

120

TOGETHER



ASSOCIATION OF
BAPTIST CHURCHES
IN IRELAND



FURTHER READING

Baptist Evangelism in 19th Century Ireland – D P Kingdon
The Review of Particular Baptist Life in Ireland 1780-1840 – Dr C Gribben
We Irish Baptists – L E Deens
Century of Grace – Dr J Thompson
Celebrating 100 Years, Home Mission Centenary
The Past and Future of Baptists in Ireland – Hugh D. Brown

1895-2015

120 TOGETHER



I THANK MY GOD EVERY TIME I REMEMBER YOU ...
BECAUSE OF YOUR PARTNERSHIP IN THE GOSPEL
FROM THE FIRST DAY UNTIL NOW. PHILIPPIANS 1:3-5

INTRODUCTION

In the year 2015 the Association of Baptist Churches in Ireland (formerly Baptist Union of Ireland until 2000) will have been in existence for 120 years. At the first annual assembly of the Union in 1895, 29 churches were recorded as being in membership. The number of churches in the Association now stands at 118.

It is evident that the churches that comprise the Association are very different in style, approach, custom and practice. They do not, however, differ in terms of core beliefs. A collective commitment to the Doctrinal Statement, centring on the authority of Scripture and the gospel of Jesus Christ highlights that the churches hold the essentials in common. Indeed, the shared vision of the Association is “evangelisation and the establishing of churches, training for ministry, promotion of fellowship and maintaining spiritual unity”. This doctrinal stance and shared vision, along with the blessing of God, has enabled the churches of the Association to carry on a fruitful and faithful ministry together for 120 years.

This booklet tells the story of the Association, the factors leading to growth, its distinctive ethos and a look at what the future might hold. We pray that you will experience a sense of thankfulness, encouragement and joy in seeing how God has been working out His purposes through Irish Baptists and, in turn, this will lead to a renewed resolve and commitment to working together as an Association of Churches.

CONTRIBUTORS

Derek Baxter, Agnes Borland, Trevor Brock, William Colville,
Edwin Ewart, David Luke, Dave Ramsey



1: BORN TOGETHER

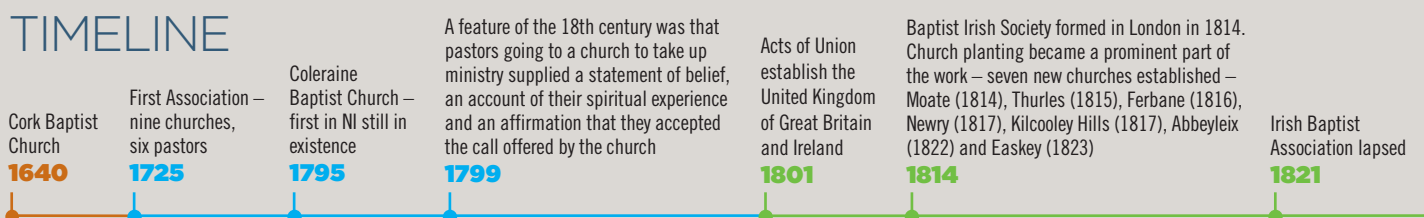
It is not possible to identify a date when Baptist ideas first emerged in Ireland but there is ample evidence that we have been around since the middle of the seventeenth century, with early records showing churches established in Cork (1640), Dublin (1642) and Waterford (1650).

Fast forward 150 years to 1812, and we meet nine young men from Dublin who share a burden to preach the Gospel to people within a 30 mile radius of the city. In less than a year the gospel had touched towns and villages as far as Drogheda and there were many conversions. In a letter to the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) in England they said 'we have much cause to rejoice that God has blessed our efforts in the conversion of at least 70 souls, some of whom had never heard a gospel sermon before.' A successful appeal for help was made to the BMS and this led to the establishment of the Baptist Irish Society (BIS) in 1814 and the appointment of its first itinerant evangelist.

By 1821, seven missionaries, many Scripture-readers and school teachers (male and female) were working in Ireland, mainly in the province of Connaught. One of the objects of the Baptist Irish Society was to help with the education of the many neglected Irish children. They proceeded to set up schools in mostly rented or borrowed premises around the country. Those attending were instructed in reading and writing and received teaching from the Scriptures. In the 1823 Annual Report of the Society it was recorded that 8,000 children, plus male and female adults, were attending nearly 100 day and evening classes. Reports in 1832 spoke about the 'triumphs of the Bible distribution work in Ireland'.

For 50 years, the BIS sent able ministers to the neediest areas of Connaught and Munster. Their dedication to preaching the gospel, Scripture education, church-planting and famine-relief is a thrilling story which underlines the fact that innovative evangelism and church-planting has been part of Baptist spiritual DNA from the beginning. By 1846, we find that an astonishing number of churches (38) had been formed. The evidence is clear - Baptists in Ireland founded churches at the rate of almost one every year in the first half of the nineteenth century. By 1848, there were 45 churches listed – 20 of them in, what is now known as, Northern Ireland.

TIMELINE





“... INNOVATIVE EVANGELISM HAS BEEN PART OF BAPTIST SPIRITUAL DNA FROM THE BEGINNING.”

Tragically, the ‘Great Famine’ of 1845-49 took its toll on Irish Baptists. It is estimated that numbers were depleted by more than 3,000 both through death and emigration. As a result, quite a number of churches disappeared in the south and west of Ireland. This, coupled with the influence of the 1859 revival, ultimately led to the balance of Baptist work shifting from the south to the north.

During the period from 1857–1864 resources were concentrated on centres of population - the view being that the only worthwhile strategy for the changing times was to establish some well supported churches in larger cities and towns. As a result, the BIS helped the churches in Belfast, Tobermore, Coleraine, Ballymena, Banbridge, Portadown, Tandragee and Carrickfergus. The plan was simple with each church becoming a centre from which the gospel was preached to the surrounding areas. Over a period of time, an impressive network of out-stations was created, supplemented by tent missions, open-air preaching and the distribution of the Scriptures and Gospel literature.

In 1888, after a meeting of leaders from Ireland and England, it was decided the time had come to hand over control of the work in Ireland to Irish Baptists and so the Irish Baptist Home Mission was born to take on a whole range of activities, personnel and commitments. That God blessed their evangelism is seen in the fact that in 1865 records show that there were 809 members in Baptist Churches and by 1901 there were 2,684 members.

By the time the Baptist Union of Ireland (now the Association of Baptist Churches in Ireland) was formed in 1895, Irish Baptists had come through many peaks and troughs. In fact, there were times when viewed from a human perspective it looked like they would be wiped out but God sustained and enabled evangelising and church planting for over 240 years. The Association was born out of mission and is characterised by a remarkable urge not only to survive but also to work together in preaching the gospel and planting new churches.



Baptist Irish Society involved in educational work 10,000 pupils in 91 schools
1832

The Potato Famine led to mass starvation and emigration
1845-1849

First Baptist church in Belfast – Great Victoria Street
1847

1859 Revival
1859

Irish Baptist Association revived
1862

Formation of the Irish Baptist Home Mission (IBHM) – beginnings of formalised independent Baptist work in Ireland
1888

Louis Deens born in Athlone. He ‘graced the ministry of the Irish Baptist churches for the better part of the twentieth century’
1889

2: GROWING TOGETHER

The mission-mindedness that gave birth to the Association continued throughout the 20th century with evangelism as the driving force of Association life. Wherever churches were planted they became centres for evangelistic activity. The churches took their duty to evangelise most seriously through sustained gospel missions, open air preaching and the distribution of Scripture.

INNOVATIVE METHODS

Throughout the century one set of ground-breaking, cutting-edge initiatives in evangelism followed another. To contemporary readers many of these methods may now appear common place or even outdated but at the time they were risky and a product of thinking 'outside the box'. Tent evangelism continued in such places as Crossgar, Killyleagh, Dromore, Dunseverick, Claudy, Ballymena, Kilrea, Tobermore, Knockconny, Mullycar, Coagh and Limewood Park, Belfast.

In 1947, 'caravangelism', the brainchild of Frank Forbes (Secretary, BUOI), was launched. Throughout the 1950s the caravan toured monthly fairs and markets in Tyrone and Fermanagh. In the south and west of Ireland team evangelism was used. In the 50s and 60s the Home Mission sought and employed men, gifted and trained for evangelism in a Catholic environment. From open-air preaching in Dublin to cottage meetings in Avoca and on to the markets and fairs in the towns and villages of Cavan, Longford, Roscommon and Galway, the work progressed. Imaginative and innovative means continued to be used as well as the traditional. For example, to present the gospel to military personnel in Athlone evening 'Soirées' were held. On one occasion '120 men sat down to a soldier's tea and did justice to it!' The goal of evangelism was always church-planting. Christians need teaching and fellowship. Many of today's churches started life as a result of Home Mission evangelism - Mountpottinger, Shankill, Lurgan, Londonderry and through the 50s and 60s, Cookstown, Grace (Dublin), Stonepark and Enniskillen, to name a few.

OVERSEAS GROWTH

Significant progress and growth took place in areas outside Ireland as a result of Irish Baptists working together. Work in the high sierra of Peru among the Aymara Indians during the 40s and 50s resulted in the establishment of over 100 churches, most of which are still in existence today. The emphasis of the work in Peru shifted during the 80s to the shanty towns of Moquegua, Tacna and Ilo, where vibrant church planting work continues. Ministry in Europe during the 80s through the Marne Le Valle project was instrumental in establishing over 10 churches on the outskirts of Paris.



Irish Baptist College (IBC) established in Dublin by Hugh D. Brown with an intake of five students. Ambrose U. G. Bury appointed Principal.
1892

The Baptist Union of Ireland is formed with 29 member churches. They decide not to affiliate with the Baptist Union of Great Britain. John D. Gilmore appointed as General Secretary.
1895

Baptist Corporation; Annuity Fund, Loan and Building Fund formed
1902

Sunday School Union founded
1913

World War 1 commences. Forty-five young men from Harcourt Street Church, Dublin join the Forces. The church's organist is killed in service.
1914

RECENT TIMES

Throughout the 1980s growth continued in the north with a church-planting team being formed under the leadership of Pastor Jim Henry. An astute strategy was developed to plant churches in the satellite towns growing up around Belfast and in other areas. The churches in Saintfield, Moira, Crumlin and Ballymoney were formed as a result. However, there was a subtle shift in some of this growth. Our gospel witness also attracted believers from other church groups with less than clear evangelical convictions. In the Republic of Ireland, with the advent of the Second Vatican Council, a new day began to dawn which was to have an unforeseen impact. By the 1990s this new openness was more than apparent as a door opened for the gospel right across Ireland. As a result of a joint venture between Baptist Missions and the Cork Church, churches in Carrigaline, Midleton and Douglas were formed and the Cork-Kerry project was born. The work of the project has seen the founding of churches in Youghal and Kinsale. Churches formed in

Lee Valley (Ballincollig), Westside (Bandon) and Killarney have also become part of the project and joined the Association.

Partnership with Baptist Missions, local churches and like-minded mission groups in other areas of the Republic has resulted in churches being formed in Athlone, Balbriggan, Ballycullen, Carrickmacross, Cavan, Galway, Nenagh, Tralee and Trim.

Key to the work of the gospel has been strong local churches reaching out to their own communities. It is this evangelistic impulse – the burning desire to make Christ known - that has, with God’s blessing, resulted in the growth of the Association of Baptist Churches in Ireland and it is this impulse that continues to be so urgently needed today.



I WILL KNOW THAT YOU STAND FIRM IN THE ONE SPIRIT, STRIVING TOGETHER AS ONE FOR THE FAITH OF THE GOSPEL. PHILIPPIANS 1:27

T. Harold Spurgeon appointed IBC Principal. **1916**

Orphan Society established **1917**

World War 1 ends **1918**

Estimated that there were 1,000 Baptists in Belfast **1920**

The Government of Ireland Act results in Partition of Ireland **1921**

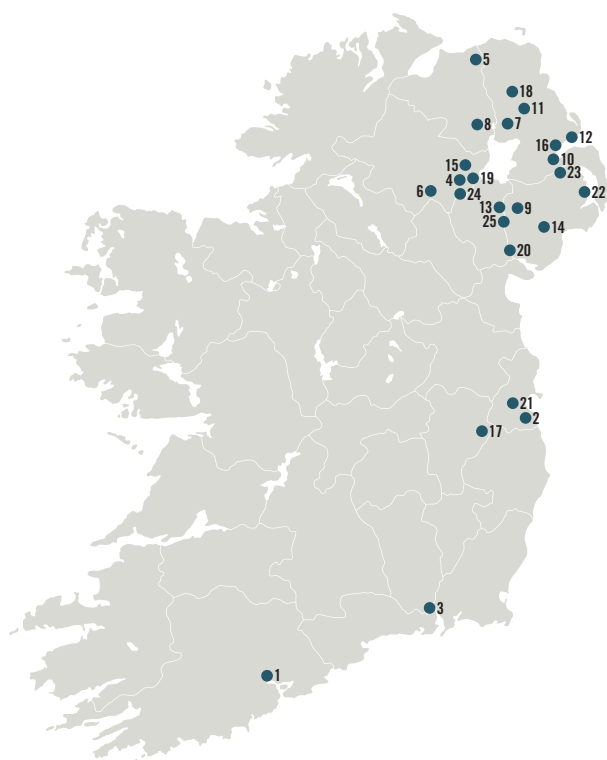
Northern Baptist Corporation established **1924**

Irish Baptist Foreign Mission (IBFM) formed **1924/25**

CHURCHES TOGETHER

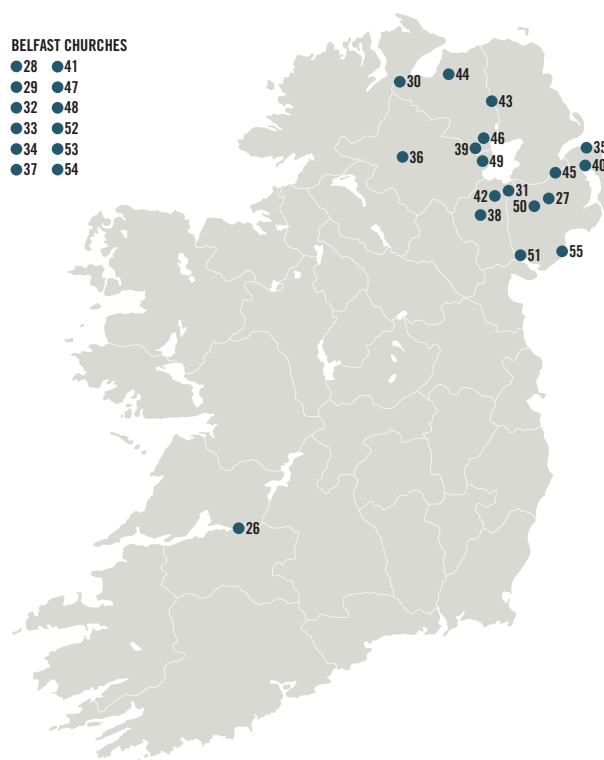
THE FOLLOWING FOUR MAPS HIGHLIGHT CHURCHES WHICH CAME INTO EXISTENCE

1640–1894



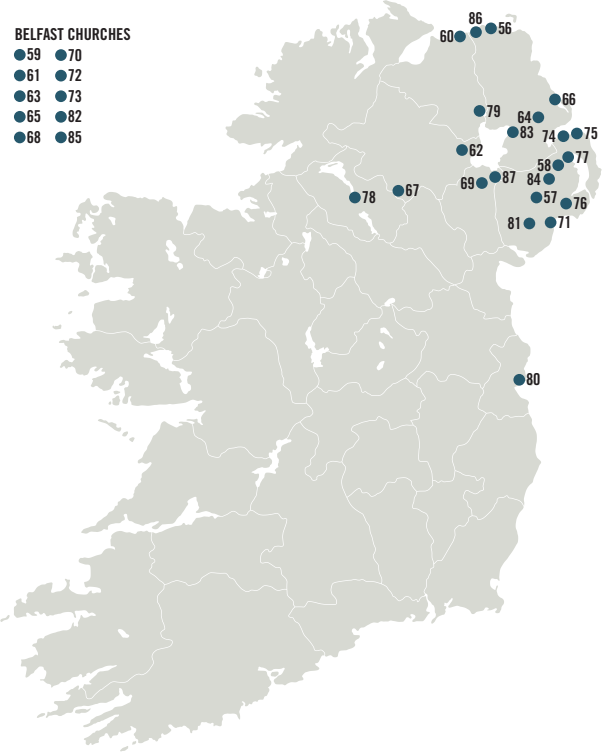
1	Cork	1640	14	Derryneil	1864–1964
2	Grosvenor Road	1642	15	Lisnagleer	1866
3	Waterford	1650	16	Antrim Road	1867
4	Mullycar	1740–1966	17	*Brannockstown	1870
5	Coleraine	1795	18	Clough	1872–1993
6	Knockconny	1807	19	Dungannon	1884
7	Grange	1811	20	Newry	1889
8	Tobermore	1814	21	Jamestown Road	1891
9	*Banbridge	1845	22	Killyleagh	1891
10	Great Victoria St.	1847	23	Mountpottinger	1891
11	Ballymena, Hill St.	1859	24	Gortmerron	1894
12	Carrickfergus	1862	25	Poyntzpass	1894
13	Tandragee	1864			

1895–1934



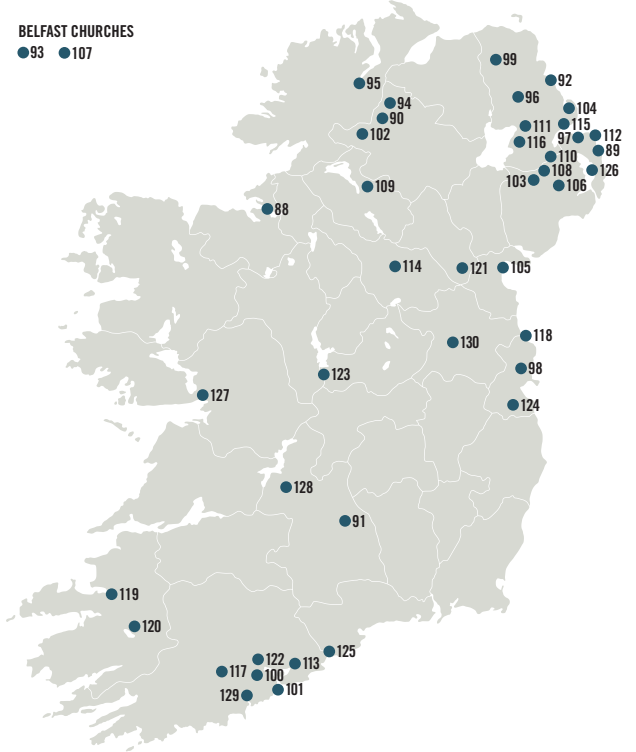
26	Limerick	1895	41	Monkstown	1924
27	Ballykeel	1896	42	Portadown	1924
28	Milltown	1896	43	Kilrea	1925
29	Shankill	1896	44	Limavady	1926
30	Londonderry	1897	45	Lisburn	1926
31	Lurgan	1899	46	Magherafelt	1926
32	Cliftonpark Ave.	1901	47	Strandtown	1926
33	Bloomfield	1903–2014	48	Haypark Ave.	1926–2007
34	East End	1904	49	Coagh	1928
35	Hamilton Road	1908	50	Dromore	1928
36	Omagh	1908	51	Warrenpoint	1929
37	Grove	1915	52	Church Street East	1930–1978
38	Armagh	1917	53	Windsor	1931
39	Carndaisy	1923	54	Glengormley	1932
40	Newtownards	1923	55	Kilkeel	1933

1935–1974



56	Dunseverick	1935	72	Ballygomartin	1962
57	Ballynahinch	1939		73	Castlereagh	1964
58	Carryduff	1939		74	Holywood	1964
59	Orangefield	1939		75	Bethany	1965
60	Portstewart	1944		76	Downpatrick	1965
61	Rathcoole	1951		77	Comber	1966
62	Cookstown	1952		78	Enniskillen	1966
63	Dundonald	1953		79	Bellaghy	1967
64	*Ballyclare	1953		80	Grace Bible Fellowship	1968
65	Newtownbreda	1954		81	Rathfriland	1968
66	Larne	1955		82	*Bethel	1968
67	Stonepark	1956		83	Antrim	1970
68	Finaghy	1958		84	Carr	1972
69	Killicomaine	1958		85	Grace (Tullycarnet)	1972
70	Gilnahirk	1959		86	Portrush	1973
71	Newcastle	1959		87	Central Craigavon	1974

1975–2015



88	Sligo	1975	110	Lambeg	1989–2013
89	Millisle	1976		111	Clady Water	1990
90	Sion Mills	1976		112	Donaghadee	1991
91	Thurles	1976		113	Midleton	1992
92	Glenarm	1977		114	Cavan	1993
93	Calvary	1978		115	Greenisland	1996
94	Dunamanagh	1978		116	Crumlin	1997
95	Letterkenny	1978		117	Lee Valley	1997
96	Lanntara	1981–2011		118	Balbriggan	1998
97	Ballycrochan	1983		119	Tralee	1999
98	Swords	1985		120	Killarney	1999
99	Ballymoney	1986		121	Carrickmacross	2005
100	Westside	1986		122	Douglas	2005
101	Carrigaline	1987		123	Athlone	2007
102	Castlederg	1987		124	Ballycullen	2007
103	Moirá	1987		125	Youghal	2010
104	Whitehead	1987		126	Kircubbin	2013
105	Dundalk	1988		127	Galway	2014
106	Saintfield	1988		128	Nenagh	2014
107	Cregagh	1989		129	Kinsale	2015
108	Emmanuel	1989		130	Living Hope, Trim	2015
109	Mullaghmeen	1989				

* Churches no longer in membership of the Association.



3: DISTINCTIVELY TOGETHER

The matter of what Christians should believe and practice is readily answered by Baptists through appeal to the Scriptures. In common with many believers of other traditions, we maintain that the Bible (not church or reason) is the final authority in all matters of faith and conduct. On this basis the following claims may be made:

1. THE NAME 'BAPTIST' IS MORE APPROPRIATE THAN EVER

There is a popular argument nowadays that denominational labels ought to be dropped in favour of something much less 'threatening'. However, it is clear that we all have to call ourselves something – 'Christian', 'evangelical', 'born again believer' and so on. The name 'Baptist' has a long and honourable pedigree which says something vital about our identity and convictions and ought to be retained and explained. As a name it has rarely proved to be a hindrance but more commonly a help in reaching out to communities throughout Ireland and beyond. It is a name with positive historical associations and vital doctrinal content which carries potential, in a unique way, to represent and glorify Jesus Christ.

2. BAPTIST PRINCIPLES AND DOCTRINES ARE MORE RELEVANT THAN EVER

Most prominent among these are:

1. Our doctrine of the church – in contrast to nominal, formal and sacramental religion, Baptists stand for a regenerate church membership of people born again by the Holy Spirit. Members of Baptist churches are, first of all, those who have exercised repentance and faith into a life-giving relationship with Jesus Christ. In an age of theological confusion this principle seeks to safeguard the purity of the local church.

2. Our view of baptism – the baptism for which we contend is not that of adults but of believers. Baptists refuse baptism to infants and on the basis of the Lord's command in Matthew 28:19, and subsequent New Testament accounts, administer this ordinance only to those who have faith. Faith therefore, precedes baptism and never the other way round. Furthermore, the baptism we practice is baptism by immersion. Again, this follows the pattern of New Testament examples (most notably that of Jesus in Matthew 3:16). This baptism is illustrative of biblical symbolism (Romans 6:1-4) and is consistent with New Testament language in which the Greek verb to baptise means to dip or immerse.

3. Our estimation of the ministry – Baptists hold tenaciously to the notion of the priesthood of all believers. This does not mean that we reject the importance of order and office in the local church since we wholeheartedly endorse the roles of pastor/teacher, elder and deacon. However, we reject any idea of a priestly order arguing instead that all believers are priests in the service of God, exercising the right of private judgment in matters of belief and practice.

4. Our view of church government – Baptists stand for the autonomy and authority of the local church. Local churches in the New Testament were not subject to external authority but were self-governing, meeting independently under Christ as head. This 'congregationalism' has been characteristic of Baptist life and witness over the centuries.

First IBFM couple - Mr and Mrs G. Oehring sent to Peru

1927

Women's Auxiliary of the IBFM formed

1928

Rosa de Bettin becomes the first IBFM national worker in Peru.

1929

James Fraser appointed General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Ireland

1930

Frank Forbes appointed General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Ireland. 52 member churches in the Union.

1937

Baptist Union offices at 54 Dublin Road, Belfast opened

1938

World War II begins

1939

“THE NAME ‘BAPTIST’ HAS A LONG AND HONOURABLE PEDIGREE WHICH SAYS SOMETHING VITAL ABOUT OUR IDENTITY AND CONVICTIONS AND OUGHT TO BE RETAINED AND EXPLAINED.”



5. Our argument for liberty of conscience –

as Baptists, we claim liberty for ourselves in matters of faith and conduct and also consider this to be an inalienable right for others. Just as we do not accept dictation in the spiritual realm from others, neither do we attempt to dictate to others. In order for religion to have any meaning at all freedom of the soul is essential in matters of religion and conscience. ‘We must obey God rather than men’ (Acts 5:29).

6. Our stance on the separation of church and State

- in keeping with the last two points above, Baptists take seriously the words of the Lord Jesus ‘give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s’ (Matthew 22:21). Christians ought to submit to the civil authorities in all things that are not contrary to God’s law (Romans 13:1-7) but the church should not expect the State to carry out its work (2 Corinthians 10:4) nor should the State impose penalties for religious opinions of any kind.

3. BAPTIST CO-OPERATION HAS MORE POTENTIAL THAN EVER

While it is true that there is always something of a tension between independence and interdependence, yet, in comparison to many similar groups around the world, Irish Baptists have a basic cohesion that is something to treasure. Our co-operative interest, however, is in biblical unity and not mere structural ecumenism. This means that churches within the Association can unite around a common doctrinal statement and a shared vision for outreach, training and fellowship. In a broader sense, Irish Baptists have also forged links with like-minded groups of believers who share our high view of Scripture and identify with our gospel orientation. In a world where disunity and fracture are commonplace our Association of Churches has much to offer.



The Germans launch three raids on Belfast. Around 1,000 people lost their lives and many were made homeless.

1941

Baptist Youth Fellowship formed

1943

World War II ends

1945

Baptist Union offices move to 3 Fitzwilliam Street, Belfast.

1946

Republic of Ireland Act declares Ireland to be a Republic

1948

Joshua Thompson appointed General Secretary of the Union. 61 member churches in the Union.

1952

IBC relocated and reconstituted in Belfast. David P. Kingdon appointed Principal.

1964

AT THE PRESENT TIME YOUR PLENTY WILL SUPPLY WHAT THEY NEED, SO THAT IN TURN THEIR PLENTY WILL SUPPLY WHAT YOU NEED. THE GOAL IS EQUALITY. PHILIPPIANS 1:27



4: WORKING TOGETHER

The sum of the parts is greater than the whole". This familiar phrase is true of the churches which make up the Association. There are many aspects of ministry that can only be sustained by working together and would not be possible for an individual church by itself. The work of the Association Departments and the various schemes and funds that exist are evidence of this principle at work. Indeed, as the Association serves local churches by aiding and supporting gospel outreach this generates a shared sense of fellowship and partnership in the gospel.

BAPTIST MISSIONS

Proclaiming Christ and planting churches. This is what, under God and in the power of his Spirit, we are seeking to do in France, Ireland, Peru and Spain. Four gospel needy countries, with combined populations of 150 million people! Including national workers in Peru, together we are supporting (at various levels), a missionary team of approximately 21 couples and three single people. By the grace of God, people are being brought to repentance and are putting their faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Obeying His commission to "Go, therefore and make disciples of all Nations, baptising

them in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" means that every day, Christ is proclaimed, new believers are being discipled and leaders are being trained and equipped for gospel work, in France, Ireland, Peru and Spain.

IRISH BAPTIST COLLEGE

What can be achieved in theological education when churches work together? Much, because to quote one writer "if we do not have a good theology we will inevitably have a bad one". Graduates such as T.J. McNabb, George Weir and Louis Deens made their impression in a past generation. What of today? Of the 62 full-time students graduating between 2010 and 2014, 34 are in ministry, 25 as pastors of which 18 are ABCI pastors, assistants or associates. Looking at the Insight magazine prayer diary there are 60 individuals currently serving in a variety of ministries who have received training at IBC. One of the founders of the College, H.D. Brown, said that the aim was to train students who 'possess qualifications which will last the strain and wear of pastoral work'. That, more than 120 years later and in a wider variety of ministries, is still happening.

BAPTIST WOMEN

They say 'behind every good man there is a good woman.' It is certainly true that in our Association 'behind every good church is a good group of women!' Women who help with the hospitality like Martha; women who disciple and teach others like the women of Titus 2; women who reach-out with their faith like the young girl in Naaman's court; women who render service like Phoebe or women who influence and encourage others like Priscilla. The goal of Baptist Women is to unleash this often untapped resource and equip women in the local church to reach their full potential under God so that the body might be built up in the twenty-first century.

BAPTIST YOUTH

Baptist Youth takes the gospel to thousands of children and young people across Ireland and further afield each year. Opportunities are provided for young people to exercise gifts and talents in a variety of settings sometimes unavailable to them in their own church setting. The development of future leaders for our churches and fostering fellowship are two positive outcomes. Ultimately, through churches working together we see children and young

Norman Shields appointed Secretary, IBHM

1967

The Troubles break out in Northern Ireland. Warm relations between churches north and south continue despite political upheaval.

1969

Decision taken to open up a new field of operations in Europe – initial focus on Belgium and France. Peter Quigley appointed as first Baptist Youth worker.

1971

Raymond Pollock first IBFM worker in Europe

1974

Ivor Oakley appointed Principal, IBC

1974

IBSSU and Baptist Youth Fellowship merge to form Baptist Youth

1975

people setting their hope in God, remembering his works and keeping his commands (Ps. 78:7).

ASSISTING CHURCHES

The Churches Pastoral Support Scheme exists to help small churches have pastoral oversight and care. History has shown that when a church can have a pastor the work will move forward. At one point or other in their history many of our larger churches (e.g. Shankill, Ballynahinch, Lurgan, Hamilton Road, Ballymena, Portadown, Tobermore) faced the difficulty of supporting a pastor. Humanly speaking, without the support of sister churches through this scheme or one of its forerunners, they may not have survived. Assistance to churches continues to be provided in a variety of other ways (administrative, legal and financial) through the Association office and the Baptist Corporations.

SHARED MINISTRY

Many churches engage in joint services and sharing their pastor's ministry with other fellowships throughout the year. There has always been a readiness to help churches with a "vacancy" or those unable to maintain a pastor at all. The annual Pastors' Conference is a great time of refreshment, encouragement and fellowship for pastors within the churches.

Those pastors who have recently taken up an appointment are supported in the first few years of ministry through organised events and the advice and experience of a mentor.

BAPTIST AID

Provides an avenue for churches to collectively help and care for those in need in a practical way at home and overseas. In recent years various relief endeavours have been supported; the Asian Tsunami, earthquakes in Peru, Pakistan and Haiti and through the ongoing link with the Orphan Care Programme in Zimbabwe.

All these endeavours aimed at encouraging churches to work together for the gospel leads to a great sense of fellowship and unity. The totality of this work, carried out in the name of the churches, has an annual cost of over £1.2m/€1.5m and would not be possible without the support, generosity and gospel partnership that exists within the Association.



William Lyttle appointed Secretary, IBHM. Rea Grant appointed Secretary, Baptist Union of Ireland. 85 member churches.

1976

IBFM and IBHM merge to create Baptist Missions. Roy Gamble appointed Baptist Youth worker.

1977

The Women's Auxiliary was reconstituted as Baptist Women's Fellowship

1979

Derek Baxter appointed Secretary, Baptist Missions. Mike Ewan appointed Secretary, Baptist Youth.

1985

Baptist Union offices move to 117 Lisburn Road, Belfast

1987

Norman Shields appointed Acting Principal IBC

1988

Hamilton Moore appointed Principal, IBC. John Birnie appointed Secretary, IBC.

1990

5: ADAPTING TOGETHER

God may be gracious to grant Baptist Churches in Ireland another 20, 50 or even 120 years. Have you ever wondered what plans He may bring about? Taking a look into the future is fraught with many challenges but that should not stop us from thinking about what might lie ahead. What will the next chapter of the history of the Association of Baptist Churches in Ireland contain? It is possible to think about the future by looking at what is taking place in the here and now. The reality is that the future is shaped by the present.

CHURCH-PLANTING

The Association of Baptist Churches in Ireland is a network of church planting churches and undoubtedly this will be a hallmark of the future ministry of the Association. Over the last 35 years, a Baptist Church has been planted in Ireland at the rate of almost one every year. September 2014 saw the constituting of Nenagh Baptist Church. This is one of the youngest Baptist Churches in Ireland. The church in Nenagh came about as the result of significant input from Baptist Missions and the care of the mother-church in Thurles.

In 2014, Douglas Baptist Church began a work in Passage West, a town of 6,000 inhabitants with currently no gospel witness. A small team has begun the pioneering work of building relationships, gaining trust and distributing literature in the town in order to be in a position to share the life changing message of the gospel. The province of Connacht has a population of 400,000, yet there are currently only two Association Churches in that region.

Fast forward to 2050 and imagine what each of these three situations will look like. Will we see a network of churches planted from the two churches currently in existence in Connacht? Will there be a thriving congregation of believers meeting to worship God in Passage West? Will the small church in Nenagh continue to reach into the town, see people come to faith in Jesus and begin the process of looking to the next neighbouring town in the Midlands to begin a new work?

We need to be innovative, pool resources and act in faith in order to see a mighty movement of God in planting, forming and establishing churches. The potential exists and can be realised through co-operation and interdependence. The future is being shaped by how we act now.

LEADERSHIP AND GOSPEL MINISTRY

The Association has a legacy of producing ministers of the gospel and preparing them for ministry through the Irish Baptist College. Many of the students who have graduated from the Irish Baptist College over the past few years have had the privilege of finding opportunities for ministry in churches and departments within the Association. These individuals will have around 30 years of ministry in churches across the Island in front of them. Their ministry will shape churches, break new ground and continue the faithful tradition of preaching, praying, shepherding believers and equipping them for acts of service. These men will shape the future of the Association through networks of fellowship and the shared goal of seeing the gospel impact and change lives. The challenge for the future will be to continue to identify and train those with gifting in preaching and leadership; people who will be at the forefront of advancing the cause of Christ across this island and beyond.



William Colville appointed Secretary, Baptist Union of Ireland. Baptist Union of Ireland celebrates centenary.

1995

Jackie Whyte appointed Secretary, Baptist Youth

1997

Good Friday Agreement is signed in Belfast. Isobel Moore appointed first full time Secretary, Baptist Women.

1998

Amazing Journey Presentation introduced

1999

Baptist Union of Ireland is reorganised and changes name to Association of Baptist Churches in Ireland. New work begins in Spain

2000

Association offices and the Irish Baptist College relocate to the Baptist Centre, Moira. Gordon Darragh appointed Baptist Missions Director

2003



“IN A WORLD WHERE DISUNITY AND FRACTURE ARE COMMONPLACE OUR ASSOCIATION OF CHURCHES HAS MUCH TO OFFER.”

MISSION AND EVANGELISM

The challenge of maintaining a gospel witness in large urban areas such as Belfast, Dublin and Londonderry will require prayer, tenacity and the creation of meaningful and perhaps innovative ways of reaching out to urban communities, deprived areas and ethnic groups. The many towns and villages across the Republic that currently have no Evangelical witness should evoke action and a movement of gospel work that will continue to claim ground across the south.

With respect to mission overseas, Irish Baptists have had missionaries in Peru for almost 90 years and in more recent times in France and Spain. These are needy areas that will require our resolve, commitment and prayers to see the gospel advance. However, it is evident that across the globe the face of world missions is changing and there is a shift in the direction of mission. As the ‘West’ experiences the end of ‘Christendom’, immigration is likely to be one of the hopes for vibrant evangelism. Therefore, our churches should be prepared to receive believers from Peru, Spain, France and other countries who may well be equipped to come to Ireland to reach out in multicultural urban centres and among migrant communities.

CHALLENGES

We live in a Society that increasingly presents many challenges to our Association. Secularisation, promotion of liberal moral agendas and postmodern thinking are challenges that will undoubtedly intensify in the future. However, let us take heart in the purposes of God. Let us utilise the potential that exists through our co-operation and interdependence. Let us make sure that a commitment to gospel ministry, church planting, overseas mission, training and fellowship will mark the future. There is a great need to continue our work together as an Association in the present, to shape the future and in God’s grace to see the gospel advanced, lives changed, churches established and the Kingdom of God extended right across Ireland and beyond.

Dave Ramsey appointed Baptist Youth Director **2005**

IBC Preparation for Ministry Course commenced. Nigel Younge appointed Training Director **2007**

Irish Baptist Life rebranded as ABCInsight **2008**

Gail Curry appointed Baptist Women Director **2009**

Baptist Centre library extension. Edwin Ewart appointed IBC Principal **2010**

Mervyn Scott appointed Baptist Missions Director **2014**

Marking 120 years of God’s faithfulness. 5 new churches received into membership. **2015**

KEEP IN TOUCH WITH THE WHOLE FAMILY

BAPTIST MISSIONS

ibaptistmissions.org

BAPTIST WOMEN

baptistwomenireland.org

BAPTIST YOUTH

baptistyouth.org

IRISH BAPTIST COLLEGE

irishbaptistcollege.net



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