

CENTRAL

NEWS

News Letter from the CENTRAL BAPTIST ASSOCIATION



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In this edition of Central News we continue to explore

the fruitfulness indicators from the Mission Review edition by having a look at perhaps one of the more surprising inclusions in the list, namely **UNITY**.

became a seen trait of the early church, for onlookers said "See how these Christians love one another!" So counter cultural in those days.

And now?

Now I have the privilege of serving the churches in our association as Moderator, and I see much of that unity of loving and serving going on in the worship, ministry and mission you are exercising. And it is great to walk with you in that as our association strapline says. Churches feeding and loving their fellowships, praying for their fellowships and gathering them

This is where glitches can occur. How we all keep on board to serve our communities relentlessly and lovingly, blessing them, getting out of the "what we want box" or "how we want to do it" attitude. This is not helped by the fact that most of us are change resistant following a God, whilst in nature is changeless, is always on the move and dragging us His people to keep up for the sake of His world! Remember those words of Emil Brunner "The Church exists by mission, just as fire exists by burning. The life of the church is the heart of God. The

A QUESTION OF UNITY

How ironic it is that in looking at and reflecting on the fruitfulness indicators we should come to "Unity"!! The dictionary definition talks about oneness, harmony, concord and more, and I look around the world, our own country and.....Yet it is such an important value and characteristic of our way of being that Jesus teaches us, His disciples, as His Church. In John's gospel He makes it plain in his final discourse with His disciples; "I give you a new commandment that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." And they were a motley crew to keep united and in love! But it

together. Super.

But I also see, and have seen over the years, more of a difficulty of living in harmony as we search for the mind of Christ. Where Christ would lead us in worship, ministry and mission. I say again- Christ – not the loudest voice or group or fad but Christ with that quiet voice and way. For He gave more words to us in that discourse which were a prayer for us today "Father, as you have sent me into the world, so I send them into the world. That they may all be one, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." One. United not only for our own sakes and well being, but for Kingdom building in the world for the world's sake.

heart of God is to serve a broken world." And we need to be in unity to do that. It goes together with another quote, this time from William Temple "The Church is the only institution that exists primarily for the benefit of those who are not it's members."

It's hard, it's tough, it's a work in progress always and it's still counter cultural, but it's the work to which we have been called.

Carol Murray

Moderator of CBA Council



CHILDREN & UNITY

United we stand: Divided we fail.

Jesus took unity seriously. As he prays in the moments before the crucifixion drama unfolds, he uses some of his final words as a free man to pray for unity among those who would believe in Him, praying (John 17 v 20-21):

“... for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you.”

As Baptists, we tend to put an emphasis on that belief as a reasoned, informed response to God’s grace. As such, there may be a risk that we tend to think of that community of believers as rather adult-ish... But maybe Jesus’ intention behind his prayers was somewhat wider? He talks of “little children” as “those who believe in me” (Mat 18:6), and he welcomes their noisy praise (Mat 21: 15-16), even to the dismay of the religious elite. Is our unity as believers inclusive of children? That’s not the same as asking whether children can come along to all things church. The questions is: are we prepared to welcome children as believers, with whom we share church and Kingdom as equals?

Just as the eye cannot say to the hand “we don’t need you”, so that adults cannot say to the children “we don’t

need you”. If the body is to encompass all those whose belief is acceptable to Christ, it will have to involve children. Children have a part to play. Not so

that they can be the same as adults, but precisely because of their differences; the variety of our combined testimony as church united across generations will be a better witness to the character and activity of the Godhead than any adult-only expression. Our claims as to the nature of God-in-us are only



enhanced by including those who need help in joining, as we walk the Jesus way. If we are to give witness of the inclusive love of God to the world, then it starts with living that witness among us first. Just like the cross, we don’t only reach out from side to side in our unity and fellowship, but the vertical line matters too, as we reach from oldest to youngest.

Expressing unity with our younger folk is about more than having children’s songs, or pictures to go alongside the Bible reading (although that might be important too!): this is about authentically valuing children and their belief, even as they are being formed, in much the same way that we do with adults, as we all grow

as disciples together, before our heavenly Father.

What makes you feel valued and included within church? Having a role? Being greeted by name? Being asked your opinions and taken seriously? Being invited to pray for others? What could you do to include those “such as these”, as together we see Jesus’ heart-cry for unity being fulfilled among us, today? At Bunyan Baptist (Stevenage), we’re tussling with these questions too! We’re making changes to our practice and ethos, exploring ways of helping

families take on volunteering roles together, encouraging children to offer testimony or extemporary prayer within our gathered worship, and more besides... but crucially, it’s about deliberately shaping our culture to include and value children, understanding that responsibility for such a culture is borne by every member in every encounter with every child.

If you’re looking practical way ways to express your unity with children, or to help consider your church from a child’s perspective, do have a look at the toolkit available from the Children’s Youth And Family Round Table (CYF), under the resources section at <http://Baptist.org.uk/CYF...> But maybe it all starts with getting alongside a child, addressing them by name, asking what they think, and engaging seriously with whatever follows!

Andrew Ginn
Lead Minister
Bunyan
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FOOD & UNITY

THE MEAL TABLE: as an expression of the Kingdom

One of my early memories is of passing the school playground and seeing all my friends there, whilst I played truant, sat in



the cab of the local coal lorry. I knew most of the coalmen as my Dad ran the transport café where they came for cheese on toast or a fry up. For the rest of my school years dad ran a pub. I was brought up in environments where eating

and drinking formed a focus for the communities in which I lived.

My upbringing was actually pretty normal, as eating and drinking has been somewhere at

the heart of most communities for most of history. Jesus spending time with folk over meals was not unusual – the only unusual aspect was the fact that his circle was always inclusive and not exclusive. The aloneness that permeates many eating habits today is not normal. It may be common practice and it may happen almost universally in our country, but it is not normal in the sense that it conforms to what has been or what should be.

The eating habits we observe in the early church, only receive comments when there is some neglect of inclusion: the Greek-speaking widows after Pentecost or the poorer section of the Corinthian church. It was assumed that people in the church would often eat communally, for virtually everyone in society

did so. Communal eating was not a new, revolutionary, Christian practice; what was new and revolutionary was that all would be welcome at the table.

We live in a society with such an exceptional level of social breakdown that even a small attempt at the recovery of communal eating, such as a family meal

or a church luncheon may be considered a special occasion. But, it is only really special once we go beyond what most cultures have considered normal for most of history.

Eating as part of our expression of faith, as part of the way we express love to one another, only receives true meaning when we obey the teaching of Jesus to invite those who probably cannot invite us back in return. In the town where I live, one church generally has an open invitation for folk to go for a meal in specified houses on one evening each week. My wife and I decided to copy them, and we now have open house for a meal on a Wednesday for anyone who wants to come. Numbers probably only average about eight people and the most we have had was seventeen, but significantly, the people who come reflect a span of ages, ethnicities, social standing and church denominations (or none).

Jesus said that even tax-collectors love each other. All societies have their cliques and clubs and churches may not find it too difficult to fit in and gather a few like-minded folk for a meal. However, when we regularly eat with those who may be significantly different from us, we take a step nearer Jesus' teaching to love one another as He has loved us.

Joe Story is a retired Minister from Northampton see unboring.network



A Northampton based Baptist minister has broken the world record for travelling from Land's End to John O'Groats by local bus services



Chris Matthewman, Minister of Kissingbury and Upton Baptist Church, started his trip on Thursday 9 August, catching the 7:19am bus from Land's End. He came into John O' Groats at 13:35 pm on the number 77 bus from Wick five days later, breaking the previous record by over four hours.

Chris, dressed as 'Where's Wally', undertook

this epic bus marathon, in order to raise funds for LAMPS, a Christian arts and theatre collective that Chris helped to found.

'I've been training my whole life for this. My father did not drive, nor his father before him and although I have flirted with the idea of getting behind the wheel and at times it would be useful, I just like taking the bus. I like the space and time it gives me. Time to think, to read, to write, to listen to music or a talk. To ponder and to pray.

'I have both written and acted for LAMPS productions and the arts in general mean a lot to me, but raising funds for this type of work is never easy, so I was happy to do my bit.'

Over the course of the five days, Chris travelled over 1000 road miles and caught a total of 33 buses, travelling though Devon and Cornwall up through Gloucestershire the Midlands, Greater Manchester, Lancashire, The Lake District up to the Scottish borders and beyond.

He states, 'I am glad that I broke the record and I am happy that this has raised some

money.

'I have been blown away by the goodwill of strangers and the generosity, banter and support of friends old and new.'

The Just Giving page for Chris's cross Britain quest is still open <https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/wallybusmarathon>

And you can find out more about LAMPS and their current touring Christmas and Easter productions, by going to www.lampscollective.com



Article courtesy of Baptist Times

But why is UNITY a mission issue?

One answer would be to point out that the New Testament reminds us that the way we love each other has a crucial impact upon the persuasive nature of our message - "by this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

The church is imaged in the Scriptures as 'a vine', 'a body', 'a family', 'a temple' etc, and when it functions as such it is most likely to be effective in its mission. Less so, if it comes across as a grumpy, mean spirited, coldly earnest group of

mission initiatives, generously blessing those in need, engaging with the local community through various initiatives, eating together, playing together, praying together, worshipping together.

There is nothing unusual in all these things except to reflect that the result can be something truly beautiful ... attractive. It probably means that pastoral care is not just the preserve of the professionals, that practical care is naturally expressed one to another, and where the vast majority of folk contribute in some way to the whole life of the church. Perhaps

easily gets in the way, one gets sidetracked, people get wearied of all the enthusiasm, and if a church grows and doesn't find a way to retain the simplicity, joy, intimacy and freshness of a young, dynamic, smaller group in a growing context then it will struggle. Beyond a certain size it can be hard to retain the possibility of 'being friends' with everyone, and it can be easy for things to start to fragment a little and to lose that intangible something that made it so special.

Anyone who has considered material relating to the life cycle of a church will recognise this process.

MATTERS UNITY

people. In a culture that is highly sceptical of religious institutions it matters that we are experienced as the real deal, known firstly for what we do rather than what we say.

Let me put some flesh on this by referencing some situations I and probably you have encountered. Occasionally one comes across a church community that *just works*. They have that intangible something about them, **where they embody a caring, accepting, vibrant group of friends committed to journeying together in the life of**

faith. Their common life involves a lot of 'doing together' – be that children & young people's work, daring



you have experienced something similar?

My point is not to make you envious or to encourage you to write me off as a fantasist. I HAVE seen this! I have wanted to paint a picture of a church that when it functions at its best is truly something *attractive*, and I think that when 'unchurched' folk encounter such a community it often touches them, and can open up the beginnings of a journey towards faith for them. Who we are together as an open edged, Christ centred, hopefully non-judgmental group of people has a missional impact.

Now if we could capture that and replicate it wouldn't that be wonderful? In truth such glimpses of heaven seem to be there just for a moment in time. No church stands still, people move on, human nature

This is all natural to any living organism. For a church to continue growing it needs to find new ways of reframing all the intimacy and joy of the smaller group, by enabling authentic relationships and purpose in a different sized community.

My point?

UNITY MATTERS!

Who we are together is not a side show on the mission agenda but central to it.

Colin Pye

CBA Regional Minister

