



LET'S INSPIRE ONE ANOTHER IN ALL WE DO

Hayley Young is the President of our Baptist Union 2022-2023, and her theme is 'Building a Bigger Table'.

Inspired by this, *Baptists Together* magazine invited Hayley and General Secretary Lynn Green to gather around a table and have a conversation.

LYNN GREEN

Hayley, it's really great to meet with you. You are the President of Baptists Together. I wonder if you can tell us a little bit about what

that role entails, and what your theme is for the year?

HAYLEY YOUNG

Thanks, Lynn. It's great to be here. The role of President is really interesting, isn't it? Because it's something that changes annually. It's coming alongside the Baptist movement for a season and trying to share some spiritual insight, and share the stories we're hearing as we travel around. And more importantly, to pray for the movement.

My theme as I walk alongside the Baptist movement is 'Building a Bigger Table', encouraging us to have conversations around

different aspects of our church life and our mission.

LG: There's a lot of commonality between our roles as General Secretary and President. The three core aspects of my role are the same as yours, which is about spiritual leadership: Leading out of prayer and seeking God; building a sense of team and connecting; and celebrating the identity of Baptists and representing us.

One of the differences is that I have the ongoing day to day responsibility and oversight of us as a movement.

Another important thing we share is that we're there for all the churches and for all our ministers, and trying to listen to everyone, to be perceiving and discerning what God's doing. And to be able to reflect to different parts of the family maybe what God's doing in other parts.

HY: So what are the challenges from your point of view for the Baptist movement?

LG: I think they are three-fold probably. I think one of the main challenges is the missional challenge. Times are changing so massively in our context. The Covid pandemic has really brought things into sharp focus. So:

What does it mean to be church right now?
What is God's call to us?
And how do we respond to that?

I think this is a huge challenge for our churches. It's kind of a positive challenge. I know it can come out of a less positive place. But actually, 'what does it mean to be following the mission of God where we are right now in this context?', is a real challenge.

I do think we have some practical challenges. Our churches are declining, and that is the reality. The difficulties of financing, getting volunteers, you know, there are all sorts of practical pressures on us we need to think about.

But I think one of the other challenges to us is about what I might call the relational challenge. We live in times of great polarisation and we don't want that to be in our family. We are supposed to be modelling Christ and nurturing the unity we have in Christ. So actually, the way we talk together about difficult things, the way we negotiate what we're doing, the way we serve together, is really, really important.

What sort of things are you seeing in terms of challenges?

HY: I think exactly the same and I like to reframe it in a sense of hope. And this is where the 'Building a Bigger Table' comes in. With all those challenges, especially the relational one, my response is: actually, let's just be together.

I think sometimes when we are together and doing community together, we get to know people in their hearts and where they're from. And we see that locally. As Baptists I think we've got a wonderful prophetic image here that we can share with divided communities. Even in difference we can spend time in fellowship and community together.

I think the challenge of churches facing a lack of attendance calls us to a deeper discipleship. Jesus did that round the meal table. And so I'm loving seeing churches adapt: instead of putting 45 minutes of singing as a priority, as wonderful as that is - we missed that! - actually having 45 minutes of eating together and being together is just so wonderful.

And then with the first challenge of mission, of what it means to be church - it's re-imagining everything. Covid allowed us to reset and some of us have swung back to what we've known because it was so powerful. But some have asked: "How do we continue to reach out to new generations?" I think the best way to do that is over a cup of coffee, or a meal.



LG: One of the really exciting things about Assembly this year was using the app Slido to help people to engage with the kind of questions they felt we ought to be talking about. People were able to upvote certain things.

The most upvoted question on Slido this year at Assembly was: *'It's becoming sad that our union does not value evangelism as an equal priority. Can my voice be heard?'*

As well as being President, Hayley, you're also really involved in association life. Maybe you could tell us about your role there and reflect a little on what evangelism looks like from where you are?

HY: I really hear this question. And I think sometimes this is about communication. Because actually in association life I'm seeing a great deal of evangelism and mission. I'm based in the Northern Baptist Association, and before that I was in the South Wales Baptist Association. And both associations, as with other associations, have mission enablers, or regional ministers with oversight responsibilities for mission. We are constantly encouraging and engaging our churches and ministers and missional communities to go out and preach the good news of the Gospel in its wholeness, in a context that is right for them.

Some of our churches will do that in more traditional ways, such as *Alpha* courses, inviting guest speakers to share; and others will do it through more creative or different ways, new ways. And I find that interesting.

So evangelism is happening right in our grassroots, and I guess we need that communication to share those stories more widely.

LG: Just as you're saying that it's also making me think that while both local churches and associations make up the vast majority of our movement, we also have an increasing number of chaplains. I know particularly from my conversations with military chaplains – I am just amazed by the opportunities they have to share Christ and to just engage with people way outside of the church.

HY: What else are you seeing from the national perspective?

LG: That's really interesting because I think two of our presidents in recent years have really brought this theme, this passion for evangelism. Chris Duffett in 2012 and Yinka Oyekan in 2020. It was fabulous to see how it worked out in our family.

We've also got groups like the Baptists Together Mission Forum, which is trying to connect what's happening in different parts of our movement, to encourage it and to provide resources. There is a big area for mission on our website, and one of the buttons is for evangelism. We've put articles out recently about the Talking Jesus research and the Hope 23-24 initiative (see pages 48-49), so there's lots of resources and ideas, but also if you've got ideas to share, we want to hear them.

And you were involved in the Mission Forum, weren't you? What were some of the things that you've seen coming out of Mission Forum, in terms of evangelism?

HY: The wonderful thing when I was involved in Mission Forum, as a mission enabler for an association, was the *123Go!* initiative (see pages 33-34). This encompassed Chris, Yinka and Simon Goddard, one of our Pioneer ambassadors, really encouraging churches on social media and physically, to get out and share the good news of Jesus. It was a wonderful way of seeing something that was formed in what we perceive to be 'committee', actually having a real kind of flesh on it, and churches are embracing that.

LG: Part of our *Declaration of Principle* is about all of us bearing witness and being part of the evangelisation of the world. So for me, it's at the heart of what we do.

There's lots of different ways people want to evangelise, and it's just brilliant how we can encourage all these different expressions across our family. I want to celebrate all of them. And again, as I said, let's share ideas. Let's inspire one another in all we do. Because at the end of the day, we want to see lives and communities transformed for the gospel.

This is an edited version of Hayley and Lynn's conversation, which took place at Baptist House in June. For more reflections on our life and mission together, access the full, filmed version, here: www.baptist.org.uk/hayleyandlynn
