

[View this email in your browser](#)



Dear Ian

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ from our Baptist movement!

Baptists Together is a Union of churches, associations and colleges supported by four specialist teams and the basis of our Union is our [Declaration of Principle](#). You are an important part of our movement and I am so grateful for all the ways in which you are serving the Lord and sharing Jesus in your communities during all the challenges of recent years. I hope that you are feeling supported by your regional and national teams and know the ways to make contact and have conversations.

An Update from our Core Leadership Team

Recently our Baptists Together [Core Leadership Team \(CLT\)](#) met in person and I wanted to write to you directly and share the key themes we covered.

You may want to share these more widely with your church or local context but you might feel that this is not wise in your own setting and we trust your judgment about that. I make no apologies for the fact that this is a long letter. What I am sharing is important and communicating in soundbites is not going to convey our current situation adequately.

The CLT draws together many of those who offer regional and national leadership across our Baptist movement so that we can pray together, encourage each other and model collaborative leadership that releases our Kingdom potential. This was the first 'physical' in person meeting this year and we really appreciated the opportunity to be together, to pray, read Scripture and share communion. Two passages stood out for us in particular - Ephesians 4:1-6 and Mark 4:35-41.

Our main focus was hearing and reflecting on what our listeners heard at our recent [Assembly](#) and the two key themes that emerged: **mission** and **marriage**.

Mission is at the heart of our movement

Mission remains core to the purpose of our Union and this was clearly demonstrated by what was shared at our Assembly. All the questions and comments about how we can inspire, equip and encourage each other in mission were shared. The practical challenges were raised of the time and effort it takes to keep mission 'the main thing' when maintaining our churches. Others highlighted other practical questions about resourcing mission, supporting our smaller churches and how we could work together more strategically. One thing is clear, we need to renew our commitment to inspire, connect and support each other in our mission through our clusters and networks, associations and colleges. Our [Baptists Together Mission Forum](#) are already reflecting on this feedback and [the mission area of our website](#) also provides a virtual gathering point for our stories, innovation, and learning.

Marriage and Accredited Ministry

Sexuality is a topic we have been discussing for many years across Baptists Together. In the past we have responded to changes in legislation, such as registering buildings for same sex marriage. As a movement we have also continued to explore what this means for our churches as they each discern the mind of Christ in this important area of life. [This link outlines these conversations and the decisions that we have made together since 1998.](#)

These conversations continue to be important as we seek to engage pastorally and missionally in sharing Jesus with our communities. I am encouraged to see the different ways that gracious conversations are being enabled locally, regionally and nationally and we are grateful to all of those involved in this.

Issues around sexuality may, or may not, be 'live' for you in your church at the moment. In our shared life together, however, a question has been raised about Marriage and Accredited Ministry and you may, or may not, be aware that this is being hotly debated.

As a result, nationally, we are currently reflecting on a request to change the rules for our accredited ministers. Our current [Ministerial Recognition Rules](#) are clear that any sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage is deemed gross misconduct. The specific clause (Appendix 3, Section 4.3) says:

'Sexual Misconduct which brings the church and ministry into disrepute. NB This specifically includes sexual intercourse and other genital sexual activity outside of marriage (as defined exclusively as between a man and a woman).'

The request is that the last section in brackets is removed, which would mean that a minister who is in a same-sex marriage would no longer be committing gross misconduct and lose their accreditation. This request was received in a letter signed by 70 people who are part of Baptists Together, the majority of whom are ministers.

It is this question that has arisen from the grassroots that now needs to be responded to by us nationally. The process of doing this was begun at [Baptist Union Council](#) in March because Council is responsible for approving any changes to the Ministerial Recognition Rules. Council is very aware of the significance of any possible change and is committed to creating a process that considers and responds to this question in a way that reflects the whole of our Baptist movement. I can only apologise if you have been given the impression that any decision would be reached without consultation. I am completely clear that this is not the way we do things as Baptists. If you would like further details, please read this [report of our current position, the question being asked and the initial discussion of Baptist Union Council](#).

This really matters...

As we reflected together at CLT about this issue around marriage, we became even more aware of the deep pain that is felt by so many; it was felt acutely in the room. We are all so passionately committed to being faithful to Jesus that this really matters.

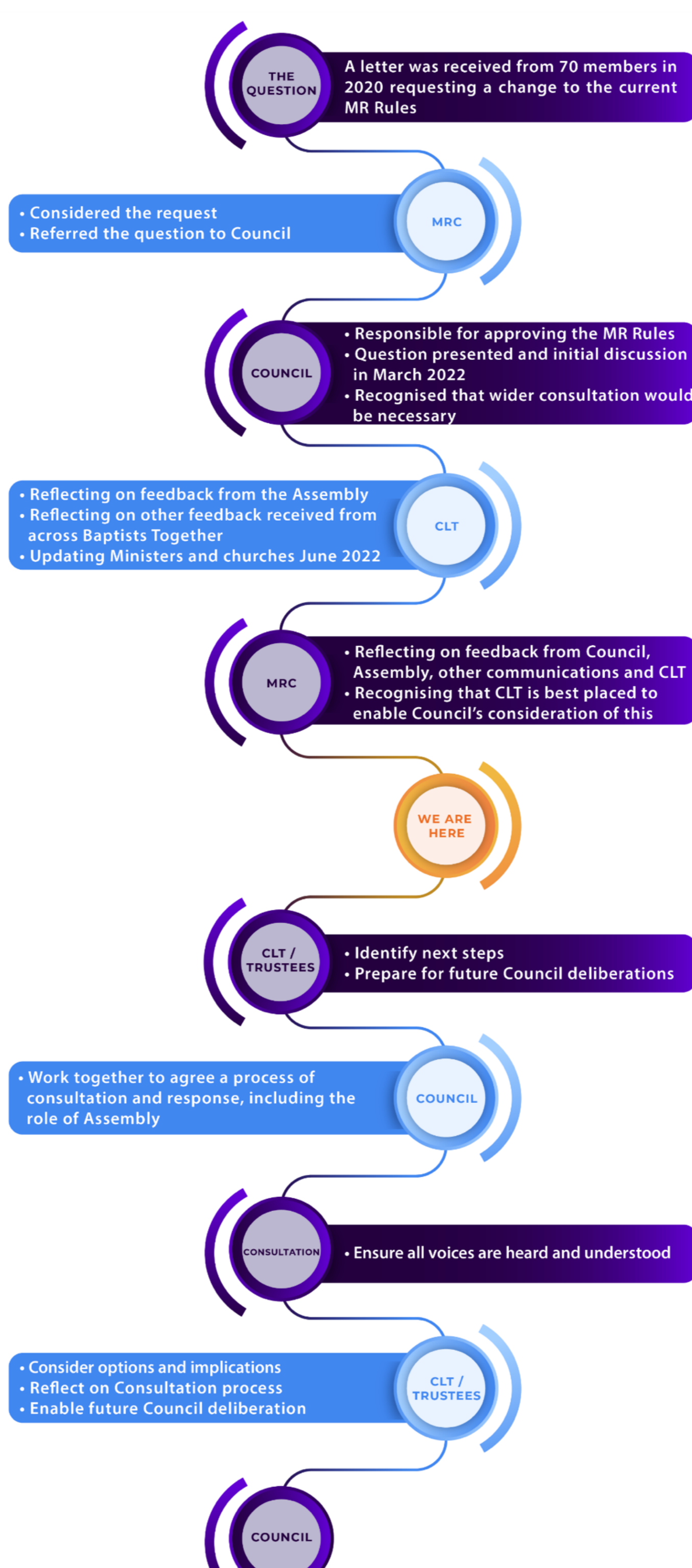
Thank you for all the feedback that has been received so far; all the different perspectives were shared, named and acknowledged as we met. We recognised that because we love and respect one another and our differing convictions, there is no easy way forward.

Again and again we came back to this passage from Ephesians 4, *"I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."*

CLT are unanimous in our absolute commitment to our unity in Christ and to holding together with the pain in the presence of the Lord. We are also in agreement that we must not rush ahead as we seek a way forward. We believe that any decision that is ultimately made must be prayerfully and carefully discerned, involving significant consultation. Much thought needs to be given to the implications of various possible options. We are acutely aware that the 'stakes are high'.

Where next?

Our [Ministerial Recognition Committee](#) (MRC), has carefully considered all that has been heard from Council, Assembly, other communications and from CLT. We are grateful for MRCs work on this so far and now CLT will work in close consultation with them and our [Trustees](#) to enable Council to agree a process for responding to this question. If you like a flow chart, here is a diagram of the process so far and the intended plan going forward:



Bearing with one another in love

In the light of all that I have shared above, you will not be surprised by my saying that we don't believe it is right at this stage to tie ourselves down to any particular timescales. It is clear that we will NOT be in a position to make a decision at Council in October 2022. I realise that this will be very difficult for those who have raised the question and also for those for whom the answer is clear cut. It is also extremely uncomfortable for us all to be asked to stay with such strong feelings. I am trusting that Christlike humility, gentleness, patience, love and faith will enable us to hold fast together. As a CLT we have a deep trust in the Lord; that as we keep Jesus at the centre, and keep our eyes fixed on him, we will be led forward even if we may not be able to imagine how that will happen. God has been faithful to us in the past, and he will continue to be faithful now.

What can I do?

In the meantime, you may be wondering what can you do?

Please pray. Philippians reminds us, *'Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.'*

Please keep sharing Jesus and making disciples as we keep mission at the heart of our movement.

Please reach out to others; meet, talk, eat and pray together. Hear each other's hearts, see Christ and look for the evidence of the Holy Spirit.

Engage; talk with [your association team](#) or a member of Baptist Union Council, sharing your thoughts about mission and marriage, and engage in opportunities for consultation.

Please pursue Christlikeness and the fruit of the Spirit. Resist soundbites, caricatures and dis-information.

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace in your church, cluster, association, college, across Baptists Together, and indeed with the whole Church.

And as you do these things, may you know the presence and blessing of the Lord in all things,

Lynn Green

[General Secretary](#)

On behalf of the CLT

We have been asked about the roles and composition of various groups so here are links that will take you to more information that will hopefully answer any questions you have!

- [Declaration of Principle](#)
- [The Core Leadership Team](#)
- [The Baptist Assembly](#)
- [Baptist Together Mission Forum](#)
- [Ministerial Recognition Rules](#)
- [Baptist Union Council](#)
- [Ministerial Recognition Committee](#)
- [Baptist Union Trustees](#)
- [The General Secretary](#)
- [Regional Associations](#)

