



## Happy New Year!

As a New Year dawns, our thoughts inevitably turn to what the next 12 months might have in store. Some of this will be quite personal as we perhaps anticipate key milestones ahead, or simply make those resolutions that might or might not last until the spring! But these are lived out against a much larger backdrop, which carries its own fair share of hopes, fears and uncertainties. The political conversation in our own nations remain dominated by “Brexit”, but many of the key issues and crises of our world also continue unabated. Looking back at the year now passed, we also recognise that events, tragedies and celebrations can occur that no-one could have foreseen - some of which have significant and lasting impact that shatter any plans or aspirations that we might have previously harboured.

Yet this is a world in which we remain convinced that our Christian message has a lasting and deep relevance. It has the potential to change lives, communities and nations, and as God’s people we have a potential that can defy human expectation. The season of Advent, through which we have just come, is one that impresses this reality upon us.

But if we are honest, this will often not be how things feel as we engage together in the life of our local churches. There are jobs to be done, rotas to be filled, bookings to be made, problems to be resolved and all too few people to do it all! None of these things are unimportant, but they can sometimes leave us with little capacity to do much more than keep things ticking over. While we totally believe in that “bigger picture” – it is hard to see what that means for us other than trying to keep our own bit of the show on the road.

But might that also be because sometimes we are trying to keep things going in a way that we simply do not have the capacity to do any more? Might it be because some of those things are no longer necessary or they do not have the impact or relevance they once had? Could it be that there are things we are much more capable of doing but we need help in recognising how we can? Might it be that we can do the same things in a different way that don’t make the demands on our time, energy and resources that our current approach does?

These are not easy questions to answer; they require time, thought and reflection, but within them might also be the key to unlocking our potential as a Gospel people. It is this vision that lies at the heart of our 2018 Association theme. It emerged from a day conference that we held in November of 2017 when we explored some of these issues with around 50 representatives of our NWBA churches.

Some told stories of how they found themselves doing things that they never thought they could. Others spoke of how they had to re-think their role as leaders to one of equipping and encouraging others instead of trying to do everything themselves. As they shared their experiences, it also highlighted how the support that we receive through Associating together might also need to adapt so as to encourage and enable new approaches.

We want to invite you to join is on that journey. Our North Western Baptist community numbers around 10,000 children, young people and adults; each with their own unique gifts, abilities and insights. What potential might we realise if we can truly harness that array of skills and experience in the common purpose of God’s Kingdom?

These of course are worthy thoughts, but they require practical resources, tangible support and genuine engagement if they are to become reality. As an Association, this is the task that we have committed ourselves to in 2018 and are already working on a number of initiatives and resources to help take this forward. We believe this to be a prompting from the Holy Spirit and invite you to engage with us as we explore it further. What potential might 2018 have in store?

Phil Jump – Regional Minister

