

Project Violet Podcast – Season 3, Episode 1

Season 3 Intro

	Music
Jane	Hello, I'm Jane Day, Community Learning Tutor at Regent's Park College, Oxford.
Helen	And I'm Helen Cameron, Research Fellow at the Centre for Baptist Studies at Regent's Park College Oxford. Together we were the co-leaders of Project Violet.
Jane	Welcome to Season 3 of the Project Violet podcast. Project Violet was a research project investigating women's experiences in ministry whilst developing women ministers. It worked to understand better the theological, missional and structural obstacles women ministers face and identify ways forward.
Helen	The research phase of the Project ended in January 2025. Currently stakeholders across Baptist life are implementing the commitments to action that they made in October 2024. Jane and I are now focusing on the academic dissemination of the Project. In this third season we wanted to catch up with some of the work that has been going on since last October.
Jane	We hope that listening to these episodes will help you engage with some of the outcomes of the project.

Helen Cameron

Today, I'm delighted to welcome the Reverend, Dr Ruth Moriarty to the Project Violet podcast. Welcome Ruth. We're going to focus on the course that you've developed for Baptist churches on the church meeting, which is called Slow wisdom. But before we talk about that, it would be great to find out some more about you. Can you tell us about your current role?

Ruth Moriarty

Yeah, sure. So I'm the Minister of Christchurch New Southgate and Friern Barnet in North London. And that's a URC Baptist local ecumenical partnership.

Helen Cameron

And how did you come to be in Baptist ministry?

Ruth Moriarty

It's a long time ago. I've been in Baptist ministry 18 years now, but I started out life after university at Canterbury, and I worked for the YMCA, and I went to a spiritual retreat, and it was being led by a lovely lady called Joy Medeiros, and she was asking us to think about what we really wanted to do with our lives. And I prayed and felt an awkward nudge from the Lord again and again and again, and tried, then to explore that about preaching and leading in churches. And no one said, No. So here I am - 18 years now. My first church was at Woolwich, second in Pointon, which is in Chester, and now here back in North London, close to where I grew up in East London,

Helen Cameron

That's great. Thank you very much. So you've done this work on slow wisdom. Can you explain how, how you got into it? What was the process that took you into to working on this topic?

Ruth Moriarty

Yeah, so I studied for ministerial training full time, which was an incredible blessing at Regent's Park College. And I did a master's there the MTh in applied theology. And when I finished the thesis, I thought I might like to write some more but wasn't sure what I wanted to write until we had quite a significant church meeting at Woolwich talking about the building there and how we should use it. And we heard lots of different voices participating in that discussion, and a question began to form my mind, how do we do church meetings, really, as Baptists a little bit later on, back in 2012 I then started to do a piece of research with the University of Chester, which eventually was called, How do Baptists discern the mind of Christ at the church meeting. It was 10 years actually, of part time study, including two maternity leaves, which then produced a piece of research based on qualitative analysis. And it's all about the local church practice. What do Baptist churches do, normally to discern the mind of Christ. And it was a wonderful time being able to observe people, being able to then analyze what people then said to me in interviews, to code it, and then to produce some writing about discernment practice for Baptists. It was a glorious opportunity, really a lot of hard work, but a great opportunity to be able to meet Baptists from different contexts and be able to try and understand what it is we do when we discern.

Helen Cameron

Great thank you. And that led to you getting your doctorate, which you're to be congratulated for you, and as somebody who supervises doctorates I know what a huge amount of work goes into it, and it's wonderful that you were able to persist over that extended period and to bring your research to fruition. But when you finished your research, I guess then there's the question of, what next? What did you feel you wanted to do when you completed your research?

Ruth Moriarty

You know, Helen, my main aim was that it wouldn't get dusty on a shelf. So I decided to try and publish the work as best I could. So I self published it through Amazon. And then I also was very aware that there were lots of people who wanted training in discernment, and I had in mind to create a video resource, which is what I then produced five short videos on how slow wisdom might work in the local church.

Helen Cameron

That's great. And can you just talk us through some of the ideas that underpin this, so that we can get a flavor of the thinking that's gone into this?

Ruth Moriarty

Yeah. So slow wisdom, I would say, is distinctly Baptist. It's Biblical and it's spirit led. So when I say distinctively Baptist, I mean that I hope, as a Baptist minister and as a Baptist that discernment

really is at the top of our agenda, because it's one of our distinctives, and I think that's something that we should be celebrating really and enjoying. However, as a Baptist minister, I know full well that it is a very difficult experience in some churches, so there is work to be done in the church meeting, and the research really shows how slow wisdom can be used in local churches. Slow wisdom is a way of discernment. It takes time. It's why it's called Slow wisdom. It's based in prayer. It listens to and hears each member. It seeks to find consensus agreement, and importantly, is led by the prophetic contributions of church members. It's a biblical idea in the sense that when we discern together as Baptist, we believe we're gathering in Christ's presence Matthew 18, we're members of the Body of Christ. That's what that language of membership means. And we see that mostly expressed in the congregational membership. And that obviously echoes 1 Corinthians 12. And importantly, we, I think, are honoring the Baptist belief in the priesthood of all believers, where we think that God has gifted each of us to discern together from 1 Peter 2. And the other thing I really sensed was important in the work was a focus on the leading of the Holy Spirit. And I saw this most acutely, where members, who were very shy, suddenly felt like God was speaking to them. The spirit was enabling them to lead their church in discernment. And I think the church meeting is well uniquely placed, really, to be able to respond to the Holy Spirit in context, but then also to be able to lead that church on in immediate changes to mission or action. So that's what slow wisdom is about, really. It's not about doing nothing, because churches and just talking forever and ever. It's about making sure we discern well, using those six marks of wisdom and looking confidently, really, to the future, where God can lead us by His Spirit.

Helen Cameron

That's wonderful and so encouraging to hear that distinctive Baptist choice coming through. And I feel that each part of the Christian tradition has been given special gifts, and this is a distinctive gift that's been given to the Baptist tradition, and you're articulating in a way which is just so a biblically based, but also very down to earth, and that people can grasp it and do something about it. Yeah, you talked about the six marks of slow wisdom, and you mentioned them. Would you like to just go through them again so that people can just pick them out in their mind as they as they listen to what you're saying?

Ruth Moriarty

Yeah, sure. So you know, when I interview people, the biggest word that came up really was that it takes time to discern. You know, it's not a quick method to make a decision if you're going to ask a group of people to think about it and pray about it, but I'm trying to reclaim that as a benefit, so not slow, as in standing still and not doing anything moving, but that it allows space, really, for people to be able to contribute, and that that's a benefit to the process, because we will make a better decision if we just take it a little slower than just one person making the decision, and then also then move. On to thinking about listening and hearing each other, listening to every person's contribution, not on every matter, but on important missional or strategic agenda items, taking time to really hear what people think and particularly the emotions with which perhaps certain people bring. To have a discussion and enabling other members to hear and listen to each other's views. Prayer is something that I've always been passionate about, actually, ever since I was a teenager, and I think it's something that church meetings may have lost. It sounds so simple and fundamental, but often, you know, I would be observing a church meeting, they'd say, Oh, we've run out of time to pray at the end. And actually, one simple thing we can do to help us to discern, well, it's just to pray more and to lean into God's voice. In that way, consensus is an important theme in the work consensus. Agreement, for me, is about several different things. One about sort of testing the room. Sometimes you might see a minister sort of saying, you know, do you agree that we should go forward with this particular idea? And people will sort of murmur and put their hands up say, oh, yeah, that sounds like a good idea. And then there's also specific consensus where we're seeking an absolute agreement on a particular statement, and that might take much more

work, particularly small group work. The best churches that I observed use small groups to really gain agreement, and sometimes you know, as ministers, you'll know that it can take more than one bite of the cherry to get to a decision. And actually, if it takes time to do that, and you gain a real consensus, where even those you know, who perhaps always would say I don't agree, can say I'm not sure, but I'm happy to go with you, and I believe that you know God is leading us, even if I individually can't say yes, then I think we build churches that are more confident of God's leading and more able to be in the world and to be able to respond to God's purposes. You know, when we have divided churches, it's a terrible witness, isn't it? So a church that's together is very important pastorally and also for the gospel, and then also the sense of the prophetic leading was quite a strong category in the research and how it came up in interviews, particularly, and that's something that I think we need to do some more work on. Really, as Baptists, we're quite good at talking about the gospel and the kingdom, but we're not so good about talking about the move of the Spirit. And I think the spirit is very active in our churches and particularly amongst our members. And what I'm trying to do here is to honor the work of the Holy Spirit as he blesses and uses church members to help discern God's purposes for that congregation. And it's a privilege, isn't it, when someone speaks in a meeting and suddenly their common sense turns the discernment, and that's where I think the spirit speaks so powerfully in our model of communal discernment. And it means that we can be confident to proceed, confident to go forward in his in his ways.

Helen Cameron

Thank you so much for that really rich and full description of what you're trying to do. Let's move on now and just talk about the training course that you've developed, which I know will be of real use to people and is available to everybody. How did you go about creating this training course?

Ruth Moriarty

Well, after a pause, a short pause, after getting the printed work out, I thought, right now's the time. And I was being contacted by quite a lot of churches and colleges and all sorts of other people trying to arrange training for their churches on slow wisdom. And I realized that very quickly that there was no way I could do that and have a normal job as well. So I set about condensing five chapters into 5-10-minute videos, which, of course, was a slightly onerous task, but was useful actually, because it helps you to, you know, rethink your material, and particularly to try and think about it in a visual format. And so I did the sort of the work of condensing the material myself, but then, inspired by the Baptist Union diversity training videos, I borrowed their model, which I thought was fantastic, where they had a short video that introduced the theme and then sort of set a question, which then structured a training session. So it's on that model, where there's five, sort of food for thought type videos that are about 10 minutes long. And then I'm encouraging anyone who watches it, perhaps either as an individual, but most especially within a church group, maybe a leadership team or small group, or indeed, as a whole church, to then think about that topic and discuss it, you know, for 20 minutes or so, and then come back to the next video, and there's a Participant Guide, which will help people to do that. That's all on the Baptist Union website, www.Baptist.Org.uk/slowwisdom. You can find all the videos there, and also the participant guides available there as well. It was filmed by Fuelcast, who did a fantastic job of making our church look even more glorious than it is. And I'll give a big shout out to the generous funding of London Baptist Association and Southern Counties Baptist Association, who funded the cost of the video production. And I'm also really grateful for the church members at Christ Church who were happy to take part in the filming. Sorry, and that's Linda, Roger, Diana, Patricia, Kurt and Martin. Martin's a local minister who helped me out when I was one man down, and their role really, is to bring voice to the participants who shaped the research. I tried always to lead with the real voices of real Baptists to generate this research. And so that is echoed in the videos. My sister also gave me a hand. She's a dab artist, and she provided the logos. That's Alison Jane calligraphy, and it came

together all together just in February when it was launched at Regents Park College for the Centre for Baptist studies, with a with a great do Helen, that you were part of.

Helen Cameron

It was a wonderful evening, and I agree with what you said about the videos and the fact that your church members took part just it just brings them to life, doesn't it, in a way in which a single-headed speaker wouldn't do so, they're a great watch, certainly from my perspective. Have you had any feedback yet on people who've used the material, or is it too early for that?

Ruth Moriarty

Yes. So they've certainly been watched a lot on YouTube, and either on the Baptist Union page or on the Centre for Baptist Studies page, which is great. And then I know of a couple of churches that have used them already, either at an all-church event, where they've used them as a training event, and then also another church who's used them trying to unlock a church meeting, really, where they are stuck in discernment. So that's been helpful. And they've been signposted to lots of different places. And I also happen to know that they are being used in New Zealand to help train Baptist ministers in discernment there, which is, wonderful.

Helen Cameron

That's wonderful to hear that there's already been some use of them, and that you're getting some positive feedback. And I really hope that that continues. We're talking as part of the Project Violet podcast series. Now I was wondering whether, in your mind, you could make any connection between the work that you've done and the work of Project Violet.

Ruth Moriarty

Yeah, you know, Project Violet came into being really just as I was starting to do my coding analysis of my interview scripts, so as I was, you know, trying to work out how I could name participants, and particularly participant churches, we were celebrating the centenary of Baptist women into ordination. And so I picked four important Baptist women in our in our heritage and named the sample churches after them. So that was Margaret Jarman, Edith Gates, Violet Hedger and Kate Coleman. And in a sort of parallel time, I was also part of the first MagnifyYou scheme, which was a group of women ministers who were gathered from various regions in the UK, and that was aimed at encouraging us female ministers to take on different roles within the union, perhaps to take a greater lead in regional work or in other areas of the Baptist life. And I would say that Project Violet helped to foster a desire in me to develop my thesis, to be as accessible as possible, and to be confident of the material that I had been slowly gathering and working on, and to make sure that that my voice was heard, I guess, in that research area. And then also, of course, Project Violet hosted this incredible international academic research conference, the symposium earlier this year. And Project Violet supported lots of Baptist women, really, in all sorts of contexts, which then I was able to share slow wisdom in that environment, which meant that the work was then heard about in America, Canada, Africa and New Zealand and Australia, and that facilitation of that conference meant that there was excellent networking opportunities for myself, and also a really good time to share best practice amongst Baptist female academics. And we're a rare breed, so that was quite a privilege. And then, most recently, I've also been working with Claire Nicholls, who I think you've got on the podcast at some point this time, and I've helped to develop a resource for London Baptist, but I'm sure anyone can use it about how the church meeting can function during settlement. Really trying to encourage women in their experience of calling and settlements and the church meeting. And I did a small piece of research off the back of that, to try and tell the story, really, of what it's like to be a woman going through settlement, and particularly going through that church meeting vote. There're particular influences on those church meetings, and the research on

slow wisdom helped to unpack some of those themes, which you can read about on the London Baptist website.

Helen Cameron

Great. Thank you very much. That's really, really encouraging, as one of the co-leaders of Project Violet, to hear about those connections that you've made. I guess we're coming to the end of our conversation now. And I was just thought this would be a good moment for you to reiterate the ways in which people can access the slow wisdom course, so that people have got that firmly in their minds and will be encouraged to go straight to it and explore what's there.

Ruth Moriarty

Well, the hot tip, really, Helen, is to go to www.baptist.org.uk/slowwisdom that will take you to the church meeting page, which has got an introduction to the work, and then also the information about all of the videos. You can download them in a low-resolution format or use them directly from YouTube. You can choose a Participant Guide and a bibliography there for people who want to do more research in the area. The book is available either from the Baptist online shop, which is a great resource. Please do check it out, or you can buy it on Amazon, and it's £10 in both. And if you also want an e book, which I did through Amazon, that's five pounds, and you can read the work in those ways too. What I'd encourage people really to do is to set aside a period of time in your church context, with your leadership team, maybe with the whole church, and allow those free resources to structure a reflection time, really, on discernment. It's all there, and I, you know, my greatest desire is that it gets used and can bless people. And you know, this is an opening conversation, really, on discernment. There's not much written about discernment for Baptists, and so I'm very happy to hear of how people have used it, how they've found it helpful, or what they could find that might be different in their practice. And I hope that it's a start of a renewal, really, of the church meeting practice, and a greater confidence in who we are as Baptists. You know, Baptist often spends quite a long time worrying about who we are. Well, one way we really are Baptist is when we discern the mind of Christ together. And I'm hoping that this resource will grant us confidence and hope in the God who calls us to discern in this way together.

Helen Cameron

Thank you so much, Ruth, for all that you've shared, and thank you for taking part in this podcast.

Season 3 Outro

Helen	Thank you for listening to this episode of the Project Violet podcast.
Jane	We invite you to go to the website if you want to learn more about the Project. www.projectviolet.org.uk
	Music

Project Violet Podcast – Season 3, Episode 2

Season 3 Intro

	Music
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Helen	And I'm Helen Cameron, Research Fellow at the Centre for Baptist Studies at Regent's Park College Oxford. Together we were the co-leaders of Project Violet.
Jane	Welcome to Season 3 of the Project Violet podcast. Project Violet was a research project investigating women's experiences in ministry whilst developing women ministers. It worked to understand better the theological, missional and structural obstacles women ministers face and identify ways forward.
Helen	The research phase of the Project ended in January 2025. Currently stakeholders across Baptist life are implementing the commitments to action that they made in October 2024. Jane and I are now focusing on the academic dissemination of the Project. In this third season we wanted to catch up with some of the work that has been going on since last October.
Jane	We hope that listening to these episodes will help you engage with some of the outcomes of the project.

Helen Cameron

Today, I'm delighted to welcome the Reverend Claire Nichols and the Reverend Brian Nichols to the Project Violet podcast. I think the first daughter and father to appear on the podcast. Welcome.

Claire and Brian

Hello. Hello.

Helen Cameron

We're going to be talking about the resources you have developed to help churches with settlement, the process of appointing a new minister. But before we talk about that, it would be great to find out some more about you both. So Claire, can you start by telling us what your current role is.

Claire Nicholls

So I am a regional minister for London Baptists and as part of that, I look after churches in Southeast London, and I oversee the London Baptist justice hub.

Helen Cameron

Great and Brian, you're retired now, I understand, but what were you doing before retirement?

Brian Nicholls

Well before I retired, I was pastor at South Parade, now called Cornerstone Baptist Church in Leeds. And then before that, Regional Minister, and then before that, Superintendent for the West Midlands area of the Baptist Union.

Helen Cameron

Thank you. So I guess people are also interested in finding out how people come to be Baptist ministers. So Claire, perhaps we can start with you. What was your journey into Baptist ministry?

Claire Nicholls

So I think I've told my story before on the podcast in the last season, so I'm going to do a short version. I first felt called to ministry at university when I was on a Christian Union leadership training weekend, and I read Isaiah 6 in my tent. And I felt at that point that God was calling me to something more, and I didn't need to worry about not being good enough, because he made me good enough and he wanted me to do what he wants me to do, what he's calling me to do. And the long story short is that I explored what that could be for a while, and then I had different roles in church, and I worked as a maths teacher, but throughout that time, people kept on saying to me, perhaps you're called to something more. Perhaps ministry might be the way forward. And I was like, 'No', but I wrote down every time, and my journals at that time were full of that, and I took up the call to preach. But God kept on niggling at me, through other people, through what I read. And there was a point where it got to where I knew that it was the right time to explore it completely. And that was about 10 years later when Pat Took was speaking at Baptist Assembly, and her sermon basically told me to get on with it, so I had to, and the rest really is history.

Helen Cameron

Thank you very much, Brian, what was your story?

Brian Nicholls

Well, I became a Christian when I was a child, and we used to go to the Keswick convention every year, and it was when I was 15 in the missionary meeting at Keswick, I suddenly just knew that I had to go into some kind of full time Christian ministry. And so then it was a question of following that through A' levels and on to higher education. So I went to Northern College straight from school, having got my A' levels, and then from there, straight into my first pastorate, a group of three churches in Derbyshire in 1973. I was only 22 at the time. So and. It was quite a trauma for everybody else, if not just for me. And yeah, so the rest of the time I've done any work, it's been as a minister over the years.

Helen Cameron

Thank you. Now, Claire, you're one of the co researchers in Project Violet, and as you say, you've spoken about that in the previous series, but can you just recap for us what your involvement in Project Violet was.

Claire Nicholls

So I was part of the millennial group, right at the top of the millennial group, kind of beyond millennial. But I was my research was reflecting on the development of the London Baptist women's justice group as part of the London Baptist justice hub. As that was written up I embarked on the journey into regional ministry. And I took on responsibility for justice in the association. So I've also,

I've been leading the Project Violet response for London Baptist as well. And so it's all been part of my journey, as well as being a bit of research.

Helen Cameron

Thank you. Now you've responded to the request for change that was made in the project to develop guidance for the settlement process and to support the role of regional ministers in settlement. Now, for any of our listeners who are not part of the UK Baptist family. Can you just explain settlement and how it works? Claire, do you want to start on that?

Claire Nicholls

So the settlement process is about discerning the future ministry of both ministers and churches, and it brings churches and ministers together to explore what God is calling them to and whether God is calling them to work together. It's a discernment process, and Baptist Union churches put together a profile, and it goes on what kind of church they are, what kind of ministry they're looking for, and it goes on a pastoral vacancy list. Accredited ministers do their own profile, which is a series of set questions, and then they explore the pastoral vacancy list, and they apply to the churches that God might be kind of hinting it might be a good place to look, that's the hope, anyway. And they apply directly the regional ministers help to guide that process a little bit. And if churches believe it's the right minister, they invite them to meet with them and go through a process of interviews and preaches, and that ends with a preach with a view in a special church meeting that discusses, whether the Minister is the right person, and then has a vote to call the minister or not. It's all about discerning the mind of Christ, but we're very aware that we're only human, and sometimes our humanity comes into this. Well, always it does, and that's where it can be difficult.

Helen Cameron

Brian, have you got any reflections on your experience of helping churches through this process? From your experience as a regional minister?

Brian Nicholls

Well, my experience is quite old now, and the system has changed. So there's more... It's the wrong word, really, but power in the hands of the local church and the ministers and the sense of guidance from a regional perspective, again, it's not the right word, but it's kind of weakened, as far as I see it, because in the in the old regime, it was very much in my hands as a superintendent to guide churches clearly towards certain kinds of people. And so releasing names to churches got came through me, generally speaking. I think my more recent experience has been as a moderator for ... I've been involved with four churches. The two that I'm involved with now are unlikely to call a minister in any near future because they're quite small. But the two previous ones were sort of medium size. And my experience there was that, again, we were very much dependent on what the regional ministers sent in our direction. And we had to be very clear in our own minds, in the in the churches involved, as to what we actually wanted. And there was a talk about, well, if we could advertise, we don't need the association. We don't need the Union, but I found that actually, when we tried that route, we ended up with all sorts of also random individuals who wanted to come from the far reaches of the globe and so on, and it wasn't particularly helpful. I think we needed a bit more firm guidance from the regional team. I think I got that right in my head, whether it's come out right is another matter.

Helen Cameron

No. Thank you for those reflections and so very understandably, given the experience that both of you bring to it, you decided to collaborate on developing some resources. Claire, can you start by talking about the resources that you've developed?

Claire Nicholls

So one of the things that came out of Project Violet was that women don't always have a really good experience in settlement. Sometimes they do, but sometimes they don't. They can be asked unhelpful questions, and churches assume that they're open to women in ministry, but when it comes to it, there are entrenched views that come out that are unhelpful sometimes, and we've had stories recently of views coming out in the special church meeting after they've preached with a view. And it's been quite a contentious meeting. And it's sent the church into a difficult place, and we've had to deal with that, and we've heard of women being explored by churches as their minister, but then someone says, 'Oh well, they're a test case to see if we'll have a woman', and it shouldn't be like that. So I recognize the need that for something to be done with churches and settlement to help them not to get to that point where it comes out in that way. And I read Brian's response to Project Violet, the Project Violet report, and it had in there, he talked about a resource that he'd used to help explain a biblical egalitarian argument for women in ministry, and what to do if church members disagreed, because sometimes the churches are open, but they can't articulate why. And a resource like that is really helpful, and it helps individual church members to think through their ideas. So I don't know whether you want to talk about that.

Brian Nicholls

Yes, I think things that that come to me are that you needed to start the conversation about accepting women early on in the process, so that by the time you got to meeting prospective ministers that a lot of the issues had been ironed out. I think I did become aware that some of the things that felt like they were specific to the challenges women faced were actually also challenges for other groups within ministerial candidates, and what one of the things was that if you had anything attached to you that was slightly unusual, you were probably going to struggle to get churches to meet you, for example, if your surname didn't sound English, or if you hadn't got a family, or if you had got a family and there were too many of them, or if you were of a different ethnic background from the majority, that was a challenge, and if your theology was different from the kind of mainstream understanding that people would have, then all of these things could be quite big hindrances in getting churches even to look at the profile of a person. So I think I recognize there's a particular issue for women, but I think it's also difficult for a lot of other people too, and so we need to keep working out a kind system that starts the conversation about who is and isn't eligible early on. I think one of the other things when I prepared stuff for the West Midlands was that we needed to make sure that we were taking this from a thoroughly biblical position. It couldn't just be an emotional response that was seeking to give people a leg up, as it were, but the arguments had to be made very, very firmly from biblical perspective, because the churches that were most likely to object to women in ministry thought that their stance was based on a biblical position, and that includes taking the passages that appear to forbid women from ministry and facing them head on, not just shrugging them off with 'Well, that was cultural', but 'let's see how that fits. Into the overall theology of a church'. And I found that sort of exercise was actually very, very helpful, but you're talking about a generational shift for people. If they've always believed that women can't be ministers, then they're going to go on believing that for a long time to come, even if intellectually, they say, 'Well, I get the point now'. Yeah, so it's got to be worked out thoroughly, really, and to be prepared for disappointment when churches just don't get it, in which case you go back and you start again.

Helen Cameron

And so how did you collaborate together then to decide what to produce and to actually produce it?

Claire Nicholls

So I asked Brian to send me his original document, which he searched out and he found, and I worked through it, and I developed that into a settlement guide for churches that are in settlement

to consider the biblical egalitarian argument for women in ministry. I added a bit of the history of London Baptists and women in ministry and the Baptist union as well into there, and some top tips for how to treat women in settlement as well. From the experiences that have been shared with me, I explored with the regional team about how we might get this out to churches and also to appeal to the kind of churches we're trying to target. So I go to a church that's never had a woman minister, but would say that they are open to women ministry, but are quite conservative in theology. So I shared the resource with the minister to see what he thought as a very supportive minister in this and he brought his thoughts to it as well. And then I put this resource together and sat with it for a while, and then at the Project Violet symposium at the beginning of the year, Ruth Moriarty presented a paper on the experiences of women Baptist ministers in London in settlement, and she expressed the need for some kind of resource that would help guide churches through the settlement process in a way that treated women well. So I met with her, and we began to expand on what I'd written to resource the churches more fully. And then, meanwhile, I met with Jane Day, and she said that the church where she was a member at the time, Crown Road Baptist Church in South Croydon, they were doing a sermon series on women in ministry. In response to Project Violet. So I contacted the minister there, David Rogers, and he kindly shared his notes, and that fitted in with what had been written in Brian's paper. And so I rejigged that a little bit, and I developed it into a sermon series that follows that egalitarian argument in the settlement guide. And the idea that sermon series is it could be used pre-empting the settlement process so or before the minister even leaves, so they can set them up for what comes next. And then Ruth Moriarty, in the meanwhile, drew on her PhD research on slow wisdom and discerning the mind of Christ at church meetings, and she wrote a resource for church meetings for the start of the search to address the stuff that Brian was just talking about, about exploring it first, about the kind of ministry you're looking for, and who, who that what that Minister might look like, and then one for the special church meeting, when the vote to the call the minister happens or not, because that's when some of the explosive stuff happens. And that could be used for all the other points of differences, actually, that we've just talked about, that are in the search for a minister, and so that's it became a bigger resource than I first expected it to be. But one of the issues that we have is, how do we get people to engage with the resource? How do we get churches to do that? Because in the Baptist setup, change only comes when the churches change. It comes from the ground up. And so we need to be able to address it in the churches and not just in the institution level. And so it's not quite we've got a little bit more planned with the resource. So we're going to do an introductory video as well to help engage with that. But that's not happened yet. But throughout the resource, there's all sorts of links to books and online resources to help equip churches further in this area as well, so they can dig as deep as they want to. They can just do the surface stuff, and some churches are just ready for this. And they're fine with women in ministry, and it's okay, but that being helpful for them to look at it. But then some churches do need to dig deeper, and we as a regional team would help with that. It's kind of the message in there as well. So that's kind of how it all came together.

Helen Cameron

That's amazing. Well, I think speaking as one of the co-leaders of Project Violet, that is so exciting to hear the way in which, I think the Spirit was speaking to different people and was drawing out different contributions. And Claire, you've been able to curate them and bring them together and draw upon different people's efforts. And that's exactly the kind of, I guess, collaborative response which we were really hoping for to Project Violet. So it's been really exciting to hear you describe that. As we've gone through the conversation, you've highlighted the fact that you're working from an egalitarian position. Are there any particular ideas or principles that either of you feel you're trying to get across in this material, which it would be helpful to highlight here.

Brian Nicholls

My perspective is that I want people to have a well rounded understanding of the nature of ministry and the call to ministry and so on and so I think that one of the things is that the questions that Project Violet has raised are the kind of questions that also affect other areas of our understanding of ministry. I think Baptists have often been quite muddled up, and they've sort of gone from, well, it's the ministry of the Body of Christ, and we all have a place in that to the ordained ministry is really important. And don't dare lay hands on anybody in case something electric happens and all that sort of thing. And so it needs to be in that sort of more well rounded setting. One of the things that just struck me as Claire was talking was that in Leeds, where the church had come from, a very traditional view of male headship and so on. That's where the material was really most helpful as it as it was being developed. I drew a lot from what Ernie Wally had done up in Yorkshire, and it didn't help us through the process of settlement of other team members, but it helped us to address attitudes within the church generally about women and men. The egalitarian thing is interesting, because I found that some people were able to reconcile conflicting ideas by saying, Well, of course, if we have teams of people, then you can have a husband and a wife, and the husband can be the head of the wife, and then she can minister, and that felt very unsatisfactory often when the woman was far better than the man at doing that, that job. Yes, I'm not quite sure what I'm trying to say in all of that, but I think, I think it's quite, quite a tangled sort of web that we work our way through with this.

Helen Cameron

I think that's really helpful. One of the things that came across to me during the course of the project is that people often present egalitarian and complementarian positions, as if they're a simple either/or - a simple binary. But actually, when you start to get under the surface, there are shades in both positions which come to the surface as people start to talk about what they really believe and what they would like to see happen. And so I think the value of a resource like this is it's more nuanced than that, and can help people really get to the bottom of what it is that they believe and what they want to want to see. Is there anything else? Claire, that you Oh, sorry, Brian.

Brian Nicholls

I think one of the things that we might have to live with is that there are stages in this, and we might get a church or an individual minister or whoever, a little way along the track and celebrate that little victory, and then build on that and so on it. There are situations where we you won't get change all in one great lump. And so sometimes the headship argument, there are sort of stages on the way where we can just about live with that having and having opened that one up, then you begin to go into the next thing. One of the things I found in Leeds, which was really quite difficult, was that the university Christian Unions, and there were four of them operating in Leeds. And the universities were obviously following the complementarian route. Celebrated the theology of people like Wayne Grudem, and that was influencing as fast as we were opening things up in in South Parade, we're also having this other wind blowing that was taking us backwards, and that's quite a challenge. And I don't know how that can be resolved, because it's, it's beyond, beyond the reach of the denomination, as it were.

Helen Cameron

Yeah, these things are all done in the context, aren't they? Yeah, Claire, are there any other things that you want to say about what the ideas are that you're trying to get across,

Claire Nicholls

I think, just on the what we've just talked about? One of the things in the guide that Brian wrote about was about complementarianism and about the body of the church and complementary gifts within the body of church, whether male or female. Actually, it's about bringing people together

with complementary gifts, and that's what complementarianism about. Is not about gender. It's about making sure you've got the right people in the team to balance that team out. And I am a great believer in women and men co-working for the Kingdom. It's not just about one or the other. It's about working together. But it doesn't have to be husband and wife, because you don't need covering, which is often how people see it. I think the key ideas that I want to get across that are probably a bit more practical about how churches should not be tested in their theology as part of the settlement process, and it needs to be something that they're thinking about all the way through, rather than just in that in that moment when they're thinking about their next minister. Because a minister can influence the theology of the church through their preaching, through who they are. And you do find when the minister leaves, then, then the church is finding itself again. And what, what do we want to take from that ministry? Because we're not in the image of the minister, in the image of God. So what do we want to take from that ministry? And what do we take forward? And theology can be deconstructed at time of the interregnum, as well as constructed. So, so it's about working that through before you even get there, and recognizing that it's not all about the person. It's about the body and what the body believes. It's really important. And the other thing is, I've done a little bit of research into Maria Living Taylor, who was one of the first women Baptist ministers, and she was in London in Barking. And when her husband was called to Barking Baptist Church, John Living Taylor, he asked, Will you allow my wife, not any woman, my wife, to preach in the pulpit? And the deacon said, Well, we let women sing in the pulpit, so why not preach? And they just assumed that the church would find that acceptable. And it turns out, in the end, that the church meeting didn't. And this, this exploring of theology, has got to go beyond the leadership. It's got to go to the membership, because that's where the problems come when the membership realize that the leadership are trying to take them in a direction they didn't know they were in. So they need to make sure they do that, and that problem is over 100 years old, and we should be better by now.

Helen Cameron

Thank you for giving us that historical context, and again, just celebrating those early pioneer women and all that they've brought to Baptist life. Moving on now and thinking about the issue you raised before about making these resources available. Can you just say how they're currently available, and then anything that you're doing or want to do to make them more widely available?

Claire Nicholls

They're currently on the London Baptist website. In the 'what we do' section. There's a section called resources for justice, and there's a women in ministry section in there, and you can browse the resources online, or you can download them. We've also shared them with the regional team, with our district ministers. We have a local ministers who look after ministers, kind of in a layer with the regional ministers. And I've also tested them with some London ministers. As I've said already, they've been shared, I think they've been shared with the Regional Minister Team Leaders. So they've gone beyond London as well, although they are London centric, and we're going to do in the coming weeks and months. It's a fuller launch once we've got our video done and share them with the churches who are in settlement, all of them, not just one or two that we've decided to and the moderators of the churches and others as well. So we're trying to get it out there, and we'll keep talking about it, and we hope that the churches will engage with that.

Helen Cameron

Brilliant, is it too early to ask whether there been any reaction to the material?

Claire Nicholls

I think generally, it's been received well, but I'd love to hear stories of people using the material.

Helen Cameron

Okay, well, that's an open invitation to keep that feedback loop going. That's great. So your hope, it sounds as if your hope is that churches, who sort of know that settlements coming up will engage good and early with these resources. Is that what you're hoping for?

Claire Nicholls

Yes, yes, yeah.

Helen Cameron

And you suggest that people browse them, download them. What would be a first step if people have gone online and looked at this? What would you suggest would be the first way into making use of them?

Claire Nicholls

I think, read the settlement guide first, that's the main document, and then get and then engage with the questions in there, with the leadership team and the churches and the members as well. And don't, not assuming you know what the members think, but also, if a minister knows they're looking at leaving, even if they haven't taught their church yet, consider preaching through it as well, and looking at resource in advance because of it. Often the ministers can be the biggest advocates for women in ministry, but what the who they when the church is left behind, they don't realize the importance of that, and to engage with them before and at the beginning of the process is really, really important, not when people realize that there's a problem.

Helen Cameron

Great. Thank you very much. I guess the final question is, how do you hope this is going to contribute to the purposes of Project Violet?

Brian Nicholls

I think that when the conversation needs to keep going on, I think one of the things we need to be wary of is if we rely too much on material that's produced and it's kind of there with there's the information. Get on and read it. It's actually, I think there's a heart shift that has to take place in people so that emotionally as well as intellectually, they're able to grasp what ministry is about, and that affects both men and women. I think one of the challenges that I've found when I was a regional person is that I could write screeds and screeds about things. I could try my hardest to make it accessible and so on. But if somebody sees a sheet of writing, they go, Yeah, whatever. And they don't really read it properly, and it's actually the living experience of meeting good women ministers who get on with the job without fuss and favor and that sort of thing that really helps the cause. My opening up personally was that we had a member of our church in Nottingham before I became a regional minister, who was clearly called to ministry, but she'd always been told she couldn't be it wasn't possible. She came from a Welsh background that was very traditional, and there was a point where I knew that if she was going to make any progress at all, I had to give her the means to do that. So I'm wrestling with all sorts of questions in my mind about how this this works. But the thing was that when she preached, she was a far better preacher than I was, and her pastoral skills were superb, far better than me, who is extremely clumsy when it comes to some of the pastoral stuff. And it was basically that lived experience of seeing somebody else in action that helped me to say it's fine. This is what we do. This is how we are as God's people. You don't need to worry about who's in charge and all those kind of things. Yeah. So I think that's the important thing. It's how people are within the whole debate, not just what's fed to them by way of information.

Helen Cameron

Any resource is only as good as the conversation that follows it. And I think you've really emphasized that, Claire, in the way in which you've spoken about it, you want to see this as a springboard for conversations. Is there anything else you want to add, Claire, about how you hope this will fulfill some of the purposes of Project Violet.

Claire Nicholls

Well, I've always seen Project Violet is something that's not just for making the experiences of women better, but actually making the experience of the whole church better. And my hope in in this, in bringing this, is it will help churches to not only explore how they treat women, but how they treat all of the people that they meet, and that we won't hear the stories of people being treated differently because of their gender, because of their race, because of their background, and that at the moment, in the settlement system, there's two there's two sections to the profile, and they're meant to look at the second section afterwards, so they can't tell if they're a woman or if they're from a different country. And it, and it works some way, but it doesn't really and so I hope that this resource will help go beyond that and begin to kind of change that culture of unconscious bias that is within the settlement system that we see every day when we meet with churches. And I think that that speaks into what Project Violet is trying to do.

Helen Cameron

Thank you. Thank you, Claire and Brian, for sharing your insights.

Season 3 Outro

Helen	Thank you for listening to this episode of the Project Violet podcast.
Jane	We invite you to go to the website if you want to learn more about the Project. www.projectviolet.org.uk
	Music

Project Violet Podcast – Season 3 – Episode 3

Season 3 Intro

	Music
Jane	Hello, I'm Jane Day, Community Learning Tutor at Regent's Park College, Oxford.
Helen	And I'm Helen Cameron, Research Fellow at the Centre for Baptist Studies at Regent's Park College Oxford. Together we were the co-leaders of Project Violet.
Jane	Welcome to Season 3 of the Project Violet podcast. Project Violet was a research project investigating women's experiences in ministry whilst developing women ministers. It worked to understand better the theological, missional and structural obstacles women ministers face and identify ways forward.
Helen	The research phase of the Project ended in January 2025. Currently stakeholders across Baptist life are implementing the commitments to action that they made in October 2024. Jane and I are now focusing on the academic dissemination of the Project. In this third season we wanted to catch up with some of the work that has been going on since last October.
Jane	We hope that listening to these episodes will help you engage with some of the outcomes of the project.

Interview

Helen Cameron

Welcome to season three of the Project Violet Podcast. Today, I'm delighted to welcome Reverend Beth. Powney, welcome Beth.

Beth Powney

Hello Helen, lovely to see you

Helen Cameron

Beth, you're retired now, so perhaps you could start by telling us what you were doing in Baptist life prior to your retirement.

Beth Powney

I was extremely busy! Prior to my retirement, my job title was Regional Minister, Team Leader of the Eastern Baptist Association, which I've always said is the longest job title you could possibly find. So the outworking of that was working across Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire, and heading up a team of three regional ministers, including myself, and supporting about 170 Baptist churches across that location, and supporting them in multiple ways, depending what came up, whether that's crisis or conflict or missional thinking or seeking training, you never knew what the next email or telephone call would bring, and that's part of what I enjoyed. And then, alongside working in that locality, being a member of Baptist Together, Core Leadership Team and other national occasions like Baptist Union Council and having a voice in those places. So when I talk about it now, it sounds ridiculously huge, but that is what I did.

Helen Cameron

So now you're retired, what are the things you're enjoying about retirement?

Beth Powney

I'm enjoying the fact that I can choose to do what I enjoy in ministry. So I certainly haven't stopped working for God and using the gifts he's given me, but it's having the choice to do that which I feel most called to and which gives me life. So that's great, but still very important to keep time available for family, who I felt suffered somewhat in my ministry role. And so I have three teenage grandchildren that live fairly locally, and then two very much younger ones that live further away, and it's just delightful to be available for them. So yeah, we keep busy.

Helen Cameron

Wonderful. Now we first met when you were one of the Project Violet co-researchers, and so I just wonder whether you would look back over your experience of Project Violet and whether you've got any reflections about taking part in the project.

Beth Powney

Yes, certainly I remember when Jane asked me to be involved, my immediate reaction to her was, I'm not a researcher. Because I'm not. That's not one of my key strengths, and I couldn't bear the thought of having to do a whole load of academic, stuffy stuff. Is how it felt to me. She said, "Oh no, no this is, this is action research. It's quite different". And she told me more, and she said, "You really need to do some research to do with MagnifyYou". And I thought, Oh, all right. So I'm really glad that I did, because going through the process was so helpful in analyzing the effectiveness of the MagnifyYou project. But beyond that, it was just amazing. The breadth of topics that came up was incredible. And I learned so much from these other researchers, and they were asking questions I didn't know needed to be asked. And there I am a woman in ministry for a number of years, not realizing you even need to ask these questions. And so it was really exciting to be part of that and to see it grow, and to see the things that were coming to the surface, and all those huge number of requests for change that ended up on the table was quite incredible.

Helen Cameron

Yeah, thank you for saying that. I think Jane and I one of the things that, as co-leaders, that really struck us is that questions were asked which it would never have occurred to us to ask. And so that was the richness. Was seeing what questions had been placed on women's hearts and mattered to them and facilitating them in asking those questions. Now you've mentioned MagnifyYou and that was the subject of your research, so you're going to continue to be involved in it, which is very exciting, and what we're going to move on and talk about. But for new listeners who didn't listen to your interview in Season Two of the podcast, can you just say a bit about what MagnifyYou was when you set it up?

Beth Powney

It came out of a conversation between Jane and I in 2019 Jane Day and I, the first time Jane and I had met. And as a result of that conversation. I felt that the Lord pinged an idea into my brain. There was like a two-year window because of various changes that were on the horizon where perhaps, if we could develop potential women leaders, it may be a way of equipping them to step into some more senior roles. And I went away with this germ of this idea and spoke to my colleagues in the London Baptist Association and Central Baptist Association, Phil Barnard and Geoff Colmer, and said, I've got this idea. What do you think? And they went, Yeah, go for it. We'll support you as we can. Went back and spoke to Jane and said, "How about if we try to set up something that intentionally develops women leaders, where we see people that you just know have some potential". It's a really hard thing to quantify, that, isn't it, and it almost feels very pejorative to say, Well, you've got potential, but there are. There is something about certain people that you just know God wants to take them further than where they are. And so out of that was born this thing that ended up being called MagnifyYou. And we met in person for the first time in London a week before lockdown in 2020 looking back, we probably shouldn't have met, but we did, because we weren't told that we couldn't. And there were about 15 women there, and they'd all been asked to come by their regional ministers and suggested that this program, whatever it would look like, because we didn't know what it would look like, might be a good thing for them. So we met in March 2020 to explore with these 15 women if there was something that could develop their leadership skills and develop them as people and as ministers, what would you like it to look like? And we spent a day talking about that kind of thing. And then Jane and I went away and birthed, as I said, that what turned out to be called MagnifyYou which ran for two years, had to be online. As it turned out, that was never the plan. But other than three occasions, it was online, and we met every other month online and looked at the topics that the women had highlighted, and that's what I researched for Project Violet, the outcomes of that.

Helen Cameron

So you said two things which I think are very powerful about what you did. The first was that it was intentional. You invited people, which is not a very Baptist thing to do. And then the second thing was that you built the programme based upon what the women said they needed, which, again, is quite counter cultural. People are very often very confident that they know what leadership development is, and they do it to people. And so it's very interesting that you took that approach of asking people what would be helpful for them, and then making it happen.

Beth Powney

So it's fair to say that my mentor fed into that. In talking to her about it, she said you should ask them what they need. Okay, I probably would have given something to them.

Helen Cameron

Okay, oh, that's really interesting. So again, that just shows the wisdom of having voices around us, doesn't it?

Beth Powney

Yeah, absolutely, yeah. No, that's right.

Helen Cameron

In some recent conversations with women, they have been using the phrase every Mary needs an Elizabeth, and that sense that there's another voice that you're willing to listen to in the background as you go through and do something for the first time.

So unsurprisingly, when we got this huge list of 57 requests for change at the end of Project Violet, one of them was for associations to continue to offer intentional leadership development for women, and you've been part of picking that up. So could you just say what's happened next? Then you and Jane delivered this program, this first program, and then there's, there's been a recommendation request that it continue. So what is it that's happened?

Beth Powney

I think there's, I think what you're asking is, what's, what's happened in the association where I'm at, is that right? Just well and collectively, I think because you've been asked to be part of taking it forward, haven't so I can probably answer it on two levels, really. So I'm now part of a different Association because I now live in East Sussex, and so I've had conversations with the regional team here to say, how can we roll this out in this association? Because they don't have a female regional minister. They would like to, but they haven't, and so I've been part of pulling together a group of women ministers, four of us that that can be available across this very broad Association, geographic. It's very spread. I've been having conversations with cluster groups about how they feel about the Project Violet recommendations and what their queries and concerns are. I've been working proactively at gathering together the women ministers across this association, which is something they weren't in the habit of doing just because it's good, just to spend time with each other and share and be in a space. I remember this phrase being used at MagnifyYou being a space where you're allowed to be around the table and nobody's questioning it, whereas often when you're in a space which is male dominated as a woman, you can feel like it's probably unintentional and part of the men, but you can feel like you may not have right to be there. So by gathering women together, well, you just know you have a right to be there, and

that therefore is out of the way and changes how you interact and how you share, so that on association level is part of the way I've been involved in offering intentional development for this association.

Helen Cameron

Yeah, fantastic.

Beth Powney

And then the other question, I guess, is the next phase of MagnifyYou which has risen up. And I say it's risen up because that's not something I've intentionally been involved with. I felt as I retired that it was right that I handed that over, handed the baton on, and when we had the final retreat of MagnifyYou Jane, and I said to the ladies there, we have done this, and this is what God called us to do. If you feel it should continue, we pass the baton on to you. Because neither of us felt we should just repeat it for the sake of repeating it. I think that's a mistake we can easily make, but because something's worked, we need to do it again. That may or may not be true, it's important to reflect and decide, is it right to do it again? And what rose out of that were two of the women who had been on MagnifyYou and who are now both regional ministers, felt 100% they wanted to pass on what they had received. And so one of those being Lisa Kerry, got in touch with me and said, "How much would you be willing to be involved?" And I said, "I don't want to run it, but I'm happy to be a voice and to share with you in it". And so there is a new cohort of MagnifyYou, which is going to start on the second of September.

And we have a cohort of women that spreads nationally, this time from the majority of the associations across the UK, and it is three or four women from each association that have been nominated. We have met once in Baptist house and it's over 30 women. I'm not entirely sure what the number is. Now, that's incredibly exciting. And as I stood at Baptist house and saw this group of women, I just felt incredibly emotional, because, wow, look what God has done, yeah, look, look what the ripple effect has been, yeah? And that is just so marvelous, because all I felt I was asked to do was to drop a pebble in a pond, and what I stood there and saw was the ripples, and it's marvelous. So yes, what else would you like me to say about that?

Helen Cameron

So there's this second cohort has been brought together, and they're going to be having a program of meetings over the next couple of years and but driven forward by three women regional ministers, which is, again, it's just really, really encouraging. What are your hopes? You've been on the shoreline, you've seen the ripples coming towards you. What are your hopes there for this second cohort of women?

Beth Powney

I think one of the key things that came out of the first MagnifyYou and the research that I did was how, and it was all very much based around giving these women the opportunity to hear the

stories of other women who have gone before them and who were in senior roles in various aspects of ministry, and one of the big effects was how it increased their confidence and the realization these women are just like me. They've just happened to have taken this step. Yeah, and that sounds such a simple thing, but the change that it makes in your head is huge. It's absolutely massive. And so I think my hope would be the same for this cohort in that that they just see something which is beyond themselves. However, in talking with Lisa Claire and Mary about the organization of this second program, I said the actual the landscape is now different, which is really good. The landscape is different because we have a significantly higher number of senior female leaders across the Baptist together now, and therefore the landscape is different. So it's important we don't repeat exactly the same thing or expect exactly the same outcome but recognize what is needed for this landscape. What did this group of women need? So I don't know how to answer that question. The women gave us some thoughts when we met for that day in Didcot. But therefore, what will the outcome be? I don't know, because it should be different, still good, still exciting, I'm sure. But I believe it will be different, but if at the end of the day, it enables these women to move forward confidently in their God given scope of leadership, then it's done its job.

Helen Cameron

Thank you for that. And so thinking, perhaps more broadly, about the impact of Project Violet, do you have some sort of hopes and visions for what you'd like to see happen? You've obviously been active and encouraging your regional association to reflect on the findings and respond. Have you got a sense of that wider impact of the project?

Beth Powney

I'm not sure I've got a wider sense of the impact, partly because I'm now more detached from National Baptist life. I think I have a concern that, like a number of things that the Baptist family have done over the years. It lodges on a shelf somewhere. I think there's enough people that don't want that to happen that that probably won't happen, but it is a concern. So it's a concern about keeping the momentum and not letting it get forgotten, because the next big thing comes along, because there's always a next big thing. There always will be, and there's still huge other areas of inequality and injustice that need to be addressed. So my hope and prayer is that it keeps its momentum and therefore keeps its fruitfulness. But I think, like many of the best Baptist things, it has to rise up from underneath. And when I was praying about what, what does it look like for the association I'm in now? So this is nearly two years ago. Now, I have this picture of a bubbling stream, you know, a beautiful stream that's going through a lovely woodland. And where you see the fruitfulness is along the shoreline of that beautiful bubbling stream. You see the little flowers emerging and the ferns growing. And, you know, you see life. And I just had a sense that this is more like that bubbling stream now the lifeblood flowing through Baptist together, because the women on the grassroots level know they have a voice. That's what's so important. And change has to come from that place, not from the voices of whatever hierarchy we've got saying, Thou shalt change, because it doesn't work, does it? And change has to come from within. And so, yes, I hold on to my picture of the bubbling brook in the hope that that's what the Spirit of God will fulfill.

Helen Cameron

That's a wonderful picture, and it's so much in tune with action research as a way of bringing about change, having taken some action, people see that action is possible, and then that emboldens the next person to take some action. And it does become a stream of activity, which then, as you say, enables things to new things to blossom and bloom, and which is, yeah, wonderful when those signs appear, and it's been great in this third season of the podcast to have people on talking about the various responses they've made and the things that they they've done. So as you said, we're in a new situation now. There is a new cohort of women in positions of leadership. There's a sense of women's voice growing across the Baptist movement, if you were talking to a woman, and I'm definitely not going to say young woman, because very often it is mature women who responding to the call to ministry. So a woman of any age who was exploring a calling, what are the kind of things that you'd want to say to her about today's context,

Beth Powney

I'd always say, Don't ignore what you think might be a little nudge that. Don't ignore it. Talk to someone, because I still think we're very prone to saying, well, that couldn't be me. So voice what you think God might be saying early, and if you don't feel there's a safe place to take that in your church, there will be somebody in your association where it is a safe place. And even if you don't know who that is, your regional team know who that is, so voice how you feel and allow others to walk with you through that discernment, even if the discernment ends up as No, that's not the right way, that's absolutely fine. But the sooner you respond to the nudge, the sooner you can discern whether it's right or not. It doesn't have to be a quick thing, but the having someone walking alongside you in that because the internalization of that call, which so many women have internalized, sometimes for years, just puts a massive delay on the fruitfulness of the ministry that could be there. And whereas it hasn't necessarily been safe to voice that, I think it is much safer, and safe spaces can now be found much more easily. So I think that's the main thing I would say is find your safe person to talk to, because they are out there.

Helen Cameron

Thank you. Well, that feels like a really positive place to end our conversation. So thank you very much, Beth for agreeing to come and take part in this podcast,

Beth Powney

You're welcome, Helen and thank you.

Season 3 Outro

Helen	Thank you for listening to this episode of the Project Violet podcast.
Jane	We invite you to go to the website if you want to learn more about the Project. www.projectviolet.org.uk
	Music

Project Violet Podcast – Season 3 – Episode 4

Season 3 Intro

	Music
Jane	Hello, I'm Jane Day, Community Learning Tutor at Regent's Park College, Oxford.
Helen	And I'm Helen Cameron, Research Fellow at the Centre for Baptist Studies at Regent's Park College Oxford. Together we were the co-leaders of Project Violet.
Jane	Welcome to Season 3 of the Project Violet podcast. Project Violet was a research project investigating women's experiences in ministry whilst developing women ministers. It worked to understand better the theological, missional and structural obstacles women ministers face and identify ways forward.
Helen	The research phase of the Project ended in January 2025. Currently stakeholders across Baptist life are implementing the commitments to action that they made in October 2024. Jane and I are now focusing on the academic dissemination of the Project. In this third season we wanted to catch up with some of the work that has been going on since last October.
Jane	We hope that listening to these episodes will help you engage with some of the outcomes of the project.
Jane	In this episode we are delighted to welcome Ken Benjamin as guest presenter. Ken is a Baptist minister and Director of Church Relationships at the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity.
Helen	Ken offered to engage with the issue of women's experience of leading larger Baptist churches.

Ken Benjamin

Thank you so much for joining us for this discussion on Project Violet. As we jump in, I'll introduce myself and the three people I'm interviewing straight away. So I won't repeat that here, just to say that it was such a privilege doing this, the contributions from all three friends were so poignant and helpful that this has ended up being two podcasts of around 25 minutes, not just one. So at the end of part one, I'll jump in again, and hopefully you'll have heard enough to want to listen and download part two – Episode 5. We hope you enjoy it. We're praying this is helpful and hopeful to many.

Hi everyone, and welcome to this podcast for Project Violet, looking at the particular issue of women leading larger churches, particularly thinking of larger Baptist churches. And I'm delighted to have three friends with me to do this, Ali summers, Lisa Holmes and Ellen wild and just to introduce them, just very briefly, and then we'll spend most of our time hearing from them. Ali Summers is the senior minister of rising Brook Baptist Church in Stafford, and has been since July 2022, and is one of the leaders of fresh streams. Lisa Holmes is one of the national leaders for Scottish Baptist but prior to that, was at Skipton Baptist Church, and was lead Minister between 2013 and 2021 and Ellen wild is in Chichester Baptist Church, coming to us from Chichester Baptist Church has been there since 2011 and has been the team leader there since 2021 and is one of the core leaders of the larger Baptist Church network, which is a great connection as well with this theme. And we've said together, we could discuss this in many, many different ways, but the format that we've chosen is a really simple one, yay, nay and may. It's a bit cheesy but go with me on this. Yay, nay and may. Yay, what are your Yays? What are you really positive about, about being a woman leading, or having led a larger Baptist Church? Nay - what are the negatives? Let's be honest about what the difficulties and challenges and problems and May - what are your hopes, aspirations, prayers, even for women lead leading larger Baptist churches going forward and as much as possible, just jump in and talk to each other, as well as me prompting you with any questions. So maybe if we start with Ali say on the yay Ali, what are the positives about being a woman leading a larger Baptist church?

Ali Summers

I think for me, one of the things that I love about it is I get to lead a large team, a large staff team, as well as loads of volunteers. And I've been in the church since 2003, so I've been a minister at that point, leading different areas as the years have gone by.

So I know lots of people. I've seen all our staff. I'm the longest serving member of staff now, there was one that retired at Christmas, but so that that means that I've seen all their journeys, and it's just such a privilege to lead that team, to see those people develop and grow, to bring new people onto the team, when others move on, to have some of our younger adults as interns. And there's just that life and vitality of a larger staff team that is just really exciting to be part of and to lead. And I love that about big church, in that sense.

Ken Benjamin

Lisa and Ellen, you're nodding. Do you want to jump in on that?

Ellen Wild

I guess I just want to reiterate that in a way, it does feel a privilege. I deliberately am called the team leader, because the greatest joy for me is leading the team. And I think I'd want to say that, yes, there are lots of challenges in leading in a larger context, but actually I have people around me, because I have a team who do fill some of my gaps. And I was reflecting that if you lead in a smaller church, it's hugely challenging. If you are the sole minister, actually, you need to cover so much. Whereas I am very privileged that I do have admin support and I do have a finance team and people who do things I don't and have expertise in areas where I don't, I have a lot of gaps. And rather than thinking because I have lots of gaps, I can't lead a larger church. Instead, I have lots of gaps, so perhaps I ought to lead a larger church where there's a team of people who can do some of the things that I can't do. So I really agree with you. Ali, I think leading the team that I have is my greatest joy, and one other thought then, then, Lisa, you what do you think. But I also sense a real privilege in the carving of a new path. The reason we're doing this podcast is because there just aren't many of us who lead in a larger context. And yes, I'd love there to be well-worn paths that I can follow, but there aren't. And rather than being frustrated about that, actually it's a bit of a privilege, I suppose, to be part of changing a narrative, changing a culture. There's a whole generation in my church, who just, they just don't know any different, because they've never seen any different. And there's a joy in that, isn't there. There's a privilege that I can't change the world. But in my little corner, there's two ministers, one male, one female, and our kids, teenagers, young adults, don't think anything of that at all.

Ken Benjamin

My daughter and my daughter in law they've grown up knowing a brilliant minister in Ellen Wild, and just that's the natural thing that they've assumed is the norm, until they've traveled elsewhere. Yeah,

Lisa Holmes

Absolutely. I entirely agree with what you've both said, and I think there is a privilege in being a pioneer. I mean, people used to say, oh, you're a pioneer, and I feel like the least pioneering person in the world. I think I'm way too cautious to be a pioneer, but just following God's leading in my life, day by day and ended up being accidentally a pioneer in this kind of role of senior leadership within a Baptist church. And I just kind of want to say yes to everything you've said. You know, we had young girls and young women into the church, being called into ministry because it seemed entirely normal. The role model piece is hugely important, isn't it? And I just love the team thing as well, you know? And I guess as you become the senior leader, sometimes you end up picking up things that are more challenging, that are part of the role of having a kind of overall responsibility, but at least you're probably not then trying to do everything else and you can, to some degree, pick and choose if that's the appropriate way of putting it. You play to your strengths, can't you and equip and encourage other people to do that. I mean, it was just a lot of fun. There were some quite difficult bits and it's that kind of pioneering privilege piece, which is often being in rooms with a lot of men, because that's the nature of senior leadership. But sometimes that means you get noticed. And I sometimes felt for some of my colleagues, who just became overlooked because there was like loads of them all looked entirely the same, and to have a voice into a different sphere is a real amazing opportunity as well, isn't it?

Ken Benjamin

Hmm, that's interesting as well. So you might get an extra notice or extra voice, and you right now, all of you have answered the question, either from the point of view of the yays generally, of leading a larger church. And we haven't defined larger church, by the way, I think that's fine. Sometimes Baptist together define it around 180 plus. Often it's defined the way you've defined it. By the time you're big enough to have a team, you're kind of a larger church. Sometimes it's churches with 200 plus. It doesn't really matter, from the point of view of our discussions, but some of the advantages you've named generally, and some are specific to being a woman leading a larger church. And I guess I could speak to the general point as well in in that sometimes you can just try things, have a go at things in a larger church, and it's a bit safer to do that. Great answers. Any other yays before we move on?

Ali Summers

I think one of the things that is great, what I what I love about our churches, you've got the beauty of the big and the small and when you've got a larger church, that can be like a resource hub. Like you say, you can pioneer other things. You can try other things. You can do a little church plant. Or we have Susan, who leads this fabulous deaf community, you can do those things because you've got more resource with a bigger church to be able to do it and so it's, it's not that one is good and one is not so good. Large and smaller, both great, and you and both have different opportunities, and both work really well. But I think the one thing about a large church is you've got that resource hub that lets you do the small, lets you do the pioneering, and lets you do all those things, which is, is just great opportunity to have

Ken Benjamin

Brilliant, brilliant. Well, go on Ellen.

Ellen Wild

I was just reflecting on that, Ali, the kind of large and the small and the benefit of that, I just wonder as well whether there's something about the kind of the current cultural climate that we're in, that the one of the ways and the privilege is also to do with the way that leadership style and approach is changing. So I feel quite privileged, in a way, to be leading at a time when there's a lot of questions, over institutional models, where influence comes through role and position, and not just in church, in business and other charities and communities and schools and so on, that actually there's a dissatisfaction with previous models of leadership. And in all that you've described, I was just thinking to myself, gosh, we're leading at a time when the kind of leadership style that maybe many women lean more into is actually the kind of leadership that people are looking for. More something that is more collaborative. And we talked a lot about team and releasing people and less top down. Well, actually, often women lead in that way, lean in that way. So if you were talking about the large and the small and the you know, the privilege that we have to be pioneers, we are leading at a time when I think people are looking for the kind of leadership that maybe women might bring. And so if we're talking before we get onto the nays and the hard stuff, we are absolutely not saying that larger church is better. You know, smaller churches can be just so, so hard. We just want to wave a flag to say this isn't just possible, it can also be life giving and fun, and also that we have got something significant to contribute as women that is really important in this time and in this moment.

Ken Benjamin

Thank you for saying that. We're not saying that larger churches are more important or more significant ministry at all, but you also have a good counterbalance there. And I guess that was one of the prompts for me to ask to be able to do this podcast with the three of you as chair of Trustees for one of the colleges, one of our Baptist colleges. And I was speaking to a couple of brilliant women ministers in training who've kind of ruled themselves out of ever leading a larger church, and that may be their calling, and if it is their calling, that's absolutely fine to lead a smaller church. Whatever your calling is, it is your best calling. But they've led larger organizations, they've had responsibilities elsewhere. And if God is calling them to a larger church, then for all the reasons, you've said, Yay to there are wonderful opportunities, and it's a it's a great ministry, if that's what God has called you to. So hopefully this will be useful to some who might be in that in that category. With that in mind, then let's think about some of the nays and some of the things that you wish weren't the case. I could start with any of you, but let's start with Lisa.

Lisa Holmes

Well, I think the biggest challenge, well, I don't know, there's a whole bunch of biggest challenges. One of them is the one that's inside your own heart. I think actually, just getting over the starting line is hugely challenging for a lot of women. I grew up in a church that probably didn't really have women in senior roles and leadership, but there were women who did stuff at the front. So I wasn't terribly aware that I probably was doing something that perhaps didn't fit with the structures. But I remember saying to God, no, you don't want me to do this because I'm a woman. And have you not read the Bible? You know there was that sort of personal bit of like, I don't think that I can, I mean, there was some personality stuff around that as well, but, but they're kind of getting over the front bit of the journey, and even putting your hand up and saying, I think I might be called, depending on the context you find yourself in, is immensely difficult before you even get on to the next bit, and then actually getting your first job, I think, is also the next challenging piece.

And it I'm sure it's a little easier than it used to be, but I think when I started in Baptist ministry, something like the maximum was 7% of all ministers were women. So just actually getting a job to even get started requires people to be willing to open some doors for you, to take a chance. And often that comes out of relationship. But you got to have the relationships before that happens. So I think those things have been quite difficult for a lot of women.

And I would say that over overwhelmingly, I have quite positive experiences with one particularly challenging, negative one, but you can end up feeling very discouraged and without carrying a lot of hurt if you've had a lot of difficult experiences, and I think that if you do go around carrying a lot of hurt, it only makes things more difficult for you. So is it that's kind of cycle that that I think it's easy to get on? And I suspect that's not unique to women, but I think it's particular to women with regard to leading. So that's just a couple of things,

Ken Benjamin

Good, helpful. Ali?

Ali Summers

I think my journey is, is a little bit different in it to Lisa's. In that sense, I grew up in a Methodist Church. So there were women, you know, at the front. I didn't really think anything different around that. And then I went off to university, was part of the Christian Union, and that was the first time that I really hit a whole thing of, in the UCCF at the time, there was the whole thing of women can't lead. I remember having a conversation with somebody in regional leadership saying, We think you'd be great to be leading the CU, but you can't because you're a woman. Oh, oh, okay. So they said we'd like you to lead the mission committee instead, because you can do that. That was my first encounter with it. And then I went into teaching, I always felt a huge call into leadership of some way and everything in school, and my first head teacher, and all of that was pointing to like, Oh, you're going to be a head teacher, and this is going to be the journey. And then it was sort of 13 years later that God had other plans. And by that point, I was in Rising Brook church. And so it was appointment from within, because people in the church saw that, and there was a whole sort of few years of calling and local appointment within that and a journey. But I feel, when I listen to some other women's stories, a huge privilege of people who just gave me a safe seat at the table and a different journey into it. And so I have had interesting conversations and interesting challenges along the way, but not the horror stories that I've heard from some women, as you said, you know, Lisa, to even get through the line into a first role.

Ellen Wild

If we're thinking particularly about the way in terms of leading in a larger church, I think it is good to reflect on the fact that if this does feel like a really significant sticking point for our Baptist family. So you know, why are we on the screen? It's not because we were like Ken's favorites. It's because there wasn't many to choose from.

Ken Benjamin

I'd like to say both, but...

Ellen Wild

There are very, very few women doing what we are doing. And I'm delighted that more women are coming in to train, and I'm delighted that we're seeing a real sea change in the number of women moving into regional ministry. I think that's really encouraging and to be celebrated. But where we're not really seeing any change is women breaking through whatever the barriers are to leading in a larger church. So if we're talking about yay, nay and may, I think a big nay has got to be 'why are more women not doing this?' I do think some of it is what you say, Lisa, about how easy it is to count ourselves out. I've done that. But of course, the reason we count ourselves out is because that whole thing of you can't be, what you can't see, feels true. So when I felt called to this role, one of my big problems was that I believe theologically, women can do this, but they are not doing it, and there must be a reason why. So why should I think I could do it? I do wonder, if we're talking about larger churches, I think a really key issue that's only going to be overcome through modeling and prayer, and a culture change is to do with unconscious bias. I don't think the theological problem is that big a deal. There is some of that. And there are some churches that it is their stance and that I've got loads of grace for that. That's your view, your understanding of the Scriptures. No problem. The problem is in churches that say, in theory, on their profile, of course, will have a man or a woman, but the reality of it is that they don't really mean that, and it isn't theological. It's unconscious bias, and I just feel like I've seen that quite a lot, so there's no reason why larger churches wouldn't appoint a woman into a senior church in a senior role in a larger church, but because there aren't any well worn paths or any models, or because our leadership style might be different, or whatever, unconscious bias kicks in, and churches look to fill those gaps with the kind of male framework that they understand. So I think that's a really significant barrier, and it is interesting just to know that all three of us were a second minister on a team in a church who then loved us, respected us, saw leadership in us, and so therefore were willing to appoint us. If a larger church is looking for a new Minister, how many would appoint someone like us? From cold, so to speak?

Lisa Holmes

I think that's so wise. We were just really observing that that was our reality, was being known and trusted, and therefore could be trusted with that next level of leadership, and probably something in us as well of saying, well, actually, I can step up to this, because it's only one step up.

You know, it feels like that, whereas it changing to another church and a senior role, it feels like a much bigger move, doesn't it? I just sense a kind of caution, I think, in there, and maybe it's something about my context. But I think in the way that we feel that there's been some significant change in terms of the opening and possibility of women in leadership, which might even mean senior leadership, there's also a bit of a pendulum swing the other way. And I think we're seeing quite a strong resurgence, I suppose, of kind of the male role, which perhaps has just felt a little undermined. And I understand there's reasons behind that, but both in the secular sphere and also in the church sphere, and that just makes me sad, really. I think one of the lovely things about leading in the larger church is very often you get to model what women and men leading together looks like and maybe there's also a generational thing that you get to model. But something about that is so beautiful to see, and I feel sad if we're sort of the possibility is at the point where we're starting to see real shift and change, there's a kind of pendulum swing back the other way again. I certainly see that around me, and we see it somewhat in the States as well. I don't want to be too much of a generalized person about that, but I do think it's something in that nay zone that concerns me.

Ken Benjamin

So just thinking about that nay element and the fact, as you observed Ellen, that you've all come from being existing ministers in a church, and therefore known, so maybe some of that unconscious bias thing is overcome. But between us, we don't know many, if any, examples, of women leading larger churches straight into that role, is some of it like another layer of complementarianism, like a soft layer so? And this could be unconscious, but the idea that, yes, women can be ministers, but the sort of ministers that they are is caring, pastoral ministers, and that suits a smaller church. It doesn't seem the gift set suits a larger church. Is that part of it? And it's another Nay. I don't want to invent nays that you haven't experienced. It's easier in a large church for there to be a subgroup that may not be very large, but can be very vocal, and it's hard to kind of get on top of. And if they're not for you at the point that you're coming into post, that can be a huge thing to overcome, because you're not at that point in Baptist life, you're not voting yet. So you don't know how big that group is, but it feels very big, because there's something of the dynamics of a Baptist network that makes it easy for a few people to sound like they're the majority.

Ali Summers

I mean, I think that the reason the three of us have had that journey is it does go back to the trust thing.

I think we have to acknowledge that the churches that we have ministered in, you've almost proved your way. I don't like that phrase, but I think you have, you have proved your way. And so, you know, I've, I've had various comments along the way, like, well, I don't, you know, I don't really go with women, women leading larger churches, but, you know, I think Ali can, you know, I think she can, sort of, I think she's proved she can do it. That sort of a comment, and I think that has come from those, all those years of building relationship of trust, and even when you have got folks in your church who may have been outspoken on it for Well, for me, maybe been outspoken on it a number of years back, more before my time, almost when you have been the person who has walked alongside them as they've lost people in their family. You've done that. You know, you take funerals, you walked alongside them. There has been that pastoral well, they see you differently. There is, I think, that comes out of relationship and trust building. But it is sad that it takes that, it takes moving, moving your way.

Lisa Holmes

Yeah. And I would agree with everything you've just said, Ali and also with this kind of soft complementarianism. I mean, you know, most complementarians believe that women can lead in certain contexts. So you know that it's not against women in leadership. It's particular context and I think there's something that sneaks in, which is around the kind of male headship thing. So it's sort of worked out in a was totally fine. You can do absolutely whatever you want to, but it's good to have a man in the chief seats, because that makes everyone feel secure. And I think it's something about that headship piece that probably nobody can necessarily explain terribly well, but it just makes people feel secure, because that's how the world works, doesn't it? That's how it's supposed to be. And so that's quite difficult to deal with. It's quite nebulous, it's quite an emotional space, and I think that's often what people are saying in a in a church meeting when they can't think of anything specific to say. It's just that I just feel a wee bit uncomfortable with this, and I just not sure how this works, and therefore I'm not for it, but I don't really know why. Just doesn't seem quite right. It's not the natural order of things, that feeling.

Ellen Wild

All that you've just described, the soft complementarianism and all of those, all those examples, is exactly what unconscious bias is, actually, isn't it?

This doesn't sit quite right, or it doesn't feel quite right to me. To take your point, Ken about, you know, in a Baptist church as well. I mean, I'm a Baptist for a reason, and I believe in this, and I'm so grateful, actually, that I know that I'm in my church with an enormous endorsement from the church that's really important to me. But of course, the challenge is, if we're talking about bringing about change, actually, the culture change does need to be in the whole church, because it's the whole church that discerns. So it's not like other streams, where leaders appoint leaders and they might say, Here's your here's your woman for the role, we don't have that. We don't have anybody saying it. You know, Ellen, she's coming to lead your large church, that large church have got to decide together. That I'm the right person, and so no wonder, in some ways, it's a bit more challenging. Your point, Ken's interesting about powerful people, because I think that is that is true to one degree. I do wonder also, though, that there's a dilution that can take place in larger churches. I think if you're a smaller church and you've got a powerful couple, for example, a few powerful people, their voice can also be magnified in a different way, perhaps. And this, I'm quite grateful sometimes that people speak strongly in my church, but they're, they're diluted by, you know, quite large. So proportionally, they're not that enormous, you know, but, but you're right because of the discerning together and the Baptist way of doing things, their unconscious bias, the soft complementarianism, all of those things make being the lead minister as a female just so much, so much harder.

Ken Benjamin

Yeah, you're absolutely right. Ellen, it could be even harder in a smaller church, I guess, for other reasons I guess I was just thinking sometimes it sort of feels hard to keep track of in a larger church, like, where is it and who are? Who is this group? Whereas in, if you're in a church of 20, sort of know who?

Ellen Wild

Yeah, that's very, very slippery. People are slippery in big churches, yeah,

Ken Benjamin

That's where we're cutting Part One, I hope you'll join us all now in streaming or downloading. Part Two of this interview – Episode 5.

Season 3 Outro

Helen	Thank you for listening to this episode of the Project Violet podcast.
Jane	We invite you to go to the website if you want to learn more about the Project. www.projectviolet.org.uk

Project Violet Podcast – Season 3 – Episode 5

Season 3 Intro

	Music
Jane	Hello, I'm Jane Day, Community Learning Tutor at Regent's Park College, Oxford.
Helen	And I'm Helen Cameron, Research Fellow at the Centre for Baptist Studies at Regent's Park College Oxford. Together we were the co-leaders of Project Violet.
Jane	Welcome to Season 3 of the Project Violet podcast. Project Violet was a research project investigating women's experiences in ministry whilst developing women ministers. It worked to understand better the theological, missional and structural obstacles women ministers face and identify ways forward.
Helen	The research phase of the Project ended in January 2025. Currently stakeholders across Baptist life are implementing the commitments to action that they made in October 2024. Jane and I are now focusing on the academic dissemination of the Project. In this third season we wanted to catch up with some of the work that has been going on since last October.
Jane	We hope that listening to these episodes will help you engage with some of the outcomes of the project.
Jane	In this episode we are delighted to welcome Ken Benjamin as guest presenter. Ken is a Baptist minister and Director of Church Relationships at the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity.
Helen	Ken offered to engage with the issue of women's experience of leading larger Baptist churches.

Ken Benjamin

Welcome back. This is part two of our Project Violet podcast looking at the challenges and opportunities for women as team leaders or senior ministers of larger Baptist churches. If you haven't listened to part one, Episode 4, I suggest you do that first. I found Lisa Holmes Ali Summers and Ellen Wild's thoughts and contributions inspiring and challenging. I hope you will too as we go straight into part two, I start with a question for all of them.

Ken Benjamin

When I was part of the Network, that you're a core leader of Ellen, the Larger Baptist Church Network, which is particularly the team leaders of those larger churches, we sometimes said that in leading a larger church, there's an area where you're particularly responsible, particularly able and particularly vulnerable. So you're particularly responsible because you know, it's a misquote of the verse 'Those to whom much has been given, much has been required'. Because that probably refers to being given the gospel message. But there is that sense in which, as in terms of the talents that we've been given, in the number of people in the church, we are particularly responsible. There's things we can do, as we've said already, but then we are particularly able, because you can, you can then have a go at some things, like we said, but particularly vulnerable. Maybe people feel freer to criticize us in a larger church and the other churches in the town, or maybe under spiritual attack in certain ways. I don't know. So does that resonate particularly responsible, particularly able, particularly vulnerable and is there a particular female aspect to that, or is that just general to anybody who leads a larger church? Anybody jump in on any of those thoughts?

Ali Summers

Well, we're clearly all particularly able. That's why we're on this call, isn't it?

That's a hard question, isn't it? Really? Yeah, I am. I think there is, I feel very cautious in saying this. I think you need particular competencies for particular roles, and I think some people are particularly competent to lead in urban deprivation situations, and I think that I would be entirely hopeless, you know. So I think it's perhaps you do need some particular skills or particular personality traits that enable you to lead within a larger context, because it does require some different things of you than leading in a smaller context. But I wouldn't want to stack them against each other. They're just they're just different. The vulnerability piece, I suspect, is somewhat about personality, and I think that I'm someone who carries stuff quite a lot in my head and feels responsible for kind of literally everything, all of the time if I'm not careful. And I think my vulnerability is then in that the bigger the amount of people or projects that you've got, the less you are able to do that, and so that feels sometimes quite like a weight. I but I think that's a lot about how I am, how I'm wired, my personality type, what's important to me. And I think the vulnerabilities come into the spaces where I am vulnerable, but they might be different for Ellen and Lisa, and they might be different for you Ken and I tend to avoid stereotypes, but, you know, it may be women have a tendency. I mean, we sort of say our women don't. You know, men are good at putting things in boxes and compartmentalizing them. I don't think that's necessarily the truth. I think different men are different but, but maybe there is a tendency towards more men being better at doing that, and women tend to sort of juggle more stuff and have it all in their head all the same time. And maybe that's a bit of a vulnerability, but I'm happy to be corrected on that.

Lisa Holmes

I would say that there are definite differences to leading, leading in the larger context, again, not better or worse, just different. The whole budget thing and finance, then budgets and more salaries or stipends, or however you do it that you're responsible for. So, you know, I sometimes think, gosh, if you know, if it all goes wrong and I mess it all up, it's not just me and my life. It's, it's the staff, you know, it's that. So there's that sense of, yeah, there are different skills involved, I guess, in leading in, leading in that, in that bigger way, and that then there is a vulnerability in that which you carry. Whether, for me, I wouldn't see that as female or male. I would just see that as different personalities, different characteristics, different skills of and I think I can't remember who, who it was now? Was it Ken Blanchard, or someone like that, who talked about being called to be a leader of 10 or a leader of 50, or a leader of 100 or 500 or a leader of 1000 or whatever? And we're all called. We're called to

lead at different contexts. And, and I think, yeah, there are definite challenges that go with whatever context it is, but certainly that larger context, I would say, the financial burden of an organization, which you don't always learn beforehand. You know, you learn it when you get there and you have to work.

Ellen Wild

I've often, I have often felt the weight of the kind of those to whom much is given, much is expected thing, you know I'm just blessed with a brilliant, giving, generous, well-resourced church in in time and energy and money in every way. And I am the person people are looking to steward that and lead people in the stewarding of that. So I do think we, I think we are particularly able in some ways, larger churches can, as you say, and therefore also particularly vulnerable, and for all the joy there is in leading the team, I identify so much Ali that I also lead the team in every way. So I did not go to Spurgeon's and learn about HR and contracts and all of that stuff. But with my staff, and all the issues it raises, and all those things and carrying the burden for wanting them to flourish. You know, I love to cheer them on, and I really want that so much, but, but I carry it like Lisa does. Do you wonder if one of the questions is the particularly female aspects, not necessarily to do with just preferences or temperament, but just because we are women. It just can be more lonely. So I just don't have many peers doing what I am doing to talk to about things, just because there aren't many of us so and I do spend almost all of my time in in in entirely or prominently male dominated spaces. You know, it's just the way it is. Absolutely, I don't mind it. It's become kind of normal to me. I don't worry about it particularly. But actually, if I look at it, I think, Gosh, I spend all my time with men and in terms of kind of friendships and support and that actually that's hard. That's just harder to find, isn't it? If you're asking, is there a vulnerability for us as women leading in larger churches, I wonder if, if that might be one of them.

Ken Benjamin

In finding the three of you to talk to each other, you're not geographically close.

Lisa Holmes

I would definitely agree with that. And that's where it is really helpful to find other women in leadership and that way you can just give courage to each other and encourage one another and support one another and pray for one another. And because I, yeah, I would agree, I think that is one of the vulnerabilities that is quite lonely. And I've noticed you go to the States, I've had the privilege of being able to go to the States and see some of the churches in the States, and usually, unless they already know the relationship you're assumed to be the wife of a minister. It's not even considered that you might be leading a larger church and that you know those sort of assumptions that made when you join something that is church leaders and men and that you're just assumed that you're probably the spouse. Yes, it's there.

Ali Summers

Yeah, I think, I think that's a really, really good point. I mean, all of them are, and I'm so used to being just with men in the room that I scarcely even notice. People make a comment, and I'm like, oh, yeah, it's just, this is my life. I'm completely acclimatized in my life, but I think that vulnerability around am I going to have to give account for myself is, is a really subtle kind of thing that can erode you over time. Which is, you know, how many more times do I have to say, oh, no, actually, I'm the team leader. When I was at Skipton and my associate there was brilliant, and so many new people who came to the church would assume that he was obviously the senior leader, and every occasion he would correct them. But you know that not everybody has as much integrity to do that, or feels that they are going to do it. And,

and just having to kind of stand there and deal with that so many times, or, you know, being that wife or the administrator, and even now, you know, it's just like, Am I allowed to be in this room? Am I allowed to share this Bible passage? You know, there's huge stuff that goes on inside me every time that I have to deal with that, which is at least once a week. Probably there's vulnerability in that of going eventually, I just can't do this anymore because it's eroded something of my sense of self esteem and my own sense of calling, which is pretty reasonable. But you know, when that happens time and time again, that's quite hard.

Ken Benjamin

There's a there's a huge challenge in what you've said for the for the rest of us. I haven't just asked you, because you're the three I know, but because you're the only ones. You've led thriving churches. You led churches where, or are leading churches where there's Kingdom growth, where people are finding Jesus and growing in Jesus, where there are baptisms, where there are signs of kingdom life, so many things. So you're not just holding the fort here you are doing a lot with a lot that you have been given.

Just having this conversation is proof that this is doable to anybody listening, which I guess leads us to our third question. So if we've done yay and nay, you can come back to those if you wish. But I'm going to ask Ellen to kick us off with May, what do you wish would happen? What's your prayer? Maybe, for those who are listening, maybe the next generation take it in any direction you want. Ellen.

Ellen Wild

I guess my hope, my prayer, is that that we don't do more podcasts like this, because it is just the norm. It is so the norm, and that that attrition that Lisa has described is not people's experience any longer and that perhaps the shift I think I'm seeing that I mentioned at the beginning, in terms of people wanting different leadership styles would take hold in such a way that people don't think, Well, women are second Ministers and they're the pastoral ones, or whatever, actually what we really need, and the people who lead our organization is somebody who's got this kind of emotional intelligence, perhaps, who can lead a team and really believe in in the team and so on. So yeah, my hope and my prayer is for a sea change, and then this becomes the norm. That's like a kind of longer term may. But my short-term hope is that, just as you say, Ken, that more women would just realize this is possible. You know, I just want to say, I am the kind of person who would count myself out. I'm quite surprised that I'm here doing this and if I can, you can. I've been single in ministry, and it's possible. I have been married in ministry, and it is possible. I've had babies and been on maternity leave from my church and come back and had tiny kids and had teenagers and it's possible. So I've done it every step. And now I'm in a larger church, and it is possible. So my longer-term hope and prayer is for a massive sea change, and that this is just not a conversation. My short-term hope is that if people are listening and they're thinking, could I, or I thought I couldn't, that they hearing us saying, well, she thought she couldn't, and she did, and it's okay, and it's great in loads and loads of ways. So my May is that someone listening, says, I could do that. If they can do that, I can do that.

Ken Benjamin

Great. Wow. Amazing. Lisa, Ali, anything to add?

Lisa Holmes

I think Ellen's summarized it all, really, I just echo everything that Ellen's just said. And I guess I want to just pray for anyone listening, and into the future as well, in the big picture that we have generations of women just discovering and exploring their calling. And then,

because it always comes back to that, doesn't it? When you have the hard time, I go back to No, actually, I know God has called me to do this. And if you if you know what your calling is, then there are no ceilings with God. So if that is your calling, then just keep exploring it. Just keep going for it, and don't let anything else become the ceiling, because God doesn't put ceiling on these things. And that's what I know, that's where I've had to come back to, is like, No, this is my calling, and therefore I will put another step forward. And so I just want to pray that for anyone who that might be helpful to.

Ali Summers

Also just a hope that that men would be encouragers and champions. I look back and I was thinking about it because of the podcast, and thinking about the key people who've just encouraged me in a non-patronizing way, you are gifted and called by God, and who've allowed me to step into a space that I might have not done. And so if you're somebody who is hopeful that that women take up the calling of God on their lives in the leadership of churches, then please, will you encourage that to happen? Will you create space for that to happen in a in a way that has integrity? Because that really, really matters, I think, still in this age. So I'd hope for that, really. And my other hope is if this quiet revival is going on, that we're starting to kind of see around us that God is calling younger men and younger women into relationship with him, and there's a huge lost generation to be reached. We need every hands-on deck for that. And in the same way that I think in some of the nations around the world, where there's explosion of evangelism, it's whoever is able and called by God, I kind of hope for that. You know that sometimes, some point we just get over some of these conversations. And just like we need everybody, we need everybody serving God, called by God, using the gifts that they're given, because we need it for the kingdom of God. And that's kind of my hope, really.

Ken Benjamin

Yeah, wow, brilliant. We're recording this over. Zoom. But if it was live and we were all together in one place, and there was a live audience, they would have been clapping and cheering all that you said. But hear that endorsement that they would have been that clapping, because I think your answers have been inspiring and totally challenging as well. And I hope and pray this will be useful, having said that, it would be totally inappropriate if I was the one to close in prayer. I think so if, if any of the three of you, or all of the three of you, want to jump in and pray, maybe picturing, you know, some somebody who is in that next generation and praying for them, jump in however you feel, and then we'll call that the close. Thanks for listening, everyone. We're going to pray.

Lisa Holmes

Father, I want to just thank you for that Genesis mandate, which was for men and women to lead together to fill and be part of bringing the kingdom of heaven in all its fullness. And Lord, we thank You that You have invited us to partner with you in doing that as men and as women and so Lord, we want to pray Lord for anyone who is listening to this, who is just exploring their calling with you. Both men and women. Lord that they would just know that the things that you've called them into the call of God on their lives. Father that you would equip, that you would anoint afresh. Lord that you would make spaces at the table. Lord, we pray for this new generation coming through that that Lord, they would know people like us making space. They would know people who are reaching out at hand and saying, come and come and join us in leadership. In this way, they would find a place that isn't lonely, but is a place to learn and grow, just as we have been able to and Father God, we are so thankful to those that have given us spaces. We are so thankful for those in our journeys, and we pray that for everyone who is listening to this, and particularly those women Lord, who are who know some calling on their lives, but are struggling to work out, can I really do this? Is this

really for me? Father, would you just bring fresh courage and fresh boldness to explore the calling that you have given them step by step as they walk through it in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Ali Summers

Lord, thank you for your grace and mercy to us. Thank you for the awesome privilege of being called to be leaders in your church and to serve people and to care for them, to walk with them through the good times and the very dark valleys. Thank you, Lord for this calling that you've given to each of us here. And Lord, we praise You and we honour you for that, and Lord for those who are uncertain today, I pray that your spirit would be at work in their hearts, Bringing them a deep conviction about your word to them, and that you would give men and women encourage and confidence to follow you the next step and to see you opening the way before them, and to know that you're with them and that the one who calls us is faithful, and he will do it. Thank you, Lord, that you hold us. You hold each one of us in your hands, and you are faithful to us. Thank you, Lord. Amen. Amen, Lord,

Ellen Wild

We do praise you that leading a larger Baptist Church as a woman is entirely possible and doable and can be a privilege and a joy, because when you call you give us what we need, and Lord, we do dare to pray for a continuing sea change in our Baptist family and in the church at large, so that women are released more and more into all the spheres, at every level, in terms of leadership, we pray for young women to be called into ministry who've got years ahead of them to learn and to grow and then potentially to grow into larger churches. We agree and pray for all those uncertain ones listening and wondering, and pray that our words might have been helpful, and we pray that men would continue to cheer on and champion and be brothers to us in our calling. So Lord, thank You for this encouraging, nourishing conversation that it would be a blessing and a help. We pray in Jesus' name amen, amen, amen, amen.

Season 3 Outro

Helen	Thank you for listening to this episode of the Project Violet podcast.
Jane	We invite you to go to the website if you want to learn more about the Project. www.projectviolet.org.uk
	Music

Project Violet Podcast – Season 3

Season 3 Intro

	Music
Jane	Hello, I'm Jane Day, Community Learning Tutor at Regent's Park College, Oxford.
Helen	And I'm Helen Cameron, Research Fellow at the Centre for Baptist Studies at Regent's Park College Oxford. Together we were the co-leaders of Project Violet.
Jane	Welcome to Season 3 of the Project Violet podcast. Project Violet was a research project investigating women's experiences in ministry whilst developing women ministers. It worked to understand better the theological, missional and structural obstacles women ministers face and identify ways forward.
Helen	The research phase of the Project ended in January 2025. Currently stakeholders across Baptist life are implementing the commitments to action that they made in October 2024. Jane and I are now focusing on the academic dissemination of the Project. In this third season we wanted to catch up with some of the work that has been going on since last October.
Jane	We hope that listening to these episodes will help you engage with some of the outcomes of the project.

Helen Cameron

Today, I'm pleased to be with David Mayne and Mark Fairweather-Tall who are both regional minister team leaders. Thank you both for coming onto the Project Violet podcast. Let's start by asking you a little bit about your current ministry roles. David, can you talk to us about what you do?

David Mayne

Yeah, so I'm Regional Minister team leader for the Eastern Baptist Association. So we work to resource and support and encourage the 172 Baptist churches in the East of England, plus our chaplains and pioneers. So we're working across Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire.

Helen Cameron

Thank you and Mark, what about you?

Mark Fairweather-Tall

Yes, like David, I'm a Regional Minister team leader as well. But in South Wales, and in South Wales, we have around 120 churches, and that spreads from Chepstow, which is just over the Severn Bridge through to the west coast of Pembrokeshire and Broadhaven. Brecon is our most northerly church, and Barry is the most southerly one. So many of our churches are along the M4 corridor the cities of Cardiff, Swansea and Newport, and then up into the valleys the Rhondda Valley and the eastern Valley into the more rural churches of Monmouthshire, and so, yeah, it's my privilege to work and support those churches and ministers and pioneers and chaplains across that area.

Helen Cameron

Great. Thank you very much. Now we're here to talk about Project Violet. It was May 2024 that the findings were released, and they were quite a set of documents when they did arrive. I'm just

wondering what your initial reactions were when you first looked at them. Mark, do you want to open up on that one?

Mark Fairweather-Tall

Yes, I think looking back, there were a mix of feelings. Perhaps the most dominant one initially was sadness. I think when you actually hear some of the stories and hear some of what has been said to those women in ministry, it just made my heart very sad. And I know in the run up to the release, I'd spoken to a few of our women ministers across the association and outside of it, just to find out some of their experience. So there was sadness with that. I think alongside the sadness, there was also something about hope as well, because I had some conversations with women ministers who said, 'Actually, my experience in the Baptist family has been overwhelmingly positive', and I wanted to celebrate that as well and say, 'well, actually, I'm really glad about that, but clearly even one bad story is one too many'. But there's hope, and there's hope. I was reflecting then and still do now. We work with the Baptist Union of Wales, as well as the Baptist the wider Baptist family here, both the Baptist union and Wales of Wales and Baptist Union in Great Britain have general secretaries who are women. And I celebrate that. And I think that's a wonderful thing. So it gives me some hope. So, so I came with those mixture of feelings of sadness and some hope, and I hope within that that then gave me a determination to say, if there are women ministers who have been able to flourish within our family, let's do all that we can to remove the obstacles that others are unfortunately experiencing. So that mixture of feelings between sadness some hope and then some determination to do things better in the future.

Helen Cameron

Thank you. Now, David, I remember you promising me that you would read the findings, and that was a great source of encouragement to me at the time when we were trying to pull them together and get everything to make sense. What were your reactions when you looked at the findings?

David Mayne

Yes, so I very much resonate with what Mark just said about the sadness. I think you can't help but hear some of the pain in the stories that we've heard, and I think it's so helpful we've had it grounded in stories and real experiences. So I'm very grateful for the way in which the research enabled that to come to the fore. But I think I was genuinely very excited. I guess I did my Master's degree 20 years ago. It was written on advocating for women in ministry in Baptist spaces. So it's been a subject I've always had engagement in. In my last church, we sent six, seven people forward for ministerial training and overseas mission service, all of which were women. So journeying with them, we've seen firsthand as local churches, some of the barriers and issues that have come up. So we've been glad to walk so there was something really good. Perhaps something might actually get better. Yeah, perhaps this will turn the heat up. It will move the dial. Progress is always so slow, and there's so much inertia built into Baptist life, but this felt, to me, like a real opportunity to quicken the pace of change. And so it was that tinged with obviously, that sadness and that recognition of the pain that brings us to this point, but a real excitement about where we might go as a result of this.

Helen Cameron

Now, as you all know, a number of the findings the requests for change were directed at Regional Associations. So I just be interested to know from each of you what kind of response has been happening in your associations. Would you like to open up first again Mark?

Mark Fairweather-Tall

Thank you. Well, the first thing we did was bring all the recommendations where associations were mentioned to our trustees, so that we could have a time to talk about that together. We decided to use a traffic light system. As we looked at those simply being that green, we would see as a high priority, and we would actively work at them over the next 12 months. Amber, we saw as more of a medium priority. And said, Okay, we will look at those ones when we have satisfied the green that we're looking at and really want to put the effort in and then the red we said, well, they're a lower priority, possibly because we believe the responsibility for these lie outside of the association, or we just think realistically, we haven't got the capacity to properly deal with that at this time. So it wasn't saying we're not going to do anything. It was just kind of saying, realistically, we can't do everything all at once. How do we prioritize what we are going to do? So I'll give you an example of where we put each of those categories. One example of Green was to have a women's ministry advisor in each Association. We said we really feel that that's an important thing to do, and we want to work at that. So we've had a number of conversations about what that looks like, and how we can progress that. And we've just, I know it's taken a while these things often do, but we have just recently put out an advert asking for somebody who might be interested in becoming a women's ministry advisor in South Wales. An example of the amber one, we said that the ministry to the deaf community is pioneer ministry we want to fully support that we believe it is just that we felt well we would respond to that one if and when something particularly happened initially. So for example, that was about partnering with Northern College to develop appropriate opportunities to pioneer and settle with the necessary financial support. So we kind of said, with that one, okay, if something comes forward, we want to action it, but we don't feel we've got the capacity to be proactive with that one at the moment, although if something happens, we want to be able to be supportive of it. And then an example of one in the red was the monitoring, monitoring data through the vocational pathway, and we felt that the ministries team were better able to take a lead on that, so we put that in a red category. So these are the kinds of things that we've tried to do, to just look and see. Okay, how do we action these things? So again, to give you another example of what we have done, we tried to. One of the areas of my responsibility is settlement. I've tried to particularly take on board the flexibility within ministry. And I've had a few conversations, particularly with those who have children, young children in ministry, to see what they feel able to do. And I was talking to one mother who's been on maternity leave, and she was talking about the fact that she's got two children, two young children. Some nights are sleepless. Some days she feels she can do something, and some days she just thinks I really couldn't go into ministry. Well, okay, the thought of entering settlement was very daunting for her, but is there something about if we explored with a church about interim ministry for nine months to give them some extra support for that time, where you can see how you can manage and if it's proving really difficult, you know, it's time limited. Is there something more flexible we can do with that? And I just remember the kind of relief on the face, on her face at the time of thinking there could be another way of doing this that feels more manageable. So it's trying to bring that flexibility, that I think is particularly key for certain times of life, and try and bring that in. So those are a few things that we've tried to do, amongst many others as well.

Helen Cameron

That's great Mark. And thanks for giving those specific examples. That's really helpful. I think the issue of flexibility is a really good example of how Baptist ways of working and systems have been designed by men for men based upon certain assumptions that there would be a wife in the background taking care of caring responsibilities. And that's an assumption that neither men nor women want to make now. They both want to be engaged in caring responsibilities. And so that does, I guess, push back to the system and say, can the system be more flexible to make way for

people who have other calls upon their lives? And so it's really exciting to hear about that as a specific example, because that's yeah, an exact, an excellent example of what the project was trying to achieve, was to point up examples of where there were women with a calling and with abilities, but perhaps the system wasn't really designed for the way in which they were experiencing life. So thank you for that. David, do you want to come in on this one now?

David Mayne

Yeah, absolutely. I love hearing what's happening in South Wales about this. We always love hearing what our friends do in South Wales because they're brilliant. But it's so encouraging to hear those stories for us. Generally, I think it landed well. I think it's the first thing I'd want to say as an association, we have a long history, pretty much, with the whole of our existence. So 20 or so years, 25 years of having female regional ministers, we've had a female regional Minister team leader in that time. So a lot of churches have had to work through some of the challenges that might come from this report by virtue of the fact that their regional minister is a woman. And so in fact, when I joined the team two years ago, I was the only male member of the team. So I think a lot of our churches have engaged with this previously, which has been very helpful. I think we probably have a very small handful number of churches who would openly not embrace the ministry of women, so that the challenge, I think, for us has been but there are clearly a number of cultural and systemic issues that needs to be addressed where things aren't as they should be, but it's not explicit, and that creates some issues in terms of how you get underneath that. So we, when the thing came out, our trustees worked through it, myself and one of my RM colleagues at Claire Blatchford, we made a point. We sit down once a term. We go through all the recommendations. We said we'll do that going forward, and then it's on every trustee agenda for the next three years as a minimum, at least, if not, I think they wanted to make it five, actually, in the last meeting. So there's a commitment from our trustees and our team to keep this on the agenda. So that was very positive. We were glad when we went through it to accept all of the recommendations that were put to associations. There was one where we asked to amend it slightly, because that was one of the options presented to us, which was the commitment to further research in the way that Project Violet has been done. We said we're very up for research, but it might need to be done in a slightly different way, depending on the project. So with that, with that caveat, we said yes to everything, and then gave ourselves a task of working out, okay, now, how do we implement those things? We had a couple of open meetings with people across the association, which had some really interesting conversations. I mean, almost by default, you get the people who are interested coming to some of those things, but we had people who didn't know each other very well talking about this, and a good mix of men and women as well, which was really helpful. And those conversations were enlightening. And I think some good connections were made that's been really informative. Some of the recommendations were very easy to see us too because there were things that we recognized we'd already been doing, and some of that is the legacy of some of my female colleagues who've been working away on these things for years. So we're very blessed in that respect. Having female RM colleagues meant carving out time for someone to serve, specifically as an advisor for women's ministry. Was something they were keen to do, and we were keen to make the time for them to do the challenge for us was not finding someone, but how do we take other things off their desk to make sure they have the time and space to do it well, rather than just adding it as another thing on their agenda. But we have done that. The trustees have been very committed to it. One that's been particularly landed well in terms of peaking interest was Denise's report on menopause, and that's something we've been actually having some conversations about as a team anyway, but we're going to ensure that some training is had and passed out, and that's something that was really, really helpful to be picked up on, and that was a very tangible change that we've been able to do as a result of that. But yeah, so generally in the association, I would say that it landed pretty well, and it was very enthusiastically responded to the challenges. How do you dig under those things that

aren't explicit to make sure that we continue to work to shape the cost? Culture in the best way that we can.

Helen Cameron

Yeah, and as you said, it's keeping having the conversation is the way by which things are made explicit, and that's getting over people's embarrassment about talking about things like menopause or other issues is a crucial part of normalizing conversations about what some of these more implicit barriers and obstacles have been, so thanks for raising that. Now, one of the things that we were delighted to hear had come out of this was that some associations had got together to collaborate around some of the findings. And I wonder, David, whether you could perhaps talk about what some of the thinking was behind that. And then I'll ask Mark what some of the things are that might have emerged from that?

David Mayne

Yes, so a group of us, five associations, have been intentionally looking for areas to collaborate on, across the board, across our ministry, and at the same time as that conversation was beginning to take shape, Project Violet emerged, and it was the easiest thing for us to do in those meetings. It was the clearest win to say this is where we should start in our collaboration efforts, because we were all fully on board, all very supportive. And so one of our colleagues, Hayley Young, who's a colleague in another Association, agreed to convene a gathering of all the people who were going to be leading the implementation of Project Violet changes across the associations, and any other people that felt they needed to be there. And then we then invited the rest of our colleagues to join. So we were going to make this we were going to collaborate anyway, but then we invited anyone else who also wanted to join the collaboration. And so we had a really good meeting together, talking about where there are natural areas of crossover and where there are things we think, well, one association might struggle to do that, but between us, could we do that together, things like that? There was a really energizing opportunity. I think we need to do more of that across Baptist life. And it was, this was a really great way of starting that, and it was great that it was something that we all felt enthusiastic enough to make the time to collaborate on.

Helen Cameron

Well, that's really encouraging to hear. And for people not familiar with Baptist life, the regional associations are of different sizes and have different resources and so have different capacities to respond to things. And so it's really encouraging to hear of people getting together to see how they might achieve together things which they might not be able to achieve on their own. Mark, is there an example you'd like to talk us through?

Mark Fairweather-Tall

Yes, I can certainly say, from our perspective in South Wales, it's been brilliant to be able to have that collaboration, because there are things that we would not have been able to do on our own, that we are able to offer because we're doing it together. So I'll give two examples of that. First of all, I mentioned earlier on about having a women's ministry advisor in each Association. One of the things we recognized straight away, which we already knew, is both of our regional ministers in South Wales are male, and that means, if somebody is looking for some translocal input, that becomes, of course, we can speak to women, and I hope they will get just as much from us as any male would, but there may be times when they want to speak to a female regional minister. And so

one of the things that was really encouraging to see is that there are, I think it's about eight, maybe nine, regional ministers, female regional ministers, across different associations, have made themselves available regardless of geography. So it means that one of our female ministers could ring up a regional minister, a female regional minister in a different area, and that gives them an option to speak. And we recognize, as well, amongst those eight or nine, there's greater diversity in terms of age and ethnicity as well. So actually it provides for everyone more choice about who they can speak to and who they perhaps feel they would relate to most on the particular issue that they want to speak about. So I think that is a really good thing to have, and we've been able to put together a sheet that is on some of our websites that actually means that people can access that and know who they can make contact with. So that, I think that's one fantastic example of collaboration, which really builds on what we can do together, which we wouldn't be able to do in the same way apart. I think the other example, the prime example I'd use, would be the relaunch of MagnifyYou, the coaching program and encouragement for women to feel better equipped for some of the higher profile roles, perhaps taking on leadership, whether that's in regional Minister team leaders or regional minister, Moderators of associations, leaders of larger churches, those kind of things that very often, statistically, we would say fewer women apply for those roles. So to have some training, some encouragement for those who are recognized in the different associations, you can nominate some women from their particular area to take part in this. Well, we wait to see what the results are, but I'm really hopeful and excited that what it's going to lead to is more women who are applying for these roles, and that will really benefit the whole of the Baptist family. Again, when I first looked at that and I was thinking, can we possibly do something like MagnifyYou on our own. I was just thinking we can't do that, but actually we couldn't, but together, we can. And so I think that collaboration, just as somebody who's been part of that regularly, encourages me generally, because collaboration is great, and relying on the expertise the wisdom of others really benefits as well. But these are two tangible outcomes that we can see for Project Violet that wouldn't have happened without the collaboration, certainly here in South Wales, that's great.

Helen Cameron

Thank you very much for that. I guess with some of these things, like having women regional ministry advisors and having that network of women regional ministers, the thing is building the confidence to use them. I think sometimes, I think particularly about newly accredited ministers coming into ministry, they somehow need to pick up the vibe that, yes, you're actually expected to make use of this. This isn't just an emergency pull cord. These are people who are wanting to interact with you. And these new ways of working that seem slightly at odds with Baptist life, where you might reach out to somebody who's beyond your immediate Association, are things where I think people are going to need some active encouragement to engage with them. And sitting, as I am in a college, I'm thinking, Okay, how do we make sure that our ministers in training and newly accredited ministers see this as something they should be taking advantage of, rather than just something which is on a website in case of emergency. And I guess these are some of the cultural changes that are going to take longer to embed in the system, and where the ongoing encouragement from male role models is going to be so, so important. Well, thank you very much for sharing that news about and that that results of collaboration. It's really encouraging that just a year in, we're seeing some fruits of that collaboration being made available. I guess thinking to the future. I'm just interested in a more sort of longer-term perspective from each of you about how you hope Project Violet will have a lasting impact on your association. Clearly, this kind of change does happen through specific steps like the MagnifyYou programme, but it also happens by changing culture and ways of working. So I wonder, for each of you, what are your hopes for the longer-term future, about the impact of Project Violet.

David Mayne

I'm thoroughly hopeful. I really want to start by saying that I think this already has demonstrated that when we want to change things, we can and therefore the capacity for what we could continue to change and make better is huge, and I'm really hoping that people will continue to get that vision. But also, I think it does something even broader than just Project Violet. I'm hoping it spurs on other pieces of research, and it creates other conversations in other spaces about things that are related to it. I think it's part of how we strive for something better, and we renew our life together in ways that are thoroughly Kingdom centric. And so I'm so excited about that, because I think this is a big part of making that happen. The challenge, I think, is to make sure that this doesn't become something that we all tick the boxes, and it gets put in a draw, and it might be great for the current cohort of women in ministry, because everyone's thinking about it right now. But how do we make sure that the people in five years time are still benefiting from the changes that come from this? That's going to be the hard thing, but certainly from everything I've seen in all the associations, I'm hopeful that that is going to happen, and that's always a dangerous thing to say out loud, but I don't sense that anyone wants to tick the box and put it in a drawer. I sense that across the country, people are wanting to make this better, so that, I guess, I don't know if I've directly answered the question really, but I'm thoroughly hopeful, but that's the challenge.

Helen Cameron

Yeah, thank you.

Mark Fairweather-Tall

I think I would echo a lot of what David has said there. It's great to see what has happened. I hope there are things that are already embedded in our way of doing things. Things now that will have a lasting impact. To give you an example of that, we have a joint ministers conference with South Wales Baptist Association and Baptist Union of Wales. And we also have a church event called Momentum, which is joined between the two of us. So we organize it together. Both events we are asking the question, Have we got adequate female representation in what's being done? So for Momentum this year, when we were planning for it, we said we've had two male main speakers for the last two years. This time, if at all possible, we need to actually, actively look and see is there a suitable woman who can come and speak at that event. And of course, we found one very easily. It's not that it's difficult, but you have to be intentional about these things. So I hope that intention is something that is now embedded. If it wasn't before, I hope it was before, but I think it's become even more obvious with Project Violet, and I hope that that continues. I hope that this is seen as a journey as well. I would want to certainly say, from my perspective and from the association perspective, I'm on a journey. I will not get everything right. I will make mistakes along the way. I hope what people will see in the association and in myself, is a heart to see all who flourish in ministry, and where there are barriers and obstacles, we want to do what we can to change that, and where we make mistakes, we want to apologize for that and try and do better in the future. So I hope that part of this as well will be we've talked about it, people will see something of our heart, and maybe that will give them more confidence to come to us when we get it wrong and say, 'Look, this really hasn't been helpful'. Come to us gently, because we're Yeah, we're trying to get it right, but come and tell us so that we can see that we can do better in the future. So I hope those kind of things will be a message that is heard across our association and wider across the Baptist family. And like David, I just really hope that it doesn't get surpassed with other things that come onto our desk that we need to get done. I've got confidence in Project Violet, because I think it's been so well run all the way through, and I know, for example, there's another event planned for regional ministers and Project Violet team leads to come to in early part of next year to reflect on good practice together so we can learn from one another. So I think it's things like that that I have hope that we will continue to see a lasting impact of Project Violet going well into the future, and my

hope and my prayer is that for all people in ministry, we will be better equipped to help them flourish, because that's what God has called us to do and leads us to that place of flourishing.

Helen Cameron

Thank you very much and just want to thank you both for coming on to the Project Violet podcast, for being gently held to account in a very public way, but for talking from the heart about your passion to see this work through and to continue to engage with it. So thank you very much.

Season 3 Outro

Helen	Thank you for listening to this episode of the Project Violet podcast.
Jane	We invite you to go to the website if you want to learn more about the Project. www.projectviolet.org.uk
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