



Senior Regional Minister Nigel Coles explains why the West of England Baptist Association now comes with a 'strap line':



Making a Difference is the strap-line we're using on our new logo to help express what we believe we are called to be about as an Association of 120 Baptist Churches in the West of England region.

We'd spent the best part of a day as an executive, (you can imagine how many words had been spoken,

discussions about finer points of meaning taken place and flip chart sheets written upon) when someone said as a throw away: surely all most Christians want to do is 'make a difference.' Absolutely!

As individuals we want to be those people who make a difference in the name of Jesus for the Kingdom of God. This is why we have adopted the Baptist Union's strap-line as part of our own purpose statement 'encouraging missionary disciples.'

As churches we want to be able to make a difference in and for the communities God has called us to serve. 'Growing healthy churches' remains central to our purpose as a network of churches, because it remains true that God has called the Church to be a signpost of his kingdom.

So where do we fit in as Regional Ministers? Essentially, we believe our role is best described as "cultivating an environment which enables growing healthy churches". This involves a whole variety of things, but one thing we all need is a growing sense of vision of the kind of Churches God is calling us to be today. One way we have been helping WEBA churches to grasp what this means in their own circumstances is through 'Imagine – the shapes of Church to come.'

This is more a process than a programme. Basically, we meet with the leadership team once a term over two years – six times in all. Each evening has an element of input, opportunity to talk and discuss (because we gather teams together many have found listening to one another an especially helpful component), but we also set a challenge. Each team decide how best to approach the challenge before the next gathering when we ask for feedback on what they've done with it (or not as the case might be!). Part of the challenge is always for a team to find the time to address it without adding additional meetings into their diary. This in itself is proving a helpful mechanism, which provokes questions about what takes up the time at deacons meetings, what the priorities are, how mission gets addressed, etc.

Gradually through this process churches are grasping opportunities and facing challenges, which may not otherwise have been the case due to busyness with lesser priorities.

Our next Imagine process will begin in Autumn 2009 – please speak to the WEBA office, or one of the Regional Ministers if you want your church to be included in the next one.

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