



grace baptists
introducing our Association



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Welcome



Our vision is to be
a growing family
of churches that
flourish by clearly
living out the gospel
of grace

Just over 150 years ago in 1871, when Queen Victoria was in the heart of her reign and Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle had been open for a decade, our Association of churches was formed. The initial 23 associating churches felt 'a strong desire for closer union' with those fully like-minded, whilst avoiding 'the folly of spending time in abusing those who differed from them'. Although originally based only in London, our geographical area has since expanded into the home counties and their neighbours.

Our vision is to be a growing family of churches that flourish by clearly living out the gospel of grace through our theological distinctives. We are currently 70 churches and are supported by an additional charity with staff that serve the churches with administrative and financial services.

In this brochure you will be able to read a little more about us. Matt Benton writes about our theological distinctives, Jim Sayers explains some of the events we hold each year, and then I explain the different pathways we have for you should you wish to join us. Throughout the brochure there are a number of short introductions to some of our churches.

Please feel free to get in touch with us if you would like to find out more.

Andrew King, Association Secretary. May 2023.

andrewking@gracebaptists.org



Who are we?

by Matt Benton



What matters most about a church? Is it gospel-centred preaching? Is it Christ-exalting worship? Is it a well thought-through programme for mercy ministry? All of those things are important but none of them, in themselves, are sufficient. Paul tells us as much in 1 Corinthians 13. In fact, without love, he says, these things, and those who minister, are 'nothing'; nothing without love. The heart of a church should be love: love that makes the world know that we are Christ's disciples; but further, love that makes the God of glory and grace visible to a world blinded to him.

Where is God?

It is so interesting that the writings of the Apostle John have two parallel statements about God being seen. The first is in chapter one of his gospel where he writes, 'No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.' (John 1:18) Jesus, who is himself God, has made God known. But now, with Jesus exalted in the heavens, it is his people who make God visible. In chapter 4 of his first letter, John uses that phrase again, 'No one has ever seen God,' but this time rather than talking about Jesus, he talks about God's people, 'but if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is made complete in us.' (1 John 4:12) The local church can and should be the place, today, where God is seen and known as believers live in love, live as family.

Love's environment

As local churches across our Association, we long that we would abound more and more in love. Of course, this is not unique to us Grace Baptists; there are many churches across the country and across the world which share that vision. But the vision that love should characterise the local church is precisely what the distinctives of Grace Baptist ecclesiology aim at. Our distinctives aim to create the environment in which the gospel of grace is tangibly felt in the life of the local church - that we really understand ourselves as being family.

Like Marriage

In a marriage, the promises of the wedding day provide the framework of security and trust for the love between a husband and wife to flourish. So too, Grace Baptist ecclesiology provides the framework for a local church to be truly seen as the household of the God of bounteous love, and thus God himself is made visible. Yes, we passionately believe that this is

what the Bible teaches, but the importance of the order of conversion, followed by baptism and membership, and then participation in the Lord's Supper, is not simply the product of a proof text here or there, but is supported by the vision that the New Testament has for the local church.

Born of God

Consider that passage from 1 John 4. John begins in v7, 'Dear friends, let us love one another for love comes from God.' Keep in mind the end of the argument, v12: when we love one another, as God has loved us, God is seen and tangibly known. But such love is only exhibited by those who are born of God, v7. In other words, the love which we have identified as so essential for a local church is a family trait only of those born of God. The boundary marker of the family is conversion - a work of grace and mercy in the human soul. We Grace Baptists are reformed in terms of our understanding of salvation. Essentially,

this means we understand that the only thing we bring to our salvation is our rebellion. The church is a community born of mercy, born again of the Spirit, born again into a family.

Entry point

Baptism and church membership, in our understanding, are therefore the entry point into this family life of the local church, with membership following on automatically from baptism on profession of faith. Through baptism a believer's faith is expressed and affirmed by the local church and membership makes it clear that this is the local congregation of believers to which I belong. These are my people: I belong to them, and they belong to me, in Christ.

Beyond the logic of Acts 2, where those who profess faith are baptised and added to the number, our distinctives align with the New Testament vision of gospel living. The natural world prioritises relationships in terms of our biological relations and our friendship groups. But the mind transformed by the mercy of God should understand more: 'in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.' Romans 12, where that phrase is used by Paul, clearly states that the Christian life is not simply one of the mind, but very much something lived out bodily. This is seen in Christians coming together, committed in membership, using the different gifts God gives us by his grace to love and honour one another. This family environment is where love can be expressed and so God is seen.

Round the family table

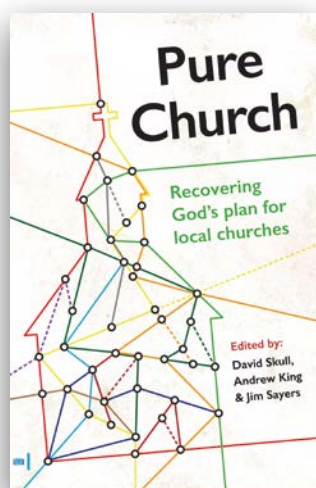
As members of one body, born of love, the centre of our family life becomes the meal instituted by our Saviour. We taste and see again that the miracle of this family is 'not

that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.' (1 John 4:10) Our participation in the Lord's Supper reminds us that our value and worth are in the work of the Saviour. Around this table, family life is experienced: we rejoice with one another, mourn together, and experience the reconciliation and forgiveness that is possible when the peace of Christ rules our hearts. And so, 'since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is made complete in us'.

Spiritual reality made visible

So many in our society passionately believe in 'equality, diversity, inclusion, compassion, freedom, rights'. The problem is that such belief is understood simply through a sense of injustice which is battered, broken and twisted by the ravages of sin: 'In view of my hurt, in view of my suffering, in view of what I feel inside, or my perceived rights.' No, all of us need our minds and our hearts recalibrated by God and his merciful love to sinners. This is a mercy that transports us from death to life, from being enemies of God to being his family - a spiritual reality made visible through baptism and membership, then the gathering around the table. All of this speaks to us of our identity and calling - born of the love of God, called to love one another that God might be seen. And what a strategy for evangelism - for a local neighbourhood looking on - to see that the community which we all seek is real, discovered in the mercy of God to sinners.

*You can read more about our Grace Baptist distinctives in the book **Pure Church**.*



Brief Introductions

Grace Baptist Church Wood Green (London)

Grace Baptist Church Wood Green is located in the densely populated, extremely diverse urban town centre of Wood Green, in Haringey, North London. It maintains a full schedule of congregational, small group, and personal discipleship, together with community work (including support groups and a food bank), and weekly evangelism - not least on nearby housing estates and the local high street - reportedly the nation's second busiest.

Itself the product of church planting in the mid noughties, the church has committed itself to church planting and revitalisation more widely, leading to the formation of Grace Baptist Partnership (GBP) in 2010. The church has continued to send out many of its members to lead or support church plants and revitalisations in other places in the UK and Europe, and is presently seeking to plant in the Enfield Lock area. The church hosts GBP's Growing Leaders programme to identify and equip men for ministry especially in church planting and revitalisation contexts.

Fryerns Baptist Church (Basildon)

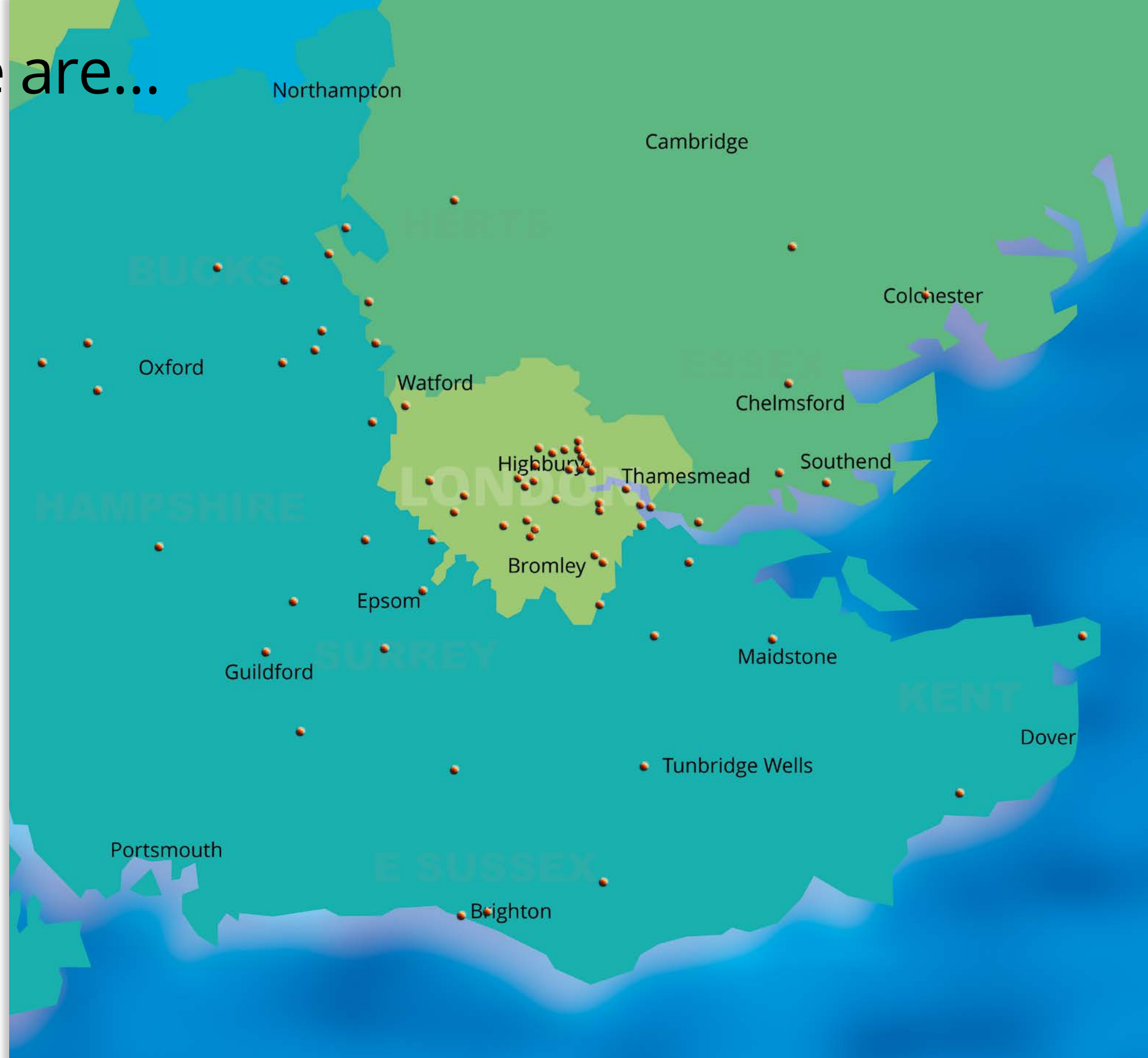
Fryerns Baptist Church aims to help people to know the Word of Life - King Jesus. There are many ways for us to achieve this: reaching local young families through our toddler ministry (35 toddlers regularly), and reconnecting with the primary school after COVID. Ladies Fellowship reaches older women, and we seek to be regularly in places where we will meet the wider community to talk about Jesus and gift literature. On Good Friday, we gave out 600 New Testaments and 200 copies of *What a Comeback!* We invite friends and acquaintances to church to hear the gospel, and witness the life of God's family. Our faithful Lord is building his diverse Kingdom (13 nationalities) here in Basildon, and he does so soul by soul, and family by family. God is good - we have tasted of his goodness - and we want to know and show more of Christ to Basildon, Southend and beyond, as we celebrate our 70th Anniversary this year!



Where we are...

ASSOCIATION CHURCHES LOCATION

Abingdon	Halstead
Amersham	Haslemere
Angel	Highbury
Aylesbury	High Wycombe
Basildon	Hitchin
Belvedere	Homerton
Bermondsey	Horsham
Bexleyheath	Kings Langley
Borough Green	Knaphill
Brentford	Lewisham
Brighton	Leyton
Brighton	Lydd
Ebenezer	Orpington
Broadstairs	Royal Tunbridge Wells
Bromley	Wells
Chelmsford	Soho / Covent Garden
Chesham	Garden
Chingford	Southall
Clapham	Southend
Colchester	Staines
Didcot	St. John's Wood
Dorking	Stratford
Downe	Streatham
Dunstable	Hambro Road
East Hanney	Streatham
Edlesborough	Hitherfield Road
Epsom	Thamesmead
Erith	Tottenham
Feltham	Tring
Finchley North	Twickenham
Forest Gate	Walthamstow
Gadebridge	Wandsworth
Gravesend	Watford Derby Road
Grays	Watford North
Greenwich	West Ham
Guildford	Wood Green
Hailsham	Yateley
Halling	





Association Events

by Jim Sayers



We organise a range of events across the year that bring together people from across our churches and beyond.

January Training Days

Our Churches look to the Association charity to provide training and support in areas such as safeguarding, finance or managing property, the necessary 'trellis' that supports the life of a local church. Our January training days pick up on one issue each time and provide training and expertise for those who need it.

Pastors' and Elders' Overnights

This is an annual watering hole for pastors and elders, running from late morning on one day to early afternoon the next day. We stay at a conference centre and enjoy times of encouraging preaching, alongside relevant teaching on the current issues we face in ministry. We also make sure we have time to relax and make new friends and share concerns across a wide spread of churches.

Saved2Serve Youth Conference

A day conference for young people aged 15-25, *Saved2Serve* aims to equip young people to serve in their local church and beyond. Whether it be growing as disciples, learning to share their faith or answer the tough questions that get thrown at them in a secular culture, or finding their place longer term in world mission, this is a one-day intensive that helps young Christian grow and serve.

We also make sure we have time to relax and make new friends and share concerns across a wide spread of churches





Ways to join us

Summer Conference

This is a day where we invite friends to come and be blessed by a time of good teaching on a summer Saturday. We are particularly keen to invite men who are training for ministry and considering serving in an Association church, as well as other church leaders from outside our network. The door is open wide as we encourage friends to come and enjoy a time of ministry and an opportunity to find out more about us.

Autumn Residential

This is an intensive two-day residential conference aimed both at those looking to train for pastoral ministry and those currently training. The intensive is held in Central London and, through a series of lectures and seminars, looks at key aspects of the doctrine of the church. Led by an invited speaker, this is an event to challenge future pastors and elders to

think hard both about what they believe about the church and how these doctrines are best applied in local church life. This event precedes our annual Association Day.

Association Day

The big day out of the year, Association Day brings together Christians from across our Association of churches and beyond. The necessary requirements of our AGM fill one session, but there is also a ministry track for those non-AGM delegates. Then in the remaining sessions of the day, we focus on the issues our churches face, hear news of what God is doing across the churches, and enjoy Bible ministry to send us home inspired to serve God together. Association Day provides our churches an opportunity to renew and make new friendships, to enjoy good food and fellowship, and to rejoice together in the gospel.

This is a day where we invite friends to come and be blessed by a time of good teaching on a summer Saturday



by Andrew King

Our Association has always been glad to welcome in new churches and new pastors.

New Churches

Although there is no biblical requirement to join a formal Association, we do believe there are very good reasons. If you would like to read more about them, please do get hold of a copy of our book called *Association*. And, of course, there are other good gospel networks apart from ours for churches to join.

However, for churches holding to the distinctives outlined earlier by Matt Benton, we extend a warm invitation to come and join us. In the last couple of years, we have been delighted to welcome in six new churches and we are excited to have ongoing discussions with a further ten or so. The centre map shows our current geographical area although we are open to extending this to neighbouring areas as the need arises.

Churches that join us typically travel

through three stages. Firstly, they investigate more about us by attending one of our events or having someone come and give a presentation. Then they discuss our distinctives, constitution and the look and feel of everyday membership. Finally, they apply to join and two of our existing churches sponsor them for a vote at our next Annual General Meeting. Our passion is to grow a network of convictional Grace Baptist churches, eager for meaningful association. Do please get in touch if your church would like to explore membership with us.

New Pastors

Some of our churches currently have pastoral vacancies and so we are keen to invite biblically qualified men who also align with our distinctives to explore these opportunities. While each individual church assesses and calls their own pastors, we can help to liaise and connect potential pastors with such churches, usually with informal conversations and meetings.

For men currently serving outside Grace

If you would like to find out more about joining one of our churches as a pastor, please get in touch

Baptist churches, we offer the opportunity to attend our pastors' conference or our Association Day to find out more about us and our churches. We are always delighted to introduce men from other networks. If you would like to find out more about joining one of our churches as a pastor, please get in touch.

New Trainees

A growing activity of our Association charity is to help facilitate and fund the training of new pastors so that we have a sufficient supply of pastors for both our current needs and to enable future church planting and revitalisation. To do this we help recruit trainees, support with their training and offer guidance in their appointment in a church.

We currently give a number of £10-15,000 training grants each year for men in our churches to study on a theological training course at an approved Bible College or Seminary. Alongside the support of their own church, such men are also given an additional mentor to help support and guide them both through their years of study and in finding a suitable Association church to serve in. Their mentor also supports them through a directed reading programme.

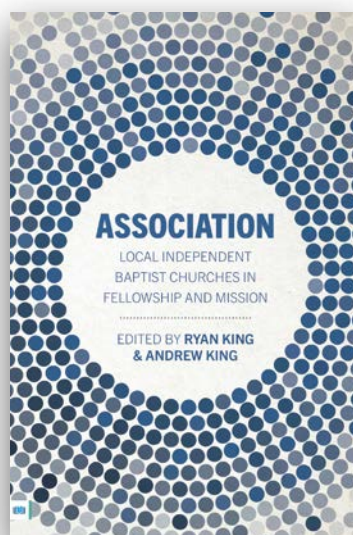
In addition to these training grants, we are looking to develop funded internships in partnership with a number of 'training churches'. Our vision is to use central charity funds to help these particular churches to train and then send out these pastors

to serve in our other Association churches. These churches will work in partnership, both to share expertise and to provide different experiences. Our vision is to provide a robust church-based element of training, whether before or after seminary theological study, to ensure these future pastors are shaped by local churches throughout their training. Church-based activities would include:

- preaching, teaching, and evangelism
- planning and leading meetings
- pastoral visiting and counselling
- one-on-one discipleship
- problem solving and conflict resolution
- working with deacons
- budgets and buildings

The aim is to produce a training programme that prepares men who are ready to serve in leadership in another of our Association churches because they already have hands-on practical experience. New pastors need both the theological conviction to keep a clear direction of leadership and the pastoral wisdom to discern the wisest speed of change. Much of that is learned by experience.

Can we help you to train for ministry? Whether you are about to start seminary and need funding, or you would like to consider an internship in the future, we would love to hear from you. Perhaps you have someone else in mind who may be suitable to apply? Again, we would love to hear from them and to discuss possible next steps.



Brief Introductions

Grace Church Guildford

Grace Church Guildford is a lively and active church in the centre of Guildford. Guildford is a commuter town set in the Surrey Hills with around 145,000 residents. The University of Surrey is on our doorstep with over 15,000 students from a variety of nations who call Guildford home during term time. Our vision is to 'gather, grow, and go with the gospel of grace to the glory of God'. We do this in various ways, both formally and informally, on Sundays, and throughout the week. We seek to be Bible-based and prayer-fuelled in all that we do. The church has 252 members and is served by a team of elders and deacons. We have recently planted a church in the nearby town of Haslemere in a building where a church once flourished. Our greatest desire is that many more in Guildford and beyond would hear the wonderful news of Jesus and respond in repentance and faith.



Grace Baptist Church, Broadstairs

Following the sudden death of the pastor who re-established the church after the war, the church joined the Association in 1988. This greatly helped it to survive a challenging period. Now we have three elders (one fulltime), twenty-six members and approaching double that number on a Sunday morning. We are encouraged by strong attendance at our evening service and midweek meeting and are blessed with a good age range, despite weaker job opportunities locally. Having lost our Margate building due to disrepair, we are pleased to have a clean and welcoming hall in Broadstairs to hire. People find us through our website gracethanet.org. We are outward-looking and our formal evangelism includes craft evenings, a coffee morning and an open-air outreach with another local church. We're very keen on fellowship and share coffee and cake after both our services. If you're down on holiday or relocating, do worship with us!





Limes Avenue Baptist Church (Aylesbury)

We are a family of ordinary believers who, by hearing and believing his word, long that our value and identity be found in Jesus and our hearts full of him. We also desire to make visible the gospel through generosity and patience with one another and the wider community. We long to live in such a way that we might be the unofficial chaplains that our neighbours seek at times of crisis in their lives.

Downe Baptist Church (Orpington, Bromley)

We are a small fellowship located in the picturesque village of Downe, where Charles Darwin once lived. In

addition to our Sunday services, we have fellowship lunches, midweek meetings, and women's Bible studies. We reach out through our busy toddler group, evangelistic lunches and our 'Coffee and Chat.' Recently, we welcomed around 60 people to listen to Jeremy Marshall speak about *Hope in the face of suffering*.

Grace Church Southall

Our town has 75,000 residents with most people coming from India, Pakistan, Somalia, and Afghanistan. We meet close to the new Elizabeth Line train station and exist to make disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ through our weekly meetings, outreach, and evangelistic

efforts. The transient nature of this town makes church life challenging, but we desire to continue encouraging one another in the Lord.

Grace Church Brighton

With Brighton declared the most godless city in England, back in January 2022, 12 people covenanted to form our new church. We are now 21 members with growing community connections through our youth and children's clubs. Julian and David are our two elders, and Oli is our minister-in-training. With the Lord's help we hope to strengthen, revitalise, and plant other churches in the city and are glad to be part of both the Association and the FIEC.