing a good number of the things suggested (eg my involvement in the wider Baptist family).

Thirdly, I have often thought that we don't have enough central organised training plans and resources, so it would seem odd if I didn't take advantage of this training scheme.

Finally, I was encouraged by the reaction of other ministers that I meet with in a huddle, all of whom were positive about signing up for CMD.

What have I done?

Having decided to give it a go, I re-read the handbook, attended some online training and webinars and then did my own initial audit to see what I was already doing and to identify gaps. I then discussed this with a couple of my deacons, who I meet with regularly and added it to the deacon's agenda. Everyone seemed happy for me to proceed, and they acknowledged that there would be implications in terms of time and money.

So, the next step was to find a CMD peer, which was fairly straightforward. Having already discussed it at huddle, we decided to do it as a small group of three. We met together to review the past 12 months and to plan the next year, and as part of the huddle we committed to holding one another accountable for what we planned to do in the five CMD habits. For me, there was a mixture of encouragements and steps to take in each area.

In area of *learning*, I do set aside time for regular reading in addition to the study I need to do for sermon prep. The pandemic also meant that there were many new things that I had needed to learn, including how to do online services and how to do pastoral care when you couldn't visit anybody. In my review of the previous 12 months, I also included other learning that I had done, for example in my role as a school governor. In terms of plans for the next 12 months I recognised that it has been a while since I have been to a conference, been part of a learning

community or done any formal study. So, following a chat with Sally Nelson I attended an open day at St Hild College and had a chat with the short-course tutor at Cliff College (where I go regularly for quiet days). The outcome of this was that I signed up for the Certificate in Christian Mentoring at Cliff College (which is mentioned in the CMD handbook). It was a week-long course at the college, followed by a written essay. This would be my first assessed piece of work in nearly 20 years!! (which thankfully I did manage to pass).

In the area of *attentiveness to God*, it was helpful to reflect on the positive and negatives of lockdown. Overall, I had managed to maintain a good devotional time, partly because the pattern of each day/week was fairly well set. While we could not spend time with friends and our wider family, it was good to spend time with my wife and two grown-up children. The initial restrictions on time outside for exercise actually helped me develop the habit of walking more often and for longer periods of time, which I have continued since lockdown has finished. I have found it to be beneficial both in terms of having head-space to think about things, and in feeling healthier and fitter. For me the next steps in this area have largely been to do with adjusting to life after lockdown and what this means in terms of my relationship with God, including the spiritual disciplines about which God is challenging me, and my relationships with family, friends, the church family and the local community.

In the area of *accountability*, again the pandemic had an impact. While some of my accountability relationships continued

online (eg huddle), others stopped. For me this highlighted the need for me to look into some additional accountability relationships. Reading the handbook challenged me about exploring having a spiritual director or mentor. Again, following a chat with Sally Nelson I have started meeting with a spiritual director on a regular basis, the huddle group I am a part of is continuing to meet, however I am aware that the nature of the group means that this might change. Following the short course I did at Cliff College my hope is to both be a mentor and have a mentor.

In the area of **connection**, I feel that I maintain a good level of connectivity with the wider Baptist family, including minister's meetings, speaking at other Baptist churches, being on a YBA committee, hosting YBA events and trying to keep up to date with news from the YBA, BU and BMS. The one area I need to think about is attending things like the BU assembly and the YBA ministers' retreat (if/when it restarts).

In the area of **review**, I decided despite some reservations to give the 360 review a go. The two deacons I meet with regularly agreed to facilitate this for me. Having completed it, I think that neither they or I are convinced about its usefulness in a church setting. At best it confirms what we already know. I believe it is better to try to create relationship where feedback can happen as and when it needs to, including the opportunity for me to raise issues I might have with the way things are working. This, along with good accountability relationships, should provide what is needed for this habit. We do have three years to see if we can find an alternative tool.

What are the benefits of CMD?

I hope it is clear from what I have written above that I do believe that CMD has and will be beneficial in my personal and ministerial development, which will in turn be beneficial to the church. It has certainly helped me to do the things that I need to do, that I probably wouldn't have got around to doing without the CMD process. It has also enabled me to have a conversation with the deacons about the other things that I need to give time and energy to, that might not always be obvious. This has included a conversation about a long overdue sabbatical, what that might involve and how it is an important part of my ongoing ministerial and personal development.

There are potential dangers of CMD, including creating a desire to do more in the five areas or habits than can realistically be done. However, it has helped me to reflect upon and discuss with my deacons what I should be spending my time doing and what I shouldn't. If I need to add things to the diary, what can I remove or do differently? For me this needs to include other areas of life, not just 'church' organised stuff: for me that would include things like my role as a school governor, possible hobbies and other interests. These should be included in things like our learning habits.

Like many things CMD could become a burden, another thing to add to our to do lists, but if it is used in the right way, including having the right people to help and support us in it, I believe it can be a helpful tool to enable us to grow and develop as people and ministers. After all —we are all works in progress!

Why CMD is Not for Me

by an anonymous correspondent

The first thing I want to say is that, on the whole, I am in favour of Continuous Ministerial Development. I agree with the statements made by various illuminaries of our Baptist community in support of CMD.

However, as the title of this article suggests, I probably won't be enrolling. This might have something to do with the fact that my 60th birthday is now looming well above the horizon and I find myself chuntering at the TV and generally being a bit of a grumpy old man. My family would look askance at the use of the word 'bit'.

When I first saw all the stuff about CMD in the missives from the BU, I will admit my reaction was 'Oh no! Not another thing from the BU!' I started having a similar reaction towards BMS World Mission. A few years ago I noticed that, at every ministers' conference, the representative from BMS would present a new initiative. One year it was about global violence against women. I thought it was great presentation and a vital project to be involved in. The following year was a new initiative. I asked the rep if violence against women was no longer a problem. His response was that this was now being handed over to the local churches. It seemed to me that the BMS was looking for a new initiative each year to keep them in the public eye.

So, in some ways my reaction towards CMD was similar. Over the years I have been involved in mentoring, including training as a mentor, peer supervision, journaling *etc, etc*. I have filled in reams of paper reflecting on practice. Looking back on my journals I had a similar feeling when I read through the deacons' and church meeting minutes of the church to which I had just been called. The same situations and concerns were raised over many years: how to reach young people, motivate more workers for the Kingdom—except mine were more personal concerns. I realised then that a year is too short a time to plan. Someone once said that we overestimate what we can achieve in a year and underestimate what can be achieved in 10 years.

I can remember submitting things to be read and wondering if anyone actually read them. Eugene Peterson had a similar doubt in his ministry. He tested his hypothesis by submitting more and more outrageous comments, including making up a story about having sex with a member of his congregation in the church and being disturbed by the ladies who were arranging flowers. He wrote on the report *I thought it was all over for my ministry at that point, but it turned out that in this community swingers are very much admired. The next day, Sunday attendance doubled.*¹ He submitted the report and never heard a thing!

The main reason that I personally won't be enrolling is that I am a networker. Over the years I have found a few good friends both inside and outside the church who are truth-tellers to me. I enjoy attending ministers' fellowships, both to give and to receive support, and I have been saddened that they no longer seem to be considered worth going to by many ministers. I like to keep up with theology and study. And, most importantly, after decades of seeking grants and report

writing, I have developed a pathological hatred of form-filling.

Again I think that CMD might be very useful to many ministers, it's just not for me. Please, please, please don't make it mandatory!

Note to text

1. E. Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir*. NY, Harper One, 2011, 198.

Disability, Inclusion and Calling

by Ruth Wilde

Author: Ruth Wilde is Tutor for the Inclusion of Disabled People, Northern Baptist College.

Inclusion and Calling

I recently wrote an article¹ for the *Baptist Times* about how inclusion is related to calling and the church cannot be the church if it puts up barriers to God's call. I feel this is an important subject to discuss in this article too, as the topic for this edition of the *bmj* is Continuing Ministerial Development. I will also soon be running some sessions on disability inclusion at the NAM gathering for Northern Baptist College with Glen Graham, a blind Baptist minister who wrote an article in 2014 for the disability edition of *bmj*. We will no doubt cover the link between inclusion and calling then as well.

God calls whom God calls. This may seem like an obvious thing to say, but the church does not always recognise it or allow it. When we put barriers up—whether consciously or unconsciously—we are blocking the will of God or saying that we know better than God. That is not a good place to put ourselves as a church. It seems clear to me that in the Bible, God often calls the most unlikely people—or at least, those who are considered unlikely leaders by the society they're living in. Of course, God has very different plans for us, and very different ideas to the church or the rest of society, about who is right or wrong for leadership or ministry.

The Bible and Calling

Looking back through the Old and New Testaments, we can see that God often makes a point of calling those who are marginalised or dismissed. For example, the vital place of women in ministry is made clear in the way God calls the Samaritan woman at the well in John's gospel to be an apostle to her people. Then, later in the gospel story, God calls the women at the tomb to be the first apostles to all people. This is despite the barriers the male disciples try to put up in both cases. Jesus knows better than us. God knows better than us.

In Acts 8, one of the very first converts to Christianity is a man who is both black and gender-different, or what some might 'queer' in today's language: the Ethiopian eunuch. When he is called, he is even reading a passage from the scriptures which he could be interpreting partly as relating to his own exclusion and forced castration—'he was oppressed and he was afflicted...led like a lamb to the slaughter' (for more on this, read Bible scholar Peterson Toscano's work ²). The societally powerful and yet simultaneously excluded eunuchs are also an essential part of the liberation of the Jews in the book of Esther.

Disability and Calling

It could be argued that the forced mutilation—and permanent scarring—of eunuchs in fact made them adopted disabled people as well as 'gender-queer.' This is where having an intersectional understanding of inclusion can be helpful. Certainly, there are disability theologians, like Nancy Eiesland, who have argued that

the scarred and wounded body of Jesus was disabled on the cross and, crucially, remained disabled after the resurrection (when his hands and his feet were not 'healed' but in fact remained an essential part of his identity).

When considering stories in the Bible of calling and disability, two important characters in the Bible come to mind who were called in spite of—or more likely because of (as this is God's way!)—their conditions: Moses and Paul. Although it is not clear exactly what the 'thorn' was, of which Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12, many scholars have put forward the interpretation that it could well have been a disability. Even if we can never know for sure, what is interesting is Paul's own attitude to his 'thorn', which he views as a positive aid to faith and not a negative aspect of his personhood.

Moses is more obviously disabled, and his condition appears to be one of speech impairment. There are many reasons why people have a speech impairment—it could have been that he was partially deaf or hard of hearing, or perhaps he had cerebral palsy or something similar. He also could have simply had a stammer. Again, knowing the exact facts is not the most important thing here. What is important is how God—and Moses—react to Moses' clear calling to leadership. God does not tell Moses it is impossible, or that there are too many barriers to pull down for him to fulfil his calling. God also does not tell Moses he needs to be 'healed' before he can pursue his call to spiritual leadership. Instead, God finds Moses an interpreter. God chooses to find Moses a practical aid.

Fiona MacMillan, one of the trustees at Inclusive Church (where I work part-time alongside my role with NBC) frequently says this: 'We are all a combination of gifts and needs, and it is when our needs are met that our gifts can flourish.' Importantly, she says this not only about disabled people, but about everyone. We all need one another, and most of us need aids, even if only a pair of glasses.

The Church and Calling

There are many disabled people who need aids and adaptations of one type or another to live life in the best way possible for them—or, to put it in Fiona's language, to 'flourish.' This is partly because of their conditions, but also partly because of the way society is set up for the majority. If there were only entrances with level access, wheelchair users would never feel excluded from entering buildings. However, the way we have set up society means that the 'regular' entrance almost always includes steps, and wheelchair users must find (or sometimes ask for) a 'special' separate entrance. Disabled people feel like they/we³ are constantly putting people out, to ask for 'special adaptations,' education or acceptance, when it is not our fault that society has only thought about the needs of some people but not all.

Whoever God calls to ministry and leadership, and whatever aids or help we might need, the church must never say 'no' to people whom God has called or refuse to provide the necessary adaptations for someone to follow their call. If (and let's face it—when) this happens, the church is not fulfilling its calling. The church is being something other than the church.

God calls the church to be the vessel through which God's spirit can breathe and work—in which people can be called to different roles and, by being the body of Christ with all its different members and gifts, can build the kingdom together.

Blocking people from their calling and their individual ministry—whether that is because we think God doesn't call 'those kinds of people' or because we think 'those kinds of people can't do it'—is a case of the church working against itself. As we know from the words of Jesus, a house divided against itself cannot stand. Equally, an organisation not including everyone or using the gifts of all its people will not do well. Most importantly of all, the church (with its specific calling to build God's kingdom) will fail in its mission if it doesn't listen to God's call, which is often to those on the margins. What happens when the church refuses to be the church? God builds the church somewhere else—somewhere where those God calls are free to follow their call and the Spirit is free to move us all forward together in new directions with abundant, inclusive, creative energy.

Note to text

1. https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/635433/Unless_it_includes.aspx
2. <https://petersontoscano.com/ethiopiane-unuch/>
3. Ruth does herself identify as disabled, being someone who is 'neurodivergent.'

Reflections on CMD

by Trevor Neill

Author: Trevor is the minister of Selsdon Baptist Church.

In each of my ministries, I have valued and sought opportunities to give and receive support from my peers. This has usually meant regular but unstructured conversations with friends, times when we've offloaded and processed events with one another, but without a framework that would alert us to what we were failing to attend to, or to enable us to put steps in place to break the cycle whereby the same problems or challenges presented themselves each time we met.

I have shared these regular meetings with the same friend in ministry for 10 years. Moves that we have made now mean that most of our get-togethers are via Zoom, but we are also committed to at least two retreat days a year when we can meet in person. One of these retreats now takes the form of our CMD audit, which has provoked an even deeper level of conversation, especially in the areas of attentiveness and accountability.

A particular blessing of the process over the past 18 months has been the prompting to engage with a pastoral supervisor. This possibility had been raised in numerous discussions in the past, but it was the CMD process that gave me no place to hide from the necessity for this deeper level of support and the accountability of that came with my recorded commitment to take this step. I began supervision in the summer of 2021, weary after 15 months of the pandemic, and unsure that

I was ready to be open and vulnerable to the stranger on the other end of a Zoom call. Over the past year, however, monthly meetings with my supervisor have taken on increasing importance to me, a safe space to reflect on the impact my role is having on me.

There are other helpful benefits from CMD. One is in the area of learning. I've always had a love for reading, comfortably getting into double figures of books each year, but often with something of a scattergun approach. Another commitment from my audit was to adopt a more deliberate approach to my study, focused on two important issues which raised themselves in the church where I minister: racial justice and human sexuality.

These are just two examples of blessings CMD has offered and each, in their own way is indicative of what I consider the biggest blessing of all, being forced to look at myself.

In one of the most memorable chapters of his excellent memoir, Pastor, Eugene Peterson writes about the 'Company of Pastors,' a group of fellow church leaders with whom he met on a weekly basis during his ministry in Bel Air, Maryland. At one point he describes a conversation with a minister who laments the fact that he can't spend more time talking to people about their faith:

"So, why don't you do it—have conversations like that?"

"Because I have to run this damn church."

The statement struck me hard. An immense irony. Tom had just spoken his passionate conviction of the Spirit-created conditions in which the church exists and then without transition called it "this damn church".¹

It may be that few of us ever have gone quite as far as this, but I suspect that we may share his sentiments more than we are willing to admit. When we gather with other ministers, a frequent topic of conversation will be the frustrations we are facing at any given moment and, while it is helpful to offload, it's also all too easy to drift into complaining. We talk about that difficult person who is making life hard for us, the pressures of all that we do, the challenges of leadership in a culture of church consumerism or governance in a time of greater regulation. While recognising the reality of these issues, we also need to acknowledge a more insidious attraction to conversations like this. As long as we're complaining about someone else, we never need to look at ourselves.

CMD, however, will not allow us to be lured into such a trap. Instead, the process requires us to search our own hearts, its five categories an encouragement to consider what is happening in our lives that we might be blind to: When was the last time I tested my assumptions or stretched my learning by reading or listening to someone who offers new scholarship or a different perspective? How closely am I walking with God and

what steps might I need to take to foster closer intimacy with Him? Who am I opening up to and allowing to speak into my life at a deeper level? What support can I give to or receive from colleagues in ministry? What would I learn if I opened myself to a review process that includes feedback from those I am serving in my church?

The gift that CMD offers is its facilitation of these conversations in a safe setting, not with someone over and above us and judging us but alongside us a caring and critical friend. We are encouraged to stop making excuses, to acknowledge where we are falling short and take steps towards change, accountable to someone else who cares for us but safe in the knowledge that what we have discussed and committed to goes no further.

One of the practices I have sustained over my ministry is the reading of at least one book on leadership and ministry per year, usually in the summer when the church year offers more space for reflection. Over the past 15 years, a noticeable and positive trend in such volumes has been an increasing emphasis on leadership of self, a recognition that attending to our own souls matters more than the latest fad or technique. I am thankful that the same priority can be discerned in CMD and I am confident that I will continue to grow through the programme in years to come.

Note to text

1. Eugene H Peterson, *Pastor: A Memoir*. NY: Harper Collins, 2011

CMD Workshops

by Jane Day and Helen Cameron

Authors: Helen Cameron is Research Fellow at Regent's Park College, Oxford; Jane Day is Tutor at Regent's Park College, Oxford.

Continuing Ministerial Development (CMD) was launched in October 2020 when much of the world was in varying states of lockdown. This period was marked by many people being confined to their homes and Zoom became a close companion. Church services quickly moved online, and theological colleges also adapted to new ways of offering learning.

It was during this period that Regent's Park College (RPC) introduced its first CMD workshop. This facilitated workshop was an invitation to all ministers to begin a conversation on the five CMD habits of learning, attentiveness, accountability, connection, and review. The learning objectives were:

- to give ministers an opportunity to discuss the CMD Handbook launched in October 2020 with other ministers;
- to enable ministers to undertake and discuss preliminary reflections on their current engagement with the five habits of CMD;
- to enable ministers to identify areas where they would like to explore further opportunities;
- to enable ministers to start work on a plan that will lead them to their first review meeting in Autumn 2021.

In evaluating this introductory workshop we invited ministers to respond to two

questions and offer feedback. This is what they said:

What have you found helpful?

- *Understanding the diversity of possibilities within the different elements of the CMD 5 habits.*
- *Having time to reflect on my own practices within each of the habits and to look at gaps and actions that will help me going forward.*
- *Meeting new people in the breakout groups.*
- *It helped reinforce details from the handbook.*
- *The invitation to join the workshop was a timely reminder, that I needed to pause and to make time to review my ministry and to be deliberate about its ongoing development.*

What is the one new idea/thought/image/word/practice that you most want to hold onto that occurred to you during this workshop?

- *Attentiveness to myself as a whole person—I recognised there are some areas in my life that are not attended to properly.*
- *It has helped me to put together an action plan across the different areas.*
- *I was reminded of the value of solitude.*
- *For me it is deepening connections. I am already connected with ministers locally, in the*

association, and know fellow ministers around the country. For me, though I think it is the value of being able to have trusted colleagues you go deeper with to be able to trust with them to make a good evaluation of ministry with me, especially in the 'audit.'

An overwhelming number of ministers commented on the need for further workshops to focus on one of the habits. A second CMD workshop on the habit of Attentiveness was offered which also coincided with Geoff Colmer's presidential theme, Being Attentive to Rhythms of Grace. It was great to have some pre-recorded input from Geoff. The feedback was just as encouraging and can be summarised as:

I loved it. I think it was the intentionality about being attentive. The workshop really made me think about this subject in ways I haven't before. I really appreciated the bite sized chunks with space and Scripture for each theme. I dread online 'retreats' or 'workshops' because they are usually relentless rather than breathing spaces. It was brilliant.

The readers of *bmj* might be interested to note that ministers expressed an interest in further exploration of the following topics.

- *Developing specific competencies in ministry.*
- *Sabbath.*
- *To encourage local churches to support CMD habits.*
- *I suggest that future CMD workshops should focus in more detail on one of the five CMD habits.*

- *Mental health first aid*
- *How to find a mentor or spiritual director.*
- *Enneagram.*
- *Attentiveness to the presence of God*
- *Wellbeing*
- *Art and poetry*
- *Godly play*
- *Time to explore creativity*
- *How to make the most of minister's meetings*
- *Going forward out of this pandemic I am sure there will be all kinds of things that will be particularly challenging; reconnecting pastorally with others, building community, engaging with the wider community, worship, preaching, family and—so much has changed. Sometimes it feels like we need to be a master of all kinds of new ways of working! For me, all this is changing, evolving, and growing as we move out of lockdown...we need companions on the journey and tools to help us.*

We enjoyed working together since it enabled us to deliver the workshops in a conversational style and draw upon the different experiences we have had in working developmentally with ministers. We sensed that for some ministers the online delivery gave them access to an opportunity that better fitted their personal circumstances than travelling to a venue.

If anyone is interested in attending future online workshops on CMD habits then do email Jane at jane.day@regents.ox.ac.uk or Helen at helen.cameron@regents.ox.ac.uk



the *bmj* interview

Paul Goodliff: My Baptist Life



Ed: Paul, please introduce yourself and give us a sense of what your ministry journey has been?

I grew up in an Anglican parish in Sussex, and in a Christian home, where I had a call to ministry as a teenager and thought that it would result in Anglican orders. But while an undergraduate at King's College, London, I attended Streatham Baptist Church (Lewin Road) under the ministry of Douglas McBain and became a convinced Baptist. Gill and I stayed in South London after graduating, when I was offered a post as a geography teacher at Tiffin School, Kingston-upon-Thames, and we became members at

Lewin Road, where, after a couple of years, at the ridiculously young age of 24, I became an elder. That call to ministry was reignited in my fourth year of teaching, and the church called me to be its full-time elder as Douglas McBain moved on to Manna Ministries. I had ten very happy years at Lewin Road, working alongside Mike Wood and others, four years of which combined that role with ministerial training at Spurgeon's College (and a year post-ordination, teaching there half time, which opened up the second strand to my ministry experience in the academy). In my last couple of years there I took the MTh in 20th Century Systematic Theology at King's, under Professor Colin Gunton.

In 1992 Gill and I, with our three boys, moved to Stevenage, having accepted the call to be the minister at the Bunyan Baptist Church—again, a very happy ministry, which included an afternoon a week as the Free Church Chaplain at the Lister Hospital. After a while I also began teaching doctrine and liturgy at the Open Theology College and counselling at St John's Nottingham Extension Studies. While at Bunyan, I wrote my first book, *Care in a Confused Climate*, published 25 years ago now. The church was very

generous in allowing me to develop this second strand to ministry.

In 1998 a letter dropped through my letterbox inviting me to apply for the Central Area Superintendency, and to my surprise, I was offered the role. I became the last General Superintendent of the Central Area, transitioning four historic county associations into the Central Baptist Association in 2000, of which I became the Regional Minister Team Leader. That role gave further expression to my ecumenical experience, including a place in the WCC team on the WCC-Pentecostal Joint Consultative Group, which has endured through three rounds of conversation. As the longest serving WCC team member, until the Covid pandemic struck, I had such a wonderful experience with those conversations, deepening my conviction that the future of the church had to be ecumenical.

In 2005 I became the Baptist Union's Head of Ministry, an office I held for a decade, during which I had the opportunity to research for a doctorate at King's College, published in 2010 as *Ministry, Sacrament and Representation*. These were challenging years, and I found that engaging with a pastoral supervisor vital for my resilience, and so I jumped at the chance after I had left the BU role to pioneer the provision of training in pastoral supervision through Spurgeon's College, using the IPSRP material developed by some members of the same team I had worked with at St John's, Nottingham in the 1990s.

In 2015 I stepped back from the Head of Ministry role and became a minister at Abingdon Baptist Church, half-time,

while lecturing, writing (including a book on ministerial formation and virtue ethics, *Shaped for Service*) and offering pastoral supervision. I thought that would be the kind of portfolio I would hold until I retired, and by such means, pursue a gentle stroll towards that blessed state! However, God had other plans! After three years at Abingdon, in 2018 God called me to be the General Secretary of Churches Together in England, the national ecumenical instrument—the post from which I retired in April of 2022. Those were the four most demanding years of ministry for me anywhere, with challenges in holding together the broadest range of churches (54 national churches when I retired, from Quaker to Pentecostal, Church of England to New Church, Catholic to Orthodox), leading the ecumenical response to Covid, and latterly, the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on the refugee crisis in English churches. Ecumenism had been a thread in ministry throughout the 40 years of full-time ministry (34 of them as an ordained Baptist minister), and it seemed fitting that stipendiary ministry should draw to a close in that sphere with ecumenism at its very heart. Now retired, I continue to teach, write, offer pastoral supervision and support the church in Bicester where my membership resides by preaching, leading a home group and offering the supervision of a minister in training. I am also the chair of the core group of the *Order for Baptist Ministry*, which I helped to establish some 12 years ago, am delighted to see this as a growing element in the range of options open to Baptist ministers seeking a supportive and supported ministry. I have also started as a trustee of BRF, and I continue to chair the AGM for Christian Aid.

Ed: Thinking of your most recent role in CTE, what has encouraged you?

Ecumenism is just so resilient at a national level! From day one of my tenure, we faced a difficult controversy about human sexuality, yet we weathered the storm, and lost not a single member church. The relationships at a national level, between the six Presidents (all of them church leaders, such as Archbishop Justin Welby, Cardinal Nichols and Archbishop Angaelos of the Coptic Orthodox Church), the National Ecumenical Officers, and the churches' delegates at the CTE Enabling Group (in which our own Baptist, Hilary Treavis, played a leading role, I am delighted to say), was close and fruitful. It convinced me that at whatever level—national, county or local—ecumenism works when those who lead the churches involved develop good relationships, and pray together regularly. This results in some wonderful ecumenical work at local level, especially in meeting the needs of the more vulnerable in our communities.

Ed: What do you think Baptists offer uniquely to the ecumenical conversation? Is it valued?

Baptists represent a kind of bridge between the more 'formal' of churches, (such as the Anglicans and Catholics) and the less formal: Pentecostals and New Churches, for instance. We have been impacted more by charismatic renewal than many, and our worship tends to the informal, yet we have room for a Baptist religious order! That role, enabling other traditions to interpret themselves to others is valued. Baptists have also 'punched above their weight' when it comes to ecumenical leadership,

and I need only point to the work of David Goodbourn, Gethin Abraham-Williams, and Keith Clements in the traditional ecumenical world, and Gavin Calver and Roger Sutton in the EA, to make my point. For a denomination supposedly not convinced by ecumenical engagement, we have often provided its leadership, and I am humbled to stand amongst those giants. We are definitely towards the evangelical end of the spectrum, yet are not exclusively so, with a breadth of perspectives that reflects the wider ecumenical landscape in microcosm.

Ed: How would you describe the challenges for the church in the UK at this time? And what does that mean for ministry?

We have to be honest about our declining numbers overall, with all the financial implications of that trajectory, and yet there are so many signs of hope, that I cannot despair. Vibrant churches, witnessing to Christ, are everywhere to be found, in every shade of tradition and in every denomination—and they are not just the evangelical ones! Movements like HeartEdge are encouraging churches to be entrepreneurial, creative and inspirational congregations in city centres, for instance; and in many places, churches are deepening their commitment to being 'good news' for their communities, post-pandemic (and in the growing cost-of-living crisis), and doing so ecumenically.

That means ministry needs to be fleet of foot, ready to change and to embrace new opportunities, while being rooted as deeply as ever in the core tasks of preaching the Word, administering the sacraments, pastoring the flock, and

not least, reaching out to those not yet embraced by the gospel. In an ever-increasing social (and political, therefore) role, Baptists must not be seduced by the siren voices of 'relevance' and management theory, but remember their calling to be first of all, the people of God, who worship Father, Son and Holy Spirit, maintaining 'the spirit of unity in the bond of peace'—even when we disagree over moral and theological issues such as those surrounding human sexuality. We do well to remember that such questions are never 'the main thing,' and that living, proclaiming and enacting the gospel always takes precedence over the things we disagree about. Paul had far more (and far stronger) words to say about the unity of the church than he did about ethical disputes, and Jesus' prayer for unity at the summit of the passion narrative (John 17) convinces me that our unity is a priority above all others in our search for faithful discipleship. Anything other than that panders to a schismatic spirit that diminishes our witness and weakens our evangelism, and which often cloaks a bid for power and control that is inimical to the very virtues that build the church.

Oh, and remember, ministry is always as much about who we are as it is about what we do. Character is more important than competence (although incompetence is never to be celebrated).

Ed: If you were advising an MiT today, what three things would be your top tips?

First, develop a rule of life, including daily prayer and the reading of Scripture, and find support to hold you to account for it. Most failures in ministry are rooted in

a loss of a close relationship with God in Christ through the Spirit. Second, have some form of regular support where you can reflect upon ministry with someone else—such as pastoral supervision post NAM period, a spiritual director, or a close group of friends that is intentional about ministry development and sustenance. This is not an optional extra, a sign of being 'needy,' or a tick-box exercise, but a vital part of humbly following Jesus Christ and exercising Christ-shaped and cross-shaped ministry. Third, read, read and then read some more! If you're starving, how can you feed your congregation week by week? If you can, pursue further studies—practical, professional or academic—but they are only a tool to give shape to what must become a habit.

Ed: If you think of highs and lows over a life in ministry, how have you been able to sustain yourself?

First, since leaving Spurgeon's College, I have been a member of a group of four friends, all Baptist ministers, who have met regularly, supporting one another and being the listening ear when life's challenges have threatened to overwhelm us. Second, I've already mentioned the value of supervision, and that saved me from a probable 'shipwreck,' and sustained me in the most challenging moments. Thirdly, I've always read widely, and when possible, pursued further studies to give shape to that reading. So now, I read theology and write about it for pleasure! Fourthly, nothing would have been worthwhile or effective without the love of a wonderful wife, and the understanding of three children. Finally, and in some ways most recently, the shape given to

my spiritual life through the Order for Baptist Ministry, its Daily Offices, cell membership and annual convocation. In that way especially it feels that latterly 'I have come home'.

Ed: Do you have any thoughts on the personal impact of retirement for Baptist ministers and how to prepare for it?

Oh, it's far too early to say! I've tried not to take on anything new for a few months since retirement, and only now am I saying 'yes' to invitations, such as providing three month's sabbatical cover for a church, or starting a home group here at Orchard Baptist Church in Bicester. It feels as if retirement for me is nothing like a clean break from what went before, with a portfolio of interests continuing, but I do have much more time for our seven grandchildren, and for the first time since I was a teenager, I am not in leadership of anything (and convening the OBM Core Group is not really 'leadership' *per se*). That feels good for a few months!

In preparing for it, I suggest having a project or two that will continue when you've left your final stipendiary ministry—I am not sure it helps to stop completely—and orientate your life to the new realities of being a church member, and not a church leader, so that when it comes, you're not knocked off balance.

Ed: How can we pray for you?

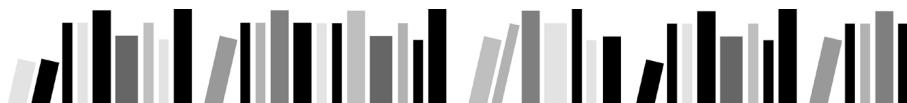
That the roles I do fulfil might be fruitful in the purposes of God, and that I exercise wisdom on knowing what they should be. I might be drawing my pension, but I've not ceased to be a minister of the gospel! Pray that I have some time for rediscovering painting (the easel is up, but the diary as yet not empty enough!) and that the writing I continue to do will be of value in the life of others. I have another book in my head, and I hope to put finger to keyboard soon. Finally, pray that as the years unfold, and I am able to do less and less, my following of Jesus might become closer and closer.

Ed: Thank you, Paul, for sharing with us and may God bless you.

Reviewing books for *bmj*

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reviews

edited by Michael Peat



The Story of Bristol Baptist College: Three Hundred Years of Ministerial Formation

*By Ruth Gouldbourne
and Anthony Cross
Wipf and Stock, 2022*

Reviewer: Michael Peat

Readers who still find cause to peruse Baptist Praise and Worship will probably know that it includes two versions of the hymn *Spirit of the Living God*, and that these appear next to each other, each with their own number. The first version begins 'Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me'; the second, 'Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us.' I find it hard not to think of them as two verses of the same hymn, and would feel something important was missing if either one was sung without the other in any given act of worship. These two versions of *Spirit of the Living God*—differentiated but intimately related—remind us that God's Spirit enlivens and equips us as individuals, but in a way that is inextricably bound up with the Spirit's work in and through the communities in which we participate. Communities, as well as individuals, are empowered with a distinctive identity and vocation which both shapes, and is shaped by, the spiritual lives of the individuals involved in it: God's Spirit falls, and can fall afresh, on both in distinguishable but interrelated ways.

This new history of Bristol Baptist College, written to mark 300 years since the college's origination with the appointment of a designated educator at Broadmead Baptist Church, is a profound testimony to these two intertwined aspects of the Spirit's work. It tells the story both of individuals whose commitment began and sustained the college as a learning community, and individuals whose vocation—at home or overseas, as ordained ministers or in other forms of ministry—has been significantly shaped by the time they shared in the college's life. Chapters for each of the three centuries are chronologically structured around the tenure of the college principals from that period. Also included are details about various of the students who have been enriched by the pattern of learning and living that emerged, and which has adapted to changing circumstances over the years. I was struck, for example, by the way in which learning at the college in the early years incorporated a breadth of topics so that ministers were equipped to engage in a range of scholarly debates of the day, and also instruction in social etiquette which recognised the new acceptance of nonconformists in polite society!

And so, the story of individuals gathered in community naturally becomes the story of a community with its own identity and

ethos. This book vividly demonstrates the way in which, like a set of musical variations, Bristol Baptist College has maintained a Spirit-given theme whose original melody remains detectable even as it is embellished according to the needs of changing times and circumstances. The author refers to this theme as 'the Bristol Tradition', distilling from early sources the college's intention to form 'able, lively, evangelical and zealous ministers of the gospel'. Chapters for each century include a brief account of the wider intellectual and social trends within which the college was immersed, and to which it aimed to adapt with integrity to the gospel and the college's founding purpose. Changes in the physical location of the college, the pattern of ministerial formation and the range of callings addressed by its learning programmes are also described in a way that highlights the responsiveness of this learning community throughout its history. This is an adaptability borne not merely of a shrewd survival instinct in each generation but, far more significantly, of fresh fallings of the Spirit. As Steve Finamore, the current Principal, puts it in his Foreword, the college's story 'is a sign of God's continuing faithfulness to his people and to his mission'.

The author is honest about moments of tension and uncertainty in this unfolding history (both in its early stages and more recently), thereby reinforcing a sense of dependence upon God. Likewise, the collaboration of Anthony Cross, Ruth Gouldbourne and Mike Brealey (the college librarian) in preparing this book for publication against the formidable obstacles of the Covid pandemic (which is acknowledged as having limited access

to material about some periods) is itself a chapter in this story of human commitment to purposes inspired and enabled by God. Although Ruth Gouldbourne introduces this book as written 'for the family', it also speaks beyond this context as an inspiring story of God's commitment, over many years, to gospel witness channelled through the perseverance of those called to be Jesus' disciples.

***Surprised by Jesus—Subversive
Grace in the Four Gospels***

by Dane Ortlund

Evangelical Press, 2021

Reviewer: Michael Bochenski

Finding a fresh 'take' on the gospels becomes harder as the decades pass, as many a NT postgraduate student, struggling to find a convincing 'new' thesis to develop, can testify. To find a book that speaks refreshingly and insightfully on the four gospels, then, is to discover well hidden treasure. Dane Ortlund's *Surprised by Jesus* is such a find. It has now been rescued from publishing obscurity by the phenomenal response to Ortlund's outstanding book *Gentle and Lowly* (see bmj January 2022 for a review). These studies, which began in a 2008 Bible class in Naperville Presbyterian Church, Illinois, were initially published as *Defiant Grace* in 2011. After some re-editing and new packaging, *Surprised by Jesus* has, happily, now resurfaced: '...each of the four gospel accounts in the Bible uniquely gives us a Jesus who turns upside down our intuitive anticipation of who he is and how following him works.' The subversive message of Jesus called the Christ emerges clearly and movingly through

the pages of this beautifully written book. In the process we also discover the reflections of several outstanding Christian writers, among them Martin Luther, Jonathan Edwards, C.S. Lewis, Martin Lloyd-Jones, Paul Tournier, Helmut Thielicke and Richard Bauckham.

Ortlund's methodology is both simple and effective. A core text or passage is chosen from each of the four gospels, and is then used to illuminate the surprises Jesus continues to introduce into human life and discipleship.

Matthew 19-20 is first used to help us to explore the surprise of 'disobedient obedience.' Ortlund diagnoses brilliantly a condition most of us suffer badly from: '... you and I, too, have a Pharisee inside us. It isn't going away by more trenchantly dutiful living—this is just the thing that feeds the Pharisee within.' A perceptive analysis follows—of how easily we lapse into judgmentalism, superiority comparisons, and a drivenness in religious matters. This is neither necessary nor helpful, Ortlund pleads: 'We are free to be fully and irreversibly forgiven. Recognize that you don't deserve it, look to him, and you are in.'

Mark 8:22-38 opens up to readers what Ortlund calls 'the surprise of the king as a criminal.' Mark's intricately planned gospel first shows us that Jesus is the king, and then goes on to demonstrate what a very different kind of king he was. In the words of the German NT scholar Martin Kähler, '[the gospels are] passion narratives with extended introductions.'

Luke 1:5-38 is Ortlund's perhaps surprising choice of passage to open up

the Lucan narrative to us. Outsiders are in fact the insiders, is the core message drawn here. The writings of Paul Tournier were, for some of us, our first explorations of the world of pastoral psychology. Consider here this quote from *Guilt and Grace*: 'There indeed is a reversal—God prefers the poor, the weak, the despised. What religious people have...difficulty in admitting, is that He prefers sinners to the righteous.' Ortlund concludes his reflections on Luke with these fine words: 'Know that you shouldn't be in. Look to Christ. Be at rest. You are in.'

John 1:1-18, less surprisingly, is Ortlund's choice of core passage for this gospel. How can the Creator become a creature? he asks. A quote from G.K. Chesterton's *The Everlasting Man* is movingly used here: 'The hands that made the sun and stars were too small to reach the huge heads of the cattle.' As someone who thought he knew this gospel well, it came as a surprise to realise that John contains two sets of 'I Am' sayings, and not just one. If you too are intrigued by this, buy the book and turn to p170 for a new preaching series! Luther's reflections on Jesus as a new Jacob's ladder, and Calvin's sense of awe on reading John 1 are also highlighted: 'The case was certainly desperate if the Godhead itself did not descend to us, it being impossible for us to ascend.'

Like *Gentle and Lowly* and its predecessor *Deeper*, this is not a book to rush through. Rather it is one to savour a chapter or two at a time, one we can safely allow to minister to us with reminders of long known, but too often forgotten, gospel truths. As Ortlund concludes: 'In Matthew,

Jesus exposes externalized obedience as thinly veiled moral rotteness. In Mark, the long-anticipated king takes up the fate of a criminal. Luke shows us Jesus inverting the social assumptions, with insiders ending up outside, and outsiders finding themselves inside. And the great surprise of John is that the eternal God who made all things became flesh and blood! *Surprised by Jesus* would make an excellent study book for Advent or Lent. It would also serve well as the basis for a stimulating house group study course: 'Jesus does not crowbar us into change. He surprises us into change.'

***Re-Membering the Body:
The Witness of History,
Theology and the Arts in Honour
of Ruth M.B. Gouldbourne***

*Edited by Anthony Cross
& Brian Haymes*

Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2021

Reviewer: Myra Blyth

This festschrift is a rich volume of essays which seek to honour a friend within the Baptist family whose life and ministry touches many lives and changes hearts and minds on the way. I have valued the times spent with Ruth and have found her contributions and insights in meetings and group discussions to be incisive and intriguing, often leaving me wanting to know more. This book, which is both theological and personal, meets that desire to know more. It is a fitting tribute to Ruth as pastor, historian, poet and preacher, expanding and deepening the reader's knowledge and appreciation of Ruth in so many ways.

The volume begins with a very moving appreciation of Ruth by her father, Derek B. Murray. He offers a clear and revealing account in a simple chronological format that perfectly puts the rest of the volume in context. The chapters are helpfully grouped thematically and highlight in diverse ways the significance of Ruth's story.

Some chapters resonate with Ruth's appreciation of textual criticism. For those less intrigued by the micro-details of textual analysis, take heart, for here you will find a lively engagement with textual ambiguity and from which the authors do the hard work of interpretation, engaging directly with contemporary issues. Sean Winter and Ernest Lucas, in different ways, disrupt inherited traditional readings and offer new interpretative possibilities for approaching texts on gender and sexuality. This is complemented by others, such as Michael Peat, who explores these same issues from ethical and doctrinal perspectives, inspired by Ruth's own 'open and questioning' approach to what God's further light might reveal about the normative reading of sex and gender.

Several chapters focus on Ruth's love of poetry and gifting in prayer. I found these chapters very moving indeed. Particularly poignant is the way contributors have woven together intertextuality and spirituality. Just one example among many that could be cited is the reflection made by Simon Perry around the motif of 'deep listening.' He argues that Jesus uses this parable to address the process of listening and suggests that radical listening called for in Jeremiah 31: 33 and in Mark 4: 10-12 is no set of external rules,

no flat-footed progression from hearing to doing, but a radical listening involving the heart. 'The word of one person is not kept at arm's length but enters into the heart and finds expression in the life of the other.' The author recalls his shared ministry with Ruth in Bloomsbury, where one would preach and the other follow with the intercessions. It is in that context that he recognises Ruth's gift of radical listening: 'Ruth's intercessions are indeed poetic but not only because of her love of language and ability to be spontaneously articulate. Poetic in the sense of poesis—that someone has taken to heart what they have heard.'

A good number of the authors focus on the contribution of women in mission and ministry, which is an area of both academic and personal importance to Ruth. These historical chapters particularly offer some very fascinating and important insights into the role women have played in expanding the space in both church and society. The chapter by Janice O'Brien on the life of Emily Georgiana Kemp, donor of the chapel of Somerville College, Oxford, offers wonderful insights into the life of a woman who was exceptional in her day. Extracts from her memoirs describe the way, in her childhood, Baptists around Rochdale were deeply immersed in mission and strongly committed to the goals of Christian unity and ecumenism. Contrary to the image often held of dour Victorian nonconformity, the great event of the year was the annual missionary dinner, which she describes in vivid detail that I cannot resist repeating here: 'How well I remember the preparations for the dinner! That beautiful mahogany table,

with its cut glass and silver reflected in the shining surface and above all the noble decanters of sherry and port, of which no small amount was consumed. After a lengthy dinner beginning at four o'clock, the whole party adjourned to West Street Baptist chapel for the missionary meeting —by far the most interesting services that ever took place there in those days, and to which we went with great alacrity.' This extract caused me to gasp and laugh out loud for some considerable time. But there is also much fascinating social history to be found in this and other historical chapters which caused me to feel a great sense of awe and admiration for women whose courage, intellect and Christian conviction influenced Baptist history and society more generally.

It is not possible in a short review to do justice to the many rich and varied contributions made by the authors. Every chapter deserves attention because together they raise important questions about how we undertake ministry and mission today, as well as being a fitting tribute to a woman who has fruitfully practised her ministry amongst Baptists locally, nationally and globally.

Outgrowing Dawkins: God for Grown-ups

by Rupert Shortt

SPCK, 2019

Reviewer: Sally Nelson

It isn't often that you read a book on a contentious topic and heave a sigh of relief. Rupert Shortt's commentary on Richard Dawkins' *Outgrowing God* (and also, to some extent, the ideas behind the much older *The God Delusion*) was a crisp, well-argued and welcome break from the sterile and antagonistic polemic of much of this debate, which has been going on for years between Dawkins and the faith community.

The book is short (as well as Shortt!) but effective. Dawkins' greatest weapon is not, as most theologians know, his theological critical ability; it is his ability to write clearly, rhetorically and abundantly to his own agenda, which is to do away with God. And, of course, this makes great media material because it generates controversy. Shortt systematically tackles Dawkins' assumptions and arguments with elegant, concise prose but without adopting a counter-version of Dawkins' diminishing tone towards people of faith.

Shortt briefly exposes some of the shortcomings of Dawkins' assumptions, in particular the idea that God is 'like' other explanations and can be subjected to a reductionist critique. His opening volley is to provide four key reasons why belief in God and in science are neither incompatible nor stupid in the way that Dawkins suggests: these reasons are (i) intellectual (we should follow the

evidence); (ii) theological (God is not a thing like other things); (iii) textual (the Bible is neither a scientific text nor always a literal explanation); and (iv) historical (science and faith need not be in conflict). Shortt also notes that many prominent atheists disagree with Dawkins' approach and method, because he is logically inadequate. Dawkins has projected an image of God which he then attacks: the problem is that 'his' God is not the one whom Christians worship. God is not a power-seeking monster and God is not a magician: God is the unique ground of all reality.

There is a very helpful exploration of metaphor within scripture: Dawkins tends to be literal in his approach. This is also perhaps the place where Dawkins could most easily challenge Shortt in return: what rules of textual interpretation should we apply and how do they differ between genres? This hermeneutical challenge is, of course, also at the heart of many disagreements within the Christian community itself, and presents a different understanding of authority from that found within the 'laws' of science.

The book ends with a plea for open-mindedness and a willingness to travel with others of different perspectives. It also issues a warning: liberal secularism is not necessarily the answer, since it can lead to an atrophied and often selfish way of life. Religion often demands that we consider the issues of justice, solidarity, and community that make life truly worth living.

This book is well worth the couple of hours it will take you to read it.

bmj Essay Prize 2023

The *bmj* invites entries for our Essay Prize from those serving in, or in formation for, the leadership and ministry of Baptist churches or in other contexts. We would like an essay of 2500 words on a topic and title of the entrant's choice that fits into one of the following categories:

Baptist History and Principles
Biblical Studies
Theology or Practical Theology

We are looking for clear writing and argument, and preferably a creative engagement with our Baptist life. The prize will be £250.00 and the winning essay (and any highly commended contributions) will be published in *bmj*.

We particularly encourage entries from those in the early years of their (Baptist) ministries, which includes MiTs and those who are not in accredited or recognised leadership roles.

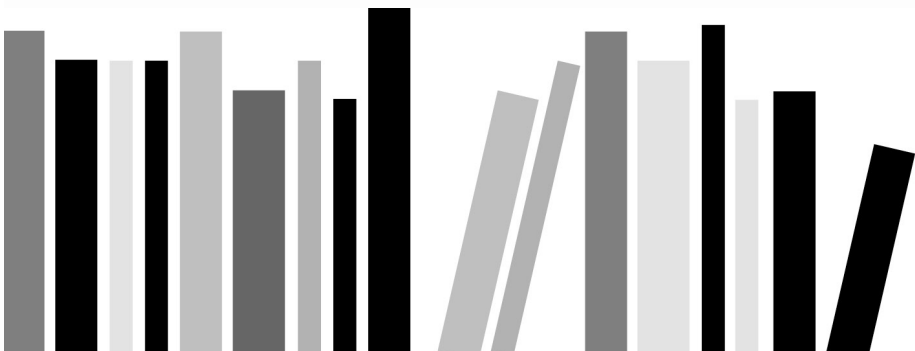
Closing date: 31 March 2023

Entries should be submitted electronically, double spaced and fully referenced, using endnotes not footnotes, to the editor at revsal96@aol.com, including details of your name, address, church, role, and stage of ministry.

Judges will be drawn from the Editorial Board of *bmj* and experienced academic Baptist colleagues. We reserve the right not to award a prize if the entries are unsuitable, of an inadequate standard for *bmj*, or do not meet the criteria.

Please share this competition with colleagues to whom it might be of interest.

Contact the editor if you have any queries.



the baptist ministers'
journal

October 2022 volume 356



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