



BURG – the journey (July 1994 onwards)

Margaret Jarman has highlighted both events and people who played their part in the formation and early days of BURG. The years since 1994 have built on those foundations. Barry Vendy succeeded Margaret Jarman as chair in 1993 up until 1998 when Ron Ayres became chair. BURG has been well served by those who have held the office of chair, Ron Ayres ('98-'2003), Joan Whyman (2003-2006), John Rackley (2006-2008) and Ian Green (2008 onwards).

The BURG Committee still give priority to making an annual retreat together, coupling this with a committee-planning meeting. Ron Ayres remains as the sole founder member, Pam Neville having stepped down at the 2009 AGM. Pam Neville and John Rackley served as treasurer and secretary respectively since the formation of BURG and when John relinquished the role of secretary in 1999/2000, Pam moved from being treasurer to become secretary. It is worth noting that Pam had been the BURG contact person for retreat bookings and enquiries since 1994 up to her leaving the committee in 2009.

At the AGM in 1994 we sought to broaden the base of the steering group by appointing six people to be elected for three years, with two members standing down annually. The Committee was also given powers to co-opt up to four additional members each year. The committee is currently formed of four members elected every other year. In addition the three offices of chair, secretary and treasurer are elected annually. The committee has the power to co-opt two additional members annually.

The Bulletin, renamed Journal in 1997 is published three times per annum and provides an important contact with the BURG membership, with not only advance information of Retreats, but also a place to read retreatant's experience of retreats and their journey of prayer. We are grateful for those who have offered their editorial skills in producing the Journal, Colin White as the first editor and later, David Good, then Ron Ayres and currently David Pountain. In 1998 BURG took its display stand along to the Baptist Assembly and has continued to occupy a space in the Assembly Exhibition Hall since that time – providing a contact point with Assembly delegates as well as welcoming new members. Another initiative saw the publication of 'Occasional Papers', providing easily accessible and practical information on many aspects of the spiritual life and retreats.

In 1997 we were delighted to see the formation of a Baptist Community, 'The Community of the Prince of Peace'. Sisters Margaret Jarman and Evelyn Pritty established a Community in Carterton, Oxfordshire, under the guidance of Burford Priory. After 2 years they made their First Profession at the Priory before moving in May 1999 to Derbyshire to establish a Baptist Monastery at Riddings. This also became the location for BURG IGR's. Whilst the Community has since closed, the contribution it made to Baptist life during its short life remains significant.



In 2003 BURG registered as a charity (charity no 1099719), which enables BURG to enhance members subscriptions by gift aid. We drew on Chris Hutt's expertise in enabling BURG to become a charity, which occurred during the years that Chris Hutt also served as treasurer.

BURG has continued to play a significant role in the life of the Retreat Association. Colin White served as chair from '93-'96. Later John Rackley served as chair ('99-'03) and Brian Howden ('06-'10). John Rackley was part of the RA Conference Planning Group in 2000, Will Thompson in 2004 and Brian Howden in 2008. BURG has valued being part of the wider retreat movement, both benefiting by the work and resources that RA makes available, as well as contributing towards its ongoing life.

In 2008 we were delighted to see the publication of 'The Rule of Christ', a book jointly written by the Baptist College Principals, dedicated 'To the members of the Baptist Union Retreat Group who have fostered contemplation and who asked for this book'. And perhaps it is this commitment and desire to foster contemplation within the life of the Baptist Union of Great Britain that motivates us still to provide a focus for those looking to explore the inner spiritual journey by providing retreats and valuing prayer and silence to nourish that journey.

Whilst the offering of retreats, both led and individually guided, has been part of the BURG programme since its formation back in 1988, BURG has also organised and run a pilgrimage to Holy Island (2005) and a retreat holiday to Prague in 2008, as part of its programme. BURG has also run a number of one day Conferences and supported regionally based one-day gatherings around the country.

We still believe there is a place for a Baptist expression of retreats. Since the early days of BURG, the place of silence and contemplation within the denomination has become much more widespread. BURG has contributed to this and remains committed to giving space and time to the inner journey and the discovery of the God who chooses to journey with us as we journey with him.

Brian Howden (secretary)
March 2012