

## **The Order for Baptist Ministry**

### **January 2018 Newsletter**

#### **Convocation**

The last few months have seen some encouraging developments in the life of the Order, including the holding of our 2017 Convocation at Brunel Manor in November of last year. With a larger attendance than in previous years, there were participants new to Convocation from the South West, South East, East Midlands and London, as well as many who attend Convocation without fail. Holding the Convocation in the vicinity of Torquay enabled some from the cells in the South West to attend, and John Colwell and Hannah Freeland from those cells led one of the three sessions that addressed our theme of 'The Stature of Waiting.' In addition to that conversational piece, Martin Taylor addressed the theme on the first afternoon, introducing Vanstone's classic text of that name, while Geoff Colmer led us in the way music makes us 'wait', in a discussion of waiting and Advent through a musical lens on the second day. At the closing Eucharist one member took vows for the first time, while many others were given the opportunity to renew theirs, as usual. This is always a fitting climax to the important, if brief, event that is Convocation. Some new to the event spoke with delight at its character, while it was noted that we do not sing much (or even, at all) at Convocation, and perhaps this might be rectified. It might indeed!

A reminder to all those who read this newsletter as a participant in, or member of, the Order that this year's Convocation (2018) is to be held on 14–15 November at St Columba's Woking (and in 2019, from 13–14 November at Shallowfield House near Stone in Staffordshire.) Get those dates in your diary! Prices for the Convocation will be in the same range as usual. Later in the year we will advertise the theme of the Convocation as it opens for booking.

A reminder too, that those who are members, or regular participants, are invited to contribute £25 pa for the life of the Order.

#### **Cells**

Cell life continues to expand, with eleven cells up and running, and up to two more in the process of forming. They are to be found in the Manchester area, the East Midlands, three in the South West, Milton Keynes, North Oxfordshire, London, Sussex/Kent borders, Buckinghamshire and the Bucks/Herts borders. We anticipate cells forming in Dorset and perhaps Yorkshire. If you are interested in discussing what that might mean for you, should you not be in a cell but would like to explore the possibility of joining or forming one, then do make contact with us. The email address via the website has been unpredictable, so we are changing this to the address of one of the Core Group for ease — in fact, mine! — [paul@goodliff.com](mailto:paul@goodliff.com). I will endeavour to ensure your enquiry is forwarded to the right person.

We have individuals interested in forming a cell in Gloucestershire, Scotland and South Wales, so we would especially be interested in hearing from any in those areas, but from the distribution described above, you'll note that there are large areas of the country beyond our reach at present — East England and the North in particular.

## Daily Office

In recent weeks there have been some additions to the suite of Daily Offices uploaded to the website, including an Office for the use, normally, on March 25<sup>th</sup> to remember the Feast of the Annunciation (although, this year that is removed to April 9<sup>th</sup> to avoid a clash with Palm Sunday); and another for use from All Saints, November 1<sup>st</sup>, until the eve of Advent as an alternative towards the close of the church year. We have commissioned some others to fill in the gaps, including an Alternative Office for Pentecost, another for use on Saturdays, and the beginnings of a series of Mid-day Offices that will follow the same liturgical calendrical pattern as our Daily Offices (Advent, Christmas, Epiphany etc.) Do take a look at that section of our website if you have not done so for a few months, and try out those new offices too.

## Core Group

As a Core Group, offering guidance to the Order, we have been conscious that there has been no one that might take on a role resembling that of a Visitor, (in sister Orders often held by a bishop or some such figure). Now, we Baptists do not have bishops, but we have recognised the wisdom and experience of Rev'd. Dr. Chris Ellis, and we are delighted that he has agreed to serve us as an Order in this way. We met with him in the early Autumn for the first time, and already have benefited from that wisdom. Chris has held a number of pastorates, latterly at West Bridgford prior to retirement, and, of course, was Principal of Bristol Baptist College before that final pastorate. Our plan is to meet with him annually at one of our meetings that is not so fully absorbed with planning for Convocation, and welcome his insight into the wider concerns of the growth of the Order.

## Future Hopes

This appointment has concluded one of our hopes, but others remain, including broadening the Core Group with some younger members, and the possible birth of a sister Order — one that we currently name for convenience, *The Order for Baptist Contemplatives* — and which would have a broader constituency than OBM's, which is restricted to those engaged in ministry. This would go some way to answer the question occasionally put to us about non-ministerial Baptists (who are, of course, the vast majority) and the desire of some for some kind of structure to hold their embrace of that contemplative spirituality which characterises OBM. If you know of any who might want to explore this, then do be in touch, in the first instance, with me at the email address above.

Together with hopes for such a geographical spread of cells as to make it possible for any Baptist minister to enjoy relatively easy access to a cell, and the completion of our suite of Daily, Mid-day and Night-time offices, I hope you see that we are asking God to deepen our fulfilment of the Dream's statement that we have 'our hearts set on pilgrimage'. Far from celebrating arriving at a destination, we look, with confidence in the Christ who ever bids us come and follow paths familiar and new marked by his footprints, to fresh ventures ahead. Indeed, we wonder if we (together with others, such as The Baptist Retreat Group) have a contribution to make to the wider life of our Baptist community of churches and ministers, offering a way of quiet trust and contemplative prayer and which might fulfil that aspect of

the Dream (and our Baptist forebears' vision) which call us to "walk together and watch over one another."

Paul Goodliff

29th January 2018