



2020-2024
Strategic Vision

www.garlandstreet.org.uk

About this vision

Since Jesus Christ rose from the dead, the church in the power of the Spirit has been serving the kingdom of God by preaching the good news and sharing the love of Christ. Through the years, Garland Street Baptist Church (GSBC) has had a very fruitful ministry. In order to continue this work, it is important that we're moving in the direction God wishes.

We've prepared this document after prayerful consideration and discussion. It summarises what we believe God intends for us as a church. It sets out what our mission is and provides goals and plans for the way forward. It is designed to direct and support the work of the church and serves as a framework for us to work together to achieve our overall vision.

As with all other churches, GSBC has been affected by the Coronavirus pandemic, which has caused us to rethink and pray about where God is leading us. For the first time in our history, the church building has been shut for many months, and our congregation has not been able to meet in person. We've had to get used to communicating through online meetings and broadcasting shortened worship services. This led us to rethink our priorities in a changed world and to consider what God has shown us during this time.

The timescale for the vision has now been set for four years to the end of 2024. What we've laid out may seem optimistic; however, we trust that in all we seek to accomplish, God will be at work in and through our efforts. We believe that for GSBC not only to survive but to thrive, we cannot delay in taking action while we still have the resources to turn around our historic decline.

As we see how God guides us on this journey together, we will constantly evaluate our progress, making any necessary changes and refinements to our strategies as we see what the Spirit is saying and doing in the church.

Please read this carefully and with prayer. Thank you.

In the love of Jesus,

The Minister and Deacons of GSBC

Introduction

The first officially recognised group of Baptists in Bury St Edmunds established Ebenezer Chapel in what is now Lower Baxter Street in 1800. The congregation moved to its present site in Garland Street in 1834 and has been serving the Lord there for 186 years. When Rev. Cornelius Elven relocated the church to Garland Street, it was on the back of significant growth, and this was a big step of faith for the fellowship at that time. Following the move, the church experienced even greater growth with membership rising to around 650 people.

Over the past century, GSBC has experienced a steady decline. The minister and deacons are acutely aware that a proper plan is needed to see the church continue to help members of the congregation draw closer to God and to make Him known.

At the heart of what the church does are the words of Jesus in the gospel of John. He gave His disciples a new command: 'Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.' This command is as relevant today as it has always been. As we share the never-changing gospel with others, we must recognise that the world around us is constantly changing. As a church, we must plan and be equipped to get God's message to those who don't know Jesus as Saviour.

On this journey, the church faces real challenges, but as leaders at GSBC, we want to continue to love and encourage one another and to grow in our Christian lives. We must also make GSBC welcoming, appealing, and relevant to those who are not yet Christians. This is essential to the future of the church.

Who we are

As we look toward the future, we need to know who we are in Christ and what God wants us to do. This means having a clear mission statement that provides a purpose for everything we do. Our mission statement is:

To follow Jesus and make Him known

As we carry out our mission, we're guided by values that form the foundation for our efforts. They define the life of the church and show its uniqueness. These values must be evident in all we do. Our values are:

FAITH



We are grounded in the Word of God. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
Everything we are is based on what we learn from the Bible.



We are inspired and empowered by the Holy Spirit. (Philippians 4:13) We seek the guidance and strength of the Holy Spirit in all we do.

HOPE



We are dependent on prayer. (Psalm 25:4-5) All our works are steeped in prayer.



We are committed to our neighbours—people with whom God brings us into contact in our day-to-day lives. (Matthew 22:34-40) We want to be known for our service to those across our town and beyond.

LOVE



We are generous in caring for others. (Galatians 6:10) We value, love, and serve those in the church and warmly welcome new people.



We are culturally accessible. (James 2:1-5) Non-Christians coming to GSBC feel included and embraced.

Challenges we face

As we emerge from the difficulties associated with the Coronavirus pandemic, we will confront many challenges in the future.

Developing a Closer Walk with God

We recognise that a strong walk with the Lord is the foundation for ministry within the congregation and amongst those who are not part of the church. We'll seek to help everyone at GSBC to experience a deeper relationship with God.

Creating Meaningful, Spirit-led Worship

Creating meaningful, Spirit-led worship has proved to be difficult at GSBC, especially given our limited musical resources. We also need to make sure we know who we want to reach. Our present services sometimes fail to connect with people because the worship doesn't feel relevant or applicable to what's going on in their lives and the life of the church.

Increasing Church Membership

A little over a decade ago, church membership stood at 110. Several members have died, and although some new people have joined the church, we've been unable to add a significant number through either conversion or attracting Christians. Today's membership is 72, and several of these folks are no longer able to play an active role in the life of the church. We're seeking to reverse the trend that has seen church membership drop by 35% while attendance at Sunday morning worship has declined by about 50%.

Adding More Children and Youth

Activities for children and teens—crèche, Sunday Club, Bible Class, Boys' Brigade, Aspire, Toddlers, and the youth group—have experienced an especially difficult time over the past few years. We continue to pray families with children and teens will find a home at GSBC.

Expanding Special Events

Many church activities have ceased because of a shortage of volunteers to plan and host these events. We've also had to limit reaching out to families in our neighbourhood and across the town. Our Christian Life and Witness Team is working to schedule and conduct more activities for church folks and guests.

Caring for Our Facilities

While we've been able to upgrade our buildings recently, more work remains to be done. We hope to continue repairs to our facilities and the refurbishment of the Elven Centre, but we may have to phase the work and carry out additional fundraising to augment the money currently in our building fund.

Conducting Ministry in New Ways

One of the lessons we've learned during the Coronavirus lockdown is that we must consider using what, for us, are non-traditional means of ministry. Whether connecting with people in the congregation or reaching out to folks outside the church, relationships in the future will not be based only on physical proximity. We will have to improve our ability to minister online and in areas away from church facilities.

Where we are going

While the mission statement outlines in general terms what a church should do, we must consider specifically how we at GSBC should minister in our unique circumstances. We've developed a vision statement that takes into account our mission and our values and sets out where we should be heading. Our vision statement is:

By 2024, in God's strength, we will be united by a deepening faith and knowledge of Christ. We will be a multigenerational church, committed to sharing the love and message of Jesus with those who don't know Him as Saviour.

To be a fruitful church, all of us at GSBC must grow in our walk with the Lord and play a role in advancing the Great Commission. We must all be directly involved in our mission 'to follow Jesus and make Him known.' We must continue to develop a deep relationship with the Lord as we engage with people we come into contact with who have not yet received Jesus as Saviour. And we must grow and reach out both individually and collectively as a church.

We believe that our vision can be achieved by focussing on two specific areas, and these are known as ministry principles. Our ministry principles are:

Grow – We invest time in helping people grow in their walk with the Lord and equip them to be fruitful disciples of Jesus

Reach – We are individually and collectively passionate about sharing the good news of Jesus

Our Goals

How are we going to get there?

Grow: We want to develop a passion for continuously growing in our faith

1. Create Meaningful, Spirit-led Worship

We have made some progress in creating meaningful worship experiences for those who take part. We want to ensure that in worship, the church family meets with the risen Lord, expects great things to happen and lives to be changed, and lays aside personal preferences to honour God in spirit, truth, and unity. Specifically this means:

- Ensuring our worship includes quality teaching, helping people to grow in their walk with the Lord, to share the love of Christ and the gospel with others, and to help accomplish the mission and vision of the church
- Using 50 live or video songs as a core resource for worship so the congregation can sing with confidence, thus enabling worshippers to express great joy in following Jesus as they lift up their praise to Him, updating the list of songs from time to time
- Continuing to post weekly worship services online

- Recruiting musicians and others who can take part in leading services
- Adding creative elements—dance, poetry, art—to worship

2. Maximise Impact of Home Groups and Church-wide Training

Because home groups are the main avenues of discipleship at GSBC, we want to ensure leaders are encouraged and trained. We also want to make sure group members study material that will help them apply what they've learned in day-to-day Christian living and enable them to contribute to accomplishing the church's mission and vision. We will focus on Christian basics, developing faith-sharing skills and identifying and using spiritual gifts. In addition, we want to use church-wide training more effectively to minister to those who do, and those who do not, attend home groups. Specifically this means:

- Conducting three home group leaders' meetings annually for planning and training
- Conducting two to three church-wide training events or programmes through the year (online or in the Alpha Course format with meal, talk, and discussion), with home groups cancelled during these activities so members can take part in the training
- Promoting home groups and church-wide training twice each year to encourage greater participation
- Considering setting up home groups online and in areas in which several church people reside (for example, Crispen Court)
- Running other courses (e.g. marriage enrichment, parenting, managing money) as the church grows and the needs arise
- Hosting online quisses, question-answer sessions, or study, especially for new Christians or those wanting to learn more about Christianity

3. Develop Ministry Organisations and Teams

As followers of Christ, we all have been given the task of sharing His gospel. Our diverse ministry organisations and teams provide good opportunities to build up those in the church and to take the message of Christ to those who don't yet know Jesus as Saviour. Twice each year, the minister and deacons will meet organisation and team leaders—either individually or in a Leaders' Forum—to determine how their groups can help accomplish GSBC's mission and vision. They will also help team leaders to encourage and train group members to serve the church.

4. Ensure All Ministry is Supported by Prayer

We will lay a strong foundation for all we do as a church among every person who is a part of GSBC by focussing on the crucial nature of prayer as we seek to achieve what is laid out in this document. Specifically this means:

- Conducting church-wide prayer events (prayer walks, prayer evenings/afternoons/breakfasts) at least twice annually
- Developing intercessory prayer for Sunday morning worship by training more people for this activity by the spring of 2021
- Praying for our leaders and strategic vision at least once a month using existing vehicles and any new prayer initiatives
- Setting up online prayer events and groups
- Continuing to pray for resources which will change as we move through the implementation of the strategic vision

Reach: We want to develop a passion for helping others to draw closer to God through faith in Christ

1. Build a Culture of Invitation and Care for Our Neighbours

Because we desire to serve as a transforming influence amongst those outside the church, we will pray for God's guidance concerning who we can invite and care for. We will continue to undertake initiatives and plan events that reach our area for Jesus as the Lord reveals those He'd have us reach. Specifically this means:

- Scheduling welcome luncheons for newcomers to the church and organisations three times annually
- Hosting special events (barbecue, meal with a message, practical classes, etc.) at least three times annually
- Conducting events that will include a clear presentation of the gospel at least twice annually
- Gathering contact details of new people in the congregation and getting in touch with them as soon as possible

2. Develop Existing Outreach Ministries

We will work with each church organisation and ministry team to develop pathways from those ministries into other areas of church life. This will mean meeting with leaders to develop the ways in which we are reaching those around us with the love of Christ and the gospel message. We will work to develop effective publicity of events across all groups.

3. Conduct Regular Evangelistic Courses

Over the years, Garland Street has run Alpha Courses for people within the church and others who have not been part of GSBC. In recent times, fewer church people have attended or invited others to attend. Specifically we plan to run at least two Alpha Courses (thirteen sessions) or Alpha Taster Courses (four sessions) annually, either in person or online. We will consider linking with other churches in this outreach.

4. Make Worship Accessible

We recognise the importance of being culturally engaged. We want to be effective at translating the richness and beauty of the gospel into the language of the 21st century, post-Christian world. We will consider how

our services can simultaneously feed the flock, challenge the sceptics, and welcome the seeking. Specifically this means:

- Reopening following lockdown restrictions as safely as possible following government guidelines and resources provided by the Baptist Union
- Providing teaching that will enable those who attend worship to put biblical principles into action in their lives
- Ensuring the language used in everything we do is understood by and challenges Christians and not-yet-Christians alike
- Using music that helps all to experience greater joy in worship
- Meeting to encourage stewards twice annually and to equip them to engage with visitors

5. Develop Children's and Youth Work

Over the years, GSBC has conducted dynamic and effective ministries for children and youth. Recently, these programmes have all but disappeared. We would like to revitalise these valuable ministries over the next four years by ensuring sufficient volunteers are available in these areas. Specifically this means:

- Hiring a Youth & Family Worker (see section on infrastructure)
- Serving children through an annual holiday club
- Seeking volunteers to start a new programme for toddlers
- Conducting recruiting events for Boys' Brigade and Aspire once annually
- Establishing an on-going relationship with a nearby primary school
- Developing programmes to minister to 14- to 18-year-olds
- Conducting a weekly biblical teaching programme for children and youth on Sundays
- Considering online ministry to children and youth

Our infrastructure

What will we need to get there?

1. Buildings and Premises

We are grateful to God for providing the premises we use for our ministry. We wish to be wise stewards of these resources, and we will continually pray for God's guidance on how best we should use them for advancing His kingdom and achieving our mission. We will continue to rely on the Building Team for the care and upgrade of our facilities and associated needs. At the same time, we will seek God's guidance on where He wants us to be located and how He wants us to use what He has given us. Specifically this means:

- Continuing to repair the church, manse, Elven Centre, and Fornham Chapel, as required (particularly with respect to the work specified in the latest Quinquennial Report)

- Redeveloping the 1970s extension to the Elven Centre, seeking grants from outside organisations as necessary
- Exploring access to car parking near the church, especially during Sunday worship and special events
- Considering the sale of Fornham Chapel and other buildings as well as relocation to other areas if we believe God is leading us in this way
- Considering the rental of premises away from the church for various outreach activities

2. Staff, Volunteers, and Members

We are blessed with a wonderful group of people who care for the church and participate in its ministry. Because church membership has declined over the years, we must ensure several important tasks are completed so GSBC can accomplish our vision. We will also work to establish relationships and programmes to appeal to people of all ages—children, youth, young adults, and older adults—in an effort to create a larger membership and a multigenerational church. Specifically this means:

- Appointing a volunteer Church Administrator
- Developing a Ministry and Training Fund, possibly in conjunction with a Bible college, to employ a young graduate with a family to help us run our children's, youth, and young adult programmes while gaining valuable experience for future ministry
- Seeking to hire a paid technology assistant who will develop and manage online outreach (website, Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
- Developing a team to coordinate publicity and promotion for church events

3. Technology

One of the lessons across the denomination that came out of the pandemic was the value of using technology to minister to people within the church and to reach out to others who are not yet involved in church life. We witnessed this firsthand as we recorded Sunday sermons that were available online and conducted home group meetings using Zoom technology. We will work to improve our online capability to reach those in the congregation and others who are not a part of the church. Specifically this means:

- Continuing to provide opportunities for Christian growth through online worship and home groups during the remainder of the pandemic and later developing a hybrid model of church maximising the benefits of meeting in person and online
- Developing 'digital mission' to engage those outside the church online, especially younger people, in evangelistic events
- Developing a library of online teaching
- Hosting training online
- Considering adding technological means of managing church rosters and other administrative tasks

4. Environmental Awareness

At GSBC, we have a very important responsibility to appreciate and protect God's creation in all aspects of church life. As individuals, families, and the body of Christ, we must do all we can to protect our environment. Many are already doing this, but we must individually and collectively consider new initiatives to care for our planet. Specifically this means:

- Minimising the use of paper products (printed matter, paper towels, etc.) and using recycled paper when possible
- Ensuring recycling of paper, glass, and food scraps
- Including environmental protection in building repairs and upgrades
- Using low-energy appliances, carefully managing heating and lighting, and prioritising utilities that are sustainably produced
- Encouraging people who are able to walk or cycle to church activities and establishing a car-share scheme

Our future

Through the past 220 years, Ebenezer Chapel and Garland Street Baptist Church have ministered to thousands of people—in the church, across the town, throughout the region, and around the world. We look ahead to a fruitful future with the joyful expectation that, despite recent challenges, God can do even more in and through us in the years ahead.

This vision is our prayerful look toward the horizon. It sets the course for our church family, making sure everyone is supported and mobilised to serve. As we find confidence, strength, and assurance in Christ, we can break new ground with the gospel. We will face unknowns and risks, but as a church, we trust the Spirit's leading and take comfort that we're in this together.

Remember, the church's work is taking the never-changing gospel to the ever-changing world. So, let's continue to have an impact for Christ far and wide. Let's continue the legacy of all those who've been a part of Ebenezer Chapel and Garland Street Baptist Church for the past two centuries, as together we follow Jesus and make Him known.