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MAIN) TREAM
NETWORK

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Introduction

We continue our look at Associations and associating in this issue. It really is an enormous topic! And still there is more. Devolution is very much in vogue politically at present as the imminent referenda in Scotland and Wales testify. In these pages you will find Philip Putman's account of our own devolution experiments in certain of the Baptist Union Areas. Many of us are watching these experiments very closely indeed, wondering if they contain clues for our Union's C21st future. Then follows one of the most provocative articles I have read for a long, long while. It began in our Cross Street Centre restaurant here in St Albans where the author Steve Blunden of ABY lunches occasionally. From him I learned of the document 'Championing a Baptist Future' produced by the Alliance of Baptist Youth (ABY) as part of the denominational consultation process. This has now been re-worked by the Executive I understand. The result is a penetrating and insightful analysis of our Union as the C21st approaches. Yona Pusey and I first met at Regent's Park College, Oxford interviewing prospective Ministers. She has contributed the first of three articles in this issue outlining something of the international character of Baptist associating in the late C20th. Next year, she reminds us, the European Baptist Women's Union will be 50 years young.

Chris Haig has for 8 years now worked as the General Secretary of the Lancashire and Cheshire Baptist Association. As one of those who helped to appoint him, it has been good to see we got it right! His article includes a number of good practice suggestions from which others of us might also learn. If Chris is long in the Association Secretaryship tooth then Stephen Copson is still teething! We appointed Stephen as the General Secretary of the Hertfordshire Baptist Association just a few months ago. Ours is a much smaller Association than Lancs and Cheshire. Stephen's article draws on an address he gave to the Association Assembly here in June of this year. Then follow the two other international articles. My personal admiration for Christian Aid grows with the years. John Logan works as one of their Regional Representatives. Some of you may have seen him interviewed on the television news during the 1997 Christian Aid Week. As you might expect he is not afraid to ask some very discomfiting questions of us here in Mainstream. Finally, following on from last issue's Poland focus, again we discern an international dimension to associating in Frank Boyd's account of the Southern Association's partnership with Bulgaria over recent years.

Something of our own plans for Mainstream associating round off this Autumn 1997 issue. Martin Hodson, of Worcestershire was kind enough to write in after our last issue:

'Once again I very much appreciated the Mainstream Magazine. I have found recent editions extremely stimulating and Issue 59 is no exception. I thought I had tired of discussion about Associating but there certainly is a freshness and relevance about the articles you have brought together.'

Please God the same is true of this issue too. There can be few more important topics around in contemporary Baptist life than repentance and renewal in the areas of our interdependence and associating.

Michael I Bochenski (Editor) St Albans

August 1997

THE HOME MISSION SCHEME IN THE 21ST CENTURY



For well over 100 years, the Home Mission scheme and its predecessors has helped to finance the work that Baptists have done together in establishing and maintaining churches in Great Britain. It is also the means by which the wider work of the Baptist Union of Great Britain has been financed. This is demonstrated by the accounts of the Baptist Union of Great Britain which are all contained within the Home Mission Fund. As we approach the start of the 21st century the Union, in the form of its constituent churches associations and colleges, will need to consider the principle on which such financing is based, and the practical implications and realities of the outworking of that principle.

There is no doubt that we will continue to have church situations where the provision of full-time accredited Ministry cannot be financed from within the available resources of the local church members. This may be because:

- the church has been newly planted and has not yet developed the necessary resources of personnel and finance
- an older church is going through difficulties of finance which are perceived to be temporary and can be rectified after a period of support or because
- the church is in an area where the social and demographic context demands

that the church be present even though there is no foreseeable possibility that it can become self-financing.

Without some form of national funding, these situations, which have been helped and are being helped, will struggle to maintain their existence.

Similarly, churches will continue to need, and perhaps increasingly need, to draw on resources which will assist them not just to negotiate the increasing mass of legal and accounting regulations being piled upon them, but to do so quickly and easily so that their main task of mission to their local communities is not lost beneath the pressure of simply keeping going. They will also probably need to continue with some procedure for the accreditation of their Ministers so that there can be consistent and easily accepted criteria for the recognition of gifts and training for Ministry. These Ministers will want some pattern of pastoral care and continuing training. All these matters inevitably require the establishment of some form of national resource and that will continue to need some method of funding.

Home Mission has always been based on voluntary giving which flows naturally from the Baptist view of Church. This has resulted for many years in the raising of what are substantial sums of money with relatively little expenditure on the actual mechanics of fund-raising. While Home Mission promotion continues to improve in quality, most Ministers will quickly think of other charities whose unsolicited appeals for money, printed on high quality paper, regularly demonstrate a much higher advertising budget than Home Mission has deemed necessary or appropriate. The principle thus brings a strength which over the years has saved us a lot of money.

The problem with the practical outworking of this is of course that so many people and churches simply do not take part. Almost every Association Treasurer speaks of churches in the Association which have given nothing or very little, and which inevitably have affected the average figures of per-capita giving which the Association provides for Home Mission. The national target has not been achieved for 18 years, and it does not help that churches have seen that few dramatic consequences have resulted.

The Union is blessed by donated income in excess of £2.5 million, but the average amount received per Baptist member - £17.30 in 1996 - remains a very low figure at only about 5 pence per person per day. We must presume that these churches are providing for other forms of Mission in a worthy manner, but it is not clear whether they think that the provision of Ministry and other

resources to other Baptist churches is not necessary, or whether they believe that such resources will or ought to come from non-Baptist sources. If every church contributed to Home Mission and the national target per capita figure of £25 per member per year were achieved, then the overall income would increase by over £1 million per year. Little extra administration would be needed to account for this extra income so that expenditure could be substantially increased on the direct Mission opportunities represented by the Grants to churches, or by other forms of innovative Ministry.

It is because many churches opt out of the Home Mission system that various changes have been suggested to the traditional pattern. One of these changes has been implemented on a trial basis, and that is the experiment in the local delivery of Home Mission. This experiment is being monitored by a Review Group set up by Council, and it is not therefore possible to draw any final conclusions from its progress. The experiment involves the Associations setting income budgets rather than targets, and having the right to decide locally those churches within their Area which will receive a Home Mission Grant and its size. Part of the income is allocated to the cost of the Superintendent, other grants which are deemed to be National rather than local in nature, and the national resource, and the Area budget is completed by the agreement of a Strategic Fund amount which either represents a further subsidy from the particular Area to the other Areas or vice versa. When the actual figures are compiled at the end of the accounting period, the Area is shown to have a surplus or a deficit, and part of this is carried forward to affect future years Area budgets; thus the failure to provide the income budgeted actually matters to the Area.

There is still further work to do to finalise the exact method of accounting to be used within the experiment, but the one thing which has already proved to be positive is the evenness with which the income within the Areas in experiment has been received. Home Mission still suffers from a large proportion of its income arriving at the very end of the appropriate year, despite the expenditure needing to be spread evenly throughout the year. Partly because of the extra publicity and attention to this point, partly because the Associations in some cases have been prepared to even the cash flow from their own resources, and partly because the experiment penalises the Areas with a notional interest charge where the income is delayed, the three areas in experiment have regularised the flow of their Home Mission giving so that at the half year stage, two of the areas have exceeded their half year's income budget and the other has reached over 96% of it. The remaining areas average only 52%. The local allocation of grants has also concentrated the attention of

the people within the Associations responsible for grants, who have sometimes found it hard to make tough decisions rather than simply pass an application on to Didcot. Council will determine in 1999 whether the experimental pattern will be continued or modified, or not.

The other change which has been mooted is to increase the present church subscription from the nominal level of approximately £1 per member to a figure which covers the national resource costs. This would need a subscription of between £5 and £10 a member depending on how the national resource is defined. The voluntary Home Mission appeal would then fund only the Grants to Churches, the Superintendents and perhaps the Associations together with Ministerial Training. The increased subscription would ensure that those churches which are in membership with the Union would play their full part in the costs of that Union and justify their access to the specialist advice available to them, still at a price that would compare favourably with professional charges for similar advice. There would however need to be a resolution of the problem of churches who might refuse to pay the subscription, particularly where the sanction of expulsion from the Union was complicated by their Trust Deed provisions requiring membership of the Union. This is a matter which will require further analysis and discussion by Council and some of its Committees.

We are often told of churches where there are very few members who are really Baptists and that therefore a contribution to a denominational fund like Home Mission, and indeed the Baptist Missionary Society, is not considered by the church to be appropriate, let alone a priority. These people come to the church because they like what they receive there, not because it is a Baptist church. Leaving aside the fact that people from almost any other denominational background will be very familiar with the concept of contributing to a central fund, (and not on a voluntary basis either), I cannot see why we do not teach that many of the features that they appreciate derive from the Baptist interpretation and heritage of Christianity, and that one of the consequences of this is participation in the Home Mission Fund and the Baptist Missionary Society. I believe if this was properly explained then it would be overwhelmingly accepted.

I am also concerned about the increasing tendency for Christians to want to control their giving, determine exactly how it should be used, and insist upon direct accountability about how it has been used and what it has achieved. When I worked as a Missionary accountant in Africa I was regularly involved in the receipt and distribution of aid money from overseas which was

earmarked for a startlingly large range of different projects. Many of these projects had a superficial attraction but were not really central to what the Church was trying to achieve. Now I know that money given in aid sometimes goes astray, and I know that the donor is entitled to receive an account for the gift. Nevertheless I used to spend so much time and effort in additional accounting and reporting back on these gifts that sometimes they almost became counterproductive. We longed to receive gifts which simply said "we love you, we trust you, use this gift for the things you believe God wants you to do, and account to Him not to us; God bless you".

This makes me wary of introducing a system of linking between donor and recipient churches in Home Mission. Apart from the cost of administration involved, it could bring peculiar tensions of partnership and accountability which could harm the mission of the recipient church as much as help it. I hope that donor churches can continue simply to give their contributions, without asking for detailed reports of its use, trusting those appointed to administer it, and those receiving it, to use it wisely and faithfully. Full accounts are available to Council which is appointed by the Churches through their associations, and adequate monitoring, and changes where required, can be ensured at that level.

What I would most like to see is an increasing number of churches playing their full part in the Home Mission Story as it unfolds into the new century. When we indicate that the Home Mission target has not been reached for 18 years, the sadness is not that the numbers fail to add into neat patterns but that so much that could be achieved has not been achieved and is not being achieved. As Baptist Christians we remain interdependent one with another. We need each other, and each of us has a part to play. The Home Mission Fund, which depends on us all, must continue to be a significant part of the story of Baptists in the 21st century if we are to maintain and expand our Baptist witness to Jesus Christ in this country.

Phillip Putman is Head of Finance and Administration at Baptist House

CHAMPIONING A BAPTIST FUTURE



This document is the Alliance of Baptist Youth's response to the ongoing Denominational Consultation process.

Introduction

One of the many things we as Baptist youth find frustrating is being invited to conferences and assemblies which take place during weekdays. Many of us are still in fulltime education and the rest are employed in work which does not allow us the time off necessary in order to attend. Only recently has ABY been able to employ a paid Development Worker, and even then only part-time. We do seek, though, to become involved when we can and play our part.

One particular accusation levelled at ABY by some is that, being made up of young people, we are inexperienced and naive. In our defence we shall point out that the Alliance of Baptist Youth, and its Planning Group, is made up of young Baptists from a wide variety of churches spread over the whole of England and Wales. Some come from churches which would class themselves as Traditional, others from Evangelical (and "Post-Evangelical") ranging to High Charismatic. Some come from churches attended by personnel of the Baptist Union; others from churches hardly touched by it. Some of us have experienced life in several different churches and denominations, while a few have even shared a year of their lives with Baptists in other countries. And ABY has had also to suffer the heartache and confusion of having a former Secretary suddenly leave and become committed instead to New Frontiers International. We are reminded that the accusation of naivety did not stop the young William Carey, and we draw inspiration from his example. Baptist young people are often called "The Church of Tomorrow". As those then who will inherit whatever state the church is left in - naturally - we want a say in it!

In the Summer of 1996, after normal business, the ABY Planning Group held its own debate on the Baptist Union and its future. During this discussion, and subsequent ones, we concluded that, despite the publicity and controversy, the need to change the structures of the Baptist Union is not the real issue. Rather, it is the churches themselves which really need to change. You can change the structures all you like, but if you still can't transform the local churches, you will achieve nothing. In particular, our recently elected Vice-

President has often shared with us the experience she had of the sheer enthusiasm and dedication of the “poor” African Baptists to Bible Study and Evangelism. This we see in stark contrast to the embedded disinterest and dithering we see in the churches of “rich” Britain. And nor is it the Traditional churches who seem content with keeping things as they are. Even among the so-called “Renewed” churches there is still not evident the same whole-hearted **drive** to go out and change the world, even though this is presented as an aim. There seems to be too much seeking the latest blessing and too little **real action** to show for it - in stark contrast to the early Christians whose response to being filled with the Spirit was to **go out** and speak the Word of God more boldly (Acts 2 and 4).

The 'Championing a Baptist future' Document

On behalf of ABY, I undertook the task of drawing up this document, seeking above all to reflect views made during our discussions. Copies were sent to the members of the Planning Group, and some revisions have been made, before the document was finally approved. First of all, it identifies the five main aspects which must be addressed if the Baptist Movement is to have a future: **Our purpose, a sense of identity, our knowledge of the Bible, a willingness to act and our need to be holy.** One issue, which seems so far to be under-addressed by others is that of the failure of communication within the Baptist Union. This issue is then raised, and a solution to help tackle the problem is suggested. Our document also concludes by identifying key roles the Baptist Union itself can play. But throughout it emphasises again and again that the responsibility for change ultimately lies with individuals and their churches - only then will we see any meaningful transformation of national Baptist life.

Many of the issues and points raised by necessity have been covered in a generalised way. We could have written in far greater depth and detail; but then the document would run to pages and pages and ultimately it would have become unreadable to all but the most document-dedicated. And yes there are not many of those people in ABY, either!

If the Baptist Union is to become effective again, then, like any other successful Christian organisation, we must have the following:-

We must have a **Purpose**

We must have an **Identity**

We must have **Knowledge**

We must **Act** and

We must be **Holy** - set apart for God's Work.

Purpose

Every organisation needs an aim or mission so that it can focus its energies and has a reason to exist. We already have a Mission. We must state that mission and gear everything we do towards it. The mission Jesus gave to his disciples is clearly stated, and is also meant for us.

Matthew 28:19 "Go out into all the world and baptise ..."

Matthew 28:20 "... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded".

The emphasis here is clear:

We must **Go Out** (Evangelism).

We must **Baptise** (Recruit and seek genuine commitment)

We must **Teach** (Pastoral/Bible Study).

We must **Obey** (Serve).

Most churches are happy to baptise and, indeed, wish for more! Most want to teach, and most obey. **But**, most do not **go out and evangelise**. Therefore, we have few to baptise, few to teach, and even fewer to obey. We need a new emphasis in our churches: we must be prepared to go out and evangelise. God calls us to go out into the streets and byways and bring (Greek "compel") people to come in. (*Matthew 22: 8-10*). And God gives the abilities to do so: "But to each one of us grace has been given ... to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ..." (*Ephesians 4: 7-13*).

Identity

People are more devoted to an organisation or movement when **they feel part of it**, and know that they matter and **have a role in it**. Despite the talk about the end of denominations, in practice this is not happening. In fact, we are seeing the growth of new denominations as the so-called "House Churches" knit closer and closer together. In these growing "New Churches" Christians now identify themselves as belonging to either: New Wine (Vineyard), New Frontiers, Pioneer, Revelation, Cornerstone, Elim etc. These movements are able to convey a sense of identity and common purpose. People within **feel part of something** and that they are **going places** which they often express as "moving in the Spirit". This identity and sense of purpose is lacking among Baptists. Very few Baptists feel part of a (remote) Baptist Union. This feeling of isolation and lack of purpose is the major reason why whole churches are seeking to join alternative movements - and we in ABY have personally seen this happen.

The Baptist Union is not perceived (seen) to be going anywhere or doing anything. The Baptist Union itself does actually do a lot of work, and provides a great deal of advice and material. But this is not recognised by most Baptists **because they know nothing about it**. There is a Commun-

ication Problem. Those involved in the Baptist Union (eg ABY), or who know someone who is, are lucky - they can see a broader picture of what's happening among Baptists and who's who. But most Baptists do not. For example, ask the average Baptist in an average Baptist Church who David Coffey and Keith Jones are, and they couldn't tell you. Or ask who the President is - blank faces. What did Baptist Council decide last month? - shrug of shoulders. **Most Baptists are even totally unaware even that there is a Union Consultation going on.** This is why it is so difficult to recruit for ABY. Using the picture of Plato's Cave:

How do you explain to someone who has spent all their life living underground what life is like outside: the trees, the grass, the river, the sea, and, especially, the sun?

The BU **does** attempt to communicate. It uses Informission and SecCheck - but only Church Secretaries see them and they cannot communicate all the information contained in them on to others. We understand that the minutes of Baptist Council Meetings are available on request - but who knows that these minutes are available in the first place? The Baptist Union has also produced Union videos. Very commendable - the use of modern media to communicate. Unfortunately, very few Baptists are even aware it exists! There is also the Baptist Times, which we understand is independent of the Baptist Union. A great deal of Union information is made available through it but it suffers from an image problem, eg it is a broadsheet in style. Most in our churches do not read it and many of these prefer to read tabloids anyway. In contrast, a greater number will have heard of what the Evangelical Alliance are up to, the latest goings-on in Holy Trinity, Brompton or the newest Christian fad in the United States. Why is this? Why are today's Christians more aware of these things?

Improving Communications - offers a way forward. Christian publications which sell well are magazines. Clearly the best example is the popularity of magazines such as Alpha (now Christianity) and Renewal. In fact, this popularity has encouraged more Christian magazines to appear: eg Youthwork, Healing and Wholeness and Woman Alive. The "New Churches" have also seen their value. They have now produced their own quality-look magazines. Thus their members are more aware of what is happening in their movements. Our point is again illustrated with the BMS. With the increase in the quality of the Missionary Herald readership has grown and people are becoming more aware again of BMS' work. Phil Marston saw fit to launch a separate magazine (WOW) to help promote missionary awareness among children. **We believe that the BU must also devise its own magazine.** This could combine all the functions of SecCheck, Baptist Leader and Home Mission News. It will not be a replacement to the Baptist Times since it will neither be

as regular nor as news-orientated. It will be a means by which the Baptist Union can communicate **directly** to individual members. A suggestion as to what form this magazine could take is given below in an appendix.

Knowledge

It is said, "Knowledge is Power". It is also said, "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing". Among Christians, knowledge about the Bible is poor. It is often said that fewer and fewer Christians read their Bible or can even be bothered to do so. "The Bible is the most unread Bestseller". (*The Guardian*) Instead, even among the "New Churches", Christians rely on the Church Pastor or Housegroup Leader to direct both their reading and understanding. They rarely read it for themselves. At the same time, a myth has grown up among these Churches that Bible Colleges are no longer needed - that Churches should "home-grow" their own Pastors. So, when the actual theology is poor, there is no-one to challenge it. Christian "do's and don'ts" are dictated and their "Biblical basis" impressed upon the listeners. And there are times where it can be downright poor (eg: one of us has heard a notable Christian speaker and author from one of the New Churches condemn vegetarianism as "a lie of Satan"!)

Baptists recognised these dangers long ago. In fact our answer is the basis of the Baptist movement. First, we have long recognised the need for Baptist Pastors, Teachers and Evangelists to have their knowledge firmly grounded in the Scriptures. That is why our Baptist heroes and forefathers established Bible Colleges (eg: C H Spurgeon and William Carey, among others). **But our Pastors and Teachers not only need to "know their stuff", they must also be able to communicate their knowledge to us.** Christian Leaders in the "New Churches" also promote their teachings and ideas through books. As can be seen from reading Informission and SecCheck, Baptists also produce books and have even written for the ordinary person to understand. But their books are not promoted, few know about them and thus they are not read. This is the communication problem again. Baptists have also recognised that we as individuals must also learn the Truth for ourselves. We need to be encouraged, and must be encouraged, to read and learn from the Bible for ourselves. Once again we must become *People of the Book*. "A Christian not literate in the Bible **by choice** is a contradiction". (*John Drane*). "From infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise ...". (2 Timothy 3:15)

Our attitude should instead be like the Early Baptists - in fact like the early Christians - who:

"... received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true". (*Acts 17:11*)

Action

"Worship that does not lead to genuine action is not genuine worship". So said Archbishop George Carey in his 1997 New Year Message. Among British Christians there is always a danger: we're all too happy to talk about doing things, but we all shy away from real action. In Peter Tongeman's words, writing in the Mainstream Magazine: 'I read recently that Baptists are quite good on love, but poor on justice. Our task is not only to provide an 'ambulance' and care for casualties of an unjust society, it is also to involve ourselves with others in dealing with the circumstances that actually create the casualties. That may involve us in actions to combat racism; in drawing the attention of a local authority to unfair discrimination; in addressing a Member of Parliament concerning unjust practice; in getting involved in political action. Our evangelical forebears had no compunction about political involvement over slavery, protection of children, the control of alcohol. Should we not also be active over unfair trading, the marginalising of the unemployed, the use of anti-personnel mines that maim the innocent, the care of the environment, just relationships between the affluent one-third and the struggling two-thirds of the world population? ... we are conspicuous by our apparent lack of involvement".

We see this reluctance in our churches. For instance, in the case of The Big Slurp: the campaign to encourage Baptist Churches to adopt fairly traded coffee, as agreed unanimously at Baptist Union Assembly. Out of an approximate 2,000 churches in the Baptist Union, The Alliance of Baptist Youth has learnt that *only* 63 participated. What of the other 1,937?

Also, in many churches a decision to do something takes months to make. Contentious decisions are passed back from Church Meeting to the Deacons to Committee to Deacons and back to Committee (and further Church Meetings!) No wonder so many Baptist churches have followed New Church Movements and have adopted authoritarian elderships instead!!! And their congregations let them - because "they get things done". But this in turn produces the problems caused by authoritarianism, such as lack of accountability (except, perhaps, to leaders outside the church, who also lack accountability), and a stifling of initiative. Some of these churches have even dangerously got to the point where only the leaders are confident and willing enough to start anything new - a far cry from the spontaneous action by early Christians which greatly helped the Gospel to spread (Acts 7: 4-5 & Acts 11: 19-21).

This reluctance to take real action seems to permeate all churches in Britain, and this includes the New Churches. Recently it was indicated at Spring Harvest '97 that "*Never before has the church been so over-equipped, and yet so under-motivated*". (Quoted by Dave Pope in the introduction to the Spring

Harvest '97 Song Book). We must no longer be allowed to “fudge the issues”. We all need to tackle the controversial issues of Mission, Youth Outreach, Third World Injustice, Individual and Social Responsibility **head on**; then go on and “do the job”. To dither means that nothing is done. The more nothing happens, the more ineffective a church becomes. The more ineffective a church becomes, the more it fails to be salt and light in its locality and thus it will be trampled on by today's society and thrown into the fire. (*Matthew 6: 13-15*)

Being Holy - The Root of the Problem

This is something the Alliance of Baptist Youth recognised during its discussions: *It is all very well attempting to change BU structures to be more “Missionary Orientated”, but if the Baptist churches themselves still do nothing, then it will all be futile.* “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (*2 Chronicles 7:14*). Fundamentally, it is us as individuals who need to change - to put aside our doubts and fears, to instead admit before God our failings, and commit ourselves anew to God's call and mission. We each need to seek God earnestly, trusting and obeying his Word in all parts of our lives. Let him renew our minds and transform us into his likeness - then God, in His Grace, will use us for his glory!

Conclusion - towards a “Missionary Union”

The Alliance of Baptist Youth itself cannot remain as it is. Nor can the Baptist Union. It must be prepared to change if it is to become a “Missionary Union” rather than an institutional body which has little real relevance to the “ordinary” local Baptist. But, in the light of our own experience as a national body, we recognise there is a limit to what, on a national level, it can achieve. But the Baptist Union can play an important supporting role. The BU needs to identify key areas it can assist in and focus its transformation to meet those needs. To be a “Missionary Union” the Baptist Union needs to:

Champion our mission and Baptist uniqueness.

1. Provide the following so that our local churches can more effectively carry out our mission:

- ⇒Resources Materials, books, information etc
- ⇒Teaching Colleges, Bible courses, books etc
- ⇒Training Specialists available to develop local church potential
- ⇒Examples & Links A greater sharing of experiences and lessons learnt between churches

2. Encourage and back our Pastors to enable *them* to lead us in our mission.
3. Speak on behalf of - and represent - Baptists as a whole when the need arises eg. on national and international issues.
4. Communicate with us individually and so encourage us to feel part of and share in the overall mission.

The Alliance of Baptist Youth (ABY) aims to unite young Baptists and to give them a Christian Vision of the impact they can have (Jeremiah 1 v 1-10). This article, incorporating the ABY Executive's own discussions, was written by Steve Blunden their Peace and Justice Officer.

APPENDIX A :

Proposal - A BU Magazine : FREEDOM

Suggested title: Freedom. This borrows from Baptist tradition ("The Freeman") while at the same time states one of our distinctive Baptist beliefs: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free". (*Galatians 5:1*)

Aim: The aim of such a magazine would be BU equivalent of the Missionary Herald combining and replacing: Home Mission News, SecCheck/Baptist Leader and providing Baptist news and information in a "reader-friendly" style. It will **not** replace the Baptist Times which is both independent and has a different purpose.

Style: That of Christianity, Renewal and the Missionary Herald

Frequency: Bi-monthly developing to monthly

Items and coverage could include:

National and International Issues - with Baptist responses.

Address - i.e a short personal statement from, alternately, the President and either of the General Secretaries.

Vision - articles by a respected Baptist Minister/Officer/Theologian to promote and challenge. Home Mission News - developments, successes and needs for prayer.

Mission Abroad - condensed news about BMS activities - with full reports left to *Missionary Herald*.

Focus - a page/section focusing on the experiences of a different church each week: its progress, setbacks and lessons learned.

The Baptist Union - discussions and decisions at BU Council which thus become more accountable.

"A Sideways Look" - humorous articles or an experience/reflection with a pointed message.

Publications -reviews of books, music and videos, especially from Baptists.
Sections for the Men's and Women's Fellowships.

A section devoted to Afro-Caribbean and Asian Church Fellowships in Britain.

A Children's work section - like WOW.

A Youthwork section - including, of course, promotion and coverage of ABY activities!

Important: Not every member should have a copy of Freedom but every church member should read one.

APPENDIX B: Practical Problems of a National Eldership

Much of the public discussion about the Baptist Union has focused on the way in which it is led. In particular it has recently been suggested that the Baptist Union should adopt some form of National Eldership. Though ABY wishes to focus on what it feels are the real issues - as highlighted above - we feel we can also contribute to this debate by sharing our own experience of the pros and cons of national leadership. First of all, ABY has had to confront the biggest hurdle facing any form of national leadership: that of the sheer size of the geographical area involved. Unlike the early Church we are not talking about a country like Ancient Greece made up of small, semi-independent *polis* City-States. The size of our modern day cities, let alone the numerous towns, is far greater. Only the development of our modern means of travel, especially road and rail, has enabled cities to grow so big.

The Alliance of Baptist Youth is both a national and regional organisation - both parts complement the other and support each other. But ABY has found that the Baptist Union's Regional Areas have proved to be too large to be represented effectively as a whole. Instead, ABY has found it easier to develop groups based on county-sized Associations. The exception is LACABY, covering Lancashire and Cheshire Association because LACABY is also subdivided into districts. One proposal put forward to make the Planning Group more representative was to replace the Area Reps with Reps from each district and association grouping. The proposal was withdrawn when it was realised that this would mean a planning group in excess of fifty members!

The issue those advocating a national eldership need to consider is, therefore, how large will this body need to be, and, thus, what role will it effectively be able to perform? Even all the New Church denominations combined, make up only a tenth of the size of the Baptist Union. To cover the Baptist Union effectively one is also taking about a National Eldership at least fifty strong, and about the costs involved to support them all. Conversely, a group the size of the present Superintendency will still face the same problem the

Superintendents already face: there are too many individuals and churches for one person to visit and attend to. We find Superintendents to be remote figures about whom we sometimes hear, but rarely see - and certainly not in our own churches. If our Superintendents with their present responsibilities are unable to regularly visit each church, how then can National Leaders build up significant knowledge and understanding of the areas to enable them to initiate a church-planting strategy? Therefore, the answer as to what is the best way to co-ordinate a church supporting and planting strategy seems to lie more at Association level. Changes in the Baptist way of working together will be much more effective if it happens there.

At the same time ABY recognises that the Baptist Union also needs to change at a national level. It still has the potential to play an important role in supporting Baptist witness nationally, as outlined above. What structures it should adopt in order to greatly improve its effectiveness is something which still needs careful and prayerful consideration. But let's not attempt to overcome its remoteness by replacing it with something that in the end also proves to be remote. On a related but very important note: though the issue of National Leadership was raised again during the general discussion at the recent BU Assembly, there was hardly any mention of the idea at the specific debate chaired by Dr Arthur Jennings. In the same way, too many churches calling for change in Associations are themselves not even bothering to play a part in their own Association's life. Only by becoming fully involved, sharing their own experience, and supporting other churches can these churches really make a case and influence their Associations to change. This will take courage, patience and perseverance.

Some have argued that in the end there is no point: that the Baptist Denomination is finished as far as God's purposes are concerned and that He is calling "His People" to leave and join other movements. However, especially after the way God spoke to us during ABY's recent National Assembly, we are convinced that He has definitely **not** given up on the Baptists yet. He is patiently waiting and now it's time for us all to move forward with Him - remembering that God has already accomplished "Great Things" through the faithfulness of our Baptist predecessors. God will do even more through us if we too are willing.

Editor's hint: The Editor is always interested to receive correspondence arising from articles in the magazine. The above article seems a particularly provocative one for such responses!

FIFTY YEARS OF EUROPEAN WOMEN ASSOCIATING



Associating! - a 1990s Baptist buzz word; more than a worthy aim - a deep-rooted desire to reach out of whatever circle we inhabit to join with others who share a common purpose and a uniting reality. It is not my task to theorise about the present ambitions for closer association among Baptist churches, or to suggest how those might be achieved. Rather I have been asked to tell you, in the context of associating, something about an organisation with which I have been closely linked for ten years, and of which I am the current secretary.

So let me begin with a story: the date is 1948 and the setting is the foyer of the Hotel Bonnington in London's Southampton Row. The occasion is a special consultation called by the Baptist World Alliance to consider issues of justice and peace with particular reference to Europe in the dark years after the Second World War. The Europeans were particularly invited to include a woman in their delegations, and several responded positively. As well as attending the main sessions of the consultation in Baptist Church House, these women, together with a few American sisters, met to work out their own role in the post-war reconciliation process - in the only place available: the hotel foyer! After a period of discussion, it became apparent that the divisions and bitterness of the war were still very much a reality for this group of women. Face to face were representatives from Italy, Sweden, Germany, England, Denmark and Norway; reconciliation among them, and the future possibility of associating, was not going to happen easily. Indeed it seemed for a while that they would have to part in disunity, despite their prayers, and their longing to become one in Christ.

In the mercy of God, there was present at this meeting an American, Mrs George Martin. Together with Mrs Ernest Brown of Great Britain, she had dreamed the vision of Baptist world sisterhood, and struggled to make it a reality during the previous decade. Mrs Brown had worked ceaselessly to build up an international communication network among Baptist women, in the hope that one day personal meetings might become a possibility. The dream was for women to associate across national boundaries for purposes of fellowship, worship and mission. Mrs Martin made the suggestion that before they parted the small group of women should stand together and say the

Lord's Prayer each in her own language. Through these words, and the faith which enabled them to be spoken, even by hearts that were breaking, the Holy Spirit was released into the group. Out of the tears, confession and forgiveness that followed, a new hope was born.

With the ability to accept God's gift of reconciliation, it at once became possible to look to the future. Almost overnight, the European Baptist Women's Union was born, and plans for its ongoing life were made. Three main ambitions were formulated: to hold an annual committee, and biennial conference; to issue a news sheet; and to make provision for an annual Day (or Week) of prayer. That all happened nearly 50 years ago; next year the EBWU will celebrate the Jubilee. The first conference took place in the international Baptist seminary in Ruschlikon, Switzerland; the anniversary will be celebrated as part of next year's conference in "the new Ruschlikon", at IBTS, Prague. In 1948 six European nations were represented; in 1998 we hope to have delegates from about 40 unions. The European Baptist family has opened its arms to unions in the Middle East, as well as stretching as far eastwards as Georgia and Uzbekistan. The division of the USSR into republics meant a sudden increase in our membership figures, and has also greatly enriched our fellowship together. As new women's unions are emerging and developing, our work of encouragement continues. We offer a context in which women can discover their gifts, to be used mainly in local and national situations. On occasions we become the arena where reconciliation still takes place. We are a link in the world-wide fellowship of Baptist women, and we maintain as a top priority the emphasis on praying together, especially during the annual Day of Prayer.

The "we" of the previous paragraph refers mainly to the Executive committee of EBWU, which consists of six members, is elected by delegates from every union at the five-yearly general committee, and meets annually. The aim is for different parts of Europe to be represented through the committee, and also that the annual meetings are held in a different country each year. Most of the western unions have had executive representation during the last 50 years; since the early 1980s at least one member of each executive has been from eastern Europe. Officers, (President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer) have come from Denmark, Italy, England, Norway, Germany, Sweden, Spain, Finland, The Netherlands, Hungary and Wales.

The executive meeting is invited to a different country each year; three to four days of worship, prayer and business are normally interwoven with opportunities to meet local women. National committees can be encouraged

and supported; local groups are informed about their European sisters, and the executive members gain a clearer picture of what is happening within the unions. In the last 10 years the executive has been invited to Finland, Poland, Spain, Italy, Austria, England (an administrative extra), Israel, Slovakia, Portugal, Scotland and the Netherlands; conferences have been held in Denmark and Germany; as part of EBF Congresses the women have also met in Hungary and Norway. The main role of the president, apart from chairing executive meetings, is keeping in touch. She aims to visit most if not all of the unions during her five-year term, and she is also the link between our continental union and the Baptist World Alliance Women's Department. The latter acts as an umbrella over the six continental unions, and organises a women's world leadership conference immediately before the BWA Congresses - a chance for women to meet at a global level. The Women's Department has also accepted responsibility for ensuring that the Day of Prayer programme is produced and circulated each year; a different continental union prepares the necessary material.

After the division of the old USSR our membership grew dramatically, so, to help the president and encourage involvement of the whole committee, we have evolved a system whereby each committee member has a special responsibility to maintain links with a group of 7 or 8 unions. This may lead to personal visits, but is usually done through correspondence. Another way in which EBWU has always tried to use the written word is in our magazine, News and Views. Publication is sometimes a little erratic, and, of course, we always have to work with the diversity of languages within Europe. Copies of the, English-language News and Views are sent to all unions, but a mailing list operates for individuals who wish to subscribe. Our comparatively low administration costs (all the officers are honorary posts) are met from the offering given at Day of Prayer services throughout Europe, but by far the greatest part of this offering is used to support women's training and projects in which women are involved all over Europe. A proportion of the offering also goes to the Women's Department and the worldwide projects it brings to our attention.

Thus we have supported old people's homes in Spain, Portugal, Latvia, (East) Germany and Wales; children's camps and orphanages in Poland, Portugal, Italy, Georgia, Hungary, plus Sunday School literature work in Finland and Estonia; retreat and conference centres in (East) Germany and Slovakia; church building in Israel and the Caucasus; individual training costs for a small number of women, and an ongoing financial commitment to the Seminary Institute for Training and Education (Prague) and the International Baptist Lay

Academy (Budapest); the women's project in Georgia (see below), and, a recent development, grants to enable national women's conferences to be held in several eastern European countries. We have not generally felt it right to be involved in specific fund-raising activities but the last five years, during the presidency of Hilde Sayers, have seen one very special development. As a result of the civil war in Georgia, CIS., the people of that country were suffering as great an extent of poverty as any seen in Romania, Yugoslavia etc. Hilde was invited to Georgia even before the fighting had entirely stopped, and with Baptist leaders and the local social security committee in Tbilisi evolved a way of helping some Baptist women to earn a small wage (supplied from EBWU funds), by visiting elderly and sick people especially among the refugee population of the capital, Tbilisi. The women agreed to tithe their small earnings so that the money supply would be at least partly self-renewing. That scheme, although not reaching as many women as we first hoped, is now in its fourth year, and has proved a means of encouragement and hope.

So far this was for EBWU a "normal" project, funded from Day of Prayer offerings. But more was to come. Because of the poverty, churches in Switzerland sent a large amount of practical aid; and, spurred on by women, churches in Pembrokeshire and Sussex joined to fill a lorry with food and clothing. This was followed by a container load of further necessities, to which groups in the Netherlands and Germany also contributed. So, we seemed to have joined the ranks of those churches, individuals and groups who were beating the aid trail to Eastern Europe. We were beginning to feel the need to reassess our involvement, and look again at our priorities, when God produced His biggest surprise for us. A story emerged from Georgia of a Baptist group, owning some land, who had a dream of growing sunflowers, processing the oil for commercial sales and thus generating income for pastors' salaries and church planting. In order to purchase the machinery for processing the sunflower oil, they had been offered a loan, from a Ukrainian Christian business man, but in their excitement had failed to notice the small print. The loan was being offered with an annual interest rate of 20%! Many years would have to pass before this loan could be cleared: their ministers would remain unpaid. Fortunately the offer of the loan co-incided with visit to Georgia of Hilde Sayers, who did read the small print. Her advice was heeded, but the oil project dream seemed to recede into the distance.

Hilde's anger at the selfishness behind the apparent generosity remained with her after her return to Britain, and it finally found a positive outlet in the setting up of a fund by the Women's Mission Network (BUGB). Women in

Baptist churches throughout Britain were challenged to give the cost of a bottle of sunflower oil (a normal part of most shopping lists) in order to purchase an oil pressing machine for use in Georgia. The target was £15,000. Within six months this total had been exceeded and together with gifts from other European women, reached the sum of £24,000. The oil press, with generators and other items of equipment, is now playing its part in the Baptist economy of Georgia.

I have told this episode at length, partly because we are still excited by how God moved so many hearts to contribute, but partly to highlight how it has given us cause to consider the way ahead. Many people are asking what our next project will be; we are asking whether God wants us to become more directly involved in fund raising. We believe so strongly that He gave us this project, and at present He does not seem to have another one "on a plate" for us, despite the mounting needs in many places. Again and again we come back to our original aim and purpose: the stimulation of closer fellowship, greater co-operation, deeper sympathy and understanding of mutual problems. It is obvious that the raising of money might make a great contribution to many of the problems experienced by our member unions. However our observations have led us to believe that where money raising becomes a named priority it tends to overshadow everything else. We will continue to offer sympathy and support through our mutual fellowship and co-operation, and we will trust that God will make plain any specific needs that He wishes us to meet. Our annual Executive meeting will continue to plan for those occasions when it is possible for women to meet together across national boundaries; we will continue to encourage communication in any possible way between our member unions; we will continue a supporting role of leading and teaching at national women's events, and we will continue to place great emphasis on the annual Day of Prayer gatherings.

For most of the first 50 years of the EBWU, the main impetus and input has had to come from western European leaders; since 1989 the eastern unions have developed with speed and confidence, and have immeasurably enriched our times of associating. In the future we shall look more and more for their spiritual insight and enthusiasm, as well as their gifts of leadership, evangelism and practical service, to carry on the work of encouragement, reconciliation and mission which is enshrined in our aim and purpose, which remains very necessary today, and which will be needed into the new millennium.

Yona Pusey is the Secretary of the European Baptist Women's Union which next year celebrates its Jubilee.

ASSOCIATING THROUGH ASSOCIATION

The trouble with having friends such as the Editor, is that they make requests of you which you feel unable to refuse! Hence I find myself writing an article on the life of the Association as a contribution to the current debate arising from the Denominational Consultation. He has asked me then to share something of the current life and work of the Lancashire and Cheshire Association. What is an Association? According to the Oxford Dictionary it can mean an '*organised body of persons for a joint purpose; a loose aggregation of molecules, mental connection between related ideas; a group of associated plants; fellowship; companionship.*' Associating on the other hand suggests '*joined in companionship, function, or dignity; allied partner; companion; colleague.*' Some of these definitions could make an interesting commentary on Association Life? - "A loose aggregation of Baptist molecules"!

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

We are an Association of 165 churches who have joined together to share in the mission of Christ to help one another advance the Kingdom. We measure our effectiveness by the way we fulfil our Aims and Objectives. These were set out in our 1989 Review document as follows: "The Aim of the Association is to serve as an instrument in the hand of God to:

- a) Enable each of its member churches to be as effective as possible in their mission for Christ and His Kingdom.
- b) Encourage and support the work and witness of the Baptist denomination in particular, and as it then has opportunity, that of other Christian churches generally.
- c) Take any other action which will advance Christ's Kingdom and which is consistent with the general aim of its member churches.

The Objectives are to:

- 1) Inspire, encourage, advise and help the churches in their:
 - ⇒ worship of God, prayer life and in the nurturing of Christians
 - ⇒ use of their members' personal and material resources for Christ
 - ⇒ pastoral care of church and congregation
 - ⇒ evangelism at home and abroad
 - ⇒ social action at home and abroad
 - ⇒ work among children, youth, women, men, and any other particular group
 - ⇒ training and use of lay preachers.
- 2) Provide occasions for inter-church fellowship, celebration and inspiration, and mutual support.

- 3) Provide opportunities for the teaching and training of pastors, lay preachers, Sunday School, Youth workers and others.
- 4) Co-operate with the Area Superintendent in his task of giving pastoral care and other practical help to the churches, including facilitating Home Mission support for Pastors.
- 5) Seek to obtain money for the Home Mission Fund and provide loans and help with special projects etc. to churches in need.
- 6) Undertake the responsibilities of the trusteeship of Association and church properties and moneys, and assist with the care and development of church premises.
- 7) Be responsive to the need for initiating new causes and giving appropriate assistance to them.
- 8) Co-operate with BMS headquarters and the BMS Northern representative in fostering interest in and support for the BMS.
- 9) Promote close relations with other Christians and churches.
- 10) Provide occasions for inter-church fellowship, celebration and inspiration, and mutual support."

ASSOCIATING TOGETHER IN FELLOWSHIP AND CELEBRATION

This year we have as our theme 'Pilgrimage'. On the occasion of our Assembly Day at Barrow in Furness, Cumbria, we tackled the theme through a Morning Celebration at which the Rev Norman Wade brought the biblical basis for pilgrimage. This was followed by a procession, with churches carrying banners to Furness Abbey where an open air musical cavalcade compered by Stuart Davison took us on a journey through the ages, reflecting the varied styles of Christian worship. Over 300 people shared in the event. Later in the year at Wallasey, there will be a multi media Family Celebration then we shall embark on a 3 hour ferry trip down the Mersey, continuing the theme, we anticipate almost 400 people sharing in that day. Each of our seven Districts had their own occasions for meeting together.

Some experiments are taking place within Districts. Some, whilst retaining an administrative structure, are meeting for fellowship and inspiration in groups of four or five churches and are reporting an increased interest and support as they share together in joint worship at times of festival, prayer concerts and mission evenings. Churches are also meeting together with link missionaries. We have seen an exciting development of partnership this year. At the end of 1996, a church whose pastor had just resigned, wondering what their future was approached the Association and the District to share their sense of discouragement and questioning of the future. Early in 1997 a Prayer Concert took place in the church involving local churches and the Association and out of that Celebration has come a new start. Another church in the area who were similarly wondering about their future were part of the evening. Six

months on, the two churches have agreed to merge and become a new church with a new name and with a fresh vision and enthusiasm to reach the estates around. They have become outward looking and confident that God has a mission for them to accomplish.

RESOURCING THE CHURCHES

We have found that one effective way of associating in serving our churches, has been to bring together those with specific responsibilities for training days. For example, Secretaries and Treasurers Days, which help them to fulfil their task in the local church. Among subjects covered have been the regulations regarding auditing and accounting; rules for listed buildings; guidelines on child protection; music copyright; taxation; investments; building and design regulations. Similar days for Church Music Leaders have also been held. Mission Action Days for Home Mission and BMS Representatives have also proved useful. With the Yorkshire Association, and CARE, a Conference for School Governors also proved an effective means of associating.

EVALUATING THE MISSION OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

Each year the Association undertakes the task through appointed evaluators of helping local churches to look at their worship and witness to enable them to grasp more effectively their mission opportunities. These have proved beneficial. For example, in one case it meant the members being able to own a vision the leadership had been seeking to share with them for eighteen months. This resulted in a new worship area and improved ancillary rooms which has enabled the church to enter a partnership with the local community and through which they have seen an expansion of their outreach and social ministries.

EVANGELISM AND SOCIAL ACTION

A working group seeks to encourage holistic mission. A survey carried out by the group revealed that over 50% of churches replying did not use any structure of training in mission or encourage people to attend courses to develop their gifts and talents. 25% of the churches did not have any significant link with any other church. We are now looking at ways of bringing a change of mind in such churches.

PARTNERSHIP WITH HUNGARY

As agents for the Fellowship of British Baptists, the Association has been developing links with Hungarian Baptists. Twinning has begun between churches. Teams have been formed to teach English as a foreign language and to help run Bible Clubs. These have proved very worthwhile. This resulted in one of our young people going as a volunteer for eighteen months to the International Bible Lay Academy on the outskirts of Budapest. They have asked us to find a replacement because her work had been so appreciated. In

addition, two people are now coming to the end of their first year of a two year commitment as volunteers working in the Baptist Theological Seminary in Budapest. LACABY (our young people's group), along with one of our churches, provided money to purchase property for conversion as a hostel for teenagers coming out of institutional care in the town of Székesfehérvár. Two members from Mills Hill Baptist Church have shared their professional expertise in social work in developing this project through a number of visits. An invitation for preachers to share in an evangelistic weekend in March 1998 in Hungary has been arranged. We have much to learn from Hungarian Christians. In a visit made, I was challenged by the holistic approach of Hungarian Baptists. All the churches visited, whether large or small, had in addition to their evangelistic zeal, a practical outworking of the gospel in social ministries. Hostels for the homeless, adoption agencies, drop in centres, feeding the homeless on the streets to mention a few.

CHURCH PLANTING AND EVANGELISM COURSE

As one of the partners along with OASIS, Spurgeon's College, The Church Army, Northern College, and the other Associations in the North and Midlands, we have been encouraged by the development of courses which provide training for local church members encouraging person to person evangelism as well as church mission and the planting of new churches. Helen Wordsworth, having established the training courses, has now been succeeded by Wayne Clarke.

NEW FORM OF PARTNERSHIP

As one of the three Areas chosen for the experiment in Home Mission, our churches and the Association have discovered greater ownership in meeting the needs of those churches whose mission needs full time ministry and could not be fulfilled without Home Mission money. As a consequence of the experiment, over 60 of our churches are now giving by Standing Order. The debates at District, Grants Committee and Council have produced a much livelier interest and sense of relevance which can only be beneficial to the work of the Kingdom. Out of this debate have come decisions to appoint a new Youth Officer and an Association Missioner. Both appointees will spend 50% of their time in a local church situation and the rest in sharing their insights and gifts in encouraging the Churches of the Association and LACABY in their youth ministries and mission opportunities. We are looking to sharing in partnership with Oasis as far as the Youth Ministry is concerned.

TRUST CORPORATION

Our Association is one of a number who have trust responsibilities and are a registered company. As part of the fulfilling of this task, in addition to dealing with trusteeships and making loans, we also invest money on behalf of local

churches and are able in this way to enhance their stewardship providing extra resources for the work they seek to do in their local communities.

BAPTIST MISSIONARY SOCIETY

We work with Cath Mawson, the Northern Co-ordinator in presenting the work of BMS and encouraging the support of churches. We now take responsibility for the election of General Committee members and encourage their participating in presenting the new strategy of the Society at Association, District and Local church. A number of our young people have taken part in 28/19 Action Teams, following on from LACABY who arranged their own team to go to El Salvador.

MINISTERIAL MATTERS

The Association through its Ministerial Recognition and Area Pastoral committees helps our Area Superintendent, Keith Hobbs, to fulfil the pastoral care of churches and ministers.

CHURCHES TOGETHER

We play our part in ecumenical partnership. Most significantly, through the participation of Keith Hobbs as one of the three church leaders in Merseyside as Free Church Moderator. Many of our churches are finding ways of witnessing together with their brothers and sisters from other denominations in local groupings. We benefit from the participation of local ecumenical officers in our Council.

In conclusion, having worked for the last 8 years as General Secretary of an Association co-terminus with an Area for which a Superintendent has responsibility, and having been part of an Association Team consisting of Superintendent, Youth Officer, BMS representative, and Church Planting & Evangelism Co-ordinator, I am persuaded that our Associating for mission needs three levels. Some is best done nationally, some regionally and some more locally in groupings of four or five churches.

Chris Haig is the General Secretary of one of our largest Baptist Associations -in Lancashire and Cheshire.

ASSOCIATIONS AND ASSOCIATING EARLY REFLECTIONS.

At the time of writing I have been in post as Association Secretary for five months. In that time I have visited our Association's churches to introduce myself - it helps to have a face as well as a name in mind. Going around, I have appreciated the welcome and opportunity to listen and have found a readiness to talk about what is good and what is lacking in the organisation. There is a variety in the churches of our Association that is probably reflected in many other areas - a mixture of urban, estate and village settings. Some churches are in ecumenical partnerships. There are "Association-minded" churches and others, in Bernard Ingham's phrase, that are "semi-detached". Perhaps you recognise your own situation here?



What do I mean by "Association minded"? In general I mean places where there is an awareness of the Association by minister and congregation but in particular where individuals from that church are active participants in some way in Association life. It is often these people who get to know members of other churches; they get around, they relate. Rather mundane, I know, but such people are a vital part of Association life because they are a living bridge. Participation in the structures will always be a minority sport yet so much of the atmosphere of an Association depends upon personal contacts. Associating must remain the province of more than church leaders, for though the rate of turnover of ministers within a given area will have a direct bearing on the quality of co-operation, for effective partnership committed people are the greatest asset.

At the end of *Christianity and History*, Herbert Butterfield advised "Hold to Christ and for the rest be uncommitted". He could have been describing the sort of *laissez-faire* attitude that has intermittently permeated our gathered church ecclesiology and has passively encouraged the independence of congregations over against interdependence, threatening to define our congregational relationships on a purely functional level. A healthy communal outlook does not fall ready made from the sky, it needs to be sown, tended and nurtured. Left to just happen, it may happen, just. Associating comes neither by magic nor without effort and if we want progress we must work at it. Priorities must be made to develop and guide planning and I want to pick out three: the will to mission, desire for fellowship and the search for mature Christian discipleship. These I bracket together as inextricably interwoven and it will easily be allowed that these ought to be on the agenda of every fellowship. Part of the rationale of our structures for associating should be to encourage

the churches in what they are doing, recognising good practice and offering new opportunities for partnership, discovering, as did Worlock and Shepherd, that it can be done better together.

Much of the current debate has uncovered a widespread need to associate and therefore the need to adopt structures that best express this. We smile at the camel which is a horse designed by a committee yet we are so keen to discover and implement the golden rule, the corporate blueprint. It is our El Dorado, masking the simple truth that each Association is different, made distinctive by geography, history, personnel and resources, and any genuine attempt to maintain a framework for co-operation will recognise this. Each Association has to work out its priorities and organise to allow these to happen. Whether we aim for greater participation in the structures, offer more opportunities for exchange or programmes of training and development or devise a cohesive plan for mission (and perhaps all of these) they will require the commitment of people, resources, finance and time.

The question is inevitable: what will you give to make this happen? Would you interrupt your church programme to support an Association initiative? Would you 'lend' a gifted member for an Association project? What works well in relationships between churches needs to be encouraged and promoted; what obstructs needs reviewing. All our structures are provisional within the broader agenda of God's purposes for humankind so we ought not to be scared of taking long hard looks at the outward expressions of our commitment to associate - Assemblies, Presidents, committee membership and function, strategies and use of resources and the rest - to see whether they are answering questions that are no longer posed. This is evolution rather than bloody revolution, a process where consultation has its place and ownership of ideas and changes is sought but firm decisions are still taken.

All Associations have skeletons. What they must have is heart. And the heart of our structures is belonging. As we share in the Spirit of God, so we belong to one another in Christ. We are part of all sorts of institutions: the local library, our local church, our family, friends, place of employment. Where on the scale of belonging do we place Association life? To many (too many), being part of Association equals meetings. This may not be possible. Distance, age or the difficulty of travel as well as busyness or indifference may hinder attendance. Association is more than getting together. Perhaps this will mean the minority represents the aspirations and needs of the majority, so let us make sure they do it well. And for the others, the least we can do is to be informed about other local churches to pray meaningfully for them - associating can start on our knees.

Mere geography is no longer sufficient reason to expect churches' loyalty (should we follow local government and speak of Baptist unitary districts?).

An Association will have relevance inasmuch as it fosters giving and receiving, mutual enhancement in our Christian calling and an authentic exchange of resources that includes finance, personnel, ideas and example. The old myth that Associations really exist for the benefit of the small churches should be decently buried, for this has often acted to relieve the larger (and usually better resourced) churches of the responsibility of seriously taking into account the experience of those who are unlike them. In contrast, the insight of the Baptist Union report *Half the Denomination* (1985), still to receive full recognition, is that not every small church is a large church waiting to happen. Each church has a genuine and unique journey of its own, dependent on location, people and opportunity. We need Associations capable of appreciating that diversity. Belonging is crucially more than attendance and yet people mainly get to know each other by meeting. Here is a circle to be squared. How to get people who rarely or never meet to be convinced and committed to feel part of a greater whole? It is a paradox for many pastors seeking to motivate the 'fringers'. In Association life too, we can have enthusiastic promoters, imaginative and exciting plans. We can explore ways of enabling more participation in the structures and be bold in developing dynamic and creative patterns of working, with short term groupings or special interest projects or committees with a limited shelf life alongside standing committees that give a steady framework. We can design clear strategies that aim to harness the diverse visions of the churches. And yet we may find that still only a small percentage of church members is involved, which provokes the question, whether participation is the proper yardstick for Association effectiveness? Perhaps we simply need to learn the worth of trust.

The desire to congregate is a common human feeling. It is there as our seventeenth century Baptist predecessors were inspired to associate. An Association is a strange animal. It owes its existence to the churches but in giving it life they endow it with a spirit of its own, at its best a profound echo of the universal Church in a way that eludes the local congregation in isolation, and yet without the willingness of the churches to resource (in the broadest sense) the Association, it will atrophy. In 1652 representatives of several Baptist congregations of what historians have called the Abingdon Association came together for their first General Meeting. They affirmed that they were "bound to hold Communion.... firstly because there is the same relation betwixt the particular churches each towards other as there is betwixt particular members of one church." Now, there's a discussion starter.

Stephen Copson. Stephen is the new General Secretary of the Hertfordshire Baptist Association. *This article is drawn from an address which was given at the AGM of Hertfordshire Baptist Association in June 1997.*

ASSOCIATING WITH THE POOR

Christian Aid is one of the channels through which Baptists associate with the poor. Supporting work in Latin America, Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe, it works particularly through ecumenical structures, but is not restricted to them. Its priority is to be as effective as possible in serving the poor of the world: through the financial support of partner groups working alongside the poor in 60 countries, through resourcing the churches here with prayer and worship material, bringing understanding from other expressions of the Christian faith from around the world, through education and campaigning about issues of international poverty and injustice in the community at large. These are not the only matters the Church here is concerned about, but our care of the poor should be a major priority if the Judgement scene of Matt. 25 is taken seriously. From "the people of all nations", the righteous selected to possess the Kingdom are those who have met the various needs of the poor. There is no suggestion here that a faith profession will have anything to do with separating the righteous from the "others".



Christian Aid has hundreds of partner groups, some of which are part of local church organisation (sometimes denominational, often ecumenical), others are run with a Christian ethos, some are secular, run by those of other faiths, or a combination of any of these. There is a sense in which supporting churches and individuals here are "associating", with the recipients, through their gifts, prayers, and campaigning. Earlier this year, I spent three weeks in Sri Lanka where some of Christian Aid's Christian partners are "associating" with Buddhists (among others), indeed they are active partners together. In the south there are only a scattering of Christian Churches, so if Christians do not work with Buddhists (98% of the population of the south) it would be closed to us supporting any development work. Through financial support for Christian Aid, we are indirectly "associating" with Buddhists and others, in serving the needs of the poor. I wonder if that thought disturbs you? - even if those involved serve the poor more effectively than the Christians could do on their own. Few Baptists or other Christians in our multi-faith areas here "associate" with local Muslim, Hindu or other communities, to work alongside them in serving the needs of the poor of their neighbourhoods. Indeed, it is often hard enough to persuade people from the churches even to collect from the Asian community in Christian Aid Week.

Poverty's problems and root causes are much the same the world over. While I was in Sri Lanka and South India I was approached by people begging on

just three occasions. But if I walk for 20 minutes from my office to the centre of Manchester, I can be accosted as many times. Financial poverty is a worldwide problem, relative to the wealth of the whole community. Did you notice that I was "approached" while abroad, but "accosted" in Manchester? - even our language when dealing with such issues can give away deeply held attitudes even prejudices, which can be critical to the perception of the reader or listener. Christian Aid's 1994 independently commissioned report "The Gospel, the Poor and the Churches" explored attitudes to poverty at home and abroad among the churches of the UK. It showed that people are far less sympathetic to the poor "on the street" here than abroad, where it appears easier to recognise people are at the mercy of forces beyond their control. We find it hard to accept society is so divided and uncaring, that some people see no alternative to living on our streets.

The following figures for the UK (from the Child Poverty Action Group) were quoted in the Scripture Union's SALT material in June. The figures are of those "living in poverty" ie below 50% of the average income. [The % increases are my calculations.]

	1979	1992	increase
Pensioner couples	21%	28%	33%
Single pensioners	12%	40%	233%
Couples with children	8%	24%	200%
Couples with no children	5%	12%	140%
Lone parents	19%	59%	163%
Single people	7%	22%	214%

These figures show an increasingly serious problem of poverty for the UK to face. Our churches need to relate to their communities, devising relevant programmes of service with them. But the churches in the areas where there is greatest need, are usually those whose members are most hard pressed themselves, and so least able to respond effectively. Baptists within Associations and in different parts of the country, differ widely in the financial and other resources they have to offer. Redistribution of resources between churches is the purpose of Home Mission, enabling opportunities in mission and service to be taken, where a church is eager to get involved but has weak financial resources; and feeding these stories back to the churches. This in itself is a form of associating.

Christian Aid is the same kind of channel, redistributing financial resources from the UK to poor communities around the world, where there is the enterprise and energy to improve their situation, but the resources are lacking to put plans into action, and reflecting stories and ideas back to us in the UK. Just as some churches dare not raise their sights above mere survival, lacking

the vision and confidence to take any initiative, so some communities are not ready in terms of inspiration or commitment to take part in their own development. Working alongside the poor anywhere is never easy, it is a battle against the forces of greed and indifference which created their poverty in the first place, and continue to grind down the most optimistic. Such work requires total commitment and is rarely blessed with success - rather, success has to be measured in different ways. However, it is romantic claptrap to suggest that materially poor communities are "spiritually rich", when many are reduced to the point of despair, by long experience of oppression and injustice.

Associating is fine when it is done between people who have a common commitment and expectations, but there is a real danger when "associating with the poor" that the wealthy automatically take a dominant position in the relationship, because of the mutual recognition of their wealth. Such a role may not be sought, but because of the vast difference in financial resources, it may be assumed by both parties. This applies particularly to communities abroad where financial differences will be greater. A Sri Lankan community leader on the tea estates asked what we were doing about Northern Ireland. For him it was important we were involved in (what he perceived to be) our major justice issue at home; if we were involved we had a right to stand alongside him and his community, if not, we had no right to be there. He was perceptive enough to sweep aside any financial aspect of our relationship and get to the core of our "association".

The gap between the richest and poorest worldwide is huge. Direct linking across a wide economic divide is fraught with problems, the bottom line of which is money. Any international associating is best done on any terms other than financial, certainly for a period of, say, two years, until the relationship is established on other mutually agreed basis. Money distorts relationships when one partner has lots and the other little. Feelings of obligation on the part of the recipients can be strong, in some cases a "sugar Daddy" mentality can develop. Even carelessly chosen photographs of homes and possessions (eg car and caravan), and the simplest of gifts from our point of view, can raise tremendous expectations, embarrassment and feelings of inadequacy, in others. Sponsorship of individual children carries the same potential difficulties. Visits to other communities can be wonderful experiences for us, and we may help with some practical project, but don't kid yourselves that they are ever of as much benefit to those visited as to the visitor. We gain an experience to last a life time, they receive us graciously, give us hospitality, and have their everyday lives and priorities disrupted by our visit. Perhaps they will gain from a shared practical activity, and the assurance of our concern, but our interest can very easily be overtaken by more pressing matters on our return. They then feel rejected, which damages their morale.

Visits from associates in other parts of the world to the UK can raise their expectations, creating dissatisfaction with their own lives, limited possessions and communities. Great care needs to be taken over who represents each community in any visiting - internal politics and nepotism can develop (either way). Much of this is worst case scenario, but be realistic about some of the pitfalls.

We may become bored with putting money into Home Mission, unless it produces super-success stories, or BMS unless we hear of phenomenal conversions. We are all tainted with the same "worldly brush" as those around us, so we look for the exotic, we seek success, we want to make a difference. "I know, why don't we link with a Third World community? I met someone from Nicaragua when I was at a conference last year, I'll contact him!" We are so caught up in the travel culture of our times that we want to visit our "pet community", providing it is far enough away. But please don't link us with a nearby inner city church, where we might actually be able to visit regularly and even get involved practically in their situation - that's too much like hard work and real commitment!

A local organiser in a group travelling to South India, viewing CA supported project work, returned to become involved in Church Action on Poverty, heavily committed to running the local mobile "soup kitchen" in her large home town. Her visit made her realise that CA partners are only trying to do in their communities what she should be doing in her own. CAP with its campaigning and practical expression locally was the answer for her. Perhaps reading about Sue here will mean someone else doesn't have to travel the world, to hear the Gospel message to serve the poor. As people moved to the cities in the Industrial Revolution, the message of personal responsibility in matters of faith was one individuals responded to eagerly, as every other aspect of their lives was restricted by their factory bosses and their own poverty. The Chapel was in a very real sense "their community". Association between such communities became a vital support. The Free Churches played a critical role in the development of the Trades Unions, as workers sought justice. The Christian Church in many parts of the world is at a similar stage of development now. Associating is a great strength to them in their struggles for justice. I wonder whether our "travel money" wouldn't be more effectively spent encouraging "associating" between the peoples of the south, who would gain much strength from each other's support and experiences.

I close with some words from the Roman Catholic theologian Albert Nolan: "There can be no doubt that what Jesus said and did was good news for the poor and bad news for the rich and powerful. . . The community of the future belongs to the poor, and the rich will not be able to enter it, any more than a

camel would be able to pass through the eye of a needle. . . The only way that the Gospel can be, in the final analysis, good news for all, is by being in the first instance, good news for the poor. The best thing that could happen to the rich would be for them to hear and be challenged by the good news for the poor." The closer we are associating with the poor, the more likely we are to hear and understand the good news Jesus brought.

John Logan is Christian Aid Area Co-ordinator for Greater Manchester. He is in membership at Wigan Baptist Church.

BULGARIA

AN ASSOCIATION LINK

"Networking" is one of the "in" words. This is true of the world at large; it is also true of the work of the Church. Mainstream sees itself as part of a Network, as does the Baptist Union and our Associations. "Network" is a word that acts as a kind of thread through all that the Southern Association has done in its relationship with the Bulgarian Baptist Union. It began at a meeting held in the early 90's at Swanwick organised by the Baptist World Alliance, (itself a network), to discuss the issue of Church Planting. Along with Geoffrey Reynolds, the Southern Area Superintendent, I attended this consultation. Also there was George Oprenov, a ministerial student at the London Bible College, who was acting as interpreter for his father and another member of the Baptist Church in Bulgaria. George had been able to come to Britain, following the collapse of Communism in Bulgaria two years earlier, with the support of the Saltmine Trust. Saltmine, and its predecessor, the Movement for World Evangelization, have been involved in Bulgaria for many years, long before the more recent reforms.

Conversations with George showed that the Baptist family in Bulgaria was still very small, though it had doubled its membership in the previous two years to 3000 members. What we noted was a concern for real growth and their longing for help in this from the wider fellowship. Part of the reason for this was that since the changes there had been an influx of "help" from many para-church organisations who were not always sufficiently sensitive to the Bulgarian culture and evangelical situation. This was confirmed when Geoffrey Reynolds, June Roberts (our President at the time) and I went out to Sofia to meet with Theo Angelov (President), Boshidah Igoff (General Secretary) and other leaders of the Bulgarian Baptist Union. What impressed us was that they were not looking for the West to give them material help.

They listed three priorities, Prayer, Fellowship and help in providing Training for their pastors. At the time they had 30 pastors but none of them, including Theo Angelov and Boshidah Igoff, had had any theological training. George Oprenov was to be their first trained pastor.

We saw that here was a people, with a great opportunity, and a real zeal to meet it, who could fail because of a lack of resources. The real danger was that they could be overwhelmed by misguided support from the West. While rejoicing in the dramatic growth that the new freedoms had brought, Boshidah Igoff nevertheless noted that "The changes had led to our importing disunity". Zealous groups coming in and bringing their own gospel packages along with a rather heavy reliance on money, had resulted in a theological divergence that had not been there previously. This was compounded by young potential leaders being tempted into working for para-church groups on the promise of higher salaries, training in the West, expense accounts, and cars etc. Hearing this cry for help, the Southern Association were pleased to respond to the invitation to become the BUGB Association link with the Bulgarian Baptist Union. As part of this associating, we have been able to link up eleven of our churches. We also keep in contact with other churches in other parts of England who have links with Bulgarian Churches.

All this is "Networking", but it has also involved us with others working in Bulgaria. June and John Roberts represent us on the Bulgaria Support Group established by the Evangelical Alliance. It meets three times a year and keeps us up-to-date with political, economic and religious developments as well as giving opportunity to participate in relief and aid projects through the various organisations represented. This is important because Bulgaria is a place of constant change. While some of the previous problems still exist; they have now been added to. There was such an expectation laid on the new reformed Government to change the living standards of the average Bulgarian which could not be realised. A mafia developed making it even worse and in a general election the nation returned to power those who previous had been Communists. By the autumn of 1996 inflation was running at over 1000%. Many of the banks had had to close, at least for a while, and it was obvious that there was the potential for massive starvation in the coming winter. At one point even the Government were predicting that 300,000 people would probably die of hunger related illnesses during the winter.

The winter was hard. It would have been more difficult had it not been that this small denomination, with the support of the European Baptist Federation, Saltmine and ourselves, had not raised support to provide food parcels to help the poorest through a frightening time. The Socialist government, who had been extremely hostile to evangelical Christians, even wrote a letter of

appreciation for what had happened. We are pleased to say that a reformist government has now be re-established. There are encouraging signs already from their administration, but no one is in doubt that next winter will still be very hard. But it has not just been in relief that our links have been valuable. We have been prayer supporters; and we have been able to give help in their need of training for pastors. Four others have been trained at Spurgeon's College to return to their land as church leaders. While in this country our churches have been able to give practical support and hospitality to these students. They in return have kept us up-to-date with the prayer needs.

Our churches on the Isle of Wight have given special support to the churches at Sandanski and Gotshe Delchev. At present a young lady from Gotshe Delchev, Mihaela Chobanova, has just completed a "Time for God" project at Newport Baptist and is hoping to study for a degree at Moorlands College, in our area, to prepare for missionary service. The Isle of Wight churches are supporting her. We have been also been able to give hospitality to Theo Angelov and Boshidah Igoff when in this country and also to Ivo Konstantinov who heads up the youth work for the Bulgarian BU. Only 22, Ivo, a student in tourism, seeks to draw together the many young people in their churches. On his first visit to England he amazed us all with his remarkable command of the English language. He also attended our Area Ministers' Conference and spoke vividly about the church in his homeland. One of the problems we have had to overcome is that of communication and getting money out to Bulgaria. The development in recent days of electronic mail has been very helpful. Teddi Oprenov, one of the students trained at Spurgeon's and now assistant pastor to Theo Angelov at Sofia Baptist Church is on the Internet, and we can communicate easily with him. We have also been fortunate that one of our Church Secretaries has had to visit Sofia regularly on business and he has become a courier for us and other churches supporting the church in Bulgaria. The benefit of this link-up to the churches of this Association is primarily in what all Networking does for us; it makes us aware that our faith is not just our personal relationship with our Lord, but that together we are the Body of Christ. The Baptist family in Bulgaria is part of that Body; so too are all those other organisations and churches that are seeking to support them. As an Association we feel that we have brothers and sisters in Bulgaria who are family.

Frank Boyd. Frank is the Secretary of the Southern Baptist Association.

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THANKYOU.

We would like to order the following numbers of copies of the Mainstream - a Word and Spirit Network Magazine for 1997/8

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Mainstream news - where do we want to be as Mainstream, God willing, by the Summer of 2001?

Roger Sutton has prepared a paper summarizing a recent brainstorming session by the Executive during its meeting at Hothorpe Hall, Leicestershire. This was shared with the Council of Reference at our meeting in Sutton Coldfield on Wednesday July 9th 1997. From it a number of suggestions for the future emerged which will be shared next with the Conference in January 1998. Here is a taster of some of it:

- We would hope to see Word and Spirit groupings accessible to all within, say an hour's drive.
- We judge that we should concentrate our energies on Englandbut we hope and pray to see Word and Spirit Networks emerging under God in Ireland, Scotland and Wales.
- We would like to offer training teams and opportunities to local churches and/or regional leaders. These occasions would need to be cumulative and not 'hit and run' occasions. They would have to be relational and not structures-based. An accompanying brochure with team details and potential programmes would be produced.
- Might our annual Conference be supplemented by regional ones?
- The role of the Council of Reference, as previously agreed, needs to be reassessed when we meet at Swanwick in January 1998. *Do we continue with a few Directors, a small Executive and a Council of Reference as at present? Or do we enlarge the Executive, from the Council of Reference, and turn it into a National Leadership Team with stronger regional representation and with a paid co-ordinator (*) working alongside the Directors eg secretary, treasurer, conference administrator, chairpersons, magazine editor. A co-ordinator - full or part-time - will cost between £10,000 - £20,000. If this is the way forward how would this be funded?*
- How do we avoid the temptation of assuming that by changing our structures we are actually having any meaningful mission impact? Where *should* our energies go in the next three years?
 - ⇒ Regionally?
 - ⇒ National Leadership team?
 - ⇒ Paid Co-ordinator?
 - ⇒ Status Quo?

Answers on a sheet of A1 paper please...

The Executive

BAPTIST UNION HEALTH AND HEALING CONFERENCE

- 'Cul-de-sac Crisis'

We have received details of this Conference to be held this Autumn from October 20th - 22nd 1997. The speakers are Tom Brown, Director of Green Pastures and Michael Jones, Secretary of the BUGB Health & Healing Group. Full programmes and further details are available from: Revd Michael Jones at 13 Brassey Avenue, Broadstairs, Kent CT10 2DS.

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South West: *awaiting leadership .*

The Executive are always happy to include new names and groupings here. Please let the Editor know of these ...preferably in writing.

(*) Please note that not all these groups describe themselves as Word and Spirit Networks but *all* share similar aims.

The Mainstream **Council of Reference** in 1997 are :

John Brewster - Retford	Dave Cave - Wales
Ian Coffey - Plymouth	Andy Cowley - Bushey
Jeffrey Fewkes- Wales	Mike Fuller - Coventry
Ian Furlong - Warwick	Stephen Gaukroger - Chalfont St Peter
Terry Griffith - Bexleyheath	Steven Hembery - Crawley
Michael Hooton - Ilkeston	Steve Ibbotson - Leeds
Paul Jackson - Paddington	John James - Penarth
Vivienne Lasseter - Didcot	Rupert Lazar - West Croydon
Mike Nicholls - Bromley	Peter Nodding - Guildford
Ron Overton - Colchester	Michael Quicke - Spurgeon's College
Lisa Rush - Skipton	Roy Searle - Northumbria Community
David Slater - Chippenham	David Spriggs - Bible Society
Roger Standing - W. Croydon	Susan Stevenson - Chatsworth, London.
Peter Swaffield - Berkhamsted	Jane Thorington-Hassell - Bow, London
John Weaver - Regents', Oxford	Nigel Wright - Altrincham

The Council meets again at Swanwick on Monday January 12th 1998

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