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CHURCH PLANTING INITIATIVE BY BAPTISTS...BACUP

BAPTIST CHURCH PLANTERS

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A network of Baptist Church Planters has been launched because Church planting is back on the Baptist agenda.

Church planting is happening. Its happening all over the UK. Its probably happening near you! Its happening amongst baptists. Its happening especially amongst baptists!

Like flowers in the early spring, new communities of believers are appearing as signs of a changing spiritual climate. Pioneering churches are breaking new ground. Associations are taking a fresh look at their own back yard and resolving to replant in areas where life has withered in the more hostile social and spiritual environment of recent decades. Some have found that the ground is hard and stoney. Many of us are discovering that we've almost forgotten what it was like to get out of doors again, so accustomed have we become to tending only the windowboxes of our home church life. But its enivorating to get out there and get our hands dirty in mission. And the seed is good! The seed is good isn't it?! And despite the thorns and the stones and the birds, we're being reminded that the Lord assured us that there is good ground out there waiting to be planted. So the seasons change, as the writer of Ecclesiastes reminds us, and there comes a time to plant. There was no doubt amongst the delegates at the recent Baptist Union Consulation on Church Planting that such a new day was dawning for our churches. Despite the uncertainties and lack of experience in this form of evangelism, there is unquestionably a new confidence in the Gospel growing amongst our people.

There is also a more realistic appraisal of the state of our own back yard. We've been praying and giving to send men and women abroad to plant churches for almost two hundred years but now Christians all over the UK are waking up to the fact that our own land is a mission field. It is perhaps in part due to the world mission link that we've enjoyed with churches like those in Brazil that the Spirit of God has been able to fire our minds with new and greater expectations for the reestablishment of the church in our own society.

Not withstanding the spreading vision for a renewed strategy of evangelism with church planting at its heart, there are real difficulties to be faced. One such I've already refered to, namely the lack of experience in undertaking such ventures. Take the London Baptist Association as an example. Since the beginning of the last war there has been virtually no baptist church planting in the capital of our country. One consequence of this is that few of our current church leaders have had

those we entrust to give direction at our church meetings, whether ministers or deacons, elders or others have had the chance to work through the practicalities or the faith challenges involved in pioneer work of this kind. Thank God for those individuals and groups that have been bold enough to press ahead in faith despite this. Thank God for those groups both overseas and in our own land like the Black lead churches and the Icthus Fellowship who have shown us it can be done. There is however a growing pool of expertise amongst our own churches and its not suprising therefore that when the proposal was made to form a network of those who have experience of, or commitment to church planting, it was met with overwhelming enthusiasm.

**The network will create a much needed opportunity to share experience, provide support, promote study and develop strategies for the multiplication of witnessing communities.**

David Coffey, Secretary for evangelism, Geoffrey Reynolds, superintendant of the Southern Area and Stuart Christine, Oasis director for Church planting and Evangelism at Spurgeon's College, were commissioned by the forty delegates at the Gorsley Consultation to take the idea forward into a reality that would serve the denomination. This month every minister in our denomination will receive an enrolment form together with the General Secretary's mailing from Baptist House. We expect a big response and take this opportunity of encouraging ministers and members alike to sign up and open this window into the exciting world of church planting.

What benefits can you expect to gain from your £5 annual subscription?

**First for sharing.** You'll be put in touch with those who have something to share. People you can get in touch with. A church perhaps in similar situation to your own that has faced the sorts of issues that are being raised in your own leaders meetings. Mistakes to avoid. Problems that didn't prove as great as at first they seemed. The good, the bad and the ugly, to inform and encourage you.

**Second for support.** For those on the front line to be in contact with others who have been there and are facing similar pressures. For folk who whilst not personally involved in a plant to be able to pray for and support strategic initiatives through their link into the network.

**Third for study.** We've alot of ground to make up and alot of lessons to relearn. Eg. study into new and creative ways of financing church planting projects. The challenges of beginning new churches in the inner city or areas of high ethnic mix. What about tent-making or bi-vocational church planters or the effectiveness of women in planting leadership? The network will enable folk with special interests to get together in study groups, exchange insights and offer a means of getting the results of studies undertaken circulated amongst the churches by means of the newsheets or planting papers to be published three times a year. Conferences will also be

sponsored to create opportunities for new ideas and insights to be shared. The first is scheduled for July 2nd/3rd next year!

**Fourth, for developing more effective strategies for multiplying witnessing communities.** A key theme at the Gorsley consultation was the importance of cooperation between churches at local and associational level in meeting the challenge of replanting the many churchless communities that surround us. The network should open up channels of communication for sharing vision and experience and provide Associations with contacts whose expertise could be drawn upon as each area develops its own plans.

In taking this initiative baptists will once again, as in the area of training, be leading the way for other denominations in this vital area of mission. The network will undoubtedly serve as both a stimulus and a resource to other church groups giving added value to the prophetic contribution of baptists to the ecumenical process.

New church planting will certainly be one of the most important and exciting characteristics of this decade of evangelism.

**We invite you as individuals, churches, associations or colleges, to plug in to the network and make this vision an exciting reality for our denomination by enrolling straight away.**

If you are interested in forming or joining one of the proposed study groups then write a note to that effect to accompany your application form and £5 subscription fee. (For this first year Spurgeon's has kindly agreed to handle the account on behalf of the network and so cheques should be made payable to Spurgeon's College.)

**SEND YOUR REQUEST FOR ENROLLMENT, CHEQUE ETC TO:  
Baptist Church Planters, (BACUP),  
c/o Rev. Stuart Christine,  
Oasis Director for Church Planting and Evangelism,  
Spurgeon's College, 189, South Norwood Hill, LONDON SE25 6DJ  
Tel 081-653-0850.**

**Stuart Christine,  
Oasis Director for Church Planting and Evangelism.**

21-11-90.