



NEWS, ARTICLES AND STORIES

FROM

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SUSAN OSBORNE

New Years message from the President

The President of the Baptist Churches of New Zealand is formally an Officer of the Baptist Union and takes on the voluntary role for a year. Susan Osborne was elected in November 2023 and is a member of Trinity Baptist Church, Titahi Bay, Wellington.

John and I have recently returned from four weeks in India and Bangladesh. I was not looking forward to this trip, particularly the long flights to and from. I think I'm too old for that sort of travel.

But God surprised me! – And this time turned out to be a time of blessing and thanks for what God has done over the last few years.

We spent the first Sunday at our 'old' Bengali church. What an encouragement this was to us. When we began attending this church over 20 years ago, there were often only 4–5 of us in the congregation. This Sunday, the hall was full, with half the congregation being women and girls from our freedom businesses. One of them was leading the service, another read the bible, and all joined in worshipping Jesus, their Saviour and Lord. On the way home, there were 18 of us on the bus, all singing songs of praise. I was a bit nervous about this, but nothing was going to stop these girls.

What an answer to our prayers and yours for this very disadvantaged community – to see these women, two from Joyya and the rest from LCA, expressing and living their new life of Hope.

We were in Chandpur the second Sunday, attending the memorial service for a dear friend and colleague, Mona Borman. The church was packed, and a good percentage of us lasted the three hours of memories and thanksgiving for a life of service to God. Mona came from a poor Christian home and became an



The Baptist People podcast show shines a light on some of the interesting, motivated and dedicated people from our faith community. You can listen to the audio episodes online: baptist.nz/podcasts

Do you have any stories of gospel renewal in your community?

You can share them by emailing stories@baptist.org.nz

Feedback

If you would like to give feedback on this newsletter, write to our Communications Director at the Baptist Support Centre: **P O Box 12 149, Penrose, Auckland 1642, New Zealand.**

extraordinary evangelist and pastoral care worker among the churches in the district. John had spent hours mentoring Mona, who went on to get a Bachelor of Theology and become a national leader in the Bangladesh church. His greatest gift was his compassion for others, particularly those less fortunate than himself.

What an answer to our prayers and yours to hear of the wonderful contribution Mona made to his community.

On our third Sunday, we went to a local Baptist church in Dhaka. We arrived right at 6 pm when the service was meant to start, and we were disappointed to find the auditorium less than half full. But an hour later, they were putting out extra chairs and moving chairs forward to fit all of those who wanted to attend the service. We enjoyed the Bengali music, some with traditional Christmas rhythms, bringing back so many memories for us of Christmas celebrated Bengali style. The founding pastor and his wife were from Chandpur, and they built up this amazing, vibrant fellowship over many years. There is a very capable, well-trained young pastor there now, leading the church in their regular two-and-a-half-hour services! A bit of a shock to our systems. What a joy to worship with around 200 local believers, with not another foreigner in sight. The service ended with my very favourite Bengali hymn written by William Carey. My heart and soul were overflowing with thankfulness to our faithful God.

Then, we met with Rev. Leor Sarkar and listened to him share the achievements of the Bangladesh Baptist Church Fellowship and their plans for the future. What a privilege for us New Zealand Baptists to share in that vision.

What an answer to our prayers and yours for the growth of an indigenous church in this country where Christians make up 0.3% of the population.

Sometimes, we can be discouraged when we don't see the fruit of our hard work and prayers. But as I reflect on these recent experiences, I know I can continue to trust God to work in His way in His time. To answer our prayers and build His kingdom.

As we look over 2023 and review all that we have prayed for and worked for, let us remember God's faithfulness. As we move into the new year

of 2024, may we hold on to the faithfulness of God, stepping out in confidence that "He who has called us is faithful, and He will do it." 1 Thessalonians 5:24

Photo supplied: Susan talking with Rev. Leor Sarkar, General Secretary, Bangladesh Baptist Church Fellowship

GLENIS SILBY

Reflections of a Children and Families Pastor



This article is reproduced from the New Zealand Baptist Children and Families December 2023 eConnect newsletter.

"Hi. My name is Glenis, and I'm the Children's and Family Pastor at Blockhouse Bay Baptist Church." These are the words I have used to introduce myself for the past 24 years – 18 as a paid church staff member and six years before that in a voluntary capacity.

Over these years, I have seen many changes. I have worked with three Senior Pastors, three Interim Pastors, three Youth Pastors, and three other Associate Pastors.

More than that, I've seen how society has changed and how those changes have influenced churches, families, and parenting. Those changes have also impacted the way we do Children's Ministry.

In this article, I'd like to reflect on some of the things I learned in almost a quarter of a century as a Children's Pastor. I share these, not because I'm an expert but because throughout all those years, I was a student constantly learning from others and from the children I had the pleasure of walking alongside in the early stages of their faith journey. Here are some of the things I have picked up along the way.

It's a calling

I believe a child can make an informed faith decision. As Children's Pastors, we are often seen as the fun Pastors keeping the children occupied while 'real church' happens in the auditorium. But our role is way more important than that. Our calling is one of sharing the faith in a way that children can understand and then calling them to respond to it. Then, we work to grow them in their faith as we help them connect with God and experience the truths of His word. Without these things, a children's programme is mere entertainment.

It can't be done alone

As a Children's Pastor, regardless of how much experience, I couldn't do it all on my own. Thankfully, over the years, I've seen an increase in support with the introduction of coaches, cluster groups, and networking to resource and inspire those who work with children. There has also been an increase in combined working relationships between different denominations encouraged by organisations like Scripture Union. I've found these times of meeting with like-minded people inspirational and vital. My advice to any Children's Pastor, paid or volunteer, would be to make certain you have a group like this you are a part of. We need each other!

You can't do it on your own on Sunday either. I've had the privilege of having many awesome team members make up my Children's Ministry team. Some were parents of children in my kids' programme; others were young people who had been part of the children's ministry just a few years before. It was exciting and humbling to have them working alongside me now as leaders. This is one of the greatest joys of long-term ministry as the relationship changes from one of teacher to mentor. The time spent encouraging, equipping, and building your Children's Ministry team is crucial to a vibrant kids' programme.

Training – Keep doing it!

It's pleasing that the need for children's workers to be trained has been recognised, and many churches have allowed for it in their budgets. I have enjoyed courses run at Carey Baptist College and other training events, which helped me to grow in confidence in my role. It is essential to take up

training opportunities for yourself and your team whenever you can.

Know your place!

'It takes a village to raise a child', but as Rachel Turner writes in her book, 'It takes a church to raise a parent.'

Over the years, in many churches, the role of Children's Pastor has changed to Children and Families Pastor in recognition of the place the church needs to take in helping to equip parents to nurture the faith of their kids - not take their place. When I ran different family events, "faith @ home" courses, and just recently Rachel Turner's "Parenting for Faith" course, the response was overwhelmingly positive as parents both understood they were perfectly placed as parents to be the greatest influence in shaping their children's faith and were given the tools to do it. It is great to journey alongside parents in this way.

Encourage opportunities for the kids

Involving the children in the service gave them a chance to share what they'd learned and, at the same time, declare their faith. Special Sunday services were run by the children once or twice a year. As I talk to young adults now, the stories from the Bible they remember the most are the ones they were part of retelling to the church as they helped to bring it to life for them. (Especially Mt Sinai with the smoke machine and flashing lights).

It's important also to provide serving opportunities. This can be simple but important tasks such as the church notices, collecting the offerings, greeting at the door, and especially praying for others, which should happen regularly. I also involved the children in service for people outside the church, baking and packaging for the food bank, cleaning community pantries, and supplying and delivering parcels to families. Create opportunities for your kids to ignite their passion for serving others.

Connect with the community

Community events can bring families into the church with the belief that they will have a positive experience, build relationships with people in our church community, and want to come back to know more about Jesus. Our Hair-Raising Hat Party (an alternative to Halloween) was one such

event that encouraged our kids and parents to invite their friends and start great conversations about what the church offered. Over the 23 years I ran this event, many families have returned to our Christmas services or have joined our church community as a result. Find your mark in your community – what is your church known for?

Intergenerational Relationships

Something that I did early on was to ensure that the children were in the church service for some time so they could be part of the worship and prayer. I also found Prayer Buddies for each group of kids in my children's ministry. These 'older' people would come into our programme regularly to spend time with the children. They would pray for and with them, look out for them when they arrive at church, send cards, bring in birthday cakes, and more. They would also get to know the parents and tell them they were praying for their family. The children would also pray for the prayer buddies and send notes home to them.

In the last ten years or so, a lot of research has been done, and books have been written about the benefits of churches being more intergenerational. This is something that I grew to be more intentional about as I learned more, encouraged senior leadership, and communicated with parents, helping them to see that having their children in the service with them is a great opportunity – not a time to be absent from church because “there is nothing for the kids.” We have constantly tried to become more intergenerational in the way we run our services – especially during the holidays when the children's programme doesn't run. Social events were also done in such a way as to encourage intergenerational relationships to flourish, remembering that we are family and every age group can contribute. We are all the body of Christ.

Keep the main thing – the main thing

With all the changes and influences in society, it is easy to get distracted as to what we should be doing. Parents often don't understand the role we have and can feel that, as long as their child is happy coming and behaving themselves, then we are doing our job well, but we need to stay true to our calling. I tried to do that by constantly referring to the Mission Statement we wrote 24

years ago for the Children's work at Blockhouse Bay and holding firm to the verse I adopted as the motto. I constantly communicated this to parents and the rest of the church.

Mission Statement: To provide a safe nurturing environment, where we can work alongside parents to see the children come to know God as their Lord and Saviour and grow in Him.

Verse: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. Deuteronomy 6:5

Finally, my 24 years in ministry have been made even more fulfilling and rewarding because I have been around long enough to see some of the fruit. I know some are not living for God now, and I grieve for them, but as I sit in church, there are some of “my” children leading worship. One is an Elder, another is our church's finance spokesperson, another is the head of property, and several are in children and youth ministry. Others have gone to the mission field or are serving in other churches – even as children's pastors!

I call them “my” children, but I understand that they are God's children entrusted into my hands to do the best I can to point them toward Him. And, with His help and the help of His Holy Spirit, something special has happened in the lives of so many and in my life, too. What a privilege to be part of those journeys.

As I stand down from this role and move away from the church that has been my family for so many years, I feel a sense of sadness but also a very humbling sense of peace. I don't know what the future holds for the children at Blockhouse Bay Baptist Church or for myself.

But I know that God does – and I can rest in that.

“Hi. My name is Glenis - and I'm a child of God.”

Photo: Glenis with her son, daughter-in-law and granddaughter. Provided by Glenis.



Please recycle or pass on this newsletter.

CHARLES HEWLETT

Baptist pivot to mission



Charles Hewlett is the National Leader of the Baptist Churches of New Zealand.

The Baptist movement is a missionary one: mission is in our DNA. It is my desire in 2024 to begin pivoting our strategic focus from foundational and structural issues to actual ministry and mission – putting greater effort into gospel renewal through our communities of faith. We asked four mission leaders what unleashing New Zealand Baptists to bring gospel renewal to our local neighbourhoods would look like for them.

Sarah Beisly, business entrepreneur, elected member of our Assembly Council

What does a missionary movement look like to you?

I see a group of ordinary Kiwi people gathered around our extraordinary Jesus. We're on our knees, and we are crying out, "God, may your Kingdom come". Our motivation to do such a thing comes from our belief that God's Kingdom coming is better than our personal ambitions and strongly held opinions. We reflect, discuss, and dream about what God's coming Kingdom might look like in our place with our people. We pray daily for God's Kingdom to come to our people in our place. And then we accept the daunting role of co-creators with Christ, and, with fumbling attempts, we act out God's Kingdom coming with our hands, feet, minds, and hearts.

What does it mean to be a church planted in our local community?

To be planted means getting to know our community, neighbours, people, and place. This starts with fostering relationships of mutual friendship and learning. You might meet someone

and think, "But this person is so different to me." When we focus on our differences, we build walls. Instead, we can ask, "What do I have in common with this person, and how can I focus on our shared humanity to build a connection?"

To assume that our church is the only group of people involved in gospel renewal in our community is naïve and arrogant. It's not all about us. God is at work outside the four walls of our church building. We can counter this bias by searching for the beauty and goodness in our community. Where can we glimpse gospel renewal already happening? Who are the people in our community doing God's Kingdom work — even if they don't realise it? How can we support our community leaders in their beautiful mahi? How can we partner with non-church groups to participate in God's Kingdom work in our community?

What does it mean to live as a Christian in the world in 2024?

To be a Christian means to know and follow Jesus. It means continuing to read scripture, to get to know the true Jesus, not just the 'helpful genie type god' we often conveniently imagine. Getting to know the true Jesus, the whole gospel, is uncomfortable and challenging. Our relationship with the true Jesus will shift our values and our priorities. To be a Christian means to seek God's Kingdom first and trust that God will take care of our daily needs. A lot of Kiwi people obsess over success, money, property, safety, certainty and control. But seeking God's Kingdom first means that instead, we give our best energy to gospel renewal and trust that God will look after the rest.

Lyn Campbell QSM, former teacher, Families Commissioner, Baptist President. Now Chaplain to the Riwaka School community

What does a missionary movement look like to you?

We are all called to mission, to go as salt and light where God places us. This is our primary role in our everyday lives.

Fundamental to an effective missionary movement's effectiveness is understanding the context we are placed in. What issues are impacting people? Where is justice lacking? Who's already active in the area? We must not just go in assuming

we know what's needed. Building trust and good relationships is essential.

My observation is that we have been inclined to have an attitude of "come (to our church) and be like us" rather than going and being salt and light wherever God leads us. A missionary movement involves a lifestyle choice where we understand and embrace the role God gives us in living as 'kingdom builders', forming communities where people can belong and grow in faith.

What does it mean to be a church planted in our local community?

If we regard our church facilities as community hubs, we could potentially increase our focus and impact beyond our immediate church community. If we intentionally turn "inside out", mission in our communities would become central to who we are.

My observation is that we tend to prioritise "gathered church", particularly Sunday services. If we prioritise non-Christian or becoming-Christian people, positive change will come. We tend to spend much of our time, energy and assets on internal nurturing, feeding and helping our people, and that should continue but not at the expense of investment in our communities beyond the doors of the church.

What does it mean to live as a Christian in the world in 2024?

We need to understand that things like tension, uncertainty, and being on the edge and in uncharted territory are our ongoing experiences. We should expect them. It makes people nervous, especially older people who tend to head for what is known. God is present and active, calling all of us to mission outside our comfort zones.

Raewyn Moodie, Kaitiaki Children & Family Ministries Northern Baptist Regional Association

What does a missionary movement look like to you?

A missionary movement looks like people who are actually interested in sharing the gospel with those around them by word AND deed, not just going to church for what they get out of it.

What does it mean to be a church planted in our local community?

To be planted in our local community, we as churches need to know the felt needs of those in our communities: go survey, ask questions, talk to

people, and don't be afraid of their answers. Most people aren't actually looking for a Sunday morning service to go to. What is it that they really need? Until we ask, we won't know. If we don't know, we aren't really planted, we are just perching on the side of our community, doing our own thing.

What does it mean to live as a Christian in the world in 2024?

To live as a Christian in the world in 2024, we must be brave. There are more people interested in reading the Bible than there are Christians prepared to ask to read with them. I run a playgroup at my house for young mums in our community. I asked who would be interested in reading the Bible for 10 minutes at the end of our playgroup, and they all stayed. It was nerve-wracking to get the courage to ask, but they all said yes. Let's be brave!!

Dave Tims, Urban Neighbours of Hope, Orbit catalyst leader

What does a missionary movement look like to you?

A movement consists of numerous groups sharing the same kaupapa, the same DNA, striving to achieve the same thing, yet in different contexts. They collaborate to find the most effective approaches.

Orbit is a national Baptist movement comprised mainly of people involved in Intentional Communities. An Intentional Community is a group of people who have chosen to live together with a common purpose, working cooperatively to create a lifestyle that reflects their shared core values, usually within the same neighbourhood or even in the same large house. This typically involves a small group (usually between 4-10 people) of highly committed individuals living in the same neighbourhood, often in less affluent areas. They intentionally share life with each other and their neighbours.

Each Baptist Intentional Community has established a set of common values bound by a covenant. These values are accompanied by collective daily prayers, regular meals with neighbours and community members, and working together for their justice and well-being. The focus is on those who are marginalised in society. These

practices bring our values to life and reshape our lives.

We've discovered that we need to slow down to 'catch' Jesus. Rather than striving for material wealth or chasing the latest trend, Baptist Orbit members choose to slow down and walk alongside their neighbours, making time to be with them and care for each other. Learning to 'catch' Jesus by slowing down takes time. The Baptist Orbit movement consists of people intentionally learning to 'breathe with it' and slow down to recognise and join Jesus walking with their neighbours.

What does it mean to be a church planted in our local community?

The expectations of us as church members can sometimes be unclear. Do we just show up? There's no accountability even if we don't. We should have higher expectations of each other so our lives reflect the lifestyle Jesus wanted us to live. Not just morally but economically, too.

How we spend our money often reveals who we truly worship. Who we share a meal with also reflects our values. Jesus shared meals with tax collectors, sinners, and those rejected by society, embodying his value of 'bringing good news to the poor'. There's something profoundly beautiful about sharing a meal at home or in a neighbour's home.

Nationally, the Baptist churches are incredibly wealthy. How can we use our wealth to help others flourish? We have tremendous resources. Every church could be an even greater blessing if we realised how wealthy we are and understood our God-given responsibility with that wealth. We could transform so many neighbourhoods, reflecting His Kingdom.

What does it mean to live as a Christian in the world in 2024?

We need to change our mindset. To follow Jesus responsively, we must care for those who are the least. Intentional communities root their values in seeing their neighbours thrive rather than just themselves. We have to relinquish a lot of our wealth and security to share it with others. Who are our neighbours, and how can we be good neighbours to them? We may need to reconsider where we live. Can we intentionally move into neighbourhoods often labelled as 'poor' and learn

to be good neighbours there? We need to be honest about our values, determining which ones reflect God's kingdom and which do not. Then, we need to live a lifestyle that reflects God's kingdom and be accountable for that lifestyle. Once we do that, the things the world deems important no longer matter, and we start to live a completely different way, becoming a blessing to our neighbours. A friend recently shared this with me: "Never be so arrogant as to think you are bringing God into your neighbourhood. Your job is to be quiet and listen to where He is already working."

Header image: L-R Sarah Beisly, Lyn Campbell, Raewyn Moodie, Dave Tims. Supplied by Charles Hewlett.

CHARIS FOTHERINGHAM

Sustainability is not a green genre



Charis Fotheringham works part-time as a communications assistant at the Baptist National Support Centre and part-time doing a Master of Management specialising in Sustainability. In this article, Charis explains the concept of sustainability and connects it to our call as Christians to bring gospel renewal.

Sustainability is difficult to capture in a definition. It's like a genre with multiple interpretations, parodies and increasing popularity. But it's not a new genre; it was around long before it got named. You can trace rhythms of sustainability in indigenous expressions of interconnectedness between people and the environment. Sustainability hums in communities that weave the care of local natural resources and shared well-being to continue together [1]. With the diversity of social, cultural, spiritual, and other contexts across the globe, sustainability has been conceptualised and communicated in many ways.

Sustainability became a ‘universal’ genre when it merged with economic and social development, creating the ‘sustainable development’ fusion, defined mainly by economists and academics. In 1987, the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development popularised this fusion in the publication of ‘Our Common Future’ (The Brundtland Report). This report considers our world’s finite resources, addresses the conflicting relationship between increasing welfare and environmental degradation and presents sustainable development as a way of reconciliation [2]. Of all the interpretations of sustainability, the one introduced in the Brundtland Report seems to echo the most:

Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs [3].

The trio

With the increased interdisciplinary jamming of sustainability, three types of instruments became core to the genre: economic, environmental, and social. In theory, these are more appropriately named pillars or dimensions. This trio gave expression to the many colours of sustainability, going beyond the limits of ‘greening’. If a company uses recycled plastic and abuses the vulnerability of migrant workers through unauthorised subcontracting to increase short-term profits, is that company sustainable?

Writing an eco-friendly initiative into a migrant-unfriendly model for a financial outcome creates a lot of clashes (greenwashing) but not sustainability. Disjointing the health of the planet from the health of the people from the health of the organisations and systems that rely on and impact them comes at a higher cost than the work of tuning these interdependent relationships.

From rivers to veins

As the demand for automobiles, electric vehicles, telecommunication, energy storage devices and solar power systems increases, so does their use of lead-acid batteries [4]. The high recyclability of lead presents potential in sustainable development [4]. However, lead pollution, significantly contributed to by the production and informal recycling of lead-acid batteries, is a silent and severe issue worldwide. Lead is also used in textile

dyeing processes [5] and found in consumer products such as toys and cosmetics [6]. It is highly toxic and poorly monitored in the developing countries that process it, contaminating water, soil and air [7].

Let’s zoom in on the infamous Citarum River, Indonesia. Over 20 years, a river that around 28 million people depend on was stripped of life by pollution, including heavy metal contamination [8]. Lead levels in this river are 1000 times the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s drinking water standard [9]. This poison laces the 340,000 tonnes of liquid waste discharged into the river by industry, significantly textiles, each day [8]. The communities here have little choice but to irrigate their farms and consume and bathe in toxic water. In an interview, a local woman explains,

You already know that the water is dirty, why still use it to take a bath [but] what else can we do? This is the only water we can use [8].

Zooming out, around one in three children in the world is affected by lead poisoning, which can impair their cognitive development and nervous system function [6]. The low- and lower-middle-income countries (LMICs) where most of these children live bear the further economic burden of IQ loss and increased mortality, morbidity and crime linked to childhood lead exposure [6] [10]. In 2019, 95.3% of global IQ loss from lead exposure and 90.2% of cardiovascular disease deaths from lead exposure occurred in LMICs [11]. These countries bore the brunt of the global US\$6 trillion cost of lead exposure that year [11].

The colours of sustainability

This case highlights that sustainability is not just about cleaning up rivers and developing better waste management processes to reduce pollution. It weaves into restoring people’s livelihoods and ensuring children can grow and reach their potential. It is about enabling people to bring income into their families, contribute to their communities and participate in shaping the future. It’s creating a healthier and more inclusive economy.

Condemning the innocent

This case also exemplifies that current practices are direly unsustainable and going with the flow has a highly disproportionate impact. This ‘flow’ benefits

the polluters and barriers the helplessly exposed, corroding a wider gap between the empowered and the vulnerable on our changing planet. On one side, it's enhanced energy generation, personal transport, low-cost fashion and profiting from outsourcing cheap operations for few. On the other, it's brain and central nervous system damage, comas, convulsions, permanent intellectual disabilities, and death for many of the world's most vulnerable and innocent (children) [12]. I hear the resounding of James 5:6 in this chasm; "you have condemned and murdered the innocent one who was not opposing you", as people are left behind in the prioritisation of wealth.

Lead pollution is one specific sustainability issue. We could unpack the impact of fossil fuel consumption, overfishing or the expansion of monocultures; the list goes on. These different but often interlinked environmental issues intertwine with people's lives and the state of our economy. They similarly disadvantage those with little say or input in creating them.

Who is sustainability about?

It's not only the responsibility of big polluters and policymakers to care about sustainability. When Christians have the calling, power and potential for a transformational handprint, we shouldn't leave sustainability up to those with the most extensive footprint. As people called to seek justice for the oppressed, we should set an example of sustainability.

The current global framework driving worldwide action and partnerships for sustainability is the United Nations 2030 Agenda. Established in 2015, this agenda sets out 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be met by 2030. These goals embody the integration of the economic, social and environmental in a pathway towards realising equity, climate action and inclusive sustained economic growth, to name a few focus areas [13]. If you want to investigate these, visit sdgs.un.org/goals.

At the 2023 SDG Summit in New York, it was clear that progress towards the SDGs is alarmingly lagging or slipping, and partnerships worldwide must accelerate their implementation. Only 12% of these goals are on track, significantly due to

to extreme climatic events, exacerbated global poverty, violence against women and conflicts [14]. Acknowledging the widening gap caused by slow progress in sustainability, the outcome document of the 2023 SDG Summit states:

We will endeavour to identify those who are being left behind and reach those who are the furthest behind first. People who are vulnerable must be empowered. Those whose needs are reflected in the 2030 Agenda include all children, youth, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, older persons, Indigenous Peoples, refugees, internally displaced persons, and migrants [15].

I pull out this statement because it lists pivotal participators in gospel renewal (as we heard in Michael Rhodes's [Spectacular Power](#) talk at the Baptist National Hui 2022). To genuinely serve and worship God is to take up the cause of these people. Baptists must seriously take on sustainability in our mission of gospel renewal. If we do not, we are letting go of the hands of these people who are most vulnerable on our changing planet and who have a central voice and value for creating a sustainable future.

How can we act?

It's easy to talk about sustainability issues. However, navigating how the Baptist Churches of New Zealand can actively care for and set an example in sustainability is not easy. Where do we begin? What does our footprint and handprint look like? I don't know the answers to these questions, but I'm keen to build a discussion with anyone who wants to see our movement of churches take on sustainability. You can email me at charis@baptist.org.nz

Cover image: Photo by Larm Rmah on Unsplash

Endnotes

View endnotes or ask for them to be printed from: baptist.nz/sustainability-is-not-a-green-genre

JULIAN DOOREY

Who says Baptists can't work together

In this article, Julian Doorey challenges Baptist churches to move beyond their boundaries and become part of national Baptist church strategies. He shares about leading/facilitating the Bangladesh Baptist churches' five-year country-wide strategic planning work in 2022-23. Julian and his family

served in Bangladesh with Arotahi (NZBMS) for 13 years, returning to New Zealand in 2015.



All nations

Making disciples of all nations...it's not often we have a hands-on opportunity to influence another country's Christian movement while sitting in New Zealand (St Kilda, Dunedin). The Bangladesh Baptist Church Fellowship (BBCF) offered exactly this opportunity, inviting me to lead (I prefer facilitate) their five-year national strategic planning exercise...a somewhat daunting exercise. BBCF is a church union of 319 active churches grouped in 18 District Fellowships. It also includes 10 Service Wings (boards, committees, departments), including Aid & Development, Mission & Evangelism, Finance, Hostels, Medical, Men, Scholarships, Schools, Women and Youth. I worked with the BBCF via email and Zoom part-time for 15 months based in Dunedin, with a 1-month trip to Dhaka in November 2022.



Previous strategic plan (out it goes)

Baptist elephants

We know the Baptist elephant(s) in the room... Baptist distinctives of voluntary association, local autonomy and lack of national organisational authority. While beneficial for local initiatives, they make national collective strategies almost impossible. However, social science tells us that groups that work well together outperform those

that don't – self-evident in families, workplaces, sports teams and churches. We Baptists don't always seem convinced of the larger collective benefit gained by churches working together. Social science also tells us that individual group members who altruistically/sacrificially contribute to their group's overall success do not automatically benefit themselves. And there lies the rub...as culture (Baptist) eats strategy for breakfast. Is your church willing to contribute to the greater good of the Baptist movement, with no guarantee of your local church directly benefitting?

Ground rules

Working nationally within Baptist cultural constraints, which are just as strong in Bangladesh as in New Zealand, required some agreed ground rules even to get started. These included:

- > Strategic planning is defined as: 'Assisting a group of people (churches and service wings) to work together in an agreed and known way towards a common goal' – not too complicated.
- > People, planning and prayer: These three words guided us. Good planning will achieve nothing without committed people and prayer. Equally, people or prayer alone will achieve little. People invited to participate towards their collective future through planning and prayer feel valued and empowered. Ownership is critical for members, churches (small and large) and service wings to want to be involved.

- > BBCF is everyone: BBCF is not the Dhaka Service Centre (BBCF office) but includes all members, local churches and service wings. The Dhaka Service Centre and service wings exist to resource local churches for mission in their communities.

- > Top-down facilitation and bottom-up initiatives: Top-down enforcement doesn't work – that's failed before. The planning process facilitated local churches via district fellowships and service wings to produce their own strategic plans, then combined them into a whole. This works but takes time.

- > Working together and independently: The district fellowships and service wings sometimes work independently and sometimes together to support the wider BBCF goals. Flexibility is key.

- > Shared mission understanding and language:

BBCF had previously adopted a holistic mission for their context of huge spiritual and physical needs. The new strategic plan focused on supporting district fellowships and service wings to design goals and activities that both (1) strengthen church congregations and (2) support local communities.

> Simple, realistic and achievable: District fellowships and services wings were limited to three goals each to strengthen church congregations and another three goals to support local communities.

Planning process

Planning steps make a huge and complicated task more doable. Each step involved BBCF members, staff and leaders (from churches, district fellowships, and service wings) providing survey and planning data (numbers & narrative) using templates (survey & design forms). This involved several orientations, workshops, presentations and feedback. The steps were:

Step 1: Church Congregations – Stats, Activities & Development Context survey

Step 2: Church District Fellowships – SWOT & Goals

Step 3: Church District Fellowships – Strategic Plan / Action Plan

Step 4: Service Wings – Basic Operational Information

Step 5: Service Wings – SWOT & Goals

Step 6: Service Wings – Strategic Plan / Action Plan

Step 7: Service Wings – Organisational Capacity Self-Assessment & Improvement Plans



Medical Ministry presentation (super organised)

Current situation

Before planning a future, we assess the current situation. A few survey findings relating to BBCF churches...

Q1: Churches. 319 active churches. A number of inactive churches.

Q2: Local church members & their families. Children 0-12 (3837, 22%), Youth 13-30 (5302, 30%), Adults 31+ (8456, 48%), Total 17,595.

Q3: Local church members education. Year 10~11 avg.

Q4: Church members household income. \$NZ 140 per month / \$NZ 40 per week / \$NZ 6 per day avg.

Q5: Churches with 1 or more pastors (paid & unpaid). 287 churches (90%).

Q6: Pastors work time. Part-time 120 (39%), Full-time 188 (61%), Total 308 pastors.

Q7: Pastors pay. No pay 220 (71%), Part-pay 57 (19%), Full-pay 31 (10%).

Q8: Pastors general education. Year 11~12 avg.

Q9: Pastors Christian training. 1 or 2 month basic discipleship at Year 11 level avg.

Q10: Church income. \$NZ 350 per year avg.

Q11: Church income offerings as % of local members income. 1.4% avg.

Q12: Churches running activities. Children activities 40% of churches. Youth activities 20%.

The Bangladesh Baptist churches' country context is very different from New Zealand's, particularly regarding income and education. An average church household income of \$NZ 40 per week (\$NZ 6 per day) reflects poverty. Flow-on effects are that 71% of pastors aren't paid, and 19% are part-paid. The average church income of \$NZ 350 per year doesn't go far. Church members give an average of 1.4% of their income. Related to poverty is the lack of good educational opportunities. An average local church member is educated to about year 10 or 11, while pastors are just ahead at year 11 or 12. Pastors' Christian training, on average, is one or two months of basic discipleship at year 11 or 12 level. New Zealand Baptist church members and pastors are light years ahead in income, education and facilities. BBCF can teach us much about achieving God's purposes with very few resources. As a result of poverty, the survey questions included very different topics to a New Zealand survey, for example, (1) Basic physical needs experienced: clean air, water, food, clothing, shelter, cooking fuel/energy, and (2) Access to and affordability of education, medical

care, toilets, clean water etc.

Future activities

The planning process enabled local churches via district fellowships and service wings to design their own goals and activities to implement over five years. The activity plans included a standard set of questions, including goals, recipient/beneficiary details, activities and targets, implementation parties, activity inputs – tasks, people, equipment/material & time, budgets and possible income sources. The resulting 152 strategic goals and supporting activities set out to achieve BBCF's wholistic mission, to both (1) Strengthen church congregations (84 goals) and (2) Support local communities (68 goals). Most goals include two or three activities. A number of common generic activity categories were chosen to assist with planning and reporting. The frequency of each activity is shown in the list and graph below. A few activities fit two or more activity categories - for example, Pastor training fits both #1 & #2.

Strengthen Church Congregations

Primary focus is growth in discipleship, congregational involvement and outreach. The recipients are primarily Christians and churches (84 goals).

#1 Pastor Activities & Appointment. Frequency: 20 | 10% Activity examples: Appoint 42 pastors. Train 238 pastors. Free health check-ups for 375 pastors.

#2 Theological & Ministry Training. Frequency: 20 | 10% Activity examples: Train 238 pastors. Train 37 other people.

#3 Outreach & Church P. (redacted). Frequency: 28 | 14%

#4 Church Life & Bible Teaching. Frequency: 35 | 17% Activity examples: Bible discipleship in 70 churches. Prayer groups in 36 churches. Revival meetings in 52 churches. Teach church and community transformation in 40 churches.

#5 Children & Youth Groups. Frequency: 31 | 15% Activity examples: Train 68 Sunday School teachers. Start 104 Sunday Schools. Run 21 child camps. Train 156 youth leaders. Start 89 youth groups. Run 15 youth camps.

#6 Men & Women Groups. Frequency: 20 | 10% Activity examples: Start 30 men fellowships. Run 3 men camps. Train 10 women leaders. Start 59 women fellowships. Run 10 women camps.

#7 Church Income & Personal Giving. Frequency 44 | 21% Activity examples: Teach tithes and giving in 160 churches. Fund raising training in 108 churches. Prep tithes and giving resources for all 319 churches. Create employment in 18 churches.

#8 Land, Buildings & Facilities. Frequency 9 | 4% Activity examples: Arrange 25 church buildings, 5 cemeteries and 2 conference centre / Bible schools with land. Repair 10 church buildings.

Support Local Communities (& Local Churches) in developmental way

Primary focus is poverty alleviating development for the wider community. The recipients are primarily non-Christians in the wider community, however local churches are also part of the wider context. (68 goals)

#1 Education & Literacy. Frequency 19 | 15% Activity examples: Arrange 9 pre-schools 700 children. Financially assist 400 families. Provide school materials for 500 children. Build 1 new school. 12 student scholarships.

#2 Economic Development & Livelihoods.

Frequency 18 | 14% Activity examples: Run savings and loans groups in 62 communities. Run income training in 85 communities. Provide financial assistance in 18 communities.

#3 Primary healthcare. Frequency 31 | 25% Activity examples: Run healthcare education (pregnancy, maternal mortality, food and nutrition, lightning safety etc) in 63 communities. Provide affordable healthcare for 370,000 people. Arrange 30 toilets and 30 clean tube well water supplies.

#4 Human Rights & Gender Equality. Frequency 30 | 24% Activity examples: Social awareness (women's rights, gender equality, children rights, domestic violence, child marriage, child labour, dowry etc) in 175 communities.

#5 Environmental Care. Frequency 13 | 10% Activity examples: Arrange tree saplings for 91 communities. Run 5 church and 5 school rubbish removal teams. Run environmental awards in 5 schools.

#6 Disaster risk reduction. Frequency 15 | 12% Activity examples: Provide disaster prep training and response teams in 42 communities. Arrange lightning safety education in 24 communities. Provide disaster shelter in 30 churches.

Final reflection

How do we NZ Baptists organise ourselves to join God's work? Often, we self-describe ourselves as a 'movement' of churches, with an underlying concern that we don't want to become 'machinery' or, even worse, a 'monument'. We like the idea of being somehow radical non-conformists (historically...these days?), perhaps with a hint of anti-establishment and suspicion of institutions. We want to be people of the Spirit. I've often heard, or it's been implied, that God's Spirit needs freedom to work, and perhaps organisational planning may somehow hinder the Spirit's work. I'm not sure of the biblical basis for this, but Jesus says to plan well (Luke 14:28-30): "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish'." It seems that our planning is absolutely part of God's bigger plan. God works through people of all personality types, theologies, worship styles, prayer patterns and organisational preferences. Who says Baptists can't plan and work together? The Bangladesh Baptists show us they can! Are our NZ Baptist churches prepared to work together - locally, regionally and nationally?

If you are interested in making disciples of all nations (or at least one), email Arotahi, the NZ Baptist global mission, at arotahi.org.nz. If you are interested in missional strategic planning, email Julian at j.c.doorey@gmail.com.



Photos supplied by Julian Doorey

IGOR BANDURA

After two years of war: Ukraine's church that grows hope



This update comes from Igor Bandura, Vice-President for International Affairs with the European Baptist Federation (EBF). Reproduced from the [EBF website](https://www.ebf.org/) with permission.

First of all, the **war is a spiritual reality** for us. And when military correspondents describe the situation at the front, it accurately conveys our daily spiritual struggle. We have begun to understand better what the following messages mean: fifty combat clashes took place over the past day; defense forces continue to hold back the enemy; the enemy had little success at this point; seven enemy attacks were repelled; the enemy made 20 attempts to break through the defense; the enemy continues to press from the South and West...



This is our reality.

And by accepting God's will and with His accompaniment, we have reached the second anniversary. An anniversary that means more than the Russian full-scale invasion. It is **the anniversary of fierce resistance** to demonic forces and zealous service to the people of Ukraine. And even if the challenges were bigger than us, God's

power was renewed in us and strengthened our hands.

In 2022, it seemed to us that we would not be able to hold out for more than a few weeks, neither emotionally, physically, nor defensively. But the Lord is holding us. **Every day He shows His miracles again and again at the front and in the rear.**

Today there are **1,900 churches** in our associations. After the full-scale invasion, 332 churches were occupied in the East and South of our country. We have 69 pastors who remained there to serve. Because of the war, 72 churches are scattered. About 10 church buildings of our Brotherhood were taken away by the occupiers, another 65 were partially or completely destroyed.

During the second year of full-scale war in Ukraine, more than **10 new churches** of Evangelical Christian Baptists were formed, and about **50 missionary groups** gathered in Ukraine in different places to organize new churches. Today we have **1,850 active pastors**. We are grateful to God that about **150 new elders were ordained** to serve in the churches during the war. **130 chaplains are consecrated to serve**. For ten years since the beginning of the Russian aggression, the chaplaincy has been providing the necessary pastoral care for the military on the front line and their families, and families of the deceased, visiting the wounded in hospitals and rehabilitation centers, and teaching churches to serve this category of people.



Church ministry

“In times of war, we received the greatest freedom to serve the people. This is the time of the greatest freedom since the early nineties. The church is fighting a battle and resisting the invasion of lawlessness,” says the head of the Baptist Union of Ukraine.

From the first day of the full-scale invasion until now, **we risk being on the verge of a humanitarian catastrophe**. Therefore, social ministry - assistance to internally displaced persons, those who have lost their jobs, homes, and breadwinners - is in great demand by the public. **Responding to it is the best manifestation of Christian sacrifice in times of war. The church has done it, is doing it, and will continue to do it.** This is a set of actions that cannot be measured in tons or kilometres.

While in the first year of the war, humanitarian service was more urgent and situational, this year **it has gained stability, structure and orderliness**. IDPs and residents of the frontline areas are still in dire need of our help - food, drinking water, hygiene products, and finances.

Despite the threat of shelling, **the popularity of children's camps and daycare centers has increased significantly**. Volunteers from churches tirelessly serve the military with food and essentials (equipment, hot water bottles, trench candles, camouflage nets, warm socks, etc.). They also take care of their families. This year, churches have been more focused on learning how to provide psychological assistance and all kinds of support to war veterans, widows, orphans, people with injuries, various disorders, and disabilities.

When evacuations and refugees are not as wild as in the first year of the war, we began to get more involved with specific people, their stories and challenges. The wife of a fallen soldier, whom the church helped to make repairs. Hungry old people in a frontline city who are touchingly grateful for a package of food and a bottle of drinking water. Children and teenagers who are missing their homes remained under occupation. Now, through Bible classes, Christian camps, and church events, they are smiling and settling into their new city for the first time in a long time. **And thousands more people have been touched by Jesus Christ Himself through the love and care of the Church**. They began to read God's Word, came to worship, and decided to follow the Lord.

We thank God with special prayers for all our international friends, partners, and prayerful supporters. Thanks to them the churches in Ukraine have been able to successfully serve the people of Ukraine these past two years.



It is impossible to overestimate the power of unity and spiritual inspiration of the great global family of Baptist churches. Its constant prayers serve as a spiritual pillar for Ukrainian Baptists. Its united efforts to provide humanitarian aid have multiplied our ability to serve people with numerous needs. Its love has inspired us again and again and given us the strength to get up and move forward. The dedication, courage, and presence of key leaders of the Baptist Fellowship have been and remain a shining example of leadership in difficult times. Ukraine will survive and win because we have millions of brothers and sisters from all over the world with us. He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world. Today we cry and work together. Tomorrow we will rejoice together and thank our God!

We continue to bring hope and nurture it in wounded souls. We live the promise: Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep His promise. (Hebrews 10:23).

We are approaching the day when we will begin the hard work of rebuilding Ukraine, because our country will be reborn and a just and victorious peace, begged from God, will come to our lands.

Call for continual prayer

The EBF family stand in continued prayer for our brothers and sisters in Ukraine. Since the beginning of the war, we have gathered monthly to pray together. You are welcome to join us. Join our prayers for Ukraine, Russia, and neighboring countries welcoming refugees into their communities.

Photos: provided by The All-Ukrainian Union of Associations of Evangelical Christians-Baptists.

ROD ROBSON

Assembly Council Meeting February 2024



Rod Robson, the Chair of the Assembly Council, brings you this update from the recent Assembly Council gatherings (9, 10 and 12 February 2024).

Hi peeps,

Your Assembly Council got together again last Friday, Saturday and Monday. Here's a bit of an update for you about what we got up to.

We spent Friday with Charles Hewlett, our National Leader, who guided the Assembly Council (AC) through some strategic exercises as we dreamed about what the next few years could look like for our movement.

We finished the day enjoying woodfired pizza at Blue Bradley's place while hanging out and getting to know each other better.

On Saturday morning, we cracked into a full business agenda. Many items of business come before the AC at our bi-monthly meetings. Recognising our need to spend more time on the strategic governance stuff, we spent some time getting subcommittees established. This will help divide and conquer the workload of AC decisions amongst the members, allowing us to spend our main meetings briefing 'business' report-backs but with a focus on strategy.

We've got existing subcommittees for Constitution Review, as well as Audit, Finance and Risk. We're establishing a committee to look after the well-being of our senior executive staff and a committee or two that will keep tabs on Baptist life... all the things involving our thirteen governance boards, other entities and working groups that are operating in the movement. It's about trying to associate better than we have been doing.

We're scheduling our meetings this year for Saturdays. We have increasing representation and participation on AC from normal people (not Pastor peeps like me), which means needing to work around Monday to Friday jobs. We've also found it helpful to meet for an evening Zoom debrief in the week following our meetings.

We continued the agenda by hearing from:

> **Charles Hewlett** about the importance of mission and Gospel Renewal in our faith communities

> **John Tucker** (Principal, Carey Baptist College) about the future of theological education and Carey's strategic review process that is currently underway

> **Ruby Duncan** (Chair, Mission Council) about how Arotahi (NZBMS) is engaging in mission both here in New Zealand and abroad

> **Susan Osborne** (2024 President) about her plans to travel around the country this year, meeting with smaller churches and ethnic congregations.

On Monday evening, we again appreciated the opportunity to debrief and catch up over Zoom.

It was a packed few days, but some great things are happening around the country. There are definitely some challenges, but we're focusing on getting the right people in the right places to make strategic decisions about what will position New Zealand Baptists to bring gospel renewal to people and places in their local neighbourhoods.

Getting to know...Jo Hood

In this column, we discover more about our Baptist whānau, meeting someone in our team of 40,000 each post. Jo Hood is the Visionary of mainly Ministries, an organisation that remains curious as they resource and support local churches, church plants, missional communities, and Christian schools to connect with whānau in the community. Currently Jo has feet in both New Zealand and Australia and certainly continues to feel 'one of us'.



What is something you think everyone should experience at least once in their life?

Falling in love with your husband when he becomes a grandfather. That was a beautiful moment. AND becoming so proud of the way your kids and kids-in-law become parents. I love my three grandchildren, but not at the expense of loving and caring for their parents!

If you could be a pro at any one thing, what would it be?

I'd love to be a pro at asking curious questions to discover what other people are thinking and what they know.

What is a random interest that has completely nothing to do with mainly Ministries?

I've just picked up crochet again – something from my childhood/teen years. I'm getting a kick out of making clothing for one of my grandsons (the other two live in a hot climate!) and for other people's children.

What's the oddest fact you know?

That jellyfish do not sit on rocks because they don't have bottoms! The song, Three Jellyfish Sitting on a Rock, is technically so very wrong.

What is your favourite way of connecting with God?

I love reading. Often, I am gobsmacked by something that someone else has written about God. Takes my breath away.

Can you describe a significant moment when you experienced God's love?

When my husband Steve died, that was earth-shattering. We only had ten weeks to get our heads around this. For the past five years, God has been showering me with His love, especially in the moments when I get tripped up by overwhelming grief.

What is your favourite thing about the neighbourhood where you live?

I love hearing the sounds of the birds. I live in Melbourne, so they're loud and obnoxious sounds from cockatoos and laughing kookaburras!

What do you love most about being Baptist?

I'm not sure I can embrace the 'most' bit of this question...I love being a New Zealand Baptist because of all the stories of Jesus at work that come out of attending the Hui and reading stories on the Baptist website.