

An invitation to a journey



baptist union
of scotland

Can an established institution
recover a youthful vibrancy and
a sense of fresh movement?

Can an independent
people learn the art
of interdependency?

Can we as a union of
churches learn to be
permission giving for
future creativity
and diversity?



Can the Baptist Union of Scotland take
the next step in the challenge to change
and recover the vibrancy of adventure and
surprise that is living 'under Christ's rule'?

It is in seeking to find affirmative answers to questions like these that the thoughts contained in this document have been gathered through Assembly, Council, Strategy Groups, Church visits and individual conversations.

The question posed to Assembly delegates in 2010 was

'What do we need to address in order to become a radical movement?'



UNDER CHRIST'S RULE



At the heart of our Union has been a longing to resource a network of life-changing Baptist communities: living, breathing, growing churches, whose Christ-like living has a transformative impact on Scotland's villages, towns and cities. We want to create an environment where creative mission thinking, in different contexts, can be germinated and nurtured.

We pray that what we offer to one another releases and equips us to reach our nation for Christ, to make disciples of those who come to faith and to place them in a church that will build them up and send them out to live 'under Christ's rule.'



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We believe Jesus of Nazareth, crucified, risen and ascended, is the Head of the Church. We declare that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Although our churches are varied in location, social context, numbers, health, and theological emphases, all are united around our Baptist Declaration of Principle. The central call of this document is a renewed call to live under the rule of Christ. This involves an intentional following after, and imitation of, Christ and a willingness to bear the cost that may be involved.

There has been a dissatisfaction amongst us for some time about the way we relate to one another and over the way we relate the Gospel to our nation in a time of great cultural change. It was a similar concern that caused our forbearers, ordinary men and women to discover a new way of being church as they addressed the challenges of a changing culture in their time and sought the mind of Christ for a way forward. Today we seek faith to continue that journey for our generation in this nation and beyond.

We recognise the Holy Spirit is pushing us into a world where none of us individually fully know what to do or where to go. We sense this is a time for map making rather than following old maps. Like Abraham, the Hebrew slaves, the early Church and our Baptist forebearers, we are called out of the familiar on a journey that challenges much of what we thought we knew. We are called to a place of vulnerability, experimentation and human weakness where we recognise the presence of the risen Christ to strengthen us and lead us in new actions. It will be in our habits, attitudes and practices that we express the impact of Christ's risen presence in our midst.

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than following old maps.

How can we do this in a way that embraces our rich heritage and expresses God's heart for a lost and changing world?

We share deeply held evangelical convictions with many other Christians, including:

- The importance of being faithful to the Gospel
- The need for conversion and Spirit-filled living
- The challenge of hearing God's word in scripture and doing what He says
- The call to partner with other churches who share these values

Our heritage invites us to re-imagine our future together, to find a fresh vibrancy and colour that will not only be a blessing to ourselves but will serve the purposes of God in our time.

UNDER
CHRIST'S
RULE

faith

habits

actions

attitudes



Assembly's Vision

Three statements form the heartbeat of this exploration of living under the rule of Christ and express a fresh and simple purpose for the Baptist Union of Scotland.

We believe:

1. God is calling us to be intentionally relational.

As churches we believe He is calling us to more trusting, encouraging, supportive, resourcing and accountable relationships. Why? To bear faithful and fruitful witness to Jesus Christ and because it expresses the biblical conviction that the church is always more than local. Nothing invites a fresh blowing of the Spirit like open, prayerful, Christ-centred relationships. We need to repent of any unbiblical isolationism that robs us of so much and find fresh actions that express a deepening of relationship with one another, travelling together wherever Jesus takes us.

2. God is calling us to be unashamedly missional.

The triune God is always reaching out in love to His creation and His people. Thus, as we participate in God's life, renewed relationships must always be outward looking and mission-focussed'. This call comes to us today with renewed freshness and urgency. There is a missional journey of discovery that unites a deepening understanding of the Gospel and the culture of our time, leading to credible witness and effective proclamation. A call has clearly come to us to equip all the saints to be missionaries in Scotland in their daily encounters with those who do not know Christ and to serve in reaching the nations of this world. This is a call to a radical, disciple-making, mission focused agenda.



**Intentionally Relational
Unashamedly Missional
Creatively Rooted**

3. God is calling us to be creatively rooted.

The rule of Christ is the realm of unbounded love, a love that opens us up to Him, to each other, to our neighbours, and most fundamentally to the resources of the Gospel.

Radical disciples are formed in communities of those who are seeking to live under Christ's rule. We believe that at Assembly we heard a call to become communities of conviction; that is congregations and individuals radically shaped by God's Kingdom, communities where our habits, attitudes and practices reveal our values. What does this mean?

- Living as a Believers' Church, a gathering church of truly redeemed people who are seeking to live out the Gospel authentically and attractively. We need to constantly reflect on what it means to be faithful missionary disciples in Scotland today.
- Shaking off the individualism and isolationism of our age to practise communal discipleship and communal discernment within our churches.

- Inter-church resourcing amongst our churches and prophetic political engagement on behalf of those who are marginalised in our society.

These three emphases intertwine and form one call and purpose for us as the Baptist Union of Scotland. They invite us to be a family of churches, a community of communities, with particular convictions, colour and contributions to offer the wider church. Within this call and purpose is an invitation to re-imagine our life together as we set Christ free among us and live together under His rule.

All of this is only possible through a fresh experience of the grace of God in our lives. The rule of Christ is the realm of unbounded love, a love that opens us up to Him, to each other, to our neighbours, and most fundamentally to the resources of the Gospel.



Living as a Believers' Church

Shaking off individualism

Inter Church resourcing

Making the Vision reality

Affirming God's grace and repenting of our sin.

We praise God for all those churches and regions where we see His Spirit clearly at work in dynamic teaching, creative worship, deep community, effective mission and joyful service. Let us affirm all of this; but let us also express our holy dissatisfaction and repentance where we have allowed the spirit of this age to impregnate our churches.

Changing our practices

In order to travel on this journey, both as individual churches and as a family of churches, we have become convinced that it is vital for us to have Gospel practices that will shape us and define us. It is only when we begin to act differently that Gospel habits and virtues and patterns become part of us. It is only when new attitudes of godliness and mission are modelled and lived out that transformation really begins to take root. Thus, a central part of *An Invitation to a Journey* is for us together to become serious about developing shaping practices. What these practices actually look like will be determined by the local church and its context. At this time several of our churches have offered to begin to explore and intentionally develop at least one fresh practice for each of the six key areas of conviction listed below. These six convictions, we

believe, reflect something of what it is to live under the rule of Christ. They are also the convictions that define us as Baptists. Our vision is that each church will develop defining practices that make the Gospel attractive, credible, and become our gift to the wider church in Scotland and beyond.

- Living authentically as a Believers' church
- Communal discipleship
- Building missional relationships
- Communal discernment of the voice of God
- Inter-church resourcing
- Prophetic and dissident political engagement

We pray that by each local church working on such practices God will root us freshly in our own tradition, help us work together better, and turn us outwards in mission.

UNDER
CHRIST'S
RULE



Inter-church
resourcing

Communal
discipleship

Building
missional
relationships

Communal
discernment
of the voice
of God

Living
authentically
as a Believers'
church

Prophetic and
dissident
political
engagement

Discerning together

This summary document represents a significant amount of listening and conversing over the last two years; including many discussions by the National Strategy Group, the Better Together tour, two residential Councils, and most particularly the 2010 Assembly 'Communities of Conviction'. We dare to believe that in all these, and in other more personal contexts, we have begun to hear the voice of God Himself. But 'begun to hear' is important because this document represents more an invitation to

journey with us than a vision statement, more a set of compass readings than sat nav instructions. Here, in summary, is an invitation to our churches to join a movement that seeks to explore together, for our day and our nation, what it means to live under the Rule of Christ. It is an exploration that will lead us, in the course of seeking to faithfully follow Jesus Christ, to new discoveries about mission, partnership and the value of bold Gospel practices drawn from our Baptist heritage.



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