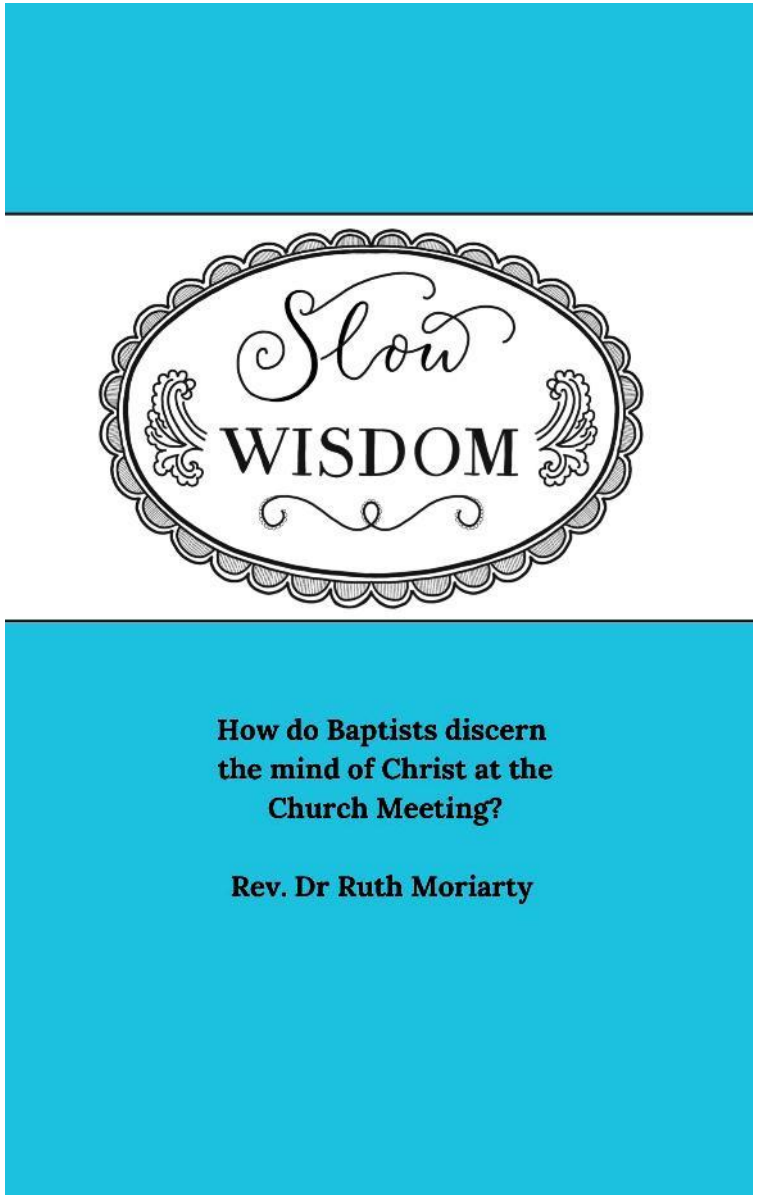
This Body Life

SWBA Ministry Retreat 2025

Session 1

Book : £10 or via Amazon



Violet Hedger : first woman to be trained for ministry at Oxford (1919).
Margaret Jarman : first female BUGB President (1987)
Edith Gates: pioneer ministry in Oxfordshire (1918)
Kate Coleman : first Black woman as accredited Baptist minister (1996) & BUGB President (2006)

1 Corinthians 12.12-27

12 For just as the body is one and has many
members, and all the members of the body,
though many, are one body, so it is with
Christ. 13 For in the one Spirit we were all
baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks,
slaves or free—and we were all made to
drink of one Spirit.

14 Indeed, the body does not consist of one
member but of many. 15 If the foot were to
say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not
belong to the body’, that would not make it
any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear
were to say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do
not belong to the body’, that would not
make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the
whole body were an eye, where would the
hearing be?

If the whole body were hearing, where
would the sense of smell be? 18 But as it is,
God arranged the members in the body,
each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were
a single member, where would the body
be? 20 As it is, there are many members, yet
one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the
hand, 'I have no need of you', nor again the
head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'

22 On the contrary, the members of the
body that seem to be weaker are
indispensable, 23 and those members of the
body that we think less honourable we
clothe with greater honour, and our less
respectable members are treated with
greater respect; 24 whereas our more
respectable members do not need this. But
God has so arranged the body, giving the
greater honour to the inferior member,

25 that there may be no dissension within
the body, but the members may have the
same care for one another. 26 If one
member suffers, all suffer together with it; if
one member is honoured, all rejoice
together with it.

27 Now you are the body of Christ and
individually members of it.

Hedger Baptist
13 members | 30 average service

Jarman Baptist
14 members | ... average service

Gates Baptist
29 members | ... average service

Coleman Baptist
39 members | ... average service

Hedger Baptist
13 members | 30 average service

Jarman Baptist
14 members | 50 average service

Gates Baptist
29 members | 90 average service

Coleman Baptist
39 members | 400 average service

Coleman Baptist Church

Carole: Good to see you here tonight. I want to introduce to you Ruth here, she's come to check I'm doing church meetings correctly. I'm being watched by the Baptist Union, but don't worry about it.

Floor: 'About time' *[lots of laughing]*

Carole: *[groan and laugh]* Here we go!
Do you want to say anything Ruth about what you are really here for?

Ruth: Yeah

Minister: 'Cause my p45 is on the way!

Diversity of the body of Christ is vital for our ability to witness in diverse contexts.

Biblical principles and history of the Church Meeting

This body life

Nell: A lot don't come from a Baptist tradition, so they don't see that the Church Meeting is important … but it's this body life which is supposed to be the Baptist thing which is foreign really.

This : Gathered church (Matthew 18)

Body : Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12)

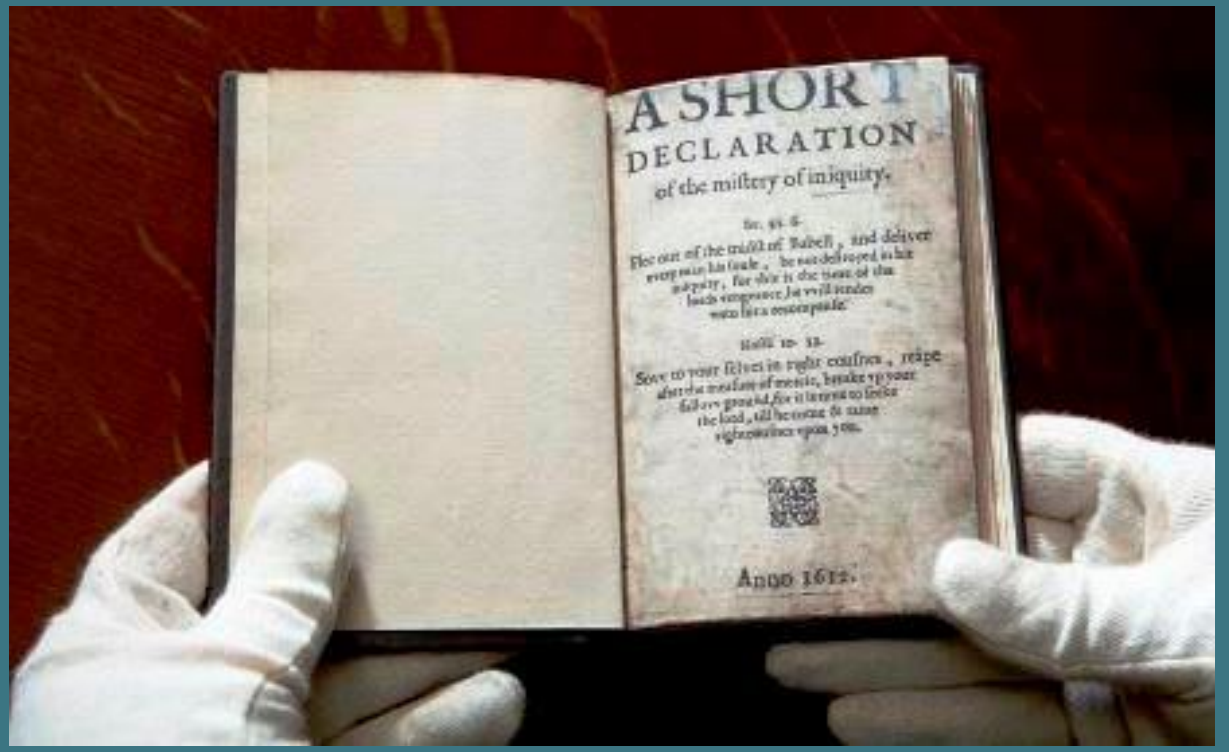
Life : Covenant & Role of priesthood
of all believers (1 Peter 2)

THIS: Gathered church

Matthew 18.20 ‘For where two or three are *gathered* in my name, I am there among them’.

Early Baptist practice forged in persecution

John Smyth, WIKI



Helwys' book, Angus library

Thomas Helwys, WIKI

Elizabeth Gaunt

Image: WIKI

Image: Cassells Illustrated History

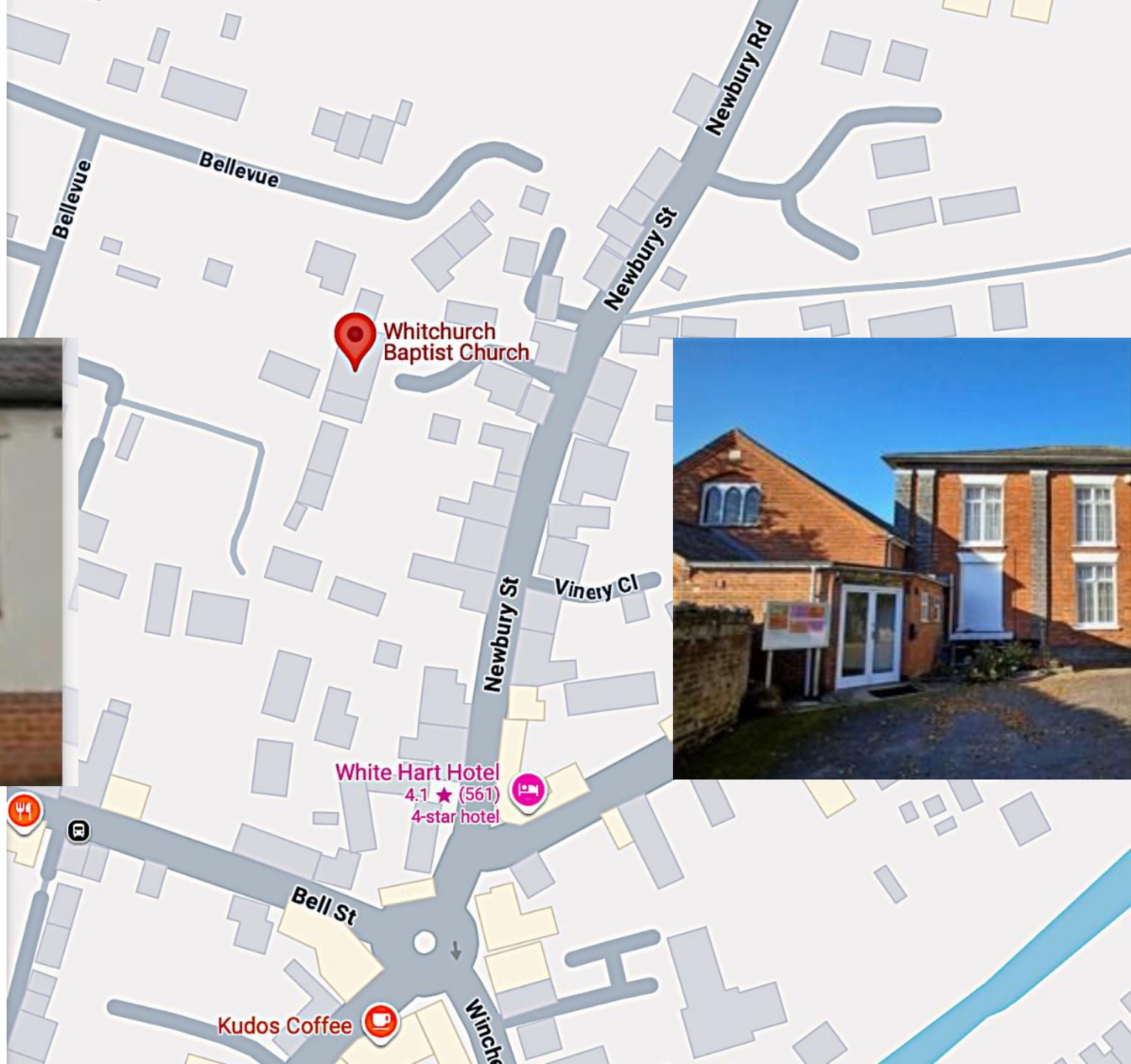
BODY> Biblical basis:
Church is body of Christ

12 For just as the body is one and has many
members, and all the members of the body, though
many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in
the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body
- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and we were all
made to drink of one Spirit. … 27 Now you are the
body of Christ and individually members of it.

1600-1700

- Baptist churches are rural, small and poor.
- Met in barns, borrowed rooms, hidden.
- Principle and pattern of discernment: members as holy witnesses as the body of Christ in the community.

Whitchurch Baptist 1652



Church meetings were often part of what happened on Sundays ...Together they would seek guidance for matters of faith and practice, discussing in this context what it was to worship, use resources, who was in need, who Christ had given as ministers. This was the church seeking the mind of the Lord so that they might be his people. (Haymes, 2008)

1750-1850

- Alongside the industrial revolution, Baptist churches grow in size and wealth in cities.
- Baptists shifted towards gathering to worship in their own public buildings and witnessing through charitable mission activities with a more formal and organising Church Meeting.

Bloomsbury Baptist 1848

While the way of gathering together has changed, the Church Meeting remains a spiritual act.

LIFE> London 1644 confession of faith:

That all beleevers are a holy and [1]sanctified people, | and that sanctification is a spirituall grace of the new | Covenant, and the effect of the love of God, manifested | to the soule, whereby the believer is in truth and rea-| litie separated, both in soule and body, from all sinne and | dead works,

through the blood of the everlasting Co-| venant , wherby he also preseth after a heavnly and | Evangelical perfection, in obedience to all the Com - | mands, which Christ as head and King in this new Co-|venant has prescribed to him (citedLumpkin, 1959, p. 164).

[1] 1 Cor.1.1 & 1 Pet. 2.9

Biblical texts are noted in the original confession.

LIFE > Biblical basis:
Priesthood of all believers

1/ Israel = priestly kingdom and a holy nation (Exodus 19.5-6)
2/ Christians are made into a holy priesthood (1 Peter 2.4-5)
3/ Every tribe and nation are called to be a kingdom of priests (Revelation 5.9-15)
(Newman, 2005, p.60)

Changing emphasis at the Church Meeting:

Democracy

The Church Meeting as a democracy ?

Fiona: ‘It is very, very democratic. Everyone has the opportunity to have a say, and to have an influence and to make a difference’.

Barbara: It is an open forum, a place to air your views.

The priesthood of believers and democratic congregational authority go hand in hand, to the extent that the church departs from democratic organization and government, so it ceases to be Christian in its principles and life (Terry Young, 1996).

A Church Meeting fails to honour being the priesthood of all believers when the individual view and right to vote (in particular) is held tighter than the responsibility to discern together and remain part of the body of the church.

‘The resulting ecclesiology from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day emphasizes the individual believer, the local church as the voluntary association of individuals and a soteriology focused on individual conversion’ (Haymes, 2008).

In USA

- The priesthood of all believers = soul competency ; individuals have the right to have direct access to God.

- EY Mullins (1860-1928)

church = 'the social dimension of the soul's competency (See Elizabeth Newman, 2005).

Stephen: They don't know too much about it and we're not doing an awful lot to help them to understand it. And we have a tension there, and I know what happens in that space. And forgive me because this is a mantra, I know you would hear over and over – it becomes a democracy.... Rather than discerning the heart and mind of Christ.

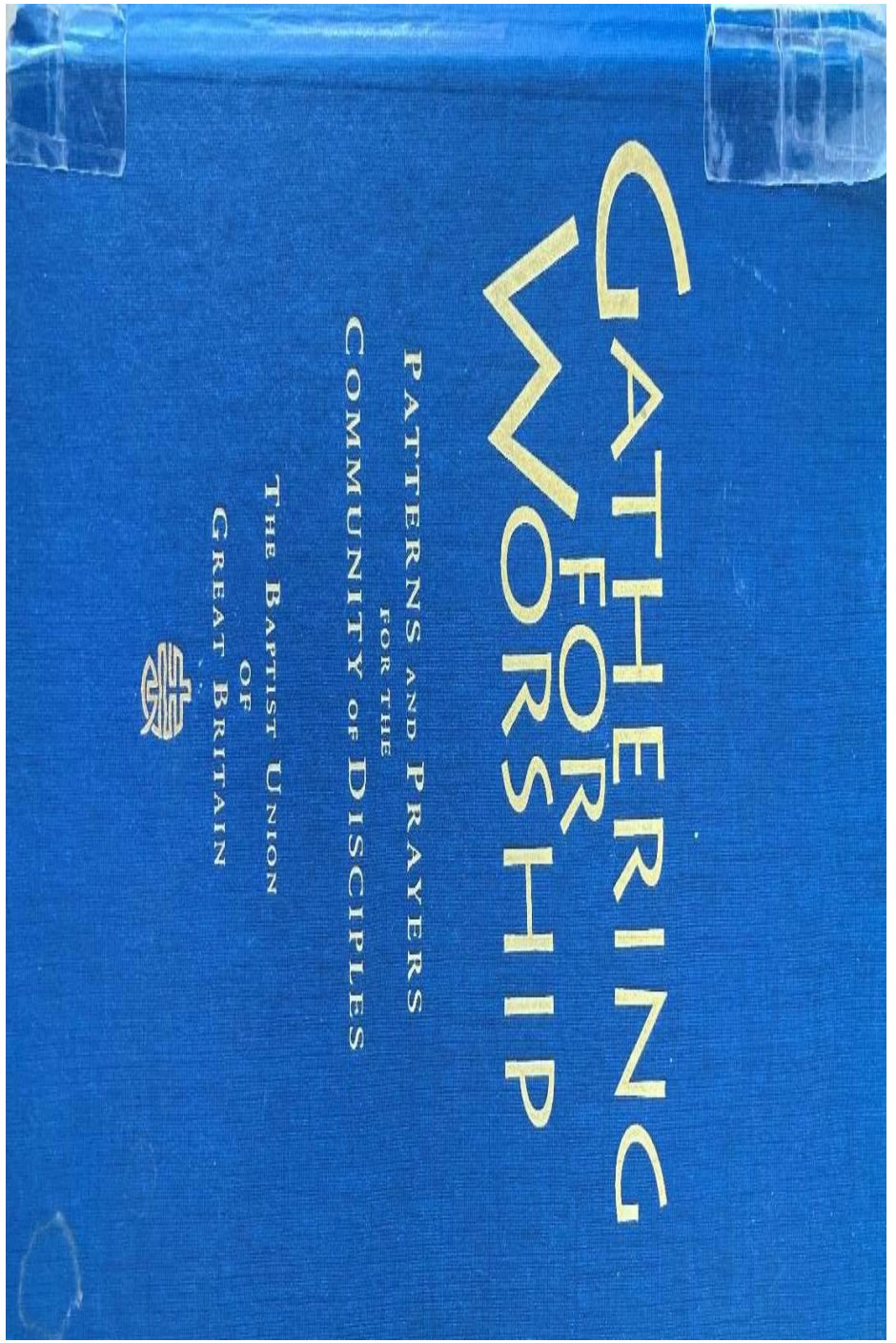
The church is not and must never be regarded as a democracy, for the power is not in the hands of the demos but [in Christ's.] To grasp this delivers us from the worst kind of church meeting where the aim is not so much to discover the will of God as to gain a policy of one's choosing by a majority vote (Alec Gilmore, 1963).

LIFE> Covenanted church

‘Joyned them selves (by a *covenant* of the Lord) into a Church estate, in the fellowship of the gospel, to walke in all his ways...’ (Bradford cited Fiddes, 2006, p. 21).

LIFE > Welcoming new members

Each church has distinctive practices. Typical for existing members to visit potential members, present to the Church Meeting and then welcome in a service.



‘A as a member of this church
Do you promise to share your life
And your journey of faith
With these people in this place?

I do.
Together we are called
To be disciples of Jesus Christ.

Will you keep listening for the call of God,
Ready to serve others
And to witness to Jesus Christ
As a member of this church?

I will.
We are the body of Christ,
And the Spirit shares
the gifts of grace
For service and witness.

Will you, as the members of (this church)
Promise to share your lives and journey of faith
with A,
Walking together in ways that are known
And yet to be made known?
We will.

Will you pray for A
And do all you can to help A
To witness to Jesus Christ?

We will.
In our life together we celebrate
The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
The love of God
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit'
(BUGB Gathering for Worship, 2005, p. 79-80).

Q: How does 'this body life' relate to Baptist life for you?

12 words max

Discernment as embodied Christian practical wisdom

Barbara: ‘I felt the mind of Christ’

Colin : ‘I felt entirely comfortable with a trustee recommendation.’

Matthew: ‘You could feel the whole meeting turn on a fulcum’.

The Baptist divine gut is both an index of the presence of Christ and a recognition of the Spirit's movement.

WISDOM

Jesus uses the Greek word *phronesis* meaning wisdom in Matthew 7.24 to describe the wise man who builds his house on rock, it is wise to listen to Jesus and to build our lives on him our rock.

In our faith communities and in our Baptist life together there is practical wisdom which helps us to know we have discerned the mind of Christ.

Christian practical wisdom: Don Browning, Edward Farley and Bonnie Miller-McLemore

Grandma Gladys

Embodied knowledge

‘Experiences layer as sedimentation in one’s body so that one gains the salience with which one can read a situation and see what it is that needs to be done here, now, within the horizon of one’s calling’ (Scharen, 2016, p. 174).

When Baptists discern together, it is to honour each other as members of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12.4-27), who gather together to encounter presence of Christ (Matthew 18.20), as members of the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2.5) and as recipients of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2.1-18).

It is Baptist bodies that determine when the Spirit has spoken and when discernment has occurred. It is these same bodies that are broken by conflict, wither with dull agendas and dis-member from the Church Meeting when other members of the body are poorly treated.

Practical wisdom helps us to remember that ideas are not fixed and static but always subject to change. Hence there is the capacity of ideas to illuminate and heighten our sense of wonder, our recognition of the power of mystery (hooks, 2010, p. 188).

Q: In what ways might the Baptist divine gut help us to discern the mind of Christ?

Think & Pair

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1 Corinthians 2.14-16: [14] The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are ***discerned*** only through the Spirit. [15] The person with the ***Spirit makes judgments*** about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, [16] for, "Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" ***But we have the mind of Christ.***

Image: Dave Walker, Cartoon church

Qualitative research and Practical Theology

- Honours lived-experience of real faith in real life as a source for theological reflection.
- Participant observation of 4 local Baptist churches of stratified sample set.
- Interviews with 2 members and 1 minister from each church. Intentional to include more members as a Baptist approach.

Slow

Prayerful

Listening

Hearing

Consensus
Agreement

Prophetic
participation

I SLOW

-Takes time to discern
-Bring everyone together
-Avoids idea being rejected
-Allow time to hear Spirit speak
- Slow BUT moving

Image: Moriarty

2 PRAYERFUL

Extempore prayer

‘There was a concern for ‘spiritual worship’ expressed through extempore prayer and a resistance to written prayer … [followed by] persecution regarding rejecting the Book of Common Prayer in 1662’ (Ellis, 2004, p. 32).

2 PRAYERFUL

Intercessory prayer

Members: 'Will you pray for A… and do all you can to help her/him/them to witness to Jesus Christ?' *Gathering for worship* (2005)

Baptists 'endeavour to actively relate to the God of their theology' (Oudtshoorn, 2013).

3 LISTENING

Matthew: ‘I’ve tried to talk about the essence of a Church Meeting as being about the responsibility to listen rather than the right to speak’.

4 HEARING

- Baptists value both hearing a multitude of different voices and a lone prophetic voice.
- Hear emotions of contributions
- Both guide discernment in new directions and offer an inclusive participatory decision-making practice.

5 CONSENSUS

1/ Gates: agreement actively tested

2/ Jarman and Hedger: general agreement.

3/ Gates & Coleman : consensus decision making in small group work

6 PROPHETIC PARTICIPATION

Maureen: If I speak up at a Meeting then it probably would be the Holy Spirit prompting me because I don't speak up very often.

Unexpected contributions: ‘change the whole tenor of the Church Meeting because [a member] talked sense ... they spoke God’s words into the situation ... they just spoke from the heart’ (Matthew).

6 PROPHETIC PARTICIPATION

Certain students may not speak often but when they speak the significance of what they have to say far exceeds those of other students who may always openly discuss ideas (hooks, 2010).

Recommendation 1:
How does the body of Christ, covenant and the priesthood of all believers speak into your context? What could change?

Recommendation 2:
Who is not present in your context? How might sharing slow wisdom help?

Recommendation 3:
What practical arrangements limit participation in your context?

Recommendation 4:
Try small groups to disrupt power balance and hear the Spirit speak from all.

Recommendation 5:
Is your agenda strategic or missional? Prioritise building the kingdom of God

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Ways forward

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Research as a minister

‘Insider research was turning the spotlight of scrutiny on me to consider [my] perceptions and insights’
(Bruce Moore, 2007).

Once I was in a meeting as a young woman. I was the only woman. I was wearing bright red, so I really stood out, or so I thought. I made an excellent suggestion out-loud but I was not heard. The chairman ignored me. A few minutes later an older man made exactly the same point as his own and the idea was hailed as brilliant.

Research log, May 2017

Some people still have one leg in and one leg out. We have people who will come unfailingly every Sunday but won't come to Church Meeting.

There are fewer young people in our churches, but they are more committed to God (Brierley, 2017). It is vital to engage with younger people and show the church to be an authentic expression of faith (Perrin, 2016) for which Baptists ecclesiology is well placed (Hopkins, 2022).

We know that Christians are switching denominations (Dougherty, Marti, and Martinez, 2015) and that denominational affiliation is lower (Guest, Aune, Sharma and Warner, 2013).

All members offer a gift to the church

‘As *Christ* to manifest himself in the world, to make himself knowable and tangible through all his members’ (Fiddes, 2006).

'Too Black'

Encountering difference

Desmond: He was concerned that the church was becoming too Black.
Ruth: Was he White?
Desmond: Yeah.
Desmond: I thought 'Oh where has this come from?' And I think it came out wrong.
Ruth: That's always gonna come out wrong! I mean there is no right way to say that, oh gosh!

Desmond: I think what he wanted to say, was that what he had noticed was that the White folks were either dying out or passing on or moving on to better areas outside the M25. And that the people coming in were more mixed. I think that's what he meant. I said to him: 'Look I have no control over who comes, or what colour they are.'

Racism and the Church Meeting: difference in expression

Desmond: It's partly cultural, both in their different ways [*two Black Nigerian members*] are very forward and clear in the way they would express things. Maybe [*the White British secretary*] and I would be more diplomatic.

We'd probably say the same thing but in a more diplomatic way and certainly, I think [*the White British secretary*] feel that there are certain things that are best not said. Whereas [*two Black Nigerian members*] would …

Ruth: Just say it! [both laugh]

Desmond *(Transcript page 14, code 27)*	
Condition	Overall theme of difficulty in discernment.
Context	Different terms of expression used by Black and White members.
Action	The non-verbal result was a source of tension within the Meeting.
Consequence	'Puts people off coming'
Links to codes	Racism, Speech, Power, Low Attendance

Difference in speech and theology

Carole: African and bringing the storehouses, give-give-give, tithe-tithe-tithe and it was kinda hard. And then she didn't present well, so what happened in the end was I had to kinda say to her that it's good for [another deacon] to present instead.

‘It’s God’s will that the believer is well supplied and well taken care of financially, referring to Acts 2.42-47 and 5.1-2’ (Emmanuel Kapofu, 2017).

Theological education is centred making ‘The Self-Sufficient Man’ based in system and structure of colonialism.

Willie Jennings (2020)

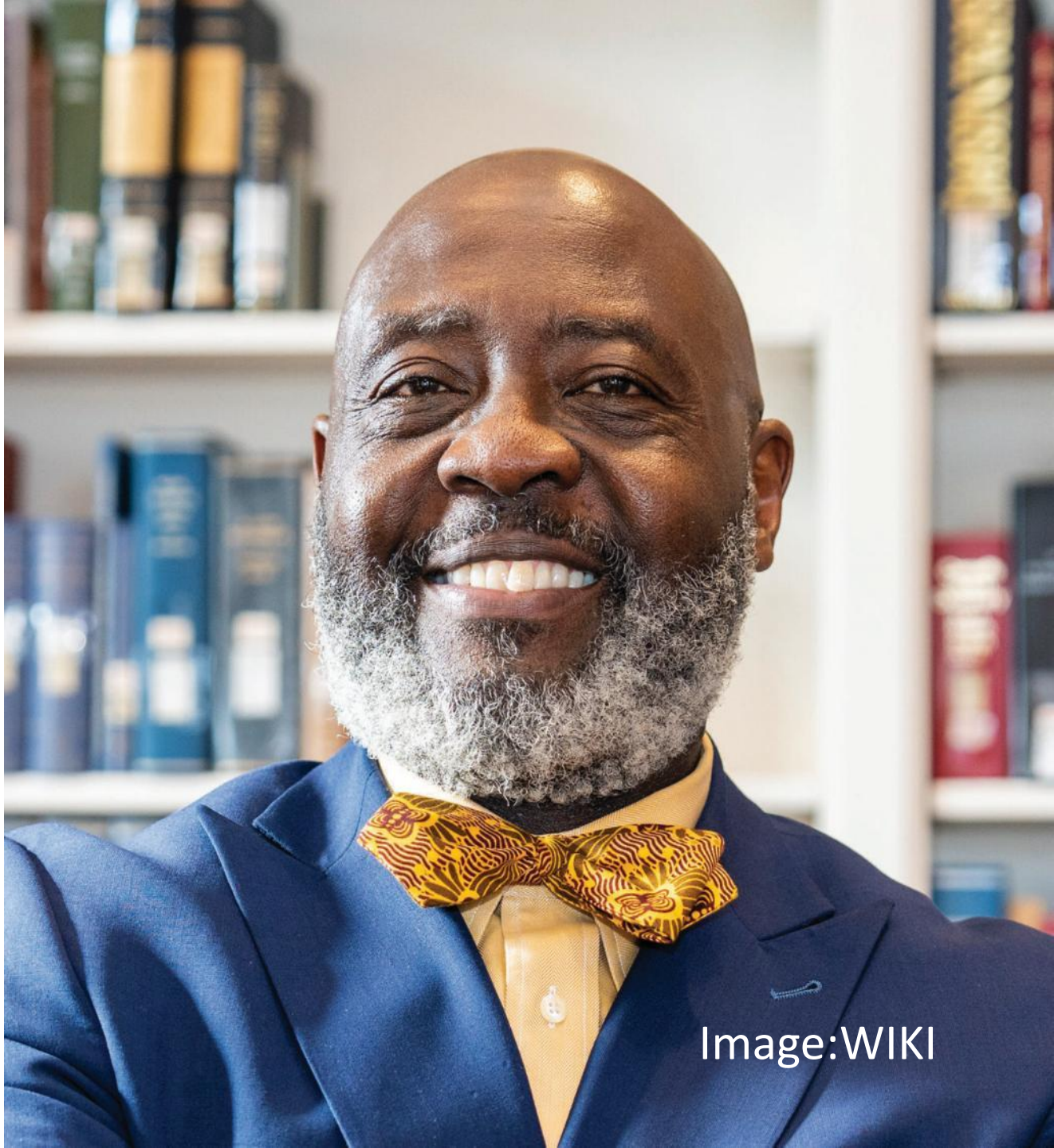

Image:WIKI

‘The self-sufficient man is an image of the perfect student which all other students are trained to become and assessed against, he has a command of ancient languages and has undergone the rigour of theological training offered only in Europe’ (Jennings, 2020).

Greeks and Romans: The Grand Man

‘Christian obedience is a direct attack against man’s grandeur’ (Schillebeeckx, 1980).

Self-Sufficient Man is based on Grand Man

Self-Sufficient Man presence

- Fragments of colonialism still present today in institutions like church or academy
- Focus on: Design and Affection

Design : Assessing ability

Mr. Yoo's essay had been marked down for poor grammar by a teaching assistant stating it was:

'Terrible, juvenile, not at the level of graduate work … [but] I knew Mr. Yoo. He spoke and wrote in Korean, Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese), French, Italian and Swahili, having lived in all these places that these languages call home' (Jennings, 2020).

Affection : Preferences

- Colonialism taught native people ‘what a beautiful dress looks like, the difference between good and bad wine, classic clothing’ (Jennings, 2020)

- Preferences shift us away from paying attention to each other and honouring diversity.

Design of the Church Meeting

Acceptable speech patterns are from White members

Desmond: It's partly cultural, both in their different ways [*two Black Nigerian members*] are very forward... Maybe [*the White British secretary*] and I would be more diplomatic.

Affection of Church Meeting

Acceptable theology is based on European values.

Carole: African and bringing the storehouses, give-give-give, tithe-tithe-tithe and it was kinda hard. And then she didn't present well

‘We should work towards a design that aims at an attention that forms deeper habits of attending to one another and to the world around us’ (Jennings, 2020).

Small group work on Hedger BBQ

Use Jennings model to unpack structural issues of difference

1 Corinthians 12.17-20

17 If the whole body were an eye, where would
the hearing be? 18 But as it is, God arranged the
members in the body, each one of them, as he
chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would
the body be? 20 As it is, there are many members,
yet one body.

Merry

If we choose to say ‘We don’t need you’, we fail to recognise the beautiful diversity of the body of Christ, and that our differences make us stronger and able to do more.

Asclepius temple, Corinth

May we honour this God given body life, delight in our diversity as the Spirit opens more doors to declare the glory of Christ in new and wonderful ways.

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