

TRUSTEE REPORT 2023

Eastern Baptist Association

Member of the Baptist Union of Great Britain

Registered charity no. 1089795

Company limited by guarantee registered in England no. 4221429

Registered office: 46 Churchill Road, Thetford, IP24 2JZ (until 6/4/2023). 2 Buchanan Gardens, Wickford Essex, SS12 9QB (from 6/4/2023)

www.easternbaptist.org.uk

Objectives and Activities

The Trustees believe that advancement of the Christian faith, particularly as expressed through the Baptist movement, is of public benefit as it encourages social cohesion, provides an ethical framework for life and works itself out in the sacrificial giving of funds, time and effort by church members and attenders for the good of their own community and beyond.

As part of their work and witness, the Baptist Churches in membership with Eastern Baptist Association deliver a wide variety of activities which benefit the general public. These activities include: -

- promoting the study of religious teachings, practices, and scriptures
- support of religious office holders e.g., ministers, deacons and elders of member churches.
- promoting prayer, praise and provision of training events.
- pastoral support to ministers and church congregations.
- contributing to the spiritual and moral education of children and young people and the provision of training to comply with the legal requirements regarding safeguarding.

The Mission Statement of the Eastern Baptist Association is:

“Growing healthy churches in relationship for God’s mission in the East of England”.

This mission statement is actively facilitated and fulfilled through eight areas of focus, these areas are:

- Growing Godly leaders.
- Stewarding shared resources.
- Enabling relevant training.
- Encouraging healthy churches.
- Exploring fruitful partnerships.
- Sharing inspirational ideas.
- Offering apostolic leadership.
- Advocating transformational justice

Below are some specific examples of how in 2023 some of our eight areas of focus have been achieved:

Diversity, Equality and Justice remained high on the Association’s priority list throughout 2023. Baptists Together launched a training video series for Ministers titled “I am because you are” this focused on justice issues. As an association we took this resource and used it to provide opportunities for ministers and leaders to gather and reflect together on the content of the material. In addition, the work amongst female leaders and ministers has continued and groups have met in person and online to encourage each other and pray for one another.

The BUEN network that focuses on encouraging churches to engage with environmental issues has continued to meet online throughout the year, it is hoped that in 2024 more churches can be encouraged to engage with these issues.



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Achievements, Performance and Developments

2023 has been a year of transition and change, the year started with Revd Gale Richards on sabbatical returning in early March. Revd Beth Powney retired from the Team Leader position in April. On the second attempt, the EBA appointed a new Team Leader, Revd David Mayne, who took up his post in November. Following conversations with various ministers and churches, we will continue to reflect on how to best reform the appointment process for Regional Ministers. In October Revd Graeme Ross left EBA to return to local church ministry, and in November Mrs Diane Forsyth retired as Safeguarding Lead. At this time the trustees will not be appointing any other Regional Ministers, but at the end of 2023 an advert is live for a new safeguarding lead with the hope of an appointment in early 2024.

At the conclusion of 2023 the EBA team consisted of:

- Revd David Mayne – Regional Minister Team Leader
- Revd Claire Blatchford – Regional Minister
- Revd Gale Richards – Regional Minister
- Mrs Hayley Beckett – Association Secretary Administrator
- Mrs Julie Eady – Finance Officer

At our AGM In September Revd Adrian Ward was elected to serve a full term as a trustee following his interim appointment in earlier on in the year. In November Revd Fiona Heddle resigned as Moderator. The trustees appointed Mr Andrew Wade to serve as interim moderator up until the next AGM.

The trustee board finished 2023 as below.

- Mr Andrew Wade – Interim Moderator / Communication
- Mr Richard Lewis - Treasurer
- Revd Adrian Ward - Finance and Administration,
- Revd John Goddard - Ministry,
- Mrs Vicky Baker - Children and Families / Safeguarding trustee
- Revd Sean Fountain – Healthy Churches
- Revd Alan Brand – Justice Transformation
- Revd Sandra Crawford as a co-opted member (until January 2024)
- Mr Benjamin Plant as a co-opted member. (until September 2024)
- Mr Binny Jaichander as a co-opted member (until May 2025)
- Revd Paul Smith as a co-opted member (until September 2025)
- Revd David Mayne (RMTL) as an ex-officio member of council.

The membership of the Association at the end of 2023 was 171 churches. This includes the resignation of Mundesley Free Church, the closure of More2life church, and a successful membership application of Church @ the Megacentre

Finance

The EBA provide two full time and one half time Regional Ministers for the Association despite the continued backdrop of falling income from the main income source. Our current situation does not enable us to appoint further Regional Ministers at this time. Resources expended on charitable activities were £376,913 (2022: £334,195) including governance. £117,137 (2022: £113,694) was awarded in Home Mission grants.

Principal Funding Sources

The charity's main source of income are the payments from the Baptist Union for both Operational Funding and Mission Payments which are calculated according to a funding formula which is applied to the total amount received by the BU for Home Mission from churches. Further income is received from investments, rental income and preaching fees.



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Principal Expenditure

The majority of expenditure is directly related to the provision of 2.5 Regional Ministers, which Council currently consider the minimum needed to service the needs of all the EBA churches over such a vast area. Provision includes amounts to maintain the property portfolio to a good standard of repair. The Regional Ministry team is supported by a Company Secretary for governance issues, and a Finance Officer. We also employed an EBA Safeguarding Officer for 12-15 hours per week until November when she retired.

Loans to churches have now been discontinued. The year-end amount owed by four churches was £15,291 (2022: £24,791).

The Ministers Training fund and Lay Ministry Training fund support Bursary applications. In 2023 thirteen Bursary grants were awarded worth £4,112. The New mission initiative fund provided one project grant to Renew Wellbeing of £5,000.

Total funds at the year-end including unrestricted, restricted and designated funds were £2,121,475 (2022: £2,219,707). EBA drew on reserves in 2023, a deficit of £98,232 (2022: surplus £80,311). Total cash held at the year-end is £273,755 (2022: £360,334) for all funds.

Going forward we project a General fund budget for 2024 with a deficit of £108,000, which is to say £2,083 every week. We consider this necessary and appropriate to support the work of the Association and in particular funding two and half Regional Ministers. We project and support similar annual deficits in subsequent years but recognise that this use of reserves to cover ongoing shortfalls in this way has significant implications. Reserves spent in this way cannot then be used to fund other activities and projects now or in the future. In the long term it can take many years to rebuild reserves, again reducing future possibilities and unless the funding structure for Associations is significantly revised, or other income streams can be developed, at current levels of expenditure, non-capital asset reserves available for ongoing deficits and not required for other purposes will be exhausted by the end of 2025.

Fund Raising

The Charity does not actively fundraise but does receive from time-to-time unsolicited gifts and donations from the general public. The Trustees do not employ professional or outside agencies to fundraise on its behalf and as such does not consider it necessary to be part of a voluntary scheme or standard. Following a change in BU guidelines, EBA is exploring ways to raise funds specifically for our own purposes.

Property Matters

The Company Secretary and the Treasurer together with the Finance and Administration Task Group oversee the property portfolio for the EBA. The Thetford house, following the retirement of the former Team Leader is currently let out. The Wickford property (Buchanan Gardens) is used as an RM manse. The RM Manse in Earls Colne, under the terms of the finance arrangement for associations the BU are giving the EBA a supporting manse allowance of £1,693 (2022: £1,551) per month. The supporting rent allowance is now at market rate. We are seeking to sell this property to help fund the purchase of a new manse in Shoeburyness.

A new build property at Firethorn Court, Ely was purchased at a cost of £395K to accommodate the new part time RM. Cash reserves were used to support this purchase. The Melville Drive property tenancy ceased in August 2022 and this property was planned be sold to offset the Ely purchase. However, market fluctuations, caused us to re-rent it out from January 2023 to generate income to support ministry and governance costs. This manse continues to be let out, though with intention to sell if and when finances require it. For our new RMTL, we are seeking to buy a new manse in Shoeburyness, funded by the sale of the Earls Colne manse. Lastly, the EBA is expected to receive a part share in a former church manse in Harold Hill, pending completion of the legal processes. The location and expected part ownership of this manse make it unsuitable for EBA purposes and there is an expectation to sell it as soon as practical. Moving forward, all properties continue to be reviewed annually to maintain the five-year plan for routine maintenance and planned refurbishment of the EBA properties.

Governance

At the start of 2023 the Charity Risk Assessment was reviewed, the section added which relates to the pandemic was updated but remains as part of the assessment.

Ministerial Support

The Ministers' Conference was held in March at High Leigh Conference Centre. Our guest speaker was Revd Ken Benjamin from the London Centre for Contemporary Christianity (LICC). The conference also provides opportunity for worship, prayer and networking.

The Regional Ministers make it a priority to keep in contact with ministers from across the association via phone call, zoom calls and where possible in person. In addition, the regional team offer preaching engagements and also provided a number of pre-recorded services on our YouTube channel for churches to make use of plus extra resources at Easter.

Within EBA there are a number of ministers who work in chaplaincy roles within healthcare, education, the armed forces, the workplace and prisons. Over the course of 2023 we have developed a new network of people in these ministry situations for mutual support. We also aim to offer an in-person session at the Ministers' Conference 2024. In addition, we also have several ministers working outside of traditional church in more pioneering ways and the team are looking at the ways in which we support and connect these with us and with each other.

Administration and Communication

The Association uses a variety methods of electronic communication methods, including a weekly prayer focus sent out by email and a MailChimp monthly bulletin, up until October the association also produced a regular 'thought for the week' We also have a presence on Facebook as both a page and a community group which facilitates churches sharing events with other churches. It was hoped that in 2023 the website would be updated but due to a number of contributing factors this has been delayed and will be looked at again in 2024.

Church Support

The association continues to support churches when looking for a new minister and support churches who are not in a financial position to have a minister. The association also provides support for churches in developing policies that churches, as 'excepted charities' are required to have. 2023 has seen a slight increase in churches facing financial difficulties and the team support the church leaders in making difficult decisions.

The association continues to work alongside the national Baptist Union in the recognition of people displaying skills and calling to take on the role of Minister.

During 2023 the committee met with 13 candidates, two of whom were recommended onto training at college, eight were affirmed as a Nationally Recognised ministers, now renamed as Recognised Local Ministers, one went forward to the national residential selection conference, one who was seeking Baptist recognition as a preacher having served as a Methodist lay preacher, and one who was seeking a transfer of their accreditation from an overseas Baptist Union.

The Home Mission grants committee considered applications from nine churches and six special ministries. Each application is considered on its own merit and if successful grants are awarded measured by an active mission action plan. The grants committee submitted its recommendations to the trustees and awarded grants to eight of the nine churches and all six of the special ministries. These recommendations were agreed. The giving by churches to Home Mission (the Baptist Family national appeal) is generally decreasing year on year and this will affect the ability of the EBA to give grants to churches. The trustees commissioned a report into the resilience and sustainability of Home Mission Grants, the report was received, and recommendations made to the trustees for consideration. In November

the trustees initially accepted three of the recommendations which will lead onto a new way of offering grants. During early 2024 this will be worked on and launched in the future.

The Association recognises that churches look outside of their local area and often to other parts of the world to support organisations and individuals working with people or groups in other countries.

Ecumenical

The regional staff continue to relate to ecumenical structures in the region within the counties where they are based. Revd Gale Richards was appointed chair of Cambridgeshire Churches Together and was made an ecumenical canon at Ely Cathedral. Further Ecumenical work is supported by Denominational officers in the counties. This work is particularly important where Baptists are involved in Local Ecumenical Partnerships.

Risk Assessment

An annual risk assessment continues to take place in the areas required by the Charities Commission. This is completed at the beginning of each year.

Serious Incidents

There are no serious incidents that the Regional Ministers/Council are aware of that require reporting.

There have been no significant events affecting the Association's financial position since the end of the year. The trustees are aware of the current financial position and are taking steps to discuss and implement ways forward. There are no commitments or guarantees requiring disclosure.

Approved at Trustee Meeting 6 April 2024