

Surveying the Scene

In this final Advance article as Superintendent, I am drawing on my concluding Assembly report to highlight developments I consider significant for our future as Tasmanian Baptists. I also want to express my gratitude for the privilege of serving in this role for the past nine years.

Mission Leadership Team

One of the most strategic developments has been the consolidation of the Mission Leadership Team. For me it has been rewarding to share denominational leadership with gifted, godly colleagues whose friendship and support has immeasurably enriched my life. Regional Ministers Jeff McKinnon, Ivan Jordan and John Smith, together with Global Interaction state director Mark Holt, comprise the team.

I am happy that in response to Ivan James' review recommendations our recent Assembly has now gone a step further in vesting the superintendency functions in the three regional ministers under the team leadership of Rev. John Smith. This is a visionary collegial model well suited to our current missionary context and full of promise for the future.

Partnerships Bearing Fruit

Fostering effective partnerships has been a key strategy in recent years, and over the past twelve months there has been fruitful development in these cooperative relationships. Denominationally we are the richer for the stimulus of broader thinking and for the generous, supportive spirit of those organisations who have been working with us. Currently we benefit from the following six partnerships.

(1) The administrative agreement between Victorian and Tasmanian Baptists is a major venture in mutual cooperation in important tasks which we would struggle to fulfil within our own limited resources of finance, expertise or personnel. This will underpin the new leadership model recently adopted at Assembly.

(2) Cooperation with Global Interaction and Victorian Baptists is working well in making Mark Holt's services available to Tasmania. Whilst recognising inevitable constraints on the availability of the Director to individual churches, we believe the fruit of this new approach will be evident as we continue to develop creative ways of maintaining a holistic missionary focus and engaging younger generations.

(3) In his capacity as denominational consultant, Dr. David Jones worked with appointed representatives of Southern congregations in formulating the report *Growing Together – Hobart Baptists' 2020 Vision* and the companion *Strategic Plan (2009-2012)* which have now been formally adopted. It is satisfying that

the missionary and financial legacy of our former Moonah Church will be carried forward in this process. With the recent appointment of Rev. Stephen Baxter as 2020 Director, we can look forward prayerfully to the emergence of fresh initiatives in God's mission in the greater Hobart region.

(4) Well underway is the two-year partnership project between Tasmanian Baptists, Launceston's City Baptist Church and Forge Tasmania in assisting Launceston's City Baptist's transition to a more missional mode. This includes maintaining the integrity of current congregational life whilst evoking fresh, experimental expressions of church for the future. This may eventually provide a helpful model for others. Even though Forge is ceasing formal operations in the State, the training commitment will continue in 2010.

(5) As the 'welfare agency' of the Baptist Union of Victoria, Bapcare provides a range of services including aged care, family services and projects designed to address the needs of people living with disadvantage. Commencing Tasmanian operations at Karingal in Devonport last year, Bapcare has now commenced delivery of an integrated family services program in Hobart and Launceston. A Memorandum of Understanding is currently being formulated to express our organisational partnership in these significant public services.

(6) *Deeper*, the Youth ministry of Victorian Baptists, and our own state youth leadership team *Rapid* have been working in association over the past couple of years. I believe this to be a mutually beneficial relationship, especially empowering of our own youth leaders in areas of training and equipping.

Momentum 09

This was the third major celebratory gathering of Tasmanian Baptists in recent years, through which we have sought to place the challenge of God's contemporary mission at the top of our agenda. Guest speakers Dr. Ross Clifford and Rev. Jason Hoet spoke into this context in an inspirational way. Linking the twin ideas of opportune divine moment (Kairos) and momentum, or dynamic movement in mission, the recent gathering brought us to a critical point in denominational reflection on our shared future. We shared a necessary focus on repentance, together with corporate prayer for spiritual renewal and greater active engagement as God's missionary people.

A Fresh Framework for Cooperative Mission

The adoption of a revised Constitution and accompanying Partnership Covenant by recent Assemblies opens up the life of our association in some important, inclusive ways and provides a more contemporary framework for our combined mission to Tasmania. The covenant invites the churches of our association to focus on key areas of God's mission in a positive, mutually supportive way for the sake of God's Kingdom. A significant focus occurred at Momentum 09 when, in conjunction with a

public prayer of corporate repentance, the representatives of signatory churches came forward at Communion to express solidarity in the work of Christ.

Exploring Missional Communities

Under the leadership of Jeff McKinnon, the Advance 21 Task force provides a means of potential linkage with the denomination on the part of new missional communities. The task force also facilitates the A21 Network which, in its increasingly inclusive gatherings, is providing support, mentoring, workshop input and prayer opportunities for a range of people who share a sense of divine calling to explore fresh expressions of church. This is an exciting development and a healthy way for our denomination to position itself with flexibility and openness to the future.

Valued Relationships

I want to pay tribute to the members of Union Council, especially its Public Officer and Chair, Agnes Webb, and to my colleagues in the Dayspring Office, Alan Firth and David Richardson, former administrators Ian Ritchie and Lesley Hancock, as well as Eric Lockett (Public Questions Officer), Laurie Rowston (Advance Editor) and Ben Armacost who served for several years as Evangelism Consultant. As Assembly Chair and the author of the recent review of Tasmanian Baptists, Ivan James has made an outstanding contribution, and Tasmanian Baptists are greatly in his debt for his courage in naming key issues and proposing ways forward. To be part of so mutually supportive and dedicated a team has been one of the greatest satisfactions of my role.

I came to this role with initial hesitation, but also with a sense of God's guidance through the strong affirmation of Tasmanian Baptists. Looking back on the past nine years, I have a profound sense of privilege and underlying gratitude to God. Particularly precious to Wendy and myself have been warm friendships with many pastoral families and local church leaders who have been supportive in prayer and responsive to the leadership we have sought to offer. I am deeply grateful for the understanding and support of my family. My wife Wendy has been a wonderfully caring and supportive companion on the journey and, apart from the undeserved grace and sustained presence of our Lord Jesus Christ himself, I honour her as the greatest of God's gifts in my life.

Poised for God's Future

The immediate future is full of challenges for our denomination. Among the terms of reference presented for Ivan James' recent review we note a complex interplay of factors including the denomination's ageing profile, lack of viable youth ministries, its restricted capacity for renewing vision, difficulty coping with discontinuous change and the increasing challenge of resourcing the state-wide mission in terms of

personnel and finance. There is also the impact on our churches of post-denominational attitudes, especially among the younger generations. We will continue to face these and other issues in a rapidly changing context that requires the application of sanctified discernment, courage to risk anew, and mutual commitment to the mission of God. I thank God for the positive aspirations evident in our recent denominational gathering, Momentum 09, the ground-breaking decisions of Assembly, and the timely challenge from guest speaker Ross Clifford to be people of the Resurrection.

Throughout these years of office I have sought to live by the guidance of Proverbs 3:5-6: *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.*

Our future as Tasmanian Baptists is in the hands of our risen Lord who calls us to fresh abandonment in his mission to this state. Working with many companions in this great enterprise, it's been my privilege as Superintendent to till some soil and plant a few kingdom seeds. Like the apostle Paul, we now wait actively, working and praying together for timely growth and fruitfulness that will bring glory to God. In the words of missionary pioneer William Carey: *Attempt great things for God and expect great things from God.*

Garry Billing

November 3, 2009