

The Order of Baptist Ministry

Advent 2016 Newsletter.

We have just returned from our 6th Convocation, held for a second year at St Columba's Retreat Centre in Woking, where we were fed and housed wonderfully well. We were also served by Ian Green, Colin Norris, Heather McIntyre and Carol Murray as they led us, helping us to focus upon our theme of 'Being Present.' Amongst other features of the Convocation were the usual Community Life meeting— an opportunity to discuss the life of the Order together; prayers throughout using our Daily Office and using fully the settings available — small circular prayer oratory, chapel and our meeting room; the second outing for an OBM Communion Office that we hope to post on the website soon now it has been used a couple of times; the wonderful opportunity for two members of cells to make their vows as members of the Order (Glen Graham and Graham Sinden) and those who were already members to renew them; and some down time, including a poetry reading from Richard Kidd and Paul Goodliff. Our professed membership now stands at 24, but there are more than 40 in cells.

Our plans are to take the Convocation to the South West next time, where there are now three vibrant cells, and so we gather next November 15–16, 2017, at Brunel Manor near Torquay. Do write that into your diary and if you are a member of the Order, do your utmost to be present there.

At the Convocation we heard that there are now cells in London, North Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes, the East Midlands, the North West, and the South West. We hope to see cells established in South Wales in the coming months, as well as elsewhere. We give thanks to God for these signs of growth and life.

We noted that there are still some gaps in the suite of Daily Offices, and our hopes are to complete the cycle of Ordinary, Alternative and Shorter offices for all seven days of the week, and the seasons they reflect. If you are a budding liturgist and want to see where the gaps lie, and offer a draft of your work to the Steering Group, then please do so. We are beginning to write a fourth series, of which the Advent Office that we wrote collectively last year at our 2015 Convocation is the first. This will be available on the website very soon. This has the flavour of a more communal usage, although it could very easily be used individually as a fourth alternative in the long season of Advent about to begin.

As a Steering Group we were thankful for the affirmation of Convocation, and so we continue to comprise Geoff Colmer as our chair, Colin Norris, Martin Taylor, Carol Murray, Heather McIntyre, Brian Howden and Paul Goodliff. Since the very beginning we have considered how we might express the role that in other Orders or Communities is filled by a Visitor — a Baptist who understands our charism and calling, without too close an identity with us as a member of cell or Order. We are delighted to be able to explore that role with Chris Ellis next year. Former President of Bristol Baptist College, (and previously minister in four different churches in both England and Wales) and latterly Minister of West Bridgford Baptist Church in Nottingham before retirement to Yorkshire, we believe that Chris will serve us well as a sympathetic friend and 'critical ear.'

On a wet and wild day in September, Geoff Colmer and Paul Goodliff travelled to be with the cells in the South West. They were spending a day apart to consider how to grow from two to three cells (a move which they have now completed), to pray the offices together and to have some time for personal retreat. One cell member described The Order as “the best kept secret in the Baptist Union”, which delighted Geoff and Paul, and the wider Convocation as Geoff shared that comment. We are not intentionally secret, although we do not widely publicise ourselves, preferring organic growth to forced growth. However, if you are reading this letter and are curious about our life and practices, (it is on our website, after all) then do make contact through our website. Sometimes cells are born as just two or three people ‘find one another’ in a locality, and discover that their longings for the kind of disciplined, contemplative and corporate spirituality that the Order offers as its distinctive contribution to the ministerial life of *Baptists Together* is shared by others who live near enough to form just such a cell.

There will be no Community Day in 2017, and so it will be important that we all are sensitive to those who might be seeking us out, and offer them some initial hospitality in existing cells, where possible. We hope to take Community Days on the road to places other than Milton Keynes in following years, but for the coming year, we are taking a break.

For those who are members, you will know that we agreed in 2015 to ask for a gift to the Order of £25 per year per member. This has enabled us to build a small surplus in our bank account, and this will enable us to, for instance, assist a few in a small way who might find attendance at Convocation challenging because of the costs of attendance. We believe this practice of ‘fellowship’ is an appropriate way to further express our belonging to one another in Christ and in the vision and purposes of the Order. Our Treasurer would be glad to receive 2017 gifts as the New Year opens.

So, as 2016 draws to its close, with all of the world-changing events that have unfolded during it, may the one, constant God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, bless preserve and keep us all in the grace of Christ, and inspire us to follow him with greater confidence and love as 2017 opens.