

Tell me about ... baptist church

Being a Baptist

How did Baptists begin?

The first Baptist Church was founded by two English people, John Smyth and Thomas Helwys. Smyth was an Anglican priest but left the church as he believed it had lost its way in a number of areas. A group of people began to meet together under Smyth's leadership but were persecuted and fled to Amsterdam.

Through their study of the New Testament they came to believe that a church should be a body of baptised believers. So in 1609 Smyth baptised himself, then baptised Helwys and the others and the first Baptist church was formed.



In 1612 Thomas Helwys returned and formed the first Baptist church on English soil at Spitalfields just outside the City of London.

What do Baptists believe?

Perhaps the most important thing that Baptists believe is that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and through it Jesus Christ is revealed, who is our final authority for what we should believe and how we should live. Baptist churches stress the importance of personal reading of the Bible and of Bible Study together. The other convictions of Baptists follow on from this.

Baptists believe that the local church is a group of believers who gather

together for worship, witness and service. Personal faith and trust in Jesus Christ is basic - without faith there is no church! The local church is governed by its members, who together seek the will of Christ for their work and worship (for more information, see the leaflet *Tell me about Church Membership*).



Although the local church is autonomous in this sense, it is not independent as we recognise that as churches we need each other, so we prefer to say that Baptist churches are 'interdependent' (see below).

Baptists believe that baptism is for believers only. That is to say, we do not baptise infants but wait until people are old enough to make a commitment to Christ for themselves. For more information, see the leaflet *Tell me about Believer's Baptism*.

Baptists also believe in freedom of conscience. Thomas Helwys and John Smyth championed religious liberty for themselves and others in their day. Up to this day Baptists work so that people everywhere can have not only religious freedom, but also freedom from all kinds of oppression.

How are Baptists organised?

In England and South Wales, Baptist churches can be affiliated to the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB). Its Declaration of Principle is printed overleaf. There are over 2,150 churches affiliated to BUGB, with a total membership of almost 140,000. From Baptist House in Didcot, the Baptist Union acts as a centre for resources and information.



It also administers the Home Mission fund. This is a fund that gives grants to support Pastors in small churches and for the work of Missioners, Evangelists and Chaplains in industry and education.

The fund also pays for the staff at Baptist House and a percentage goes to the area Associations across the country.



Our area is the Eastern Baptist Association (EBA), which covers the counties of Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex. It has three Regional Ministers who look after the churches and the ministers in its area.

The vision of the EBA is "to see God's Kingdom grow in the East of England, through healthy churches, living as wholesome communities and engaging in relevant mission".

BUGB is a member of the European Baptist Federation and the Baptist World Alliance which represents nearly 150,000 churches and more than 40 million members.

What about mission overseas?



The Baptist Missionary Society (now known as BMS World Mission) was founded in 1792 by William Carey, and he was its first missionary. He departed for India and began what has become known as "the modern missionary movement".

Today BMS World Mission is working in more than 35 countries across four continents. It works in the areas of:

- ◆ **Church planting** - enabling people to hear the good news of Jesus.
- ◆ **Development** - improving quality of life through such things as creating water supplies, helping build homes, hospitals and schools.
- ◆ **Disaster relief** - helping out when things like flood, famine or war strike.
- ◆ **Education** - enabling the young to have a better start in life and participating in theological education to help equip local pastors.
- ◆ **Health** - helping to care for the sick and involvement in community health projects.
- ◆ **Media** - working alongside other agencies in using technology to share the Christian message with the world's peoples.

BAPTIST UNION DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLE

The basis of this Union is:

1. That our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and that each Church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer His Laws.
2. That Christian Baptism is the immersion in water into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, of those who have professed repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ who "died for our sins according to the Scriptures; was buried, and rose again the third day".
3. That it is the duty of every disciple to bear personal witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to take part in the evangelisation of the world.

To find out more about Baptists, you can log on to the following web sites:-

BUGB - www.baptist.org.uk

BMS World Mission - www.bms.org.uk

EBA - www.easternbaptist.org.uk

European Baptist Federation - www.ebf.org

Baptist World Alliance - www.bwanet.org



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Declaring **God's Way** - Sharing **His Love**