

What do we see as the eventual outcome of this initiative?

Are there activities that we need to stop in order to release resources to be allocated to this initiative?

What can we learn from churches engaged in a similar area of mission?

As churches begin to share their emerging vision, so NWBA will be able to tailor its existing resources such as Forum, Regional Resource days and specialist training days to meet the needs that arise.

### **Phase 3 - Implementing our Vision**

The next natural step is to begin to actively engage in the new area of mission that we have identified. Some will be more successful than others, but by sharing stories and perceiving our endeavours as part of a greater whole we can encourage and motivate one another. It may be too that as mistakes are made and lessons are learned, so others can benefit from this and avoid the same pitfalls themselves.

NWBA will seek to contribute to this by identifying some of the common elements that are involved and producing further Church life resources to help churches work through them. We are also glad to have partners like Northern Baptist Learning Community and BMS World Mission who are also keen to be involved where appropriate.

It would be wonderful to look back in a few years time and recognise that a significant number of new initiatives have emerged as a result of "Beyond the Boundary". However we would still stress that the key initial thrust is not to rush into beginning new things, but to prayerfully and seriously seek the mind of Christ as to whether he is calling us to engage in mission in a new way.

**We may not be forced by the same circumstances that scattered the Early Christians throughout the communities of the Middle East and Southern Europe, but we are faced with the same mission imperative. Let us explore together what new territories God may be calling his people to encounter!**

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# Beyond the Boundaries

## “Beyond the Boundaries”

In 2008 NWBA launched the initiative “Encouraging Missionary Disciples” as part of our ongoing work to support and encourage one another in mission and ministry. The inspiration behind it lay in those events recorded in Acts 8 when the early believers were scattered in the wake of persecution, and through their dispersal brought many others to faith in Christ. These refugee Christians had little in the way of resources, strategy or plans; yet through the simple reality of their living faith attracted many others to become believers. The challenge of discipleship is for us all to seek to develop such an evident and infectious faith that we become effective witnesses simply through our everyday living.

Yet that is only half the story, for the events of Acts 8 not only reflect the power of authentic Christian lifestyle but also the mission impact of Christians establishing themselves in new and unfamiliar places. This of course was somewhat forced upon the early believers through circumstances, but the challenge of *BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES* is to encourage local Church communities to ask whether God is calling us to engage in new places, communities and situations.



Through resources originally prepared for Back to Church Sunday, congregations were invited to look afresh at their local community and the type of church they were seeking to be in its midst. The discipleship programme mentioned above, built on this by challenging us to recognise the importance of Christian lifestyle above organised mission projects. It seems a natural step for those who have engaged with these programmes to then ask whether God is calling us to seek to extend our impact into new territory.

Beyond the Boundaries seeks to encourage that in three distinct phases.

### Phase 1 - Identifying the opportunities

The first phase is to consider whether God is calling your church to engage in mission “beyond the boundaries” of your present activities. By this we do not mean a vague desire to reach “more families” or “young people”, but a prayerful and deliberate engagement of a new community or people group within their life and witness. This might take several forms, for example:



Beginning to work in a geographic community where there is currently no visible Christian Presence.

Engaging with a particular ethnic or age group that the church presently does not impact.

Beginning to work with a particular institution or organisation within the community e.g. a local school, day centre etc.

Launching a new congregation with a particular emphasis or distinctive.

Engaging in “café church”, “pub church” or some similar fresh expression of worship and community.

These may not be the only possibilities that emerge and we would want to particularly encourage an approach that responds to perceived needs rather than simply the aspirations of the church. So for example we might explore initiating a new congregation because we have become aware of a specific and distinct community around us and sense a particular calling to become engaged and involved in that place. There may be a new housing development in our neighbourhood which has attracted a people of a different age group of lifestyle to those who have traditionally lived there. We may be in an area which was once predominantly residential but now largely comprises shops and offices; perhaps our calling now is to consider how we might reach out to those who work there. It is vital to stress that this is not a case of simply rolling out a new programme because everyone else is, but because God has laid a particular need or opportunity on our hearts.

The initial focus on Beyond the Boundaries is simply to challenge churches to find the space to ask the questions that might lead us to such conclusions.

This will involve a process of careful reflection, discernment and research in which we would particularly seek to “read the signs” around us. For example:

The construction of a new development or similar in the geographic vicinity.

The arrival into our church of one or two families from a particular neighbourhood or ethnic group.

A particular emerging concern or passion within the church.

Realising the existence and development of particular gifts within the church that might indicate suitability to engage in a particular context.

Responding to questions or opportunities that are placed before us by members of the wider community.

We have to accept that for some of us, God’s call right now might be to stay put and consolidate the work we are doing, so one very genuine conclusion from this process might simply be “no – God is not calling us to move beyond the boundaries at the moment”. This does not mean that we have somehow failed, but rather have participated in a wider act of discernment across our North West Baptist family. It may also be that you conclude that your immediate task is to support another congregation in opening up a front which has become apparent to them – more about that later!

The sort of questions that churches might initially ask themselves are:

What needs and opportunities have we recently become aware of?

In what way is God calling us to move beyond our present boundaries?

How have we sensed God’s guidance in this respect?

What do we believe God is calling us to do?

What might we need to do differently in order to respond to this challenge?

### Phase 2 - Exploring our resources

For this programme to be effective, participants need not only to ask what they can get from it, but also what they have to offer to it. We are a family of churches, and like all families have a natural desire to support and encourage one another. In the next phase, we ask churches to consider what they might contribute to this overall initiative. For example you may already have experience of working with a particular ethnic group or have successfully introduced a new approach to worship. For you these things have become routine and second-nature, but for a church embarking for the first time into this area of mission it will be fraught with uncertainty and unfamiliarity.

By working as an Association, we will be able to connect those churches who are seeking to engage in new situations with those who already have some experience and expertise to offer. We will also be able to see whether any common strands begin to emerge and through NWBA or BUGB forge links with relevant organisations and experts who can help us.

At the same time, we might ask ourselves some further questions about moving forward. For example:

How do we listen to the needs of the group we are seeking to reach?

What do we need to do differently in order to include the group we are seeking to reach?

Do our premises or ways of meeting need to change?

Who do we need to release to participate in this initiative?

