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*Effective oversight of Methodist Fresh Expressions:
An exploration of how fresh expressions are
challenging the practice, discipline, and ecclesiology of
the Methodist Church, with specific reference to the
task of presbyteral oversight.*

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Abstract

Rev Langley Mackrell-Hey: Effective oversight of Methodist fresh expressions

The British Methodist Church defines oversight as the means by which churches remain true to their calling. Its presbyters are charged with upholding *Constitution, Practice, and Discipline* or 'CPD'. This research employs a combination of Practical Theology methods to examine the challenge of applying CPD to fresh expressions (forms of Church established for the benefit of those who are not yet members of a local church). It offers three original insights in regard to the tension between mission-praxis and ecclesiological discipline. First, it provides empirical evidence to support the anecdotal observation that not all fresh expressions are authentic in that they lack ecclesial intent. A combination of factors inhibited this. New churches can be formed when twelve Methodist members unite. Current legislation allows members of the Church to belong to only one society, meaning that leaders face the conflict of leaving their parent church if they are to form a new church. Second, membership mediated an unequal power balance between fresh expressions and their parent churches, undermining progress towards achieving a 'mixed economy'. This situation was confounded by the fact that newcomers to fresh expressions viewed Methodist membership as an institutional construct and requirement, rather than an opportunity for spiritual renewal. Third, the Methodist Church policy that encourages presbyters to apply CPD with a 'light-touch' in respect of how its disciplines are applied to new work, risks inconsistency. This thesis invites the Church to find a way of identifying which of its fresh expressions have genuine ecclesial intent, reflect on how membership is impacting their ecclesial formation, and widen its existing legislation so that a Methodist member may belong to two local societies at the same time. This, combined with additional District oversight, would remove some significant barriers to ecclesial formation.

Effective oversight of Methodist Fresh Expressions

An exploration of how fresh expressions are challenging the practice, discipline, and ecclesiology of the Methodist Church, with specific reference to the task of presbyteral oversight.

Langley Adrian James Mackrell-Hey

Submitted for the award of Doctor of Theology and Ministry,
Department of Theology and Religion, University of Durham, 2016

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List of Abbreviations

MSC – Mission Shaped Church
MSI – Mission Shaped Intro
MSM – Mission Shaped Ministry
CPD – Constitution, Practice and Discipline (of the Methodist Church)
S.O. – Standing Order
VFX - VentureFX Pioneer Scheme

Referencing and internet links:

This thesis uses Chicago footnote referencing.

All website links were accessed and valid as of March 26th, 2016.

Nomenclature:

In this thesis, a capitalised 'F' and 'E' refers to the broader Fresh Expressions movement that seeks to encourage local development, whilst 'f' and 'e' or 'F' and 'E' refer to individual projects. Similarly, where Messy church appears capitalised, I am referring to the wider Messy Church movement, whereas 'Messy church' or 'messy church' refers to a local Messy Church project.

Declaration:

None of the material contained in this thesis has been submitted previously for a degree in this or any other institution. This thesis is my own work.

My ethnographic present:

My position is as of January 25th 2016.

Copyright:

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Referencing of participants:

In the case studies, to preserve anonymity, the names of individuals and the churches, and their geographic locations have been changed. In the consultation, names or roles have been retained if the role and identity of the person concerned is important to the thesis argument.

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Dedication

I give thanks to God who in Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit has directed me and sustained me as I have balanced the demands of part-time study with work in full-time ministry. I dedicate this thesis to my wife, Ro, and our family; Joshua, Maya, Ben, Sherlock the dog, who have endured so much in order that I might follow this path. I remember those who have supported me during the challenging times, and I offer this work in the name of all those who have struggled in recent years as the Methodist Church has restructured itself, particularly those who have journeyed through anxiety yet remained loyal to their calling.

Chapter One

Introduction and Method

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1.0 Introduction

Fresh Expressions, an ecumenical charity with an increasingly international scope, was established in 2004 to encourage local Christians to cultivate new forms of church. A fresh expression is,

A form of church for our changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church. It will come into being through principles of listening, service, contextual mission and making disciples. It will have the potential to become a mature expression of church shaped by the gospel and the enduring marks of the church and for its cultural context.¹

The *Methodism in Numbers* report of 2015 states, 'British Methodism has long faced numerical and demographic challenge. Membership numbers were over 800,000 in 1908 and over 600,000 in 1980.'² Between 2003 and 2013, Methodist Church membership decreased by an average of almost 10,000 members per year, closing at 224,500. The number of church closures during this period was 1,474, approaching an average of 150 per year, and leaving a remainder of 4,282. Against this broader context of decline, fresh expressions have become the source of celebration and encouragement. By 2013 at least 1,550 'Methodist' fresh expressions met monthly or more frequently across the connexion.³ By 2015, this had risen to 2,705. The situation in regard to how many of these projects have constituted themselves as churches is unclear. The 2015 *Recording Pioneering Fresh Expressions* working party report to the Methodist Council stated, 'A small but significant number of fresh expressions have become a church of the circuit in which they reside.'⁴

¹ "What Is a Fresh Expression?," Fresh Expressions, <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/about/whatis>.

² Alan Piggot, "Statistics for Mission," (paper presented at the Methodist Conference, 2014). <http://www.methodistconference.org.uk/media/228157/conf-2014-37-statistics-for-mission.pdf>. See also "Methodism in Numbers - Statistics at a Glance, June 2014," All statistics are as of 31st October in the year cited.

³ Martyn Atkins. "General Secretary's Report," (paper presented at the Methodist Conference, 2013), 3. Paragraph 13. <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-2013-3-general-secretary's-report.doc>.

⁴ Nicola Price-Tebbit, "Report of the Faith and Order Committee of the Methodist Church to the Methodist Council: Recording Pioneering Fresh Expressions: A Response to Notice of Motion 103," The Methodist

However, according to the Methodist Church statistics office, only one fresh expressions project has *legally* constituted in this way.⁵ As a Methodist superintendent, and a member of the Fresh Ways Working Group, I am interested in the ecclesial relationship that exists between these forms of church and their parent churches, and in how ministry within such contexts challenges the inherited processes, practices, and disciplines of Methodist oversight. This qualitative study suggests that fresh expressions are generating deep ecclesiological questions for British Methodism.

1.1 Introducing Methodism

The Methodist Church bases its understanding of oversight in the meaning of the Greek word, *'episcopé'*:

...used in the Bible to describe God visiting people and “keeping an eye” on what is happening... it is the process of reflecting on experience in order to discern the presence and activity of God in the world... It involves aspects of watching over, watching out for, monitoring, discerning, disciplining, directing, guiding, encouraging and caring.⁶

Methodism began from within the Church of England as a movement for reform, challenging clergy to live a life of piety and service.⁷ In 1726, Charles Wesley formed the Holy Club at Christ Church, Oxford⁸; a group committed to prayer, bible study, and charitable works. The term ‘Methodist’ was

Church, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/1541973/coun-mc15-49-recording-pioneering-fresh-expressions-april-2015.pdf>.

⁵ E-mail to the author from The Statistics Office on, 8th June 2015 in response to a direct question about how many fresh expressions had legally constituted themselves as churches, as outlined in CPD. ‘New Song Network in Warrington is unique in constituting itself as a CPD Methodist Church on the back of a prehistory as a FX cafe church.’ Permission was given to cite this figure. Discussions with the Methodist Church Connexional Fresh Expressions Missioner (also the former Methodist Church Church Planting Secretary) revealed that a small number of new churches had been planted in ecumenical partnership, but that not all would identify readily or solely with Fresh Expressions.

⁶ “The Nature of Oversight: Leadership, Management and Governance in the Methodist Church in Great Britain” (paper presented at the Methodist Conference, 2005), 1. http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/co_05_natureofoversight_0805.doc.

⁷ For a summary of how the Anglican Church struggled to maintain unity amidst the cultural freedoms of the early 18th Century, See Kenneth Wilson, *Methodist Theology: Doing Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 7.

⁸ “The Holy Club,” The Methodist Church, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/who-we-are/history/the-holy-club>.

just one label given to this group in reference to their methodical process and planning. Charles's brother, John Wesley (hereafter referred to as 'Wesley') soon emerged as a leader, but it was not until after his difficult experiences as a missionary in Georgia, his encounters with Moravian tradition, and his 'heart-warming' Aldersgate conversion-experience of 1738, that Methodism grew in popularity and prominence. On his return to Britain, Wesley found that he was unwelcome in many churches and so joined with the evangelist George Whitfield, preaching in the open-air. As Methodism grew, its leadership structures evolved to include stewards, 'class' and 'band' leaders, local preachers (also known as helpers) and trustees. The practice of meeting for mutual support as classes and bands imitated Moravian tradition, and it was from here that leaders could instruct adherents on the nature of faith and the obligations of membership. Wesley coordinated Methodism centrally through a series of conferences at which his preachers and ordained helpers met to agree, 'what to teach, how to teach, and what to do.'⁹ His most senior assistants worked itinerantly, visiting societies (which were grouped together in circuits), chairing quarterly meetings, and retaining a sense of connexion with himself. Wherever possible, Wesley sought to work in tandem with the Church of England. Despite local tensions and as late as 1787, Wesley was still insisting Methodist and Anglican meetings should not interfere with each other.¹⁰

Wesley was, arguably, something of an enigma. He was a High Church authoritarian who disregarded ecclesial protocol and discipline when it did not agree with him. For Wesley, the practice of open-air preaching was unorthodox. He found it discomfiting but saw no other means of reaching those who would never likely enter a church. He would preach without invitation or permission if

⁹ Barrie W. Tabraham, *The Making of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1995), 47. For a complimentary account of early Methodism, see Rupert Davies and Gordon Rupp, eds., "John Wesley," in Vol. I of *A History of the Methodist Church of Great Britain Volume* (London: Epworth, 1965), 37-79.

¹⁰ John Wesley, "Wesley's Threat to Deptford," ed. Percy Parker, *Wesley's Journal* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1951), 463. Published by Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/journal.pdf>.

necessary. He authorised his own preachers, including many ordained Anglican priests.¹¹ In 1784, he ordained Whatcoat and Vasey as elders for work in the Americas, and re-ordained Coke (who was already an Anglican priest) as their superintendent. This momentous move contributed to a growing separation between Methodism and the Church of England. Wesley safeguarded Methodism's future by overseeing the 1784 Deed of Declaration (giving the Methodist Conference an independent legal status).¹² When Wesley died in 1798, Methodism became a *De facto* Church. However, as the movement grew, ecclesiological differences gave rise to schism; over whether the movement should adopt episcopacy or strengthen its conciliarity; on the balance of power between preachers and the laity; and of how Methodists should relate to the Church of England. It was not until 1932 that some – but not all – of these factions were reunited.¹³

Much of this infrastructure remains. Wesley's assistants have become superintendents overseeing the work of circuits. Presbyters who are under their charge typically oversee a section of churches and exercise a three-fold ministry of:

- The Word, '(formal and informal) preaching, evangelism, apologetic, theological, and prophetic interpretation, teaching and the articulation of faith and human experience'.
- The sacraments, 'presiding at acts of celebration and devotion, especially baptism (and, in the wider sense of sacramental acts, confirmation), and Eucharist.'
- Pastoral responsibility, 'oversight, direction, discipline, order, and pastoral care.'¹⁴

¹¹ Tabraham, *The Making of Methodism*, 42-43.

¹² Tabraham, *Making of Methodism*, 49. See also Jonathan Crowther, *A True and Complete Portraiture of Methodism* (New York: Daniel Hitt & Thomas Ware, 1813), 36-62.

¹³ Tabraham, *Making of Methodism*, 64-65. For a rich perspective on how history has shaped Methodist Presbyteral Ministry see also, Martin Wellings, "Presbyteral Ministry: A Methodist Perspective," *Ecclesiology* 1, no.2 (2005) 57-74.

¹⁴ "What's a Presbyter?" paper presented at the Methodist Conference, 2002, 4. <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-what-is-a-presbyter-2002>.

The circuit remains the principal authority by which the Methodist Church resources local churches and appoints staff. Local churches are governed by church councils, normally chaired by a presbyter with 'pastoral charge', and send representatives to a 'circuit meeting'. Likewise, circuits, chaired by a superintendent, send their representatives to a District Synod. Finally, the Districts, covering distinct geographical regions within England, Scotland and Wales, encompass the entire 'connexion'.¹⁵

Representatives from each District gather with other senior church leaders for an annual 'conference'. This is the Church's ultimate decision-making body. By capitalising on the strengths of its delegated representation, the Methodist Conference strives to encourage an attitude of constant reflection between its centre and peripheries as it explores the impact of changes to Church policy.

Shier-Jones, writing in 2004, reports that since 1932 the Methodist Church Faith and Order Committee had spent the majority of its time focused on issues of ecclesiology and discipline, rather than faith or doctrine. Questions raised at Conference have centred primarily on the nature of the church, who has authority, by what right they hold it, the nature of church leadership, and the place of Methodist membership.¹⁶

1.2 Three new contentions through a combined method

This thesis considers how presbyters serving in the Methodist Church can best oversee the development of fresh expressions. It is the first, systematic, detailed, and transparent study of *circuit* fresh expressions within British Methodism. It surveys the thinking and process that underpins Fresh Expressions, considers the experience of practitioners who have worked in these contexts, examines this in light of Methodist tradition, and suggests how fresh expressions might challenge presbyters who have oversight of local projects. Crucially, it sensitively applies qualitative analysis to a range of

¹⁵ "The Connexion," The Methodist Church, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/who-we-are/what-is-distinctive-about-methodism/the-connexion>.

¹⁶ Angela Shier-Jones, "Conferring as Theological Method," in *Methodist Theology Today*, ed. Clive Marsh (London: Continuum, 2004).

fresh expressions, and explores the ecclesiological synergies and tensions that become apparent. It brings three new contentions to the ongoing debate:

First, this study offers empirical evidence in support of the claims made by Horsley and Cox-Darling that few fresh expressions are fresh expressions of 'church':

Horsley stated in 2011:

A large number (the majority?) of fresh expressions are not strictly fresh expressions of church, but rather fresh expressions of worship, often seeking to meet the spiritual needs of Christians who might otherwise drift away from church.¹⁷

Meanwhile, in 2015, Cox-Darling stated:

There is an argument, to suggest that many self-identified fresh expressions are extraordinary experiments in mission and ministry, but are not actually fresh expressions. They use missio Dei missiology as their theological frame-work, and they are beginning to engage in creative forms of mission and worship – but their outcome is not an ecclesial community in its own right.¹⁸

And in respect of Fresh Expressions in the Church of England, George Lings, of the Church Army Research Unit, writes:

I do think that we need to work harder at recognising that not all that grows is a fresh expression of the Church. Some things are pale imitations, or even plastic copies, or the real deal and need exposing. Some things may not even be Christian. Some are honourable mission initiatives from an existing church. But their aims, to assimilate newcomers into existing church, and the lack of intention to begin further churches are clear indications that they are not fresh expressions.¹⁹

¹⁷ Graham Horsley, "Fresh Expressions of a Biblical Faith," *Epworth Review*, April (2011): 84-97. 84. <http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/604949/epworth-review-freshexpressionsofabiblicalfaith-0411.pdf>.

¹⁸ Joanne Cox-Darling, "Mission-Shaped Methodism and Fresh Expressions," *Holiness*. 1, no. 2 (2015): 202.

¹⁹ George Lings, "A History of Fresh Expressions and Church Planting in the Church of England," in *Church Growth in Britain: 1980 to the Present*, ed. David Goodhew (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 162-178.

Within Methodism, the evidence for this has been largely anecdotal. Whilst the Methodist statistics are useful in that they reflect the number of churches who are keen to affiliate with the movement, they are a self-declaration by local churches. Unlike the Church Army, the Methodist Church has not developed a set of criteria by which they can differentiate between those projects that are intending to form a new ecclesial community (I term this 'ecclesial intent'), and those who view themselves as an extension of local church mission.²⁰ Almost all of the Methodist fresh expressions lay leaders who participated in this research viewed their projects as fresh and creative forms of fellowship, worship, and mission that belonged to the local church, rather than newly emerging faith communities that had genuine ecclesial potential. Whilst some presbyters argued that they were intent on forming a church, this had not yet progressed to the point of baptism or communion being celebrated within the newly emerging community. These were the preserve of the Sunday morning or evening inherited church congregations. This research advances Horsley and Cox-Darling's arguments by identifying two factors that may be influencing this resistance. In some cases, fresh expressions lay leaders had not fully appreciated the link between Fresh Expressions and church planting. In others, lay and ordained leaders were simply uncomfortable with the concept of forming new churches. Whilst this may have been linked to a difference in language (participants responded better to the concept of establishing a new 'congregation' than a new 'form of church'), many leaders were nervous about the conflict that might arise in the event that they pressed their inherited congregations to give fresh expressions greater autonomy and freedom.

Second, this research suggests that the ecclesiology of the Methodist Church, particularly the Methodist construct of membership, is inhibiting rather than enabling the ecclesial development of fresh expressions. For Methodists, the question of whether a fresh expression is a church or a

²⁰ *From Anecdote to Evidence: Findings from the Church Growth Research Program 2011-2013*, (The Church of England Commissioners, 2014).

congregation is significant. Local churches have a distinct legal status. They are self-governing, self-sustaining, and self-financing. Whilst a congregation within a church might be encouraged to develop a distinctive form of worship, or develop a particular niche in mission, it remains accountable to a church council. In this study, fresh expressions leaders were a minority voice on local church councils and struggled to convince members of the wider church that:

- The desire to create alternative forms of worship was not a compromise driven by a need to respond to the latest trend, and/or a response to consumer demand. Rather, it was based on the conviction that culture impacts community formation. Practitioners argued unsuccessfully that the local church had a culture of its own, and that if the cultural distance between newcomers and the emerging church was too great, community development would be difficult. Effective engagement was complicated further by differences in pastoral needs, teaching needs and learning styles that were evident between those who attended 'mainstream' church, and those who attended fresh expressions.
- The locality of 'church' for those who attended a fresh expression demanded a new form of church. The wider church struggled to recognise that traditional patterns of worship (such as attending Church on a Sunday), worked against the pressures of work and family that limited when people could gather. It also failed to capitalise on existing community networks that bound people together – often when they had a shared interest, such as raising children.
- Fresh expressions should be treated as missional-ecclesial units in their own right and be freed from unrealistic expectations as to how they might be present at, or serve the wider church.

This amounts to more than fresh expressions simply finding themselves on the losing side of an argument. It is a product of Methodist ecclesiology. It concerns how both formal and informal authority present themselves in the Methodist Church, and who is empowered to enable change. The prevalence of membership (by necessity) in established churches, coupled with its relative sparsity amongst fresh expressions adherents, exposed these newly emerging communities to an unequal power balance that acted as a centripetal force, pulling fresh expressions towards rather than pushing them away from conforming to the very form of church from which they sought an alternative.

Methodist membership is significant because it gives those who hold it greater power than those who do not. Although Church Councils are in the first instance open meetings, and opinion may be canvassed from non-members, only members are entitled to vote and take-up office. Whilst developing a creative synergy between the basic obligations of membership and the aims of Fresh Expressions might be theoretically conceivable, in practice, the wider church expected members to attend Sunday worship and serve the inherited church by taking up roles and responsibilities. Churches viewed their fresh expressions as just one form of worship or fellowship among others. Newcomers who opted to become members of the church, but express this primarily through their commitment to a fresh expression, struggled to gain credibility (and therefore social capital) among permission givers. To complicate matters further, whilst some participants who had previous experience of journeying with other denominations appreciated the obligation for local Methodist Churches to appoint trustees (as required by charity law), they questioned Methodism's much broader emphasis on membership and its scriptural warrant. Why should membership be required beyond baptism and confirmation? Whilst participants recognised the importance of membership as a means by which they could demonstrate their commitment to a local congregation, they believed that they were already showing this by virtue of their attendance. This proved to be a significant

argument given that in all of the churches studied, pastoral secretaries were aware of members of the inherited church who rarely attended, and yet the church was reluctant to remove them.

Ominously, the literature review suggests that Fresh Expressions does not major enough on the importance of denominational affiliation. At best, it assumes that those who lead fresh expressions are already comfortable within the oversight structures of the parent church. At worst, it avoids confronting the issue of denominational affiliation and church authority because it wishes to help people remain positive, rather than agitating scepticism. Therefore, for Methodists, the ecclesiology of the Methodist Church and the very concept of membership makes the prospect of achieving a mixed economy, whereby fresh expressions can grow and co-exist alongside inherited churches, difficult to implement.

Third, the Methodist Church has stated that in order for the mixed economy to be a success, presbyters need to 'bring about as light a touch as is proper to the rules and regulations pertaining to our local churches'.²¹ Initially this appeals, because it allows practitioners to apply the spirit of the law rather than the letter of the law. However, this research generates two significant concerns. First, CPD is a legal document and whilst there may be some instances where presbyters can interpret its requirements in a certain way, or even delay applying them, other requirements are non-negotiable. The regulations concerning church planting are a case in point. New churches can only exist if twelve locally resident *members* unite.²² The second concern is that rather than gifting fresh expressions with a freedom in which they will flourish, the 'light touch' risks destabilising fresh

²¹ Martyn Atkins, "General Secretary's Report: Contemporary Methodism: A Discipleship Movement Shaped for Mission" (paper presented at the Methodist Conference, 2012), 16. <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf2011-pc-2-gen-sec-conference-report-0812.doc>. See also, 'Contemporary Methodism: A Discipleship Movement Shaped for Mission. A summary of the General Secretary's Report to the Methodist Conference,' <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/intra-contemporary-methodism-280611.pdf>.

²² CPD, Vol. 2., 605, S.O. 605(1). (*sic.*)

expressions through a lack of consistency in policy between presbyters who have oversight. This thesis suggests that more rather than less legislation – encapsulated in the form of a Fresh Expressions Mission Order - might be required to safeguard development. The word ‘order’ may admittedly make some nervous, since it might be confused with creating a third order of ministry. However, this term originates from the Church of England, in which a Bishop’s Mission Order has become one way of facilitating fresh expressions development.²³

Finally, it is important to note that the methodology for this research fuses three contrasting but complimentary Practical Theology methods.²⁴ Its strength rests in its simplicity as practitioners are encouraged to discern the difference between what should be happening in their contexts, and what is happening, remain open and attentive to a wide range of voices, and reflect on how differences in cultural perspective, experience and tradition are impacting those whom they serve.

1.2 Previous research in Methodism and the call for further work

Fresh Expressions literature ranges from material that outlines the vision that drives the movement, self-help guides, theological critique, and insights from small-scale research. Whilst some case studies do originate from exclusively Methodist contexts, little attention is given to how projects are overseen, or the relationship between the fresh expression and the wider church. Even less are the product of sustained academic research. For Methodists, there is one notable exception. In 2012, Cox in her *Challenging Leadership: Mission-Shaped Presbyters in Methodist Fresh Expressions*²⁵

²³ “Working text reproduction of House of Bishops' Code of Practice on Bishops' Mission Orders,” The Church of England, <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/1499290/workingtextbmocop.doc>.

²⁴ Jane Leach, "Pastoral Theology as Attention," *Contact: Practical Theology and Pastoral Care*, no. 153 (2007): 19-32; James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry : Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 57; Richard Robert Osmer, *Practical Theology : An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 4.

²⁵ Joanne Cox, "Challenging Leadership: Mission-Shaped Presbyters in Methodist Fresh Expressions" (DThM diss., University of Durham, 2012), http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/3276/1/DThM_thesis_corrected_submitted_13_Nov_2011.pdf?DDD32+.

found that the concept of pioneer and the nature of pioneer ministry led to ‘irreconcilable tensions’ between the vision and values of three VentureFX (VFX) fresh expressions and those of the wider circuits or districts in which they were situated. She suggests that the Methodist Church should consider three options; ordaining people locally to fresh expressions projects, developing a new *order* of ministry from which the church deploys ministers in evangelism, church planting and mission, or rethinking the Church’s present understanding of presbyteral ministry.²⁶ Whilst this work was important, VFX incorporates only fourteen pioneers working in thirteen centres and involves only three presbyters.²⁷ A further consideration is that VFX operates under a different mechanism of oversight in comparison to circuit presbyters. In contrast to Cox’s work, this research explores the tensions and challenges for presbyters who have pastoral charge of fresh expressions alongside traditional churches.

Most recently, *Recording Pioneering Fresh Expressions*, a Faith and Order report submitted to the Methodist Council, stated:

Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church calls for a “light touch” to the way in which ecclesiastical discipline is applied to Fresh Expressions, whilst recognising that a permissive interpretation of discipline needs to be balanced by proper and appropriate structures of accountability. It offers no suggestions as to how this can happen. Further work on what forms of oversight are appropriate and enabling for fresh expressions is needed. This requires consideration of appropriate and effective oversight structures and processes, as well as looking at how the Methodist Church might foster supportive relationships and encourage wider ownership of the mission of fresh expressions.²⁸

²⁶ Ibid., 228-229.

²⁷ Obtained by cross-referencing the names of pioneers on the VFX Website with the 2015 Conference Directory.

²⁸ Nicola Price-Tebbit, "Report of the Faith and Order Committee to the Methodist Council: Recording Pioneering Fresh Expressions: A Response to Notice of Motion 103," The Methodist Church, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/1541973/coun-mc15-49-recording-pioneering-fresh-expressions-april-2015.pdf>.

This research considers the nature of fresh expressions, the tradition of the Methodist Church and the impact of CPD. It identifies areas where presbyters are struggling to implement CPD in inherited contexts and explores where areas of tension and incongruity lie in respect of Fresh Expressions.

1.3 My Context

During the first phase of this research, I was a presbyter responsible for the oversight of fresh expressions in a semi-rural circuit. Working alongside a superintendent minister, I shared pastoral charge of fourteen churches. I inherited the oversight of four fresh expressions, and planted a further project:

- Sonrise, a children's 'puppet' service based in a market-town church.
- Breakfast Church, an all-age congregation meeting in a village hall.
- A Café Church, a gathered congregation meeting in a village church.
- Animate, an all-age congregation offering 'lounge' style worship in a church hall.
- Coffee and Cakes drop in, held in a rural village church.

My role was not to lead these congregations but to mentor the lay leadership within. My style of leadership was one of 'high-accountability, light touch.' After five years, I moved to become a circuit superintendent elsewhere. Here I found eight activities that the circuit was promoting as fresh expressions:

- Messy Church meeting in a rural village church.
- Messy Church meeting in a suburban church.
- Café Church meeting in a suburban church.
- Messy Church meeting in a city centre church.

- Messy Play in a rural village church.
- Anglican-Methodist led Messy Church, meeting in a town chapel.
- URC-Methodist led Messy Church, meeting in a town chapel.
- An ecumenical Messy Church project being planned for a village hall.

1.4 How the thesis developed

In contrast to taking a positivist approach, beginning with a theory and subjecting it to testing, Cohen cites Meinefeld, Whyte, Glaser, and Strauss and poses the question, 'Should one have a hypothesis in qualitative research?' This is based on the conviction that 'the research is much more open and emergent in qualitative approaches.'²⁹ Harding finds this argument to be persuasive one, stating that deductive approaches produce an 'embarrassing gap between theory and empirical research.'³⁰ Conversely, Barbour is critical, suggesting that grounded approaches appeal to researchers who are, 'too lazy to read the relevant literature.'³¹ Whilst my own position is closer to that of Cohen than of Barbour, I suspect that whilst many qualitative researchers would reject the idea of an initial hypothesis, few would deny that their research often begins with some prior knowledge about why a particular subject area or sample is of interest. Qualitative researchers will also find it difficult to declare with absolute integrity, that their own approach and findings are free from bias.

Personally, I was wary of both extremes. I did not want to resist exploring questions and ideas that surfaced during the observations, holding off until the writing stage. Ethnography and journaling go hand in hand; the research context allowing theory to surface, and providing a constant source by

²⁹Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, *Research Methods*, 226.

³⁰ Harding, *Qualitative*, 13.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 14. Harding cites Rosaline S. Barbour, *Introducing Qualitative Research*, 197.

which I could establish clarity and deeper understanding. At the same time, I wished to avoid entering and revisiting the research context with a set of suspicions and a fixed theory to prove or disprove. The danger in this instance is that the research would miss an alternative view, or lack the capacity to explore it further if it were identified. My approach was to generate data about the nature and challenges of work in Methodist fresh expressions from the earliest point, contrasting this with both the ideals of Methodist oversight, and the disciplines of the Church. Some aspects of Fresh Expressions left me feeling uneasy in that I wanted to support the movement's vision, and in particular how it gave presbyters the freedom for people to break with tradition. At the same time, my conviction was that freedom without limits could give rise to anarchy on the one hand, or alternatively the Methodist Church might promise freedom, whilst resisting changes to practice and discipline. This latter view became reinforced at the point when *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* was published, midway through my research. The report argued that neither Church of England, nor the Methodist Church needed to change its ecclesiological structures or disciplines in order to accommodate fresh expressions.³² This did not resonate well with my early research observations.

1.5 Methodology

I turned to four practical theologians, each of whom provide a simple and contrasting way of thinking through issues of pastoral challenge or organisational conflict; Evelyn Whitehead & James Whitehead, Richard Osmer, and Jane Leach.³³ Whitehead and Whitehead encourage practitioners to consider how pastoral challenges are influenced by differences in culture, experience, and tradition. The first task is to discern these voices whilst suspending judgement. The second is one of assertion;

³² *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*, 183-184, Section 7.7.

³³ Jane Leach, "Pastoral Theology as Attention," 31; James Whitehead and Evelyn Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 57; Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.

of bringing the different voices into dialogue and asking, 'What does this add up to?' The final stage is to suggest what pastoral responses might be appropriate. This helped me to discern some basic research questions which were then nuanced in light of Osmer and Leach's insights. Osmer encourages practitioners to ask four key questions - What is going on? Why is this going on? What ought to be going on? And, how might we respond? Importantly, he suggests that practitioners should reflect on their *responsibilities* as well as their legal obligations. This forces an honest dialogue between orthodoxy, as laid out in CPD, and questions of orthopraxis, raised by practitioners. Finally, Jane Leach, a Methodist presbyter and Practical Theologian who specialises in enabling ministerial formation, proposes that reflection and reflexivity in ministerial practice improves if practitioners can be attentive to all of the voices – audible and inaudible – within any given context. Leach moves on to direct practitioners to explore the wider issues that are implicit to any given situation; one's own bias, 'What are your heart's saying?', what Christian Tradition has to say, and what the implication of these strands might be for the mission of the Church. Leach's method was helpful because it gave warrant to working with material in which I had an investment, and because it encouraged reflexivity as a key component of the research process.

Significantly, Leach offers some challenging questions in relation to the wider issues; what trends in culture are exemplified here? What kinds of human behaviour are evident? How has the past shaped the present? She then directs practitioners to question how their role might be influencing their perspective, and how their emotions are impacting upon their observations, urging them to acknowledge their immediate instincts so that these can be challenged through subsequent analysis and reflection. Finally, Leach encourages practitioners to ask questions about how theological tradition is at work in any given context; what ethics are being practised, and what theology/ideology is implicit to this? Leach's end goal is to encourage a form of theological reflection which is based on scripture; 'What Biblical texts resonate or set up a challenge in this

encounter/situation?' Whilst I did not identify any Biblical texts, or ethical dilemmas (apart from a dismissiveness from some groups within the church towards fresh expressions), I was able to distinguish the contrasting theological perspectives that underpinned different viewpoints and practices.

The importance of reflexivity as an interpretative resource within ecclesiological and ethnographic research has most recently been highlighted by Kaufman, who states that the crux of successful research is to be aware of 'what normativity is at work, and how it is at work'.³⁴ As a presbyter and a practitioner, I was likely to have a normativity which could impact how I interpreted my observations; reflexivity would be a guard against this. What aspects of espoused theology; either from Methodist Conference, Fresh Expressions, or the Methodist Church was I accepting uncritically? How would I be open to challenge? In practice, the Whitehead's method gave structure to the literature review, whilst the initial questions posed by Osmer and Leach proved simple enough to focus my thoughts during the research, whilst providing a foundation for further reflection. I might leave a church meeting and think, 'What just happened? What should have happened? Who were the loud voices or the principle actors? Who was overlooked or silenced?'

1.6 Blending Research Methods

My first priority was to try and understand how ministry in fresh expressions challenged presbyters who had been given oversight of local projects, and what might constitute best practice. Osmer calls for four elements of research design; purpose; strategy of inquiry; a research plan and a degree of reflexivity over the assumptions upon which observations are built. He observes that 'strategies of enquiry' in church contexts often employ a blend of quantitative and qualitative research. Osmer suggests that researching life histories, carrying out case studies and conducting ethnography are all

³⁴ Tone S. Kaufman, "Normativity as Pitfall or Ally," *Ecclesial Practices* 2 (2015): 92

useful ways of understanding the narratives that drive particular responses in any given context.³⁵

My initial explorations began with a literature review and a small degree of quantitative work to explore the nature of those fresh expressions that I could access easily, with a view to identifying key centres that might provide fertile ground for further father qualitative research.

1.6.1 Three research foci: Literature Review, Consultation and Case Studies

The Whiteheads' approach helped focus the literature review by generating four key areas for reflection; *Methodist Church Tradition*, *Fresh Expressions Tradition*, *Practitioner's Experience*, and *Ongoing Methodist Experience and Debate*. I decided against examining culture as a separate category for two reasons. First, I found that tradition and culture were so closely related that to consider one was to consider both. Apart from helping me remain attentive to the relationship between Methodist tradition and context, the process of divorcing one from the other in search of a more detailed analysis seemed inefficient. Much Fresh Expressions literature responds to concerns about how the inherited Church should respond to cultural diversity, and so questions about the significance of culture would surface naturally and serve as a better starting point. Second, I sensed that an ethnographic approach to case study work (carried out as a separate research focus) might be more productive, in that it would generate fresh insights that would confirm or challenge arguments put-forward by supporters and critics of the movement. The literature review succeeded

³⁵ The following also proved helpful. In terms of approach, Helen Cameron, *Studying Local Churches : A Handbook* (London: SCM Press, 2005); In terms of ethnographic candour and style, Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger : An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2002). John Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field : On Writing Ethnography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). In terms of considering the weaknesses of ethnography, James Clifford and George E. Marcus, *Writing Culture : The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). As for the focus of ethnographic study, Matthew Eric Engelke and Matt Tomlinson, *The Limits of Meaning : Case Studies in the Anthropology of Christianity* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007). Finally, as an outline of the ongoing debate over the place of ethnography in investigating church practice, Pete Ward (ed.), *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, *Studies in Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012) and Christian Scharen, *Explorations in Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, *ibid*. Also consider, Theodora Hawksley, "Book Review on Ecclesiology and Ethnography by Pete Ward," *Ecclesiology* 10, no. 2 (2014): 263-265.

in identifying an array of principles and concerns that presbyters should consider. It also highlighted areas where the Methodist Church needed to provide greater clarity and direction.

The second research focus addressed one question in particular. To what extent did CPD inhibit fresh expressions? Whilst I had ten years' experience of applying CPD, I wanted to critique my understanding of what the Church did or did not permit against the views of other leaders. I therefore developed a means by which a sample of practitioners could consider my experiences and offer their own interpretations. I began by developing a broad qualitative survey (Appendix A). This outlined a number of scenarios in which CPD had informed my response. In line with the *Nature of Oversight*, I categorised each example according to whether they related more closely to leadership, governance, or management. I then outlined my understanding of whether (and if so, how) Conference was exploring any given issue, or what the latest developments might be. Finally, I left a column for participants to pass comments themselves. This is a helpful document in itself because it demonstrates how CPD reflects Methodist Church culture (understood as 'the way we do things round here' or the way we do things without consciously thinking about it).³⁶ However, was my interpretation correct? Did participants agree with the requirements laid out by CPD in the first instance? Had any participant had trouble implementing this particular aspect of CPD? What tensions existed between orthodoxy and orthopraxis?

The third research focus began with a number of pilot studies to try and find the best approach for generating data through case-studies. I needed to examine the feelings and motives of those who were involved in fresh expressions, and to try to understand the dynamic of leadership that was

³⁶ Marvin Bower, *The Will to Manage; Corporate Success through Programmed Management* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 22.

present. Where were the points of conflict and synergy between Fresh Expressions and the wider church? How did differences in culture, experience, and tradition influence this? Cohen *et al* state:

Research must include 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973) of the contextualised behaviour; for descriptions to be thick requires inclusion not only of detailed observational data but data on meanings, participants' interpretations of situations and unobserved factors.

And:

Social research needs to examine situations through the eyes of the participants – the task of as Malinowski (1922: 25) observed, is to grasp the point of the native [sic], his [sic] view of the world in relation to life.³⁷

Denscombe writes:

Ethnographic research calls for a certain degree of introspection on the part of the researcher. He or she needs to reflect upon the way in which background factors associated with personal experiences, personal beliefs and social values may have shaped the way in which events and cultures were interpreted. However, the ethnographic researcher needs to go beyond mere reflection. This is, in a sense, a private activity. Researchers need to supply their readers with some insights into the possible influence of the researcher's self to the interpretation of events or cultures.³⁸

Each phase of the research was scrutinised by the Ethics Board of the Department of Theology at Durham University.

1.6.1.1 Consultation: sampling and scope

Sampling Methods

Cohen cites Borgan & Bilken (1992) and LeCompte & Preissle (1993) suggest a range of sampling

³⁷ Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion, and Keith Morrison, *Research Methods in Education*, 7th ed., (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 220.

³⁸ Martyn Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide : For Small-Scale Social Research Projects*, 4th ed. (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2010), 81 & 84-87.

methods that may be helpful in ethnographic research. I included a mix of reputational critical-case sampling, convenience sampling, and extreme-case sampling.

Number of participants and interviews

Initially, I circulated the consultation document across two Methodist districts and received sixteen responses from twenty-four invitations. By the close of the consultation, forty-five individuals had taken part, including thirty ministers; twenty-six presbyters, three presbyter-ordinands and one deacon, (twenty-one males, nine females). Of these, ten occupied District leadership roles (five combining this with circuit responsibilities). Five were Methodist supernumeraries who still contributed to circuit life, and four were ecumenical partners; Anglican, Baptist, United Reformed Church, and Free Church.³⁹ The remaining fourteen participants were non-ordained (four males, ten females). Four of these were District leaders. As part of my ongoing ministry, I also attended a VentureFX support group which gave rise to a continuing dialogue with two presbyter-pioneers. In total the consultations resulted in thirty-two submissions of written material (either e-mail responses or annotated forms), twenty short research conversations, and twenty-eight follow up interviews. The participant age range (apart from the supernumeraries) was between forty to sixty years. Apart from one Black-British participant, the remainder were White-British. This demographic reflected the comparatively low numbers of female ordained and/or ethnic minority leaders within the learning regions covered by three Districts.⁴⁰ The consultation ceased at the point where new insights were proving difficult to find. The full list of participants and their roles are detailed in Appendix B.

³⁹ Baptist, Anglican, United Reformed and one free-church pastor

⁴⁰ Stated during a meeting of the Regional Learning Area forum, October 2015.

The focus group

One of the unintended but welcome consequences of the consultation was how a group of five retired Methodist ministers, a supernumerary support group who met with me on a monthly basis, offered themselves as a source of collaboration and encouragement I reflected on my research observations, and began to develop this thesis. They held contrasting theological views, had served in a diverse range of contexts, and continued to support circuits by covering in emergencies, leading communion services and by encouraging particular forms of ministry. We met monthly, for two years, and on every occasion they asked how the research or my thesis was progressing. This group provided a forum where I could reflect on my experiences and question my own understanding and interpretation of CPD.

1.6.1.2 Discerning the best approach for consultation interviews

The purpose of the interviews was to:

1. Allow respondents to explain the comments in greater depth.
2. Discern how and when they used CPD.
3. Identify instances when CPD was proving difficult to implement.

The first three conversations served as a helpful pilot. My first concern was to ensure that I suspended judgment until the participants had contributed all they wished. I drew from the same observational and listening skills that counsellors use in order to enable their clients to share their own story; watching (and noting) body language, reflecting back, paraphrasing what the participants shared so that they could confirm that I was understanding them correctly, and being unafraid of silence. As I took notes I used Osmer and Leach's basic questions to discern areas that I could explore once the participant had finished sharing. What was happening? What did they think should be happening? Whose voice was not being heard? What did they think needed to change? Direct questions that would clarify my understanding of current policy or practice were left until the end of the interview...'Am I right in thinking that?'

One early lesson was in how, as the interviewer, I needed to create the best possible dynamic. I found, as Barbour⁴¹ cautions, that using the word 'interview' was unhelpful, in that it created a dynamic where I the researcher was seen as the expert, conversations were guarded, and there was an air of formality. Conversely, when I began to speak in terms of interviews as 'research conversations', participants became much more relaxed and open. Patton confirms this, stating that informal conversational interviews allow questions to be raised, 'In the natural course of things (whereby) there is no predetermination of question topics or wording.'⁴² Participants responded warmly when I stressed that the purpose of the research was to *help me understand* how as a presbyter, I could best oversee fresh expressions. Interviews were normally conducted in participant's homes, or at conferences.

1.6.1.3 Processing the consultation data

Collating the written responses to the consultation was simple, in that most related to the scenarios that I had outlined in the original documents and could be added to my own comments. This allowed me to both critique my own understanding, to discover new insights, and identify areas of congruence or difference.

I developed a rigorous pattern for processing the interviews; reflect immediately and record my initial impressions and feelings; listen to the interview at home, noting how the conversation flowed and the themes that were covered (this helped me to suspend judgement, rather than be heavily influenced by a single striking statement); then transcribe. Transcription proved demanding and time-consuming; it was not just a matter of recording words. As Cohen rightly states, a vast array of other features; pauses, hesitations, inflections, emotion, volume, speed, breaks, stresses and

⁴¹ Rosaline S. Barbour, *Introducing Qualitative Research : A Student Guide to the Craft of Doing Qualitative Research* (London: SAGE, 2008), 120.

⁴² Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 1990). Cited by Cohen *et al.*, *Research Methods*, 413.

phrases, audible breathing and non-verbal activity, are also be significant.⁴³ One advantage of listening to the interview before was that I could note the confidence (or nervousness) and emotion behind what was said. Importantly, Silverman argues that the level of transcription should be appropriate for the research problem; interviews requiring the greatest detail are those that use a constructivist model as a basis for analysis.⁴⁴ Helpfully, my approach in inviting participants to share in an open-ended conversation about what they had submitted, was more naturalistic. Meanwhile, Harding similarly notes that pauses, interruptions and rephrases are always significant but also affirms that the level of detail required is at the discretion of the researcher.⁴⁵ My transcription was in the first instance words only, but became fuller during the key points of the conversation.

1.6.1.4 What to include, and what to exclude?

This was a fundamental question throughout the entire of the research. All of the submissions and observations were valuable, in that they enabled me to gain a greater understanding the wider context in which this work is undertaken. Nevertheless, to keep the focus on the central question, 'How can Methodist presbyters best oversee fresh expressions?' I developed a checklist:

1. What information has the participant shared?
2. Does it reflect an attitude of the wider Church?
3. In light of Osmer, is anything 'not happening that should be happening'?
4. In light of Leach, who are the principal actors, and is there an absent or silenced voice?
5. Does this relate to CPD?

⁴³Cohen *et al.*, *Research Methods*, 538.

⁴⁴ Cohen *et al.*, *Research Methods*, 205. Cohen cites David Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data : Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction* (London: Sage Publications, 1993).

⁴⁵ Harding, *Qualitative*, 52.

6. Does the participant's position or experience give the scenario greater significance?
7. Has this influenced the fresh expression?
8. Has this issue been replicated elsewhere?
9. Am I giving this more scenario profile that is justified? Am I keeping an open mind?
10. How is my emotional state impacting my judgements?

After I had transcribed each interview I summarised *each theme* and the context in which it was evident on to a separate card. This allowed me to form a card index and identify, again, points of congruence and contrast.

1.6.1.5 Case Studies: Identifying centres, conducting pilot studies, developing a methodology, and refining methods.

The case study work comprised an initial qualitative survey, ethnographic participation-observation, informal conversations, an online quantitative survey, and follow-up interviews. In total I studied thirteen fresh expressions across two centres. I carried out a total of thirty-six observations within Animate and messy church, and a further twenty-two observations within the surrounding satellite projects. I conducted twenty-eight research conversations or formal interviews across the whole.

How I identified centres that were suitable for case-study work:

Cohen states that finding a role and managing entry into the context is one of the most important phases of the research planning.⁴⁶ He suggests that researchers need to:

Identify the gatekeepers to establish trust with the wider community.

Negotiate a participant-observer role.

⁴⁶ Citing Margaret Diane LeCompte, Wendy L. Millroy, and Judith Preissle, *The Handbook of Qualitative Research in Education* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1992).

Ensure there is enough time, space and social relations to carry out the research.

Have the capacity to join in with people and share in the same experience.

Appreciate that the field under study becomes clear once the researcher has entered it.

Cohen also cites Swan who draws from his experiences of researching in educational environments and advises that role negotiation, balance and trust are significant issues:

One must try to select a role which will provide access to as wide range of people as possible, preserve neutrality (not being seen on anybody's side) and enable confidences to be secured.⁴⁷

With reference to De Laine (2000), Cohen states that:

Role conflict, strain and ambiguity are to be expected in qualitative research...Diverse role positions are rarely possible to plan in advance, and are an inevitable part of fieldwork, giving rise to ethical and moral problems for the researcher, and, in turn, requiring ongoing resolution and negotiation.⁴⁸

Drawing from Walford (2001), Cohen also adds:

This becomes sharper as researchers feel forced to retain neutrality, compromise their own beliefs and values, manage relationships carefully without breaking confidences and try not to divulge too much information about themselves...there is a need for researchers to develop rapport, trust, sensitivity and discretion. They need to find a way to manage people or issues which they find difficult. They need to be attentive, empathising, discreet and know how long to stay. Herein the researcher needs to remain long enough to be able to observe regularities.⁴⁹

The initial search for suitable case studies began with four lines of enquiry:

1. *Researching in VentureFX projects*

⁴⁷ Cohen et. al, *Research Methods in Education*, 233.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

I approached the two VentureFX projects that were within closest reach. Both pioneers felt that their projects were not at the point where there was anything resembling 'church' or an emerging 'Christian community' that I could research. Both were uneasy about how my presence would alter the dynamics within small groups, and how further input from the Methodist Church (even though I was acting independently) might be viewed by other stakeholders.

2. *Researching a church in a circuit that had reconfigured itself so that one of its presbyters could serve a single church as a 'pioneer minister', intent on creating fresh expressions:*

This pilot was immediately frustrated by the practicalities of travel. I learnt that in order to construct reliable conclusions from quantitative work, I needed to be consistently present.

3. *Researching in a circuit where a presbyter had sole oversight of a group of fresh expressions, rather than only those fresh expressions within their 'section'. :*

Despite information to the contrary, I could not find a context that offered this.

4. *Researching a fresh expression was looking to form itself as a church:*

I was able to travel regularly to this project, and could trial participation-observation, conversations, and recorded interviews. This was the first pilot, and proved successful in that I was able to establish its history, discern the oversight issues that were of concern, identify the points of conflict and congruity between different leaders, and what measures had proved helpful in securing its future. I also began to reflect on the possibility and legitimacy of my researching a fresh expression that was under my own oversight.

5. *The fifth and final pilot was a case study at Animate.*

Animate was a fresh expression within my own circuit. My task as a minister was to accompany and mentor its senior leaders. From its conception, Animate followed the guidance issued in *Mission Shaped Ministry*⁵⁰, the training course developed for fresh

⁵⁰ "Mission Shaped Ministry," Fresh Expressions, <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/missionshapedministry>.

expressions leaders. I developed a methodology which blended the research methods that proved successful in the above, and developed two surveys, one to generate data on those who attended the project, and one that explored the question of engagement. Whilst Animate was the primary centre for research, I was also able to visit other local 'satellite' projects. Animate became the first full-fledged research centre. This methodology was then applied to messy church when I moved circuits.

Incorporating a quantitative and a qualitative survey

The basic survey (Appendix C) generated data about ages, gender, life experience, and attendance. It also asked participants to share their understanding of the purpose of their fresh expression, how they were using their gifts, and whom they approached for guidance and pastoral support. For example:

What previous training do you draw from in your role?

Who do you confide in when you are going through a difficult time with your faith?

What do you enjoy most about being part of this project?

The second survey (Appendix D) was inspired by Kirby's theory on the process by which people engage with fresh expressions.⁵¹ It probed how the different elements of worship and fellowship at Animate impacted participants' sense of belonging and belief. It also explored how their attitudes and behaviours had changed, and included open questions:

Tell us something of your Church history - i.e. Attended Methodist Church as a child, then left as a teenager; or used to worship regularly at....

Do you attend both Animate and another Church? If yes, please state where and tell us why Animate is helpful?

⁵¹ Jeff Kirby and Vanessa Kirby, "The Pitsmoor Cycle," *TSC Research Bulletin* (Winter 2010), <http://www.churcharmy.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=138332>. For a fuller description of what Kirby means by engagement and how these are reflected in the survey, see also section 2.1.5 of Chapter 2.

Would you be happy to ask your friends to come to Animate? Again, please tell us what holds you back (if anything).

In respect of some of the worship activities at Animate, namely Meaningful Gossip, Sharing Bread, Bite-Size Bible, and Chillax, participants were invited to reply to questions such as:

Rate the following in terms of helping you to believe God can change your life...

Now rate them in terms of how they help you feel that you belong to the group.

...using a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree). Likewise, I invited them to respond in the same way to statements such as:

I am more aware of God's presence at other times in the day/week.

I pray more by myself than I did before.

I feel more confident to talk about what I believe with others.

1.6.1.6 Translating from Animate to Messy Church

The online survey was adapted for messy church (Appendix E) to cover its key elements of engagement; conversations, worship songs, bible teaching, craft activities, and prayer. The open questions included:

Please share anything else that has been really important in terms of making you feel welcome and part of a family at Messy Church.

Please let us know if there are any other aspects of Messy Church or any experiences that have encouraged your belief that God can make a difference to your life?

Would you be happy to ask your friends to come to Messy Church? Again, please tell us what holds you back (if anything).

1.6.1.7 Using participation-observation and conversation within the case studies

Osmer's prophetic discernment raises a single question, from which others develop:

What is the 'norm' that each fresh expression is judged against?

Evaluating the worship that is taking place in each case study was at considerable risk of being highly subjective – and therefore required some kind of framework. Whilst many approved sources for worship offered some guidance (such as the *Methodist Worship Book*), Fresh Expressions cautions practitioners to guard against introducing forms of worship that may be culturally inappropriate.⁵² Helpfully, the training for local preachers and worship leaders encourages practitioners to develop 'liturgies' or orders of service of their own (whether written or extempore).⁵³ At the time of writing, the Methodist Church is in transition between previous and newly updated versions of *Faith and Worship*. The former assessment sheets for local preacher 'on trial' include a number of valuable questions:

- How was the place, time and season are taken into account?
- Was the worship was appropriate to the congregation?
- How well did the preacher and congregation related in the service?
- In what way were the congregations' gifts were used?
- How were people helped to encounter and respond to God?

⁵² *The Methodist Worship Book* (Peterborough: Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, 1999).

⁵³ Local preachers are trained using the *Faith and Worship* course material, and their services are assessed periodically. See "Faith and Worship Course Information," The Methodist Church, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentoyou.content&cmid=3524>. Also, "Worship Leaders," The Methodist Church, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/ministers-and-office-holders/local-preachers/worship-leaders>.

- Were any 'ingredients' of worship absent?
- If they were deliberately omitted, then why?
- How well did the language used relate to the congregation?
- How did the service develop and flow?
- What were the strongest aspects of the worship and what could be developed?
- What was the aim of the sermon and how successfully was this achieved?
- What were the strongest points of content in the service?
- What were the strongest points of delivery?⁵⁴

The updated version of Faith and Worship is currently being piloted by the Church.⁵⁵ It also asks:

- Were you able to hear the leader clearly?
- If used, were projector and screen, service sheets etc. used effectively?
- Did any elements of the service feel too short, or rushed?
- Did any elements of the service feel too long, or laboured?
- Where in the service were you particularly aware of the presence of God?
- Was there space for flexibility and/or spontaneity?
- Was the space / setting for worship used creatively?
- Was the language and imagery about God generally inclusive and creative?
- Did the worship make connections with the world beyond the church?⁵⁶

⁵⁴ "Service Report Form," The Methodist Church, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/1821155/servicereportform130812.doc>.

⁵⁵ "Faith and Worship Course Information," The Methodist Church, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/ministers-and-office-holders/local-preachers/faith-worship/faith-worship-course-information>.

⁵⁶ "Worship and Preaching Feedback Form," The Methodist Church, http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/1820302/servicereviewer_s_feedback140815.pdf.

I used these broader criteria to make an assessment on the worship in each fresh expression. This said, I was conscious of how Fresh Expressions emphasises that worship is only one aspect of a much wider community life. Thus, any analysis of local projects must ask questions about how people are welcomed, affirmed, and supported in their faith journey. In terms of assessing Christian character and ecclesial potential, VFX has developed some key questions intended to help the wider Church:

Is there a good relationship with those among whom mission is taking place?

Is there good engagement with the question, 'What is the Good News in this place for these people?'

'Is there a fledgling community that might become the context in which a fresh expression might grow?'

Is there a constructive relationship that places this ministry in the context of the wider Church?⁵⁷

The joint Anglican-Methodist report, *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* has also offered some guidelines for fresh expressions development. In the closing sections of the literature review that features in Chapter Two of this thesis, I summarise:

Fresh expressions must keep the vision [of becoming church] in mind; they must strive to embody the Church's ministry of word and sacrament; they should look to develop a full koinonia with the wider Church; they should be subject to normal ecclesiastical discipline; they should work in partnership with other churches.

Therefore, in line with the guidance offered by the report:

Fresh expressions should be worshipping communities who are sent out to engage in mission and service.

⁵⁷ "Journeying Out: Pioneer Mission: 3. How are we doing?," VentureFX, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/635996/venturefx-how-are-we-doing-0912.pdf>.

The gospel must be proclaimed appropriately within the community.

Baptism needs to be conferred and the Lord's Supper must be celebrated by an authorised minister.⁵⁸

1.6.1.8 Conducting case study interviews

I applied the same principles for the case study interviews as I did for the consultation. These interviews explored the information that participants had disclosed in the basic survey. To guide my own questioning, I developed a personal checklist (Appendix F) of areas that might be relevant. This was based on the insights of Harding (2013)⁵⁹, who suggests that researchers generate richer data by asking questions that are motivational, amplificatory, exploratory, explanatory and clarificatory. Matching the participant's initial responses with the checklist also helped me to question what might be the most valuable use of my time; what statements had the participant made (wither on paper or in general conversation), or what specific expertise might they bring that could help me understand the project's needs?

1.6.1.9 Processing Case Study Observations and Interviews

For Aspire and messy church I journaled on a monthly basis, noting down significant conversations and events. This process was made easier by logging conversations or meetings in my diary, so that I could reflect on them later. This resulting in a rolling document where it became easy to note where the same themes repeated in different scenarios. For the interviews, I used the same checklist as for the consultation. Once again, brief answers to these questions were used to summarise each point which surfaced in the interview, and each point was transferred to card system, allowing me to sift

⁵⁸ Joint Anglican Methodist Working Party on the Ecclesiology of Emerging Fresh Expressions of Church (JAMWPEEC), *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* (London: Church House Publishing, 2011), 178-179 & 181-183.

⁵⁹ Jamie Harding, *Qualitative Data Analysis from Start to Finish* (London: SAGE, 2013). Harding cites Monique M. Hennink, Ajay Bailey, and Inge Hutter, *Qualitative Research Methods* (London: SAGE, 2011); R. Legard, L. Keegan, and K. Ward, "In Depth Interviews," in *Qualitative Research Practice : A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*, ed. Jane Ritchie and Jane Lewis (Thousand Oaks, Calif. ; London: Sage, 2003).

through the data and discern where the same phenomena was evidenced in different contexts. The final step of the exercise was to cross reference the case study observations with the interview data, and vice versa.

1.7 Reviewing the Methodology and the Analysis

One of the most prominent and early questions that I asked when developing this methodology was whether it was possible for me, a presbyter, to conduct research in contexts where I had an investment? How might my pastoral responsibility to the participants, my oversight responsibility to my seniors, and my very identity as a minister impact the research? My approach addressed these questions by making participants aware that I was a presbyter first, and a researcher second. There would be no difference in how I kept confidences and acted with discretion. One key question is what could go wrong? Would my role as a minister impact the research in a negative way? Would respondents be more, or less open owing to my presbyteral identity? My conviction is that the former is true, and that my identity gave credibility to the research (because I understood the context), and helped establish trust. My pastoral-mentoring role, and the fact that I was able to observe for a long period of time, gave rise to a depth in the research, and helped me develop thick descriptions. Any internal conflict resulting from the closing interviews made at Animate were made easier by the fact that I had moved circuits and no longer had pastoral charge. Without this pastoral-mentoring relationship, generating data in the second case study centre took longer. Even so, the fact that my role was different in each case study centre gives my research greater rigour, because I made my observations from different perspectives.

An additional concern was that even though at Animate I ministered with a 'high accountability, light touch' approach, I was still influential in the decisions that the group made. My instinct was that I should be completely detached. However, I also recognised that this was permitted within other research methods, such as Participatory Action Research, where research and action is an activity to

be carried out with people and not for people, and where communities of enquiry and action evolve.⁶⁰ Here, researchers work alongside teams of professionals and measure how changes to process, practice and discipline help an organisation achieve a particular goal. Animate was a living project. Its leaders sought to fulfil the Fresh Expressions ideal, and I shared in this task with them.

In terms of the volume of data that my methods generated, whilst the response to the basic survey (which was circulated among leaders), the consultation, and the online survey on engagement at Animate were pleasing, the response to the online survey at messy church was low. I cannot account for this. Even so, one advantage of this methodology is that it allows for a measure of redundancy. Whilst the online survey at messy church comprised only three respondents, I was able to discern how people were engaging by other means; through observation, conversation and more formal interviews. Also, the focus of the online survey was narrow and represented just one aspect of oversight, whereas the main focus of this thesis is how CPD impacts fresh expressions. In terms of the case studies, my journaling gave rise to copious notes that began with an observation and questioned what themes might be emerging. One challenge was managing the sheer volume of data. One advantage of my methodology was that it allowed me to process material and form theories during the research phase, whilst suspending complete judgement.

In terms of scope, the consultation was eventually circulated across three districts. I would have preferred for it to have included more people from ethnic minority backgrounds, who may have been able to offer insights on the contrasting cultural attitudes that were in operation within the Church. The number of women who were in leadership was low. However, District Chair suggested that this reflected the low number of women in Church leadership. Ultimately, this research was

⁶⁰ See Peter Reason and Hillary Bradbury (eds.), *Handbook of Action Research: Participatory Inquiry and Practice* (London: SAGE Press, 2008), 1.

never intended to be representative of what might be happening across the wider Church. I did hope, however, to generate insights that were worthy of further investigation.

This research blended a small degree of quantitative research with a much larger body of qualitative work. In fact, even the most quantitative survey (which explored engagement at Animate and messy church), contained large sections to allow for qualitative input. Cohen *et al* state that validity and reliability are two key factors in assessing the value of any given piece of research. For *valid* quantitative research, survey construction must be neutral in the sense that the way in which questions are put should not bias the outcome. Results must be replicable and provide a basis for predicting attitudes and events across a larger whole.⁶¹ For *reliable* quantitative research, the method needs to be stable: there must be a consistency in how data is measured. For example, a survey cannot be taken over a long period where situational factors might distort the results. In the case of qualitative research, Cohen suggests that honesty, depth, richness and scope are significant contributors towards validity. The quality of the research is advanced further as the objectivity of the researcher increases, and as they triangulate their data to form conclusions. The concept of reliability for qualitative research however, remains deeply contested. Cohen states, the possibility of demonstrating reliability through replication is rendered impossible through 'the uniqueness and idiosyncrasy of situations'.⁶² This said, Cohen acknowledges the contributions made by Denzin and Lincoln⁶³ who suggest that, reliability in qualitative research can be addressed by (among other factors), establishing the *stability* of the observations; would the researcher have made the same observations and interpretations if they visited a second time. Additionally, reliability increases if

⁶¹ Cohen, 178. My interpretation.

⁶² Cohen, 202.

⁶³ Cohen, 202., citing Norman Denzin and Yvonne Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (London: Sage, 1994).

researchers have been open to *parallel forms* (paying attention to other phenomena rather than allowing one event to dominate their impressions). My methodology mitigates against these concerns by conducting multiple observations, and suspending judgement. A final mark of reliability is *inter-rater reliability*, would another researcher, using the same method, have observed as I did, and come to the same conclusion. This is a difficult question to answer, but the fact that the method requires the researcher to be openly reflexive and transparent, provides a further safeguard. Finally, whilst I am aware that this method could be questioned in any number of ways, I am encouraged by Cohen's statement that, 'It is impossible for research to be 100 percent valid; that is the optimism of perfection.'⁶⁴

In reviewing the analytical process, I have come to focus on two key questions. First, have I been objective? My response to this is to question whether a researcher can ever claim that they are completely objective. Instead, as Cohen suggests, it is important that researchers are honest about any bias that they might hold, and derive their conclusions from thick descriptions.⁶⁵ I am given confidence in my research from the fact that my research challenged my own normative assumptions; the circuit drives for mission in local churches; membership is a workable construct; the light touch is releasing. Also, I do not particularly like this thesis; as a practitioner who wants to support fresh expressions I am disappointed with the reality that so few projects had ecclesial intent. I am also uncomfortable with the intensity with which it challenges the wider Church. The second question is, 'Has this research methodology put a negative bias on my observations? Are, 'Why is what should be happening not happening?' and, 'Whose voices are silent or have been silenced?' helpful starting questions? I believe they are, particularly in examining oversight. However, I also

⁶⁴ Cohen, 179.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

note a difference between how the research generated strong examples of what was good in fresh expressions, and the observations, specifically relating to ecclesial formation, that I present in order to defend my three main contentions. Fresh expressions' practitioners were deeply committed, and their projects were transformative. There were excellent examples of fellowship, worship and teaching. Their parent churches were being challenged and enriched. However, this transformation did not extend to these fresh expressions becoming new churches.

1.8 Thesis Outline

The remainder of this thesis proceeds as follows:

The Literature Review is presented in Chapter Two. This demonstrates how Methodist presbyters serve in a context of general decline, in which they must sustain what they can whilst encouraging the development of fresh expressions. The call for Methodism to rediscover its roots as a 'discipleship movement shaped for mission' raises questions about what distinguishes a movement from a church. Should Methodists identify with the independence and freedom that a range of Methodist denominations experienced after the death of John Wesley, or the United Church that emerged following the Deed of Union in 1932? I find, on reflection, that much of Methodist ecclesiology and practice is a blend of Anglicanism and Moravianism in which orthopraxis has, at times, been given a greater weight than orthodoxy. I outline in detail the findings of Jo Cox, Bell and Lindridge's call for fresh expressions to be nurtured through special oversight measures, and the findings of *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*.

In Chapters Three and Four the issue of culture becomes much more prominent as I outline my observations and experiences at each of the centres where I undertook ethnographic research. I begin each chapter with a list of findings, specially intended to provide insight and direction to other practitioners. By the end of Chapter Four, areas of common concern become clear. In Chapter Five, I

summarise the findings of the consultation on CPD. I demonstrate those areas of Methodist practice and discipline that are already a challenge for this small sample of leaders working in inherited church settings. I then highlight areas where CPD may prove even harder to apply in fresh expressions contexts and how, when the wider church raises questions about fresh expressions, it inadvertently highlights its own shortcomings. I demonstrate how presbyters who are not supportive of fresh expressions can use CPD to inhibit development. I also demonstrate how the superintendent's role is crucial. The chapter closes with a deeper reflection on how differences in cultural perspective and patterns of worship may account for some of the difficulties faced by the Methodist Church. In Chapter Six I summarise by demonstrating how my thesis is supported by evidence on multiple fronts. In line with Osmer's question, 'What should be happening?' I return to the *Nature of Oversight* and focus on the question of how the Church enables a subsidiarity that is effective. I conclude by offering six suggestions for immediate action. I concede that whilst my observations and conclusions may not necessarily be true across other areas of the British Methodist Connexion, they do warrant further work.

I.9 Table I: Whitehead, Osmer and Leach: A combined Methodology

Key: Data attainable from LR (Lit. Review), CS (Case Study), C (Consultation)

WHITEHEAD & WHITEHEAD	KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS	INSIGHTS FROM OSMER	INSIGHTS FROM LEACH
<p>Attending to Religious Tradition</p>	<p>What is it to be Methodist and what is the nature of Methodist oversight and discipline? (LR, C)</p> <p>Given that CPD is such a key component of Methodist Religious Tradition, how might this be outlined and critiqued? (LR, CS, C)</p> <p>What is the theology and vision of Fresh Expressions? (LR, CS, C)</p> <p>What other traditions have influenced this? (LR)</p> <p>What of Methodist Tradition elsewhere in the world. How does the practice and disciplines of other conferences differ? (LR, C)</p>	<p>Osmer suggests that different types of congregations tend towards conflict in contrasting ways dependent on the numbers present and the context in which they serve. How do the needs of fresh expressions congregations differ from those of the inherited Church? What impact does this have on how the mixed economy? (LR, CS, C)</p> <p>Leadership is exercised through a mix of expertise and communication, both individually and/or collaboratively. What differences might exist in how leaders communicate? Where are the formal and informal authorities, and how do they act? What impact might this have on how Methodist authority figures and process is received? (CS, C)</p>	<p>What ethic[s] are being practised in any fresh expressions and what is their implicit theology/ideology? (CS, C)</p> <p>What Biblical texts resonate or set up a challenge in this encounter/situation? Why are those texts used as opposed to others? (LR, C)</p> <p>What has the Methodist Church said about fresh expressions? (LR, C)</p> <p>How helpful/realistic is the stance taken for dealing with this situation? (LR, CS, C)</p> <p>What other theological resources can I bring to bear? (LR, C)</p>

WHITEHEAD & WHITEHEAD	KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS	INSIGHTS FROM OSMER	INSIGHTS FROM LEACH
<p>Attending to Culture</p> <p>'Convictions, values and biases that form the social setting in which the reflection takes place.'</p>	<p>What is the culture of the inherited church? (LR, CS, C)</p> <p>What cultural sensitivities exist in fresh expressions? (LR, CS)</p>	<p>Our preunderstanding of fresh expressions may be based on inaccurate assumptions. I will look for where the research exposes this. How do these examples help us see things anew? What are the challenges of applying CPD in fresh expressions? (LR, CS, C)</p> <p>Sees leadership in three forms; competence (in tasks), transactional leadership – a sense of reciprocity and mutual exchange (meeting needs in exchange for support, or politically trading one thing off against another), and transformational leadership (deep change) –whereby the identity of an organisation is completely rediscovered. People resist change if it is likely to lose power or control. Moving from an old pattern to a new one, feels chaotic – this is where conflict, failure and dissatisfaction surface. Leaders have to change to model the new behaviours. (LR, CS)</p>	<p>Whose voices are part of the conversation?</p> <p>What are they saying?</p> <p>What feelings are being expressed?</p> <p>Whose voices are absent or being silenced?</p> <p>Whose voices are being mediated by someone else and how does that nuance them?</p> <p>What trends in culture are exemplified here?</p> <p>What kinds of human behaviour are exhibited here?</p> <p>How has the past shaped the present?</p> <p>(All – LR, CS & C but CS will generate original data.)</p>

WHITEHEAD & WHITEHEAD	KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS	INSIGHTS FROM OSMER	INSIGHTS FROM LEACH
Attending to experience	<p>What has been the experience of Church leaders who have overseen fresh expressions work? (LR, CS, C)</p> <p>What has been the experience of fresh expressions practitioners? (LR, C)</p> <p>What of my own experiences? (CS)</p>	How is hierarchical-pastoral authority being received by fresh expressions? (LR, CS, C)	<p>What is my role? How do I feel? (CS)</p> <p>Where do I locate myself in relation to the issues that are emerging? (CS)</p> <p>What are my instincts about the real issues here - where do these instincts come from? (CS)</p>
Assertion: (Bringing perspectives into dialogue)	<p>What specific tensions exist between Methodist discipline and this experience? (LR, CS, C)</p> <p>What fundamental issues are at the core of these tensions? (LR, CS, C)</p>	<p>What should be happening? What is happening? Why is this happening? What is to be done about it?</p> <p>(LR, CS, C but CS and C should generate original data)</p>	<p>Raises the profile of thinking pastorally as opposed to procedurally. ((CS and C)</p> <p>Emphasises the need to interlink thoughtfulness (which is consideration and kindness as opposed to impatience and irritation) with theoretical interpretation (which includes a nuanced understanding of situations where complexity is embraced and simplistic views are challenged. What are the simplistic assumptions surrounding fresh expressions and the church? (LR, CS, C)</p>

WHITEHEAD & WHITEHEAD	KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS	INSIGHTS FROM OSMER	INSIGHTS FROM LEACH
Responding	<p>What can be done? (C)</p> <p>Review of what we still do not know and therefore areas for further research. (LR)</p>	<p>Osmer draws on Niebuhr’s moral philosophy in which to be able to discern what to do, one needs to know what is happening in the first place. Osmer argues that when leaders are presented with a diverse mix of opinions and values, the concept of responsibility becomes more important than obedience to the letter of the law. This seems to link with the tension evident in much of the literature, between orthopraxis and orthodoxy. How do each inform the other as tradition develops? (C)</p> <p>Osmer refers to Elaine Graham’s work on transforming practice, whereby the focus of pastoral care needs to be on transformation, and how this might be achieved through good practice suited for particular rather than generic contexts. (CS, C)</p>	<p>Wise judgement is about phrenosis – practical wisdom and prudence. In fresh expressions how might phrenosis conflict with the wider disciplines of the Church? (LR, CS, C)</p>

Chapter Two

Fresh Expressions in the Tradition of the Methodist Church: an exploration of the synergy and disparity between Fresh Expressions Tradition and Methodist Experience.

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2.0 Literature review: Perspective, Method, Scope and Depth

For this literature review, I have refined the Whiteheads' categories into three points. This provides a means by which I can examine and interrogate the literature and force a dialogue between the Nature of Methodist Oversight and the vision of Fresh Expressions.

In the first section, *Fresh Expressions Tradition*, I survey the literature produced by Fresh Expressions and many of its practitioners. I explore the origins of the movement and the advice given by Fresh Expressions through its training course, *Mission Shaped Ministry*. I outline how the vision for a mixed economy developed. I highlight some of the deeper reservations that have been raised by academics and/or church leaders.

In the second section, *Methodist Tradition and Oversight*, I will focus on a number of characteristics that are distinctive to Methodism; the centrality of CPD, how Methodists understand and experience oversight, the role of its presbyters, the place and status of the class meeting, and how, over the past decade, the Church has committed to 'reshaping for mission.' Crucially, I will show how fresh expressions have impacted the church and are challenging the scope of presbyteral ministry.

In the final section, *Recent Methodist Experience and Debate* I examine three documents that are particularly challenging; Cox's research on pioneer ministry, the VFX scheme review, and *Fresh Expressions and the Mission of the Church* (a report produced by the Joint Anglican Working Party on Emerging Ecclesiologies of Church (JAMWPEEC). This remains the most recent review of how both denominations are progressing in respect of fresh expressions. Significantly, it explores the ecclesiological questions that are emerging and questions how these relate to current Church practice and discipline.

It is important to acknowledge what this review does not include. First, as per my method, I do not consider Culture as a separate category of analysis alongside Tradition and Experience. Neither does

this review explore how Fresh Expressions may have been influenced by the Emerging Church tradition.⁶⁶ Second, this review examines the literature concerning the relationship between fresh expressions and their parent churches, particularly in respect of how fresh expressions are adhering to Church process and discipline. I also focus more on insights that are grounded in academic research, as opposed to those that appear within a much broader volume of what might be termed popular literature on fresh expressions. Whilst this is informative, its primary purpose is to present the vision and theology that is behind Fresh Expressions, reinforced with an examples of good news stories, in such a way that encourages practitioners and churches. Rarely (if ever) is this material written from a position that seeks to constructively critique the movement by highlighting areas where tensions and conflict between local leaders, projects and their sponsor churches have frustrated ecclesial development - apart from in the broadest terms. Third, this review is written from the perspective of presbyters who have 'pastoral charge'. Whilst the Methodist Church's Diaconal Order asserts itself as a 'pioneering religious community committed to enabling outreach, evangelism, and service', I will not explore how deacons might contribute to the staffing and oversight of fresh expressions.⁶⁷ Whilst deacons might be able to make an attractive contribution to fresh expressions (they are free from many of the ecclesial tasks that are carried out exclusively by ministers), deacons do not have pastoral charge. Fourth, this review does not explore those fresh expressions where the Methodist Church and other denominations share oversight of any given

⁶⁶ For further reading consider, "Are 'Fresh Expressions' the Same as 'Emerging Church'?", <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/guide/about/whatis>. See also, D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church : Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids.: Zondervan, 2005), Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I Am a Missional, Evangelical, Post/Protestant, Liberal/Conservative, Mystical/Poetic, Biblical, Charismatic/Contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Green, Incarnational, Depressed-yet-Hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished Christian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004). "One, Holy, Catholic and Fresh," In *Fresh Expressions in the Sacramental Tradition*, edited by Steven J. L. Croft and Ian J. Mobsby, (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2009). Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Communities in Postmodern Cultures* (London: SPCK, 2006). Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come : Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003). Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church : Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003); Mike Yaconelli, *Stories of Emergence: Moving from Absolute to Authentic* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003).

⁶⁷ See "Methodist Diaconal Order," The Methodist Church, <http://www.methodistdiaconalorder.org.uk/>.

fresh expression. This would require a much deeper study on the nature of oversight as understood from each denominations' perspective, and how, where differences in ecclesial practice become evident, presbyters have been able to reach a consensus.

2.1 Fresh Expressions Tradition

2.1.1 Breaking New Ground and Mission Shaped Church

Fresh Expressions originated from the evangelical wing of the Church of England, somewhat paradoxically, following concerns raised within the wider Church about church planting practice.⁶⁸ The principal anxiety was that some initiatives were proceeding without the approval of the bishops and the local clergy. By 1994, the Church had published the findings of a working party, set up to explore this, in the form of *Breaking New Ground*.⁶⁹ Whilst this unearthed only four examples of irregularity, the stories of church planting highlighted important issues; 'the legal position of church plants, the authorisation of leaders, the use of buildings, relationships with the diocese and other Churches, permitted forms of worship, and Anglican identity'.⁷⁰ Whilst King suggests that one of these events had the potential to undermine the Anglican Church planting movement nationally,⁷¹ *Breaking New Ground* affirmed church planting as a supplementary strategy to the parish principle, and called for a collaborative and co-ordinated response. Almost a decade later, a review of *Breaking New Ground*, *Mission Shaped Church* (hereafter referred to as 'MSC') considered that the nature of community had changed so much that parishes needed to view church planting as an imperative rather than optional component of local ministry; 'The existing parochial system alone is no longer able fully to deliver its underlying mission purpose.'⁷² MSC associated the decline of the

⁶⁸ See George Lings, "A History of Fresh Expressions and Church Planting in the Church of England," in *Church Growth in Britain : 1980 to the Present*, ed. David Goodhew (Farnham : Ashgate, 2012). Fresh Expressions now has an increasingly international following. See <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/international>.

⁶⁹ *Breaking New Ground : Church Planting in the Church of England, a Report Commissioned by the House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England*, (London: Church House Publishing, 1994).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, v.

⁷¹ Philip King, "Bishops, Church Planters, Mission Shaped Partnership," in *Fulcrum*, 2006, http://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/articles/bishops-church-planters-mission-shaped-partnerships/#_edn1.

⁷² Graham Cray, ed. *Mission-Shaped Church : Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (London: Church House, 2004). See also Stuart Murray; *Church after Christendom* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2004); *Post-Christendom, After Christendom* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004); *A Vast Minority : Christians in Post-Christendom Britain* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2015).

Church with the passing of Christendom and the rise of post-Christendom.⁷³ Changes in housing, employment, mobility, family life, and entertainment had influenced communities in a manner that challenged the historic base and geographic boundaries that once defined them. This was complicated further by an increase in social networking. The Archbishops of Canterbury and York, alongside the Methodist Council, responded to these changes by establishing Fresh Expressions as a separate charity to encourage new forms of church.⁷⁴ Missioners needed to enculture the gospel in a way that was appropriate for these alternative contexts. MSC firmly rejects the 'cloning' model of church planting – whereby practitioners assume that model of church that has been successful in one locality, can be transplanted elsewhere, with no consideration for differences in community and culture. Church planters needed to shape their emerging church communities around the needs of the people, rather than expecting people to conform to the 'normal patterns' of church worship and fellowship.⁷⁵

Fresh Expressions grounds its argument in the Trinity; new churches will be missional⁷⁶, incarnational⁷⁷, formational⁷⁸, and ecclesial⁷⁹. They will exhibit the four classic marks of Church; as One (through baptism and common discipleship), Holy (dying to self for the sake of mission),

⁷³ For a fuller description see Robin Gill, *The "Empty" Church Revisited : Explorations in Practical, Pastoral, and Empirical Theology* (Farnham : Ashgate, 2003). As to the complex link that exists between belief and affiliation, see Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945 : Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); *Religion in Britain: A Persistent Paradox*, Second Edition (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2015), and Matthew Guest, Elizabeth Olsen, and John Wolffe, "Christianity: Loss of Monopoly," in *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*, ed. Linda Woodhead and Rebecca Catto (London ; New York: Routledge, 2012).

⁷⁴ Cray, *Mission-Shaped*, 23.

⁷⁵ "Is there a difference between fresh expressions and church plants?," Fresh Expressions, <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/ask/planting>. Also, "Fresh Expressions: Culture - a Different Approach to Church," Fresh Expressions, <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/category/story-tags/culture>.

⁷⁶ Cray, *Mission-Shaped*, 79-80.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

Catholic (inclusive and diverse) and Apostolic (sent).⁸⁰ They emphasise particular values; living is incarnational ('dying to live' in response to the needs of others); engagement with the community is authentic in that it looks to bring about transformation; relationships are encouraged by a strong focus on welcome, hospitality and intimacy.⁸¹ 'Church' is not somewhere that the community gathers: it is where the community is headed.⁸²

2.1.2 Mission Shaped Ministry & the training of fresh expressions practitioners

The MSM course material is available only to those who register for what has become a year-long course incorporating twenty-four sessions spread over six weekday evenings, three Saturdays and one residential weekend.⁸³ So far, the course has run 115 times across the U.K., with over 3,600 participants.⁸⁴ In essence, Fresh Expressions encourages local leaders to learn from the pattern of discipleship in the gospels⁸⁵ and the nature of the early church in Acts.⁸⁶ Its authors underpin this by drawing from *missio Dei*, stressing the need for forms of culturally sensitive community engagement. This is incorporated with teaching material produced by the Anglican Church Planting initiative.

In relation to the link between fresh expressions and the wider church, MSM gives little priority to exploring the benefits and risks of denominational affiliation.⁸⁷ In my view, it is forced to underplay

⁸⁰ Ibid., 96-99.

⁸¹ Ibid., 81-82.

⁸² For a more comprehensive outline of Fresh Expressions tradition, see Michael Moynagh and Philip Harrold, *Church for Every Context: An Introduction to Theology and Practice* (London: SCM Press, 2012), and Michael Moynagh, *Being Church Doing Life* (Oxford: Monarch, 2014).

⁸³ Fresh Expressions also offer an introductory course; "Mission Shaped Intro," Fresh Expressions, <http://course.missionshapedministry.org/login/index.php>.

⁸⁴ *Mission Shaped Ministry*, Fresh Expressions, <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/missionshapedministry>.

⁸⁵ "B04 – Members Handout." MSM, 3.

⁸⁶ The course refers to the Apostle Paul's founding of churches and the call to prayer in Colossians 4:2-18. B05 – *Members handout*, 5.

⁸⁷ MSM includes only four references to the word 'denomination'. '...many denominations have affirmed this movement (A01 Intro. 3.) 'Denominations and new churches are engaging with processes of change'. (A02 Additional Notes. 1.) 'Emerging Church is not one single unified movement, and is not contained in any one denomination.' (A02 Additional Notes. 5.) 'This vision is being explored and owned across many

this because Fresh Expressions contends that the institutional church is struggling in its mission. The movement wants to give hope to those people who whilst being sceptical of the institution, see potential for success if people can be freed from those practices, processes and disciplines that in their view, frustrate and inhibit development. Thus, too much focus on denominational affiliation, and in particular the need for fresh expressions leaders to submit to authority and adhere to regulation, potentially undermines this process. In *Vision and Call*, and drawing from Croft's *Transforming Communities* (2002), MSM states, 'Our horizon must be on the Kingdom of God rather than the extension of influence of a congregation or denomination.'⁸⁸ In *What is Church*, the question of denominational affiliation is not raised until after the bibliography, when participants are encouraged to select from a menu of opportunities for further study and reflection.⁸⁹ The last one reads:

Are you in your denomination or stream because you agree with its beliefs and practices more than those of other denominations? If not, what are your reasons for being part of it? How do you understand loyalty, order and being under authority? Consider how these will work out as you plant a fresh expression.⁹⁰

Elsewhere, in the *Share Booklet: What should we Start?* the word 'denomination' is not used, but practitioners are urged to 'listen to friends and the local church':

denominations and streams of church in the UK and worldwide.' (A02 Members Handout. 10.) A02. This also states, 'No-one is suggesting out with the old, in with the new. Traditional church still has an effective role to play among those with a Christian background who know what they like and like what they know'.

⁸⁸ Steven J. L. Croft, *Transforming Communities : Re-Imagining the Church for the 21st Century* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2002). 38-40. In "Additional Notes, A04," *MSM*, 3.

⁸⁹ "A08 - Members Handout," *MSM*, 15.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

This is easily forgotten, but is a vital part of the discerning process. Who are you acting on behalf of? Has anyone authorized what you are doing?...Ask the local church and/or your friends for prayer support. God may [sic.] speak through them to help your discernment. So keep them up to date with what you are discovering and seek your reactions.⁹¹

At the same time, the local church is also presented as a mixed blessing:

Some pioneers find that one of their biggest headaches is their relationships with the local church. They encounter misunderstanding, unrealistic expectations, and often suspicion. Managing these responses is helped by explaining constantly what you are doing, attending to the reaction and then showing that you have listened. Trust grows when people feel that they have been understood.⁹²

Thus, whilst Fresh Expressions emphasizes the importance of remaining faithful to Christian Tradition, it is coy about how projects should be committed to local churches and their denominations.

2.1.3 Oversight and coaching

In terms of leadership within fresh expressions, MSM suggests that normal protocols might not apply. *Mission Context and the Mixed Economy* states:

Who leads? Will it be lay or ordained, full-time or voluntary leadership? The key is not what is the 'done thing' but who the community will relate to best.⁹³

Nonetheless, MSM does stress that project leaders should to be accountable to a wider authority, citing Sue Hope, who writes in *Mission Shaped Spirituality*:

I have often observed a pattern which emerges in the life of those who receive a vision from God to do something - and that is a process whereby the vision is purged of the 'ego' of the originator/s of the vision. For example, someone has a vision of starting an

⁹¹ Michael Moynagh and Andy Freeman, *Exploring Fresh Expressions of Church Together: What Should We Start?*, ed. Karen Carter (Warwick: Fresh Expressions, 2011), 7.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ "Unit A02, Mission Context and the Mixed Economy," *MSM*, 6.

outreach and shares it and sometimes a PCC/church leadership will say, 'Yes but not yet'/'Yes, but it needs to be shared with a wider group and not just be about you ...' Sometimes when the vision is shared among a wider group, it changes - other people enlarge, refine the original idea. This can be painful for the original person/persons. But the process is one of letting the grain of wheat of the original idea fall into the ground and die. It is not the possession of the visionary. When it dies, it then bears much fruit.⁹⁴

Hopkins and Headley give an indication of the complex dynamics that can be at work in fresh expressions as different forms of authority are in play; positional, expertise, spiritual and relational. These need to complement each other. MSM also turns to *Planters Problems* for insights as to why projects fail.⁹⁵ 'Fixed mindsets, poor planning, issues of leadership, being inward focused, poor engagement and evangelism, cultural blindness, lack of team dynamics, the team not being effectively released or being under-resourced' – all of these are cited as reasons for failure.⁹⁶

MSM is less concerned about the nature of the relationship between the presbyter who has pastoral charge and the project leaders, and focuses more on the spiritual and practical dynamics of group leadership. The course draws from Belbin's model of how roles combine in a team, and encourages participants to reflect on their natural behaviour and to discern their individual strengths.⁹⁷ MSM also turns to Breen's *LifeShapes*⁹⁸ as a tool by which leaders can critique their work-life balance, relationships, priorities, prayer and personal devotions. It then progresses to help leadership teams discern their missional focus. Breen suggests that every group will journey through four stages;

⁹⁴ "Vision and Call, Handout A04," MSM, 9. Citing Susan Hope, *Mission-Shaped Spirituality : The Transforming Power of Mission* (New York: Seabury Books, 2006).

⁹⁵ Bob Hopkins, "Planters Problems", Anglican Church Planting Initiatives, <http://www.acpi.org.uk/articles/PlantersProblems.pdf>.

⁹⁶ Bob Hopkins and Freddie Hedley, eds., *Coaching for Missional Leadership* (Sheffield: ACPI, 2008), 153.

⁹⁷ In addition to R. M. Belbin, *Team Roles at Work*, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam ; London: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2010), MSM refers to Steve Chalke and Penny Relph, *Making a Team Work* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1995), David Cormack, *Team Spirit: People Working Together* (Oxford: Monarch, 1990), Bryn Hughes, *Leadership Tool Kit* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 2002) and John Maxwell, *The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork: Embrace Them and Empower Your Team (New Edition)* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001).

⁹⁸ "Vision and Call, Handout A04," 60-73.

biblical revelation (as leaders discern God's calling); dependence (on the wider church), counter-dependence (as differences within the team bring about tensions), independence (team members may feel unable to process these tensions), and Inter-dependence (when the third phase is overcome).

Hopkins points out the weaknesses of a (presumably Anglican) inherited church ecclesiology that puts the minister at the centre and encourages a model of working in which the minister speaks only with one person. He urges for a more collaborative model of working. Fresh expressions leaders are encouraged to find a coach or mentor. Hopkins and Headley define coaching as,

intentionally helping someone else perform to their highest potential... helping people to unlock someone's potential in pursuit of their goals... helping people be successful... where success is knowing God's will for your life and putting it into practice.⁹⁹

One important coaching skill is to help leaders or groups to discover *for themselves*, through the sharing and re-reading of situations, things that they do not know. *Coaching* also recognises that diverse patterns of learning may be present; visual, auditory, kinaesthetic and prophetic/instinctive learning. MSM contrasts coaching against line-management (ensuring accountability), self-development (which is about the individual rather than the project) and spiritual direction (whereby participant's journey with God is encouraged). The quality of relationship between both parties is crucial; both the person who has oversight¹⁰⁰ and the coachee must share the same goal and believe that by working together they can achieve it.¹⁰¹

Historically, for Methodists the language of 'coaching' or 'mentoring' has been largely absent from discussions about Christian formation. Instead, 'pastoral supervision' is the most commonly used

⁹⁹ Hopkins and Headley, *Coaching*, 25, citing Robert Logan, Sherilyn Carlton & Tara Miller in *Coaching 101: Discover the power of coaching* (Illinois: Churchsmart, 2003).

¹⁰⁰ I have used 'oversight' here rather than 'coaching'.

¹⁰¹ Hopkins and Headley, *Coaching*, 34.

term. It refers to the model of support that superintendents or other accompanists are required to provide for probationer ministers up until the point of ordination. However, by January 2015, the Church had trained and was in the process of appointing sixty 'pioneer coaches', using the Webb Coaching Model.¹⁰² These specialists will be distributed across eleven Fresh Ways Hubs that have been dedicated to enabling people in circuits (often volunteers but increasingly employed staff) who feel called to work exclusively among unchurched people.

Despite this progress, two prominent issues remain. First, whilst Hopkin's definition of coaching is inherent in some aspects of pastoral oversight, the term coaching implies coaches passing on and helping practitioners to develop a particular skill. Yet few presbyters will have the necessary expertise to advise people on how to plant new churches. Whilst the Webb model is useful in that it focuses on helping practitioners discern the outcomes that they are looking for, and discern what practical steps they could take to achieve them, it is not a source of training, or a model that permits the coach to be directive. Secondly, these coaches would not be able to focus exclusively on their task – it would be an addition to their current roles within circuits and districts.

2.1.4 Beginning a fresh expression

New forms of church can emerge in a number of ways; through the renewal of existing congregations as they listen to non-churchgoers; by reinventing an existing fringe group; by creating a new community, or by developing a new network church spanning several parishes or circuits. The fresh expression website categorically states that fresh expressions are not an old project with a new name or 'bridge' projects that point people to 'proper' church.¹⁰³ Thus, the challenge for Methodist presbyters is fourfold. First, they need to educate the wider church on the nature of fresh

¹⁰² Keith Webb, "The Coach Model," <http://keithwebb.com/coach-model/>.

¹⁰³ Fresh Expressions website, "What Is a Fresh Expression?" See also, Michael Moynagh and Andy Freeman, *Exploring Fresh Expressions of Church Together: How Can Fresh Expressions Emerge?*, ed. Karen Carter (Warwick: Fresh Expressions, 2011). Moynagh, Freeman and Carter have also authored/edited, *How Can We Get Support?*, *How Can We Be a Great Team?*, *How Can We Find Our Way?*

expressions and in particular, the notion that a fresh expression should be a missional-ecclesial unit rather than a mission-project intended to address a particular need. Significantly, MSM distinguishes between the concept of communities thinking of themselves as 'church' and argues that they should be constantly focused on 'becoming' church. Thus, the vision is one in which Christian eschatology is being realised, rather than being caught in a state of inertia and resistant to change. Importantly, Fresh Expressions encourages these emerging Christian communities to incorporate baptism and communion from the earliest opportunity. Second, presbyters need to oversee a process wherein newcomers discover the Christian faith, learn what it is to live in Christian community, and grow as disciples. Third, they need to help adherents develop an understanding of what makes the Methodist Church distinctive and how the wider church functions. Finally, presbyters must encourage those who attend to have faith not just in God, but in the practices and disciplines of the Methodist Church. Implicit to all of this is the need to balance autonomy and freedom with accountability to the whole.

2.1.5 Effective Engagement

Although Kirby does not feature within MSM, his insights are particularly relevant to the question of how presbyters can oversee effective engagement. In his *Pitsmoor Cycle*¹⁰⁴, and drawing from his experience as a Church Army Officer, Kirby reflects on the process by which people belong and invite newcomers to attend fresh expressions. He theorises that engagement can be understood through a cycle of experiencing God (in the sense of feeling blessed and a sense of belonging), understanding God (experienced as 'belief') and behavioural change (reinforced by a mixture of rituals and daily practice in the form of attendance, ceremonies, bible reading, care and service). Whilst the importance of these three emphases is not in dispute, the issue of whether newcomers belong and

¹⁰⁴ Jeff and Vanessa Kirby, "The Pitsmoor Cycle."

then believe, or vice-versa, is. Davie in her *Religion in Britain* (1994)¹⁰⁵ argues that many people believe yet choose not to belong, leaving a latency of belief that is (among others) either depressed, assumed or expressed clearly. In her *Religion in Britain: A Persistent Paradox* (2015)¹⁰⁶, Davie notes whilst much affiliation in the Church of England is nominal, that does not make it meaningless.

2.1.6 Insights on sustainability, accountability and failures

Williams in her *Fresh Expressions in the Urban Context*¹⁰⁷ surveys thirty-one Anglican and one Methodist fresh expressions leaders. She found that some fresh expressions required leaders with specific key-skills in, for example, the ability to present 'up-front', or to compile and manage visual and audio presentations. She also noted that many of these individuals had additional church, family or work commitments which limited their involvement. Despite this, many participants were prepared to commit to their fresh expression for the long-term; common responses to questions about how long they intended to remain included, 'Until God calls me elsewhere' or 'As long as it takes'.¹⁰⁸ Their logic was that they needed to remain until the point at which their fresh expression had developed a core of indigenous leadership which would sustain them in the future. Many participants held the view that growth would not be evident until after five years, and that this therefore was the absolute minimum length of any appointment, voluntary or otherwise.

Williams discovered that many fresh expressions practitioners valued their link with the wider church:

Almost without exception, the leaders of the fresh expressions spoke of their support from the wider church alongside a need for accountability structures. It was felt that this needed to be set in place intentionally, so that it was functioning as a framework that

¹⁰⁵ Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945*.

¹⁰⁶ Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain: A Persistent Paradox*, Second ed., (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2015).

¹⁰⁷ Eleanor Williams, *Fresh Expressions in the Urban Context* (Haverhill: YTC press, 2007).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

was present if and when a crisis occurred, rather than have to put something in place where there was a problem.¹⁰⁹

Perhaps unsurprisingly, William's research suggests that the sustainability of fresh expressions is influenced by their finance, leadership, and accountability structures. She confirms what one would expect of a fresh expression planted in an area of multiple high deprivation indices, where local communities appear marginalised. First, there is an increase in the number of people having 'significant physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual needs' – surfacing as low self-esteem, apathy and a general lack of involvement. Leaders need to address this as part of the ongoing formation of both individuals and the community as a whole. This weaker base made it harder for leaders to identify and nurture new talent. Additionally, some projects were important but short lived. Funding was a major concern. The wider Church funded projects by a variety of means; through dioceses, circuits, districts, or charitable trusts, by the local church as it fundraises to meet the costs of staffing and/or through experienced and newly retired people who offer their time or expertise. Where grants are concerned, funding was often time limited. The administration required to prepare repeated funding applications took time and distracted leaders from their core tasks. Some fresh expressions took a more commercial route by setting up shops or cafes but rarely was this enough to support salaries. Another key issue was how in certain cases, funding was split for example between sending churches and a fresh expressions project which did not take account of how the demands of the fresh expression would change as it grew. This dual role then became unmanageable. A shortfall in funding led to the closure of one initiative. Williams also provided valuable information about where projects went wrong; some pioneers shaped Church in their own image, rather than adequately assessing the needs of the local community and creating a church in

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 61.

response. Alternatively, it is possible to be mission oriented and yet lack the marks of Church. She also noted instances where fresh expressions lacked proper oversight.¹¹⁰

Shoesmith visited 15 Anglican urban fresh expressions in 2009 and noticed some common issues.¹¹¹

The theological training and other expertise that leaders had gathered from their profession was rarely adequate for the task in hand. The support of leaders (through peers and mentors) was vital. Whether and how the sacraments were incorporated was significant; if an ordained leader came in from outside this tended to 'disrupt fragile relationships and make the sacrament feel like an optional extra'.¹¹² Finance, again, was a crux issue. Not all grant providers recognised the significance of small steps and low numbers. Literacy was a concern and finding appropriate resources for worship and training in discipleship was difficult. Membership within each fresh expression was low, owing to chaotic lifestyles, and different patterns of attendance (as opposed to regular weekly attendance) were apparent. Shoesmith reasoned that it will take 10-15 years for fresh expressions to become viable communities.

The question of the extent to which fresh expressions are indeed attracting new people and are ecclesial has been explored more beyond Methodism than within it. Walker in *Testing Fresh Expressions* (2014) surveys a range of fresh expressions in the Diocese of Canterbury. This led him to question whether fresh expressions were in fact helping reverse decline. In his view, fresh expressions did not have the unique role that the wider movement claims for them: they were 'clearly not discrete faith communities but a dimension of parish mission'. They did however have

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 130.

¹¹¹ Francis Shoesmith, "Exploring Fresh Expressions of Church in Deprived Areas: Report on Study Leave 2009," 9, <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/sites/default/files/franceshshoesmithsabbaticalreport2009.pdf>.

¹¹² Ibid., 3.

the capacity to reinvigorate the church, particularly where mission among children and the unchurched was concerned.¹¹³

2.1.7 The Mixed Economy

Archbishop Rowan Williams first used the term 'mixed economy' in response to the rapid growth of fresh expressions and arguably, a desire to ensure unity in the Church of England.¹¹⁴ Concerns have been raised by among others, Davison, Hull, Alison Milbank, John Milbank, Percy and Walton.¹¹⁵ One implicit anxiety has been that Fresh Expressions is an evangelical-liberal attack on traditionalism. For example, Hull (2006) has been concerned that Fresh Expressions are warping the Church of England's approach to mission by interpreting the *missio Dei* too narrowly. In his view, Fresh Expressions places too much emphasis on conversion and not enough on service or engaging with people of other faiths. Davison and Milbank (2010) have been troubled by how Fresh Expressions seemingly downplay the importance of historic holy space and traditional liturgy, whilst pandering to individualism and shallow consumerism. In general, those who are sceptical about Fresh Expressions view the decline of Christendom, nervousness about the future of the Church, the call for more contextual forms of church planting, and the weight given to cultural accommodation, as postmodern turbulence, rather than the winds of an oncoming storm that require urgent action.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ John Walker, *Testing Fresh Expressions : Identity and Transformation*, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 234.

¹¹⁴ "What Is the Mixed Economy?," Fresh Expressions, <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/guide/about/mixedeconomy>.

¹¹⁵ See Andrew Davison and Alison Milbank, *For the Parish. A Critique of Fresh Expression* (London: SCM Press, 2010). John M. Hull, *Mission-Shaped Church : A Theological Response* (London: SCM Press, 2006). Martyn Percy, *Power and the Church : Ecclesiology in an Age of Transition* (London: Cassell, 1998); John Milbank, "Stale Expressions: The Management Shaped Church," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 21, no. 1 (2008): 117-128. Roger Walton, "Have We Got the Missio Dei Right?," *Epworth Review* 35, no. 3 (2008): 39-52. 42.

¹¹⁶ For further information on the amorphous link between postmodernity and the emerging church, see, Jonny Baker, *Transforming Preaching : Communicating God's Word in a Postmodern World* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2009); Graham Cray, *The Post-Evangelical Debate* (London: Triangle, 1997); Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches : Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (London: SPCK, 2006); Graeme Fancourt, *Brand New Church? : The Church and the Postmodern Condition* (New York: SPCK, 2013); William D. Henard and Adam W. Greenway, *Evangelicals Engaging Emergent : A Discussion of the Emergent Church Movement* (Nashville: B&H, 2009); David Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland : Religion in Postmodern Times* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); Gordon Lynch, *Losing My Religion? Moving on from Evangelical Faith* (London: DLT, 2003); David Lyon,

They place greater faith in a broader church tradition that has lived through centuries of decline and growth. In a worst-case scenario, the dynamic is one of conservative-traditionalists quarrelling with liberal-progressives. The counter-argument to this is that the decline of the inherited church is beyond dispute – and no other credible alternative has emerged. It was into this dissonance that Williams launched his mixed economy construct; fresh expressions and inherited forms of Church can co-exist, respecting and supporting each other. In 2011, at the Fresh Expressions National Day Conference in Oxford, Williams stated:

So mixed economy – yes it’s one of those phrases I occasionally regret having coined. It keeps coming back ad nauseam... we’re not looking for a church which is a kind of Balkan map of little independent, autonomous, self-serving groups doing what they fancy, finding the style that suits them, which is always a danger... but much more a context in which there really is a flow of communication, good news and challenge between different styles of church life that may respond to different personalities and different stages on the journey.¹¹⁷

Fresh Expressions’ vision for the mixed economy is that it should echo the distinctive and mutually dependent work of the Trinity, reflect the diversity of creation, express the Eucharistic heart of the Church (belonging to one body), and draw strength from the patience of the Spirit.¹¹⁸ Lings, writing from a Church Army perspective, offers a complementary and practice based way of understanding the mixed economy, by revisiting Winter’s work on sodality and modality.¹¹⁹ In examining the

Jesus in Disneyland : Religion in Postmodern Times (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); Gordon Lynch, *After Religion : 'Generation X' and the Search for Meaning* (London: DLT, 2002); Brian D. McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side : Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2000); Dave Tomlinson, *The Post-Evangelical* (London: SPCK, 1995) and *Re-Enchanting Christianity: Faith in an Emerging Culture* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2008).

¹¹⁷ Rowan Williams, "Making the Mixed Economy Work," <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/2044/making-the-mixed-economy-work>.

¹¹⁸ "What is the Mixed Economy?," Fresh Expressions, <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/guide/about/mixedeconomy>.

¹¹⁹ George Lings, "Why modality and sodality thinking is vital to understand future church," Church Army, <http://www.churcharmy.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=138339>. Winter was a Protestant missiologist.

pattern of mission in Acts, Winter noted how two contrasting expressions of church were interrelated; a people-centred, 'modal', and a task centred 'sodal' form.¹²⁰ Lings suggests that any ecclesial community is likely to be a blend of the two and states, 'sodality pioneers what modality sustains...and modality provides resources that enable sodality to flourish'.¹²¹ Whilst this insight is helpful in affirming role and diversity, it does not sufficiently examine the question of what degree of separation should exist between fresh expressions and their sponsor church. Originally, Winter attributed the emergence of fresh and increasingly independent sodalities, to the fact that the existing models of church mission had become too modal:

by the early part of the 20th century, the once-independent structures which had been merely related to the denominations became dominated by the churches, that is administered, not merely regulated. Partly as a result... there was a new burst of totally separate mission sodalities called *Faith Missions*.¹²²

2.1.8 Pioneer Mission and Ministry

Currently the Methodist and Anglican Churches incorporate pioneer ministry under different structures. In Anglican settings, dioceses have the option to create Ordained Pioneer Ministry posts, with training institutions providing a different training package for ordinands, whereas in the Methodist Church pioneer ministry has been introduced through its much smaller VFX scheme. VFX has been a deliberate move to plant new forms of church for newcomers in between the ages of twenty and thirty, and has deployed fourteen workers across thirteen centres. Meanwhile, a second strand of pioneer is evolving as local churches incorporate aspects of pioneer ministry into new staff appointments, and as the wider Church develops a pioneering pathway to support local

¹²⁰ Ralph Winter, "The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission," 1973, 4-5, published by World Evangelical Alliance Resources, <http://www.world-evangelicals.org/resources/view.htm?id=436>.

¹²¹ Lings, "Modality," 4.

¹²² Winter, 8.

practitioners.¹²³ Two observations indirectly challenge how presbyteral ministry is presently exercised. First, VFX pioneers live in the communities that they serve, unlike presbyters who serve across a circuit. Second, they work in deeper partnership with a single local community, rather than across a range of communities.¹²⁴

*Fresh*¹²⁵ (co-authored by two Anglicans and one Methodist) considers the nature of pioneer identity by examining the Apostle Paul's character and ministry. *Fresh* resonates with the shared experiences of pioneers as outlined in *Pioneers for Life*.¹²⁶ Lings and Drane¹²⁷ were the first to explore this link but in *Fresh*, Goodhew, Roberts, and Volland deploy their argument in calling for the Anglican and Methodist Churches to identify more people who have apostolic gifts. In their view, pioneers have the potential to reinvigorate fragile communities and/or plant new churches.¹²⁸ *Fresh* explores the qualities that pioneers might bring; identifying opportunities; focusing and achieving; seeing differently; having the strength to challenge the view of others; creating social networks; acting boldly and having persistence. The authors suggest that pioneering people do not readily fit the stereotype of those who would typically be welcomed in the life of the Church. They also acknowledge that some entrepreneurs can also have unhelpful character traits such as personal ambition and a worldly approach to wealth creation for personal gain.

¹²³ "Methodist Pioneering Pathways," The Methodist Church, 2014, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/1246863/pioneer-pathways-report-140714.pdf>.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 160.

¹²⁵ David Goodhew, Andrew Roberts, and Michael Volland, eds., *Fresh! An Introduction to Fresh Expressions of Church and Pioneer Ministry* (London: SCM Press, 2012). For Methodist perspective, see Angela Shier-Jones, *Pioneer Ministry and Fresh Expressions of Church* (London: SPCK, 2009). For continued Anglican reflection see Cathy Ross and Jonny Baker, *The Pioneer Gift : Explorations in Mission* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2014); Steve Hollinghurst, *Starting, Assessing and Sustaining Pioneer Mission : A Guide for Pioneers, Permission-Givers and Local Churches*, Grove Evangelism Series, (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2013); Moynagh, *Being Church*.

¹²⁶ David Male, ed. *Pioneers 4 Life : Explorations in Theology and Wisdom for Pioneering Leaders* (Abingdon: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2011).

¹²⁷ John Drane, "From One Pioneer to Another: Insights from St Paul," in *Explorations*, 149-164.

¹²⁸ Goodhew, Roberts, and Volland, *Fresh*, 17.

2.1.9 Fresh Expressions literature and the wider church response

Fresh Expressions literature falls into one of three tiers. The first looks to encourage Churches and leaders to become mission-shaped and start fresh expressions. A second, much narrower band shows how some fresh expressions are drawing from catholic sacramentalism and tertiary monasticism. The third band of literature is more extensive, allowing both supporters and sceptics to share their reflections.

*Mission Shaped and Rural*¹²⁹, *Children*¹³⁰, *Spirituality*¹³¹ and *Youth*¹³² all form part of the first band and follow a similar pattern; show how the mission of Church was once successful but is now struggling to adapt to sociological change, give examples of where the decline has been reversed, and explain how this lends credibility to fresh expressions.¹³³ *Mission Shaped Parish*¹³⁴ calls for a change in the culture that surrounds church administration, in that leaders need to encourage mutual friendship and discipleship.¹³⁵ Meanwhile, Potter, in *Pioneering a New Future* (2015) encourages churches to look with honesty and humility at their situation, and examine their vision, aspirations, intentionality, and goals (with reference to the SMART model).¹³⁶ Although his text is

¹²⁹ Sally Gaze, *Mission-Shaped and Rural : Growing Churches in the Countryside* (London: CHP, 2006).

¹³⁰ Margaret Withers, *Mission-Shaped Children : Moving Towards a Child-Centred Church* (London: CHP, 2006).

¹³¹ Susan Hope, *Mission-Shaped Spirituality : The Transforming Power of Mission* (London: CHP, 2006).

¹³² Tim Sudworth, Graham Cray, and Chris Russell, *Mission-Shaped Youth : Rethinking Young People and Church* (London: CHP, 2007).

¹³³ Withers, 29. Withers argues for the legitimacy of fresh expressions in her introduction, then on pages 1-15 outlines how the sociological and cultural context in which the Church carries out its mission has changed. On pages 16-28 she evidences how the Church has struggled to respond effectively. On pages 29-40 she cites examples of how this trend has been reversed. Pages 41-55 provides an account of the form that Church has traditionally taken, and pages 56-65 suggest new ways of being church.

¹³⁴ Tim Sledge, "We Can't Go on Meeting Like This: Shaping the Structure of the Local Church for Mission," in *Mission-Shaped Parish : Traditional Church in a Changing Context*, ed. Paul Bayes and Tim Sledge. (London: CHP, 2006). 105-131.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

¹³⁶ Phil Potter, *Pioneering a New Future : A Guide to Shaping Change and Changing the Shape of Church*, (Abingdon: BRF, 2015). 97. SMART refers to Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timed.

written with fresh expressions practitioners in mind, much of his writing provides guidance on how Church leaders can facilitate change by inviting churches to reflect on a range of pertinent questions. Potter's text reflects much of the Fresh Expressions literature in this band, in that all of the fresh expressions that he cites are presented positively and as evidence in support of the movement; rarely is there mention of any creative conflict either within a fresh expression or between the fresh expression and the wider church. There is some recognition that the structures, processes, and expectations of the Anglican Church have hindered development. Potter cites an observation made by Lings; 'Our efforts [within inherited church] to do church and mission effectively are like standing someone on the [swimming pool] board and teaching them to perform a perfect dive into the pool. The problem is...doing mission today is a completely different sport and it is not a diving board we need but a surfboard.'¹³⁷ Nonetheless Potter does not allow this to detract from the core task of communicating the vision for fresh expressions. Rather, there is a simple conviction that the Church has the capacity to embrace these new forms of mission. This *tour de force* - vision and theory followed by example - is also evident on the Fresh Expressions website, where a vast number of good news stories have been posted.¹³⁸

The seminal text within the second band is Croft and Mosby's *Fresh Expressions in the Sacramental Tradition* (2009).¹³⁹ Herein, Williams argues that catholic disciplines can help Christian communities remain spiritually honest.¹⁴⁰ McLaren suggests that new communities need to resist the temptation to 'throw out the old wineskin before it is too early; 'if we discard the old wineskin before we have a

¹³⁷ Ibid., 166.

¹³⁸ "The Fresh Expressions Website: Stories," Fresh Expressions, <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/stories>. See also Graham Cray and Ian Mobsby, *Fresh Expressions of Church and the Kingdom of God* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2012).

¹³⁹ Steven J. L. Croft and Ian J. Mobsby, *Fresh Expressions in the Sacramental Tradition* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2009).

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 8.

new one in place, ready to receive the new wine of the gospel, the wine will likewise be lost.’¹⁴¹ Blair outlines the growth of the U2charist, a service of Holy Communion in which the gospel imperative to love the neighbour is reinforced through the lyrics of contemporary rock music.¹⁴² Cottrell similarly calls for fresh expressions to match words with actions; ‘St. Francis of Assisi famously told his followers to go into the world and preach the gospel, using words only if they had to...[this] does remind us of a vital truth that actions speak louder, and that sometimes words get in the way’.¹⁴³ Giles explores the concept of liturgy and argues that inward preparation needs to be matched with a willingness to physically change the space in which worship takes place; ‘When these two aspects of our common life [theology and architecture, theory and practice] stop talking to each other, buildings become untouchable shrines, and the people who use them prisoners or curators.’¹⁴⁴

In *New Monasticism as Fresh Expressions of Church* (2010), Cray encourages fresh expressions to search for ‘deep church’.¹⁴⁵ Fresh expressions must ground themselves in their heritage; ‘Consumer culture may be rootless, having turned ancient heritage into a tourist experience...it is the role of the Church to offer hope.’¹⁴⁶ Mosby discerns that three distinct expressions of monasticism are evolving; the development of new places for prayer and contemplation allied to a Benedictine vision; the planting of single households, communities, or pioneers in the Franciscan and Dominican traditions, and a blending of the two, exemplified in his own Moot community.¹⁴⁷ There are limited but powerful

¹⁴¹ Brian McLaren, "One, Holy, Catholic and Fresh," in *Fresh Expressions in the Sacramental Tradition*, ed. Steven J. L. Croft and Ian J. Mobsby (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2009), 25.

¹⁴² Paige Blair, "U2charist," in *Sacramental*, 28.

¹⁴³ Stephen Cottrell, "Letting Your Actions Do the Talking," in *Sacramental*, 78.

¹⁴⁴ Richard Giles, "Liturgically Informed Buildings," in *Sacramental*, 130.

¹⁴⁵ Graham Cray, "Why Is Monasticism Important?," in *New Monasticism as Fresh Expression of Church*, ed. Graham Cray, Ian Mobsby, and Aaron Kennedy (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2010), 9.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁴⁷ Ian Mobsby, "The Importance of New Monasticism as a Model of Building Ecclesial Communities Our of Contextual Mission," *ibid.*, 14 & 16.

examples of how some fresh expressions have been shaped in this way.¹⁴⁸ Safe Space in Telford practices 'daily rhythms and liturgies, Ignatian spiritual exercises and pilgrimage.'¹⁴⁹; Re-generation incorporates young people on their leadership team and enables their pastoral ministry to develop as older youth take on responsibility for younger groups¹⁵⁰; Wolverhampton Pioneer Ministries are developing 'rhythms of grace' as a means of 'staying close to the heart of God'.¹⁵¹

Evaluating Fresh Expressions sits in the third band and examines the ecclesiological issues raised by new work, asking some pointed questions; Are fresh expressions weighty enough to be called Church?¹⁵²; How might fresh expressions challenge not just our ecclesiology but also our patterns of training?¹⁵³; How might they challenge our pyramidal power structures?¹⁵⁴; Is it possible for fresh expressions to retain their prophetic witness whilst remaining part of the Church?¹⁵⁵ Male¹⁵⁶ and Moynagh¹⁵⁷ are both concerned that Fresh Expressions might pander to consumer culture rather than challenge it. Meanwhile, John Hull's criticism¹⁵⁸ (outlined previously in 2006)¹⁵⁹ was that whilst

¹⁴⁸ "New Monastic Fresh Expressions," Fresh Expressions, <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/guide/examples/monastic>.

¹⁴⁹ Ian Adams and Ian Mobsby, "New Monasticism," in *Sacramental*, 55.

¹⁵⁰ "Regeneration," Fresh Expressions, <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/stories/regeneration/feb15>.

¹⁵¹ Debs Walton, "Vitalise," Fresh Expressions, <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/stories/vitalise/sep15>.

¹⁵² Sarah Savage, "Fresh Expressions: The Psychological Gains and Risks," in *Evaluating Fresh Expressions : Explorations in Emerging Church ; Responses to the Changing Face of Ecclesiology in the Church of England*, ed. Louise Nelstrop and Martyn Percy (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2008), 55-70. 57.

¹⁵³ Steve Croft, "Formation for Ministry in a Mixed Economy Church: The Impact of Fresh Expressions of Church on Patterns of Training," in *Evaluating*, 40-54.

¹⁵⁴ Savage, "Psychological," 55-70. 56.

¹⁵⁵ Pete Rollins, "Biting the Hand That Feeds: An Apology for Encouraging Tension between the Established Church and Emerging Collectives," in *Evaluating*, 71-84.

¹⁵⁶ David Male, "Who Are Fresh Expressions Really For? Do They Really Reach the Unchurched?," in *Evaluating*, 148-160.

¹⁵⁷ Michael Moynagh, "Do We Need a Mixed Economy?," in *Evaluating*, 177-186.

¹⁵⁸ John Hull, "Only One Way to Walk with God: Christian Discipleship for New Expressions of Church," *ibid.*, 105-120. 115.

¹⁵⁹ John Hull, *Mission-shaped church : a Theological Response* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 1.

Fresh Expressions have a vision to create mission shaped churches, the movement is driven by a conservative evangelicalism that is more likely to result in a church-shaped mission. Whilst Mason is wary of how the power-dynamics of the wider church might impact fresh expressions¹⁶⁰, and Rollins states, 'there is no such thing as the mixed economy'¹⁶¹, Nelstrop is the most direct in her criticism. In her view, Williams' approach is flawed; the formality of inherited Church hinders the development of intimate and supportive relationships that encourage seekers to question and ask for help. She fears that the mixed economy will result in some churches becoming either tourist venues or refuges, where those who attend will create a nostalgic community hankering after a golden age that never was.¹⁶²

Steve Hollinghurst has stated that he is a great supporter of both the analysis and aims of MSC. Despite this, he remains concerned about how, 'The language of fresh expressions of church may be killing our mission'.¹⁶³ Hollinghurst argues that if fresh expressions only offer alternative styles of worship, they will only attract existing or disaffected church members. He states, 'Such churches cannot enable new Christians from non-churched backgrounds to worship in their own culture when they have already had the culture of the fresh expression decided for them in advance by a group of well-meaning but culturally different Christians.' In *Mission Shaped Evangelism* (2010), Hollinghurst offers a much more detailed argument for increased cross-cultural mission and echoes some of Fresh Expression's contextual-incarnational themes. Evangelism is; 'Not getting people to church but getting people to be church'; 'Not taking God to people but seeing what He is already doing in their

¹⁶⁰ Mark Mason, "Living between the Distance of 'a Community of Character' and 'a Community of the Question'," in *Evaluating*, 85-104. Mason similarly argues that fresh expressions should be determined in developing their own ecclesial identity, and should be alert to how power is mediated. 88 & 98-99.

¹⁶¹ Pete Rollins, "Biting," 72. Argues that the process of incorporating fresh expressions into a mixed economy suppresses their prophetic voice in calling for ecclesial change.

¹⁶² Louise Nelstrop, "Mixed Economy or Ecclesial Reciprocity: Which Does the Church of England Really Want to Promote?," in *Evaluating*, 187-203. 195.

¹⁶³ Steve Hollinghurst, "The Language of 'Fresh Expressions of Church' May Be Killing Our Mission," Fresh Expressions, <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/views/language-of-fresh-expressions>.

lives'; 'Not first about getting people into heaven but getting heaven into people'; 'Not saving people from the world but allowing God to transform them as part of a plan to support the world'.

Evangelism is concerned with, 'Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'¹⁶⁴

Mission Shaped Questions remains a significant text that invites a range of academics and/or church leaders to comment on Fresh Expressions.¹⁶⁵ Urwin calls for a deeper focus on the sacraments.¹⁶⁶

Sharing his practical experiences of working in an emerging church context with pioneering leaders, much of what he encounters requires adaptability as he shapes baptisms, communions, and confirmations in a way that is appropriate for newcomers. On one occasion, he recast a liturgy so that people could affirm their infant baptism (if this had indeed been undertaken in the first instance), rather than him inadvertently re-baptising those who were unsure. On another he suspected that many people who approached the rail for communion (after the confirmation candidates had first received), were doing so instinctively and had not yet themselves been confirmed. This willingness to be flexible and permit 'holy experimentation' is echoed in Tilby's conviction that the Anglican Church has the capacity to offer a safe-space and give permission for people to 'experience some of the elements of Christian worship either in an unstructured way or in a way that begins to develop form and structure.'¹⁶⁷ With reference to Methodism, Atkins similarly argues that the rules and structures of the Church should not inhibit those practices that new

¹⁶⁴ Steve Hollinghurst, *Mission Shaped Evangelism : The Gospel in Contemporary Culture* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2010), 245-251. See also Matt Stone, *Fresh Expressions of Church: Fishing Nets or Safety Nets?* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2010).

¹⁶⁵ Steven J. L. Croft, ed. *Mission-Shaped Questions : Defining Issues for Today's Church*, (London: CHP, 2010).

¹⁶⁶ Lindsay Urwin, "What Is the Role of Sacramental Ministry in Fresh Expressions of Church," in *Mission-Shaped Questions*, 29-41. 38.

¹⁶⁷ Angela Tilby., "What questions does catholic ecclesiology pose for fresh expressions", in *Mission-Shaped Questions*, 89.

communities are rediscovering and reframing; 'Today the essence of the Church must be more discernibly holistic than modernist distinctions would permit'.¹⁶⁸

Moynagh (2011), turns to Venn and Andersons's 'three self's' and includes a further in light of Vatican II. Missioners should develop self-financing, self-governing, self-reproducing - and, 'self-theologising' communities. The goal of fresh expressions is not permanence but viability as they serve a particular community. However, fresh expressions will need to be 'attentive to flow', helping people to move on and settle in a different church when necessary. The ability to manage transitions will be crucial; volunteers come and go, funding may change; variations in attendance may affect group dynamics. The leadership's role during this period is to ensure that the community understands its values and the principles that guide them.¹⁶⁹

2.1.10 Deeper Reservations

For the Parish by Davison and Milbank reacts aggressively to MSC's criticism of the parish structure and the ease at which it dismisses centuries of tradition.¹⁷⁰ This, however, is not an argument made in relation to oversight; it is more concerned with the extent to which the wider church is losing faith in the parish system, and is allowing a particular form of evangelicalism (whose agenda accommodates rather than resists changes in wider culture). Perhaps regrettably, *For the Parish* has become a much-derided Aunt Sally. Cray states that when arguing against the mixed economy, Davison and Millbank select unhelpful examples of fresh expressions and are unbalanced in their

¹⁶⁸ Martyn Atkins, "What Is the Essence of Being a Church?," in *Mission-Shaped Questions*, 16-28. 27.

¹⁶⁹ Mike Moynah, "In for the Long Haul? Sustaining Fresh Expressions of Church," in *Pioneers 4 Life : Explorations in Theology and Wisdom for Pioneering Leaders*, ed. David Male (Abingdon: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2011), 130-148. 130, 132 & 144.

¹⁷⁰ Davison and Milbank, *For the Parish. A Critique of Fresh Expressions*. Fresh Expressions is generating discussion about the extent to which the traditional parishes structure remains appropriate. See Steven J. L. Croft, *The Future of the Parish System : Shaping the Church of England for the Twenty-First Century* (London: CHP, 2006); Malcolm Grundy, *What's New in Church Leadership? : Creative Responses to the Changing Pattern of Church Life* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2007).

approach.¹⁷¹ Stephen Cox argues that *For the Parish* is written defensively, and that Davison and Milbank's work contains 'a fair amount of intellectual and cultural snobbery' and a 'deliberately wilful' misreading of fresh expressions.¹⁷² Tueno notes that Davison and Milbank wrote their book without having visited any fresh expressions.¹⁷³ Cookson is concerned that if their view is genuinely representative of the wider church, it risks appearing insular and losing an entire demographic. Poignantly, he cites the separation and growth of Methodism in the 18th and 19th centuries as an example of where this has happened before.¹⁷⁴ The core question is the extent to which church tradition can change, and whether the polemic between the traditional wing of the Church of England and Fresh Expressions is one of one-sided condemnation, (Fresh Expressions are far gentler in their criticisms of the wider church), or shared learning. Importantly, in relation to the Mixed economy, Nelstrop in her *Mixed Economy or Ecclesial Reciprocity* (2008), and Gamble in his *Mixed Economy: Nice Slogan or Working Reality?* (2008) have both questioned how *mutual* listening and learning can feature.¹⁷⁵ Nonetheless, *For the Parish* offers some important considerations. If the faith of the Church is embodied through place and liturgy, what is at risk if this changes? How might fresh expressions meet a particular cultural need without becoming exclusive? My work frames questions about fresh expressions within the context of Methodist Oversight.

¹⁷¹ Graham Cray, "We are all 'for the parish,'" *Fresh Expressions*, <http://freshexpressions.org.uk/news/cen/201011parish>.

¹⁷² Stephen Cox, "A critique of Fresh Expressions," Diocese of Guildford, <http://www.cofguildford.org.uk/assets/downloads/departments/missionevangalism/fortheparishreview.pdf>.

¹⁷³ Guerin Tueno, "Built on the Word: The Theology and Use of the Bible in Australian Fresh Expressions of Church." (DThM diss., University of Durham, 2014), 47. <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/11081/>. Tueno cites Graham Cray in "For the Parish by Andrew Davison and Alison Milbank - a Reponse," *Anvil* 27, no.1 (2011). Also consider, "Does Fresh Expressions Misrepresent the Gospel? – Opinion," ABC Religion & Ethics (Australian Broadcasting Corporation), <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2011/02/21/3144358.htm>.

¹⁷⁴ William Cookson, "Review of For a Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions," <http://willcookson.wordpress.com/2011/06/24/review-of-for-the-parish-a-critique-of-fresh-expressions/>.

¹⁷⁵ Nelstrop, "Mixed Economy," 203.

Roland Riem, writing in *Ecclesiology* has suggested that Mission Shaped Church 'takes some short cuts which may not help the Church to be in mission in the most sustainable way.'¹⁷⁶ His principal concern is that whilst Fresh Expressions have engineered a number of values, intent on freeing up local churches so that they can mission effectively, the movement has not reflected deeply enough on what limits must remain:

What is most interesting about the values chosen and their justification is the lack of challenge they present to the argument of the report. That oneness involves a unity that goes beyond co-existence, that holiness involves separation, that there are limits to diversity, that apostolicity involves authority – all these are raced over to give primacy to diversity of form as determined locally. While the need for an 'obedient immersion in context' is seen to be crucial, this obedience does not extend to paying serious attention to the tradition.¹⁷⁷

Riem is concerned that fresh expressions might become 'disposable commodities' that pander to consumerism.¹⁷⁸ He notes the ease at which MSC shifts from talking about 'the Church' and begins speaking about 'new forms of church'¹⁷⁹, something that resonated with my own, early observations about the MSM course. Walton believes that Fresh Expressions views the *missio Dei* too narrowly.¹⁸⁰ Is the Church the primary means by which God fulfils His mission? If so, the Fresh Expressions strategy for church growth through conversion to Christ has warrant. Conversely, a more liberal interpretation of the *missio Dei* sees God present beyond the walls of the Church, at work in the lives of those who are of a different faith or no faith at all. Walton therefore considers that Fresh

¹⁷⁶ Roland Riem, "Mission-Shaped Church: An Emerging Critique," *Ecclesiology* 3, no. 1 (2006): 125-139.

¹⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 128.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹⁸⁰ Walton, "Have we got," 42.

Expressions have arisen from a more insular view of Church and calls for a model of discipleship that is outward looking.¹⁸¹

2.1.11 Immediate Oversight Concerns: Fresh Expressions Tradition

Whilst MSM has much to offer, Fresh Expressions is more concerned with encouraging mission shaped thinking and encouraging vision, than it is with asking questions of how individual projects might be incorporated into their parent denominations. The challenge for Methodist presbyters is to introduce those who are involved with fresh expressions not only to Christ and the newly emerging Christian community, but also to Methodism's distinctive charisms. One particular source of unease is that whilst Fresh Expressions is robust in calling Christians to focus on becoming Church, doing the work of the Kingdom, and developing their sense of continuity with broader Christian tradition, it is virtually silent on the value and importance of belonging to a denomination. One could argue that MSM takes this as read. Local projects must declare their sponsor church when registering on the Fresh Expressions website. Leaders who wish to attend MSM need to supply a reference from their minister. This infers that any fresh expression should be under the oversight of a parent denomination, and its key leaders should be functioning comfortably within its process, practice, and discipline. At the same time, implicit in MSC is a belief that the church is struggling to navigate post-Christendom environments because it is using structures and processes that were developed originally for use within Christendom contexts. I would also argue that many people who are attracted to fresh expressions carry within themselves a postmodern scepticism towards institutions, fuelled by a distrust of power, and those who have the authority to use it. This is characterised by a resistance to embrace forms of historic tradition which, by their very nature, underpin much of Church behaviour and process. Tradition is no longer simply accepted because it has proved helpful in the past. Some of these attitudes are clearly present within the relevant,

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 49.

reconstructionist, or revisionist facets of the emerging church movement. Substantiating causality, in what is such a complex and heady mix is difficult. Nonetheless, Driscoll states:

Relevants commonly begin alternative worship services within evangelical churches to keep generally younger Christians from leaving their churches. They also plant new churches to reach emerging people...Reconstructionists are generally theologically evangelical and dissatisfied with the current forms of church (e.g. seeker, purpose, contemporary)... Revisionists are theologically liberal and question key evangelical doctrines, critiquing their appropriateness for the emerging postmodern world.¹⁸²

Given that the movement is looking to inspire hope rather than despair in newcomers, it makes more sense for Fresh Expressions to underplay the issue of denominational affiliation, the role of the clergy and the question of accountability, and direct its efforts towards arguing for a practical missiology rather than practical ecclesiology. Meanwhile, Fresh Expressions could argue that the question of how any given denomination might incorporate fresh expressions into their own ecclesiological structure, process, and discipline, is beyond their remit.

MSM also calls for a mixed-economy approach in which congregations are encouraged to value both fresh expressions and inherited churches, and for presbyters to foster a relationship of mutual respect and learning. However, this may prove difficult given the decline of the Methodist Church and the challenge of developing new work in contexts where struggling and resource hungry inherited churches are drawing valuable ministerial support away from contexts of missionary potential. This is complicated further by Winter's exploration of mission modality and sodality. Taken to extremes, his argument might be used to view Fresh Expressions as the missionary movement that it is, and to form a new group within the Church comprised of those, who will focus on developing a Pauline model of apostolic mission, planting new churches and safeguarding their immediate development. Conceivably, the inherited Church remains, providing a longer term

¹⁸² Mark Driscoll, "A Pastoral Perspective on the Emergent Church," *Criswell Theological Review* 3, no.2 (2006): 87-93. 90.

stability. However, where would Methodist presbyters fit in this? Both Winter, and Cox's arguments strike at the core of Methodist presbyteral identity and purpose. In easier times, when demands and resources may have been less pressing, Methodist presbyters may have not had to concern themselves with the question of how they might balance providing spiritual nurture and pastoral care to those within the Church, whilst pioneering new forms of outreach to those who are beyond it. However, as demands have increased and resources have decreased, this question has become even sharper, forcing a binary choice. Should the presbyteral task be one of serving the inherited church, providing spiritual nurture and pastoral care, or should presbyters focus more on outreach? The evolution of VentureFX and its dissolution into the new Pioneer Pathway is evidence that the Church has recognised this tension. Is it possible to do both? Crucially, when presbyters chair church councils, where should their loyalties lie?

This initial analysis of Fresh Expressions Tradition suggests that in order to have any chance of success as project leaders, presbyters must be present consistently, and adopt a leadership style that enables others. The danger is that presbyters will be tempted to over-administrate and dominate new work, forcing their own understanding of what church should look like, inhibiting the self-theologising process that should be at work in enabling the emerging Christian community to develop itself. The crucial question is what model of working will enable the greatest freedom and flexibility, whilst maintaining accountability. The most likely outcome is that achieving a consistent presence, given the additional demands that presbyters face, will be difficult. This means that fresh expressions will rely on delegated leadership. Meanwhile, if Methodism cannot embrace the ideals of those who attend fresh expressions, history suggests that they may look elsewhere.

In terms of sustainability, the funding and resourcing of projects is likely to be of concern, especially given that grants are time limited. In addition, those who are involved in starting fresh expressions may require a measure of coaching/and or mentoring that is not required in established inherited

congregations. One important challenge is that few presbyters are likely to have experience in planting new congregations. How can presbyters pass on what they do not know?

Fresh Expressions Tradition argues that spiritual disciplines and the sacraments should be encouraged in fresh expressions from the outset. One of the strengths of Methodism is that it is the ordained presbyter who is authorised to conduct services, rather than the liturgy – although liturgies can be received and approved by Conference. This affords presbyters the opportunity, and considerable leeway in altering the form, content and shape of liturgies in a way that is appropriate to context. However, it will require presbyters to act with a confidence and boldness in working differently. Fresh expressions baptism and communion services will require empathy and creativity. The style, content, weekly rhythm, and geographical location in which worship takes place will also be an important consideration for presbyters as they work with fresh expressions leaders. All these combine to communicate an image of what it is to be a Christian and what it is to worship.

2.2 Methodist Tradition and Oversight

The *Statistics at a Glance* report of 2015 states that by the close of October 2014, the Methodist Church comprised 4,650 local churches and 1,780 active ministers, of whom approximately 180 worked in chaplaincy.¹⁸³ The *Statistics for Mission* report of 2014 adopted a standardised weekly attendance measure and calculates that 191,812 individuals attended Sunday Services, 32,680 attended weekday services, 483,786 attended groups or outreach activities and 38,483 people attended fresh expressions.¹⁸⁴ In contrast to the broader decline of church membership and attendance, the number of fresh expressions has grown rapidly. In 2009, 893 fresh expressions were recorded; an increase of 36 from the previous year. By 2010, this had risen to 941¹⁸⁵, by 2012 to 1,084 and by 2014 to 2,705.¹⁸⁶ In 2010, the two most popular forms of fresh expressions were Messy Church (at 40%) and Café Church (at 14%).¹⁸⁷ In 2014, 29% of fresh expressions reported that they were shared initiatives, 61% with other denominations, and 23% with other Methodist churches across a circuit. Whilst the statistics cannot serve as an indicator as to whether these projects have the concept of ecclesial formation in mind, there *is* some clarity in relation to outreach. 548 fresh expressions declared that they were intended for those who do not attend church at all, whilst 304 stated that they were for those do not attend church regularly. The presence of fresh expressions, their focus on contextual mission and community formation, the strength of local involvement, and the momentum of the wider movement, is likely to impact directly on the scope of presbyteral ministry and the skills required for effective oversight. The stationing profiles and statistics suggest

¹⁸³ "Methodism in Numbers - Statistics at a Glance, July 2015."

¹⁸⁴ Alan Piggot, "Statistics for Mission," 10.

¹⁸⁵ Christopher Stephens, "Statistics for Mission 2008-2010" (paper presented at the Methodist Conference, 2011), 17, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/1154431/stats-statsformission-confreport2011-0511.pdf>.

¹⁸⁶ Forwarded by the Methodist Church statistics office.

¹⁸⁷ Stephens, "Statistics for Mission 2008-2010," 18.

that a high proportion of presbyters will have either direct oversight of a fresh expression, or will work alongside colleagues who do.¹⁸⁸

This section of the literature review explores the structure of the Church and some of its distinctive charisms. I will outline the structure of the church, the concept of connexionalism, and the nature of Methodist oversight, the role of presbyters, and the Methodist Church's Constitution, Practice and Discipline (CPD). I will also explore how the class meeting once provided a means of Christian formation for the Methodist Church, and evidence how this has now been lost.

2.2.1 The nature of the Methodist Church

The definitive statement on Methodist ecclesiology, *Called to Love and Praise* (1999) states that Methodism has been influenced by a synthesis of distinct theological emphases; belief in the reign and mission of the Triune God; the conviction that Methodists live in covenant with God and each other; a desire to retain unity whilst embracing diversity; and their conviction that the Methodist Church stands, as part of God's Church, 'One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic.'¹⁸⁹ *Called to Love and Praise* highlights how the Methodist Church is essentially societal in nature. Those who commit to the Church do so in an attitude of mutual obligation and dependency, rather than by mutual obligation or voluntary agreement alone. Commitment to the local and wider Methodist Church is expressed through baptism, confirmation and sharing in Holy Communion. Methodists view communion as a converting ordinance and advocates an open table policy. The Church welcomes three groups in particular; children (subject to certain conditions), communicants of other churches whose discipline so permits, and those who are exploring faith. The implication for fresh expressions is that for projects to be ecclesial, they need to be more than a particular interest group (such as a

¹⁸⁸ Confirmed by three Chairs of District.

¹⁸⁹ *Statements and Reports of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order, 1984-2000* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing, 2000), 42-46.
http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/Faith_and_Order_Statements_Vol2_PartI_0409.pdf.

toddler group or a women's fellowship), irrespective of the level of mutual support that exists.

Churches are founded on faith in Christ, and include the sacraments.¹⁹⁰

2.2.2 A Connexional Church

Rooted in the early Methodist practice of grouping congregations together for the purposes of oversight, connexionalism has become a cultural norm for Methodists. Atkins writes in *Discipleship and the People called Methodists* (2010):

Put very simply 'connexionalism' is the term used to describe the principles and practices by which Methodism is intentionally interrelated and connected together.¹⁹¹

In British Methodism, the 'circuit meeting' oversees the strategy for mission across the whole, directing property, finance, and staffing. Local churches share the costs of ministry and mission.¹⁹²

Presbyters typically oversee a section of churches in a circuit and live out their calling through a ministry of 'word, sacrament, and pastoral responsibility'.¹⁹³ They work in partnership with church stewards and church councils to discern the needs of local churches. Deacons exercise a ministry of 'service and witness' exercised through 'pastoral care, outreach, and worship'.¹⁹⁴ Whilst local churches are autonomous, they share in a common constitution, process, and discipline. Districts comprise a number of circuits across a geographical region and, taken as a whole, form the entire

¹⁹⁰ For further information, see, Tabraham, *The Making of Methodism*. Thomas A. Langford, *Methodist Theology* (Peterborough: Epworth, 1998); J. Munsey Turner, *Modern Methodism in England 1932-1998* (London: Epworth, 1998); Kenneth Cracknell, *Our Doctrines : Methodist Theology as Classical Christianity* (Calver: Cliff College Publishing, 1998); Jane Craske and Clive Marsh, *Methodism and the Future : Facing the Challenge* (London ; New York, N.Y.: Continuum, 2000); Clive Marsh, *Unmasking Methodist Theology* (New York: Continuum, 2004); and Wilson, *Methodist Theology*.

¹⁹¹ Martin Atkins, *Discipleship and the People Called Methodist* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 2010), 17. For further detail on the decline of the class meeting see David Lowes Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting : Its Origins and Significance* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1985), 145-152 and Andrew Goodhead, *A Crown and a Cross : The Origins, Development and Decline of the Methodist Class Meeting in 18th Century England* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 145-187. See also, Tabraham, *The Making of Methodism*, 46.

¹⁹² comprising representatives from all of the churches across a region.

¹⁹³ CPD, Vol. 2, 530, S.O. 700.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 530, S.O. 701.

Connexion. The future of the Districts is presently the subject of a two-year consultation (*Larger than Circuits*) that is being driven by concerns over cost, the geographical size and changing demographics of Districts, questions about what patterns of leadership might be appropriate, and the challenge of finding suitably qualified staff. Their primary purpose is to, 'advance the mission of the Church in a region, by providing opportunities for Circuits to work together and support each other, by offering them resources of finance, personnel and expertise which may not be available locally and by enabling them to engage with the wider society of the region as a whole and address its concerns.'¹⁹⁵ Every year, lay and ordained representatives from each District (lay and ordained) meet together for Methodist Conference. This is Methodism's supreme decision making body. At each gathering they elect a President (a presbyter) and Vice-President of Conference (a deacon or layperson). The work of Conference is overseen by the Methodist Council.¹⁹⁶ Herein, the General Secretary of the Methodist Church is instrumental in leading the development of its vision, mission, and strategy. Standing Order 302 states that, '...[they are]...the executive leader of a management and leadership team, comprising also the Co-ordinating Secretaries, the District Chairs and the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order.' The Methodist Church values this connexional pattern of working, holding that it has the capacity to incorporate views from every level of church life, and that the process of conferring restricts the likelihood of autocratic leadership.¹⁹⁷

Two of the most influential regional offices within the Church are circuit superintendents, who oversee the work of circuits, and Chairs of District. *What is a Circuit Superintendent* (2005) describes

¹⁹⁵ See "The basis and purpose of districts" and "A review of a changing context for districts: Why now?," in "Larger Than Circuits" (paper presented at the the Methodist Conference, 2013), ed. Susan Howdle, 5 & 7. <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-2013-35-larger-than-circuit.doc>. Consider also, "What is a District Chair?" (paper presented at the Methodist Conference), 2006. http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/Conf06_What_is_a_District_Chair_pc.doc.

¹⁹⁶ "The Nature, Theology and Role of the Methodist Council," The Methodist Church, www.methodist.org.uk/.../coun_nature_theology_and_role_of_the_council_1006.doc.

¹⁹⁷ "The Methodist Church in Britain: Structure," The Methodist Church, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/who-we-are/structure>.

superintendents as, ‘the extraordinary overseers of a team of extraordinary messengers and of a movement or society of extraordinary disciples’.¹⁹⁸ Chairs of District have a pastoral role towards presbyters in circuits, reinforce aspects of church governance and policy passed down from the connexion, exercise leadership in developing a District strategy, and assist circuits who wish to recruit or replace ministerial staff. The relationship between Chairs of District and superintendents is curious, especially when compared to the relationships between bishops and clergy in the Church of England, in that whilst Chairs of District have considerable influence, superintendents have the final authority on how circuits conduct their affairs.

Atkins suggests that despite Methodism’s inability to function without sharing its resources, some do not immediately recognise the principle of connexionalism, whilst others actively resist it:

For some folk, it [connexionalism] lies at the heart of Methodist Christianity and discipleship. For others it is unknown and for still others is well known and thought to be past its sell-by date. Connexionalism too has changed and developed since early Methodism, but probably more than society or class, remains with us and shapes our life together.¹⁹⁹

Atkins progresses to argue that if (*sic.*) the Methodist Church wishes to retain connexionalism, it must examine the extent to which its inherited structures still enable the church to live in mutuality and sustain its worship and mission:

If we choose to remain ‘in connexion’ with each other then we must seek new models of connexionalism which enable us to be ‘ourselves’ today. Connexionalism is not a straitjacket into which Methodism must fit, it is a way of living out our Christian discipleship together in a way which takes seriously the commands of Christ, that loving

¹⁹⁸ "What Is a Circuit Superintendent?", (paper presented at the Methodist Conference, 2005), 4. http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/co_08_whatiscircuitsuper_0805.doc. See also "The Nature of Oversight" points 2.18 & 2.19, and Davies & Rupp, *History of the Methodist Church*, 242..

¹⁹⁹ Atkins, *Discipleship and the People Called Methodist*, 17. For further information on the significance and decline of the class meeting see Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting : Its Origins and Significance*, 145-152. Also, Andrew Goodhead, *A Crown and a Cross : The Origins, Development and Decline of the Methodist Class Meeting in 18th Century England*. 145-187, and Tabraham, *The Making of Methodism*, 46.

Him means loving one another and everything God has made. The future of connexionalism is therefore essentially not about maintaining certain structures intact, but about hearts and minds, about deciding together how a contemporary discipleship/disciple-making movement wants to live.²⁰⁰

This illustrates an important issue about how Atkins views Methodist ecclesiology: it is the practical outworking of a spiritual principle. At a point in its history when Methodism is struggling on multiple fronts, this allows Atkins to argue that if the historic structures of the church are inhibiting the Methodist Church from fulfilling its calling, then they must be dismantled or reconfigured. The Church has indeed seen significant change during Atkin's tenure.

2.2.3 The Nature of Oversight

The Nature of Oversight (2005) was written in response to ongoing questions and discussions about how the Methodist Church might enter into unity with the Church of England. It states that oversight is the means by which 'the Church remains true to its calling'. It involves 'theologically informed governance, theologically informed management and theologically informed leadership'. Oversight is 'corporate in the first instance and then secondarily focused on individuals'.²⁰¹ It consists of (among others) caring, reviewing, prophetic proclamation, planning, decision-making and reviewing progress. Presbyters have a key role in chairing meetings and steering conversations.²⁰² The Church should be a place where love is given and received through its worship and mission.²⁰³

The report outlines some fundamental questions in respect of oversight. Presbyters should encourage churches to re-express their Methodist identity faithfully. Their role is to help congregations discern the Holy Spirit's leading and develop structures that are appropriate to God's

²⁰⁰ Atkins, *Discipleship*, 17.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 9-10.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 67.

mission. At the same time, they must retain unity and order. Herein, the Church emphasises the importance of subsidiarity. Local people should be empowered to make decisions in small groups. They are best placed to understand the issues faced by their own communities, and are more aware of the local resources that are available to them. These groups *are* the church in action. They represent the corporate body.

In terms of how presbyters lead, Methodism calls for its leaders to balance personal and corporate episcopé. The oversight report states:

Appropriate respect for accountable personal episcopé can lead to a liberating and creative openness to the appropriate freedoms of, and expectations from, the Church's representative and authorised individuals. This said, it is not clear what the boundaries of this personal episcopé might be, apart from the fact that for presbyters, they will be defined by what accountability structures are in place. Thus, in every ministerial context the balance between personal and corporate episcopé will need to be renegotiated.²⁰⁴

This view of ministry raises two important questions for fresh expressions. The first concerns the style of leadership that presbyters might adopt. In a newly emerging community, they will have to navigate a shift in the extent to which they delegate authority as leaders grow in ability and confidence. Since presbyters are most likely to oversee a mix of inherited churches and fresh expressions congregations, models of teamwork that depend on ministers exacting a strong personal *episcopé* may risk inhibiting the emergence of indigenous leadership, and may also be unsustainable. The second concerns what might be termed 'the balance of subsidiarity'. Local groups need to create and innovate, reflect the 'common mind' and remain accountable. They should also contribute to wider corporate reflection. Importantly, the report recognises that 'in recent times there has been a growing tendency in some areas towards local autonomy and congregationalism which has shifted

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 3.

the balance away from local circuits to local churches.²⁰⁵ The report decries this, since in the absence of the circuit, many local churches would struggle to exist. Local churches and indeed fresh expressions are then encouraged to innovate, but only as far as they do not exceed the bounds of CPD. Meanwhile, the annual process of challenging and changing CPD begins and ends with the decisions of Conference. One significant question is who, in the interim, gives permission for innovation to take place?

2.2.4 What's a Presbyter and what's a Superintendent

What is a Presbyter? (2002) explains that presbyters are interdependent on other forms of ministry (lay and ordained) throughout the connexion.²⁰⁶ Methodist presbyters do carry out some tasks exclusively. These include Eucharistic presidency and sharing in a ministry of collegial pastoral responsibility throughout the connexion. Superintendents gather together circuit staff and 'take the lead in a group that is primarily exercising leadership'. They chair the Circuit meeting ('the chief source of governance and decision-making').²⁰⁷ Superintendents have a considerable influence; facilitating conversations with circuit stewards about where and how presbyters serve²⁰⁸, organising the plan, and helping determine the priority given to one aspect of mission over another. There is a broad acceptance that whilst presbyters have considerable influence in the local church, the Methodist enterprise is one of mutuality and shared support.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 72.

²⁰⁶ "What's a Presbyter?" (paper presented at the Methodist Conference, 2002), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-what-is-a-presbyter-2002.pdf>.

²⁰⁷ "What Is a Circuit Superintendent?" point 18.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., point 16.

2.2.5 Constitution, Practice and Discipline

Constitution, Practice, and Discipline (CPD) outlines the purpose, structure, practice, and discipline of the Methodist Church. Church councils arrange annual membership classes and welcome new members. The process of church planting in Methodism assumes that established Methodist members lead the way. In order to plant a new church, twelve ‘locally resident’ members must unite²⁰⁹ and appoint a church secretary, treasurer, and church steward.²¹⁰ Helpfully, Methodist churches need not meet on their own premises.²¹¹ Methodist fresh expressions can meet in homes, schools, community centres, or even public houses. Regulations about how circuits should respond to decline are also important. If the membership of a Methodist church falls below six people, the wider circuit is obliged to provide additional support. If the situation does not improve, the circuit may intervene and insist that the congregation become a ‘class’ of another larger church who can take on responsibility for their affairs.²¹² This would suggest that in terms of ecclesial formation, it is unrealistic to start a fresh expression with anything less than a core of six people. Significantly, the Methodist Report, *Changing Church for a Changing World* (2007), raised serious and hitherto unexplored questions for fresh expressions, in relation to Church practice and discipline:

How flexible do our denominational structures need to be to encourage fresh expressions of church?

Does our system of stationing ministers need changing to take account of the need for fresh expressions?

How can our rules and regulations be made to make room for fresh ways of being church which, almost by definition, will not fit the rules?

²⁰⁹ CPD, Vol 2, 513, S.O. 605.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 516, S.O. 610.

²¹¹ Ibid., 494, S.O. 605(4).

²¹² Ibid., 508, S.O. 612.

Should all fresh expressions of church come under an existing circuit? ²¹³

2.2.6 The class meeting as a tool to develop fresh expressions?

Horsley in *Resurrecting the Classes* (2010)²¹⁴ explores the ecclesiological links between Methodism and Cell Church. Quoting the *Deed of Union*, he writes, 'The weekly class meeting has from the beginning proved to be the most effective means of maintaining among Methodists true fellowship in Christian experience'.²¹⁵ Meadows (2009) agrees.²¹⁶ According to CPD, Methodist Churches should still be dividing their membership into classes and appointing class leaders and pastoral visitors.²¹⁷ A class leader is required to meet the class regularly, to visit its members individually, to exercise pastoral care over those under their charge, and to encourage members to fulfil the obligations of membership. Ministers are required to visit classes once a quarter and to issue membership tickets.²¹⁸ Historically, the class meeting (together with its smaller and intimate dedicated 'band' meeting), has been a cornerstone of Methodist oversight and pastoral care. However, the language and theology in which the concept of class was grounded (anyone who wished to 'flee the wrath that is to come' was welcome), may sit uneasily with those who are new to the church, or even some contemporary Methodists. Whilst the practice of arranging members into classes remains, Wesleyan Methodists revoked the requirement for members to meet in 1912.²¹⁹

²¹³ Martyn D. Atkins, Tom Stuckey, and Martin Wellings, *Changing Church for a Changing World : Fresh Ways of Being Church in a Methodist Context* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 2007), 73.

²¹⁴ Graham Horsley, "Resurrecting the Classes : An introduction to Cell Church for Methodists," The Methodist Church, 2007, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/disc-new-resurrecting-the-classes-180610.pdf>

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

²¹⁶ Philip Roger Meadows, "Conference Notes: D.N.A of Methodist Discipleship" (paper presented at Holiness and Risk, Swanwick, 2009), http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/hr_dnaofdiscipleship_0209.pdf. See also *Wesleyan DNA of Discipleship S125 : Fresh Expressions of Discipleship for the 21st-Century Church*, Grove Spirituality Series (Cambridge: Grove, 2013).

²¹⁷ CPD, Vol 2, 356-357, S.O. 054 & 525, S.O. 630.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 477, S.O. 526.

²¹⁹ Charles Edward White, "The Rise and Decline of the Class Meeting," <http://myweb.arbor.edu/cwhite/cm.pdf>. White cites Howard A. Snyder, *The Radical Wesley & Patterns for Church*

Atkins, in *Discipleship* states, 'Classes' and 'bands' have largely disappeared, and with them key elements of disciple-making, though new models of small groupings [*sic.*] enabling disciple-making today are emerging.'²²⁰ Importantly, Horsley in his *Planting New Congregations* (1994)²²¹ is the only Methodist commentator to suggest an ecclesial mechanism, other than the twelve member rule, by which new churches might be nurtured. Writing in response to the growth of House Churches beyond Methodism, Horsley states that circuits might incorporate new churches by registering them as a class under S.O. 510(1x).²²² Importantly, *Planting* includes a report that was adopted by 1987, *House congregations – a Methodist Strategy*. The recommended procedure is that (i) the circuit meeting makes the decision to form a congregation, (ii) the congregation is placed under the care of a class leader, (iii) 'those who lead worship need not be accredited' but must respect Methodist doctrinal standards and, (iv) as the house group grows it either divides or constitutes itself as a local church.²²³

2.2.7 Our Calling: A framework for Methodist Mission

Between 1998 and 1999, the Strategic Goal's Planning Group concluded that the whole church would benefit from a process of developing a shared vision. They stated that the Church needed:

Significant changes of culture to take place – flexible and creative applications of the gospel to the Church's work in contemporary society; liberation from tired traditions and the Methodist obsession with procedures and rules ('CPD and all that').²²⁴

Renewal (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP 1980), 62. Also, Charles Christopher Keys, *The Class-Leader's Manual: Or, an Essay on the Duties, Difficulties, Qualifications, Motives* (New-York,: Lane & Scott, 1851), 21-24.

²²⁰ Atkins, *Discipleship*, 17.

²²¹ Graham Horsley, *Planting New Congregations : A Practical Guide for Methodists* (London: Methodist Church Home Mission, 1994), 30-34.

²²² CPD. Vol. 2, 465. .

²²³ *Planting*, 33.

²²⁴ "Our Calling: Conference Agenda 2000" (Methodist Conference, 2000), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-our-calling-2000.pdf>.

Our Calling (2000) followed and states; 'The Methodist Church exists to increase awareness of God's presence and to celebrate God's love, help people to learn and grow as Christians, through mutual support & care, become a good neighbour to people in need and to challenge injustice, and to make more followers of Jesus Christ'. By 2004, and as a consequence of the Conference Report, '*Where are we Heading?*'²²⁵, the Methodist Church began to explore how local churches were discussing and implementing *Our Calling*, and established a number of priorities.²²⁶ These included developing confidence in evangelism, encouraging fresh ways of being church and nurturing a church culture that was people-centred and flexible. The 2004 Conference Report stated that where *Our Calling* had enabled a process of critical discernment within churches, members discovered that they 'do not have to perpetuate what they have always done or continue to do things in the way they have always done them.' In addition:

Local churches have become clearer in distinguishing activities which are central to the church's worship and mission from those which are peripheral.

Local churches have become more aware of where their strengths and weaknesses lie, as their life is assessed against the *Our Calling* themes.

Congregations have increasingly recognised that they may be authentic churches but that they cannot do everything that may be implied by the *Our Calling* themes.²²⁷

Even so, not all churches had engaged properly with *Our Calling* process. The report suggested that they may be:

Living off the 'spiritual capital' of earlier generations and doing their traditional things very well indeed. Closing themselves off from the possibilities of change, or from

²²⁵ "Where Are We Heading?" (paper presented to the Methodist Conference, 2003), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-where-are-we-heading-2003.pdf>

²²⁶ "Priorities for the Methodist Church," The Methodist Church, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/who-we-are/vision-values/priorities-for-the-methodist-church>.

²²⁷ "Priorities for the Methodist Church" (paper presented to the Methodist Conference, 2004), 3. <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-priorities-for-the-MC-2004.pdf>

creative engagement with their local communities. So we hear of churches in 'maintenance mode' or enveloped in what is sometimes called 'chapel culture'.

2004 was also the point at which the term 'fresh expression' was circulated widely, having appeared in *Mission Shaped Church*. Importantly, the report from Methodist Council makes the following observation on the mixed economy in relation to fresh expressions:

Even if there is mutual recognition as churches between traditional and new ways of being Church, there is no doubt that in the coming years a great deal of work will be required to look afresh at what in traditional church we call 'faith and order' questions, to enable the Conference both to affirm and to learn from 'new ways of being Church', within an ever-broadening understanding of 'Connexion'.²²⁸

Strikingly, the Methodist Council stated:

It has been frequently reported that our systems and procedures, our institutional frame of mind, readily deflect us from our aims. So instead of local churches flourishing by discerning and using the multitude of gifts among their members, they become somewhat atrophied by 'shoehorning' people into fixed roles where they cannot easily play to their strengths. In addition, there is throughout the Connexion an anxiety about the impact of an "over-managerial" approach to church administration - as opposed to a "pastoral" approach. Of course, in practice situations are much more complex than these analyses suggest. But this Connexional Priority indicates commitment to a vision of how in every Christian community, and in all aspects of connexional life, we help one another to grow and learn as Christians, honouring the amazing potential of every individual as a channel of God's grace and wisdom.²²⁹

2.2.8 Mission Shaped Thinking in Methodism

The *modus-operandi* of the Methodist Church is one of constant conferring. Conference is the final arbiter for decision-making. It can *receive* a report, it may request that further work is undertaken, or it can *adopt* a specific point or proposal. However, it is only at the point of *adoption* that a report

²²⁸ Ibid., 9.

²²⁹ Ibid., 10-11.

or aspects of a report that a statement of the Church becomes 'official'. Thus, whilst articles such as General Secretary's Reports reflect the views of key leaders within the Church and the trajectory of their thinking, they do not necessarily reflect the final view of the Conference. In terms of investigating how the strategy for mission in the Church has developed, I began by examining the General Secretary's Reports, Methodist Council Reports, and the Faith and Order Committee reports that had been published over the last decade.²³⁰ References within these documents led me to examine a number of key reports including *Called to Love and Praise* (1999)²³¹, *Our Calling* (2000)²³², *Where are we heading?* (2003)²³³, *Priorities for the Methodist Church* (2004)²³⁴, *Team Focus* (2005)²³⁵, *Mapping the Way Forward, Reshaping for Mission* (2006)²³⁶, *Fruitful Field* (2011)²³⁷, *Larger than Circuits* (2013)²³⁸ and *Statistics For Mission* (2014).²³⁹ Whilst it is not possible to précis all of these documents, they do illustrate how whilst the Methodist Church has accepted the need to reduce costs, it has used the opportunity to rethink its mission and question how to distribute its

²³⁰ As to the progress of fresh expressions see "Fresh Expressions" (paper presented at the Methodist Conference, 2007), http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf07_19_Fresh_Expressions_pc.doc, and "Fresh Ways Working Group Report" (Methodist Conference, 2009 and 2012), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf09-16-fwow-gp-2009-201109.pdf> and <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf2012-pc-6-fresh-ways-working-group-2012.doc>, respectively.

²³¹ "Called to Love and Praise" (Methodist Conference, 1999), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/822065/ec-called-to-love-and-praise240908.doc>.

²³² "Our Calling: Conference Agenda 2000" (Conference, 2000), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-our-calling-2000.pdf>.

²³³ "Where Are We Heading?" (Conference, 2009), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-where-are-we-heading-2003.pdf>.

²³⁴ "Priorities for the Methodist Church" (Conference, 2004), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-priorities-for-the-MC-2004.pdf>.

²³⁵ "Connexional Team Focus 2005-2008" (Conference, 2005), http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/co_42_teamfocus_0505.doc.

²³⁶ "Mapping the Way Forward. Reshaping for Mission" (Conference, 2006), http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/coun_mapping_a_way_forward_1006.doc.

²³⁷ "The Fruitful Field" (Conference 2011), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/you-fruitful-field-consultation-171011.pdf>.

²³⁸ "Larger Than Circuits" (Conference 2013), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-2013-35-larger-than-circuit.doc>.

²³⁹ "Statistics for Mission" (Conference 2014), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-2014-37-statistics-for-mission.pdf>.

resources more profitably. *Team Focus* saw the restructuring of the central connexional team. *Mapping the Way Forward* encouraged circuits to reflect along similar lines, which for some resulted in amalgamations. *Fruitful Field* called for the Church to revisit its policy towards training. *Larger than Circuits* is part of an ongoing consultation about the role of Districts within the Connexion. *Statistics for Mission*, as we have seen, highlights the growth of the church in fresh expressions on one hand, with the decline of the inherited church on the other. Two other themes feature as part of these reports. One is Methodism as a 'Discipleship Shaped Movement for Mission': the other is 'Holiness and Risk'.

Holiness and Risk: an increase in mission momentum

In 2008, the General Secretary encouraged the Church to sustain its culture of change and look forward to the longer term:

What is critical is the balance between the visionary and the messy, time-consuming, process-driven realities of sustainable change. Danger comes when the latter becomes all absorbing, as it too easily does. Or when leaders are not released to lead, but are overly occupied with maintaining (to a high standard, even) that which must disappear or come under major review.²⁴⁰

And that the Church was beginning to:

See itself again as primarily a lay movement supported by a few ordained people. (Wherever I turn in today's Church, I see lay people taking initiatives and energy for mission being released.)²⁴¹

2009 was a significant year for the Methodist Church as David Deeks stepped down as General Secretary and Martyn Atkins took up the role. *Team Focus* ended, although the Church continued to process its conclusions. The Church's focus on renewal continued via *Holiness and Risk*, a three day

²⁴⁰ Martyn Atkins, "General Secretary's Report" (Conference, 2008), 23-24.
http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf08_02_General_Secretary_report210808.doc.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 18..

event aimed to enable those in positions of 'change leadership; within the church to 'think deeply about what it means to be Methodist, and what it means to express the charisms of the tradition in the 21st century'.²⁴² Atkins stated:

We are increasingly ready to take 'Godly' and 'holy' risks, and give permission to each other to do so. This will inevitably involve some failure, which, in the context of the proper accountability of being Methodists must be permitted as a necessary part of Godly risk-taking.²⁴³

In addition:

There is a general awareness and grateful acceptance that God is not finished with us yet, but as a consequence of this, continuing change and openness to change lie before us.²⁴⁴

Fruitful Field (2011)²⁴⁵ began during that same period. Here, the Methodist Church embarked upon what some might considered to have been one of its most challenging and far-reaching endeavours. This combined the need for the church to confront the unsustainable expense of training its ministers across multiple locations, with the conviction that the Methodist Church should invest more in lay training.²⁴⁶ By the end of the process, the Methodist Church had opted to close or withdraw from eleven training institutions, leaving Cliff College in Derbyshire (which historically, has specialised in lay training), and the Queens Foundation in Birmingham. *Fruitful Field* generated significant anguish for the Church. However, for fresh expressions, the change of ethos, coupled with

²⁴² "Holiness and Risk" The Methodist Church, (2009), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/who-we-are/vision-values/priorities-for-the-methodist-church/holiness-and-risk>.

²⁴³ Martyn Atkins, "General Secretary's Report" (Conference, 2009), 22. <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf09-2-gen-sec-rep-201109.pdf>.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁴⁵ "The Fruitful Field" (Conference 2011), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/you-fruitful-field-consultation-171011.pdf>.

²⁴⁶ The first institution to close was Wesley College, Bristol. See "Wesley College Bristol: A report from the Methodist Council" (Conference, 2011), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf10a-41-wesley-coll-160211.pdf>.

the emergence of new regional learning networks, may increase the availability of local training for lay leaders.

A Discipleship Movement Shaped for Mission

This phrase originated in 2011 as part of the General Secretary's Report to Conference.²⁴⁷ The report argued that Methodism began as a movement, rather than a Church, with its missional base as class, society, or chapel. Mindful of challenges in terms of costs and the sheer volume of need, Atkins questions how the Methodist Church might develop lay pastoral ministry to support presbyters' in their work. He writes:

Should it be local ordained ministry rather than lay ministry with or without numerous dispensations to administer Holy Communion? We may have to revisit what it means to be in 'pastoral charge'. And what are the relational and operational issues of local pastoral ministry with ordained circuit staff and circuit lay leaders? ...Sufficient numbers of Methodists have suggested that the Holy Spirit is urging us to reassess our situation.²⁴⁸

Moreover, in terms of lay and ordained ministry:

Many Circuits believe that we have reached the point whereby the number of full time, stipendiary presbyters and deacons we have – and/or are able and willing to pay for – has now reached a critical point. Also, particularly in respect of presbyters, many consider that the policy of spreading essentially pastoral duties ever more thinly throughout a Circuit has now reached the end of its usefulness or workability.²⁴⁹

Thus, fresh expressions practitioners stand in a place where the wider church remains fixed to its inherited patterns of ministry and oversight, whilst admitting that the current pattern of working is unsustainable. The only solution that the Church offers is to encourage presbyters to adopt a 'light touch' approach to its disciplines, rather than imposing regulations that will suffocate new work:

²⁴⁷ Atkins, "General Secretary's Report: Contemporary Methodism" (Conference, 2012), 3. Paragraph 11.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 12. Paragraph 39.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 12. Paragraph 42.

This (the mixed economy) requires a long, hard look aiming to bring about as light a touch as is proper to the rules and regulations pertaining to our local churches, but which inadvertently paralyse or render stillborn some of the new congregations emerging among us.²⁵⁰

And,

In this and other ways we require to reassert our commitment to pursuing governance that enable what is discerned as the leading of the Spirit. Our CPD, which is in many respects a permissive document, must be presented so that it is realised and increasingly experienced to be so.²⁵¹

2.2.9 Oversight Concerns raised by attention to Methodist Tradition

This examination of Methodist Tradition raises substantial concerns about how the Church might incorporate and oversee fresh expressions. These are centred on five key areas; developing fresh expressions within a resource hungry mixed-economy, ecclesial formation, whether CPD is fit for use in fresh expressions, the challenge of ecumenism and emergent church thinking, and how Methodist membership affects the prospect of achieving a balanced, mixed economy.

Methodist presbyters minister in a pressured and changing context. In terms of fresh expressions, the challenge faced by presbyters is to promote and encourage new projects whilst attending, at the same time, to the needs of a declining wider church. Whilst some churches in a section may be static or growing, the overall consequence of this decline is a lack of financial and human resources. Within their sections, presbyters are already used to making difficult choices about where they focus their own ministries. The need to oversee the planting and early development of fresh expressions is an additional pressure. Superintendents are likely to be pivotal to the success of fresh expressions

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 16. Paragraph 62.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 16. Paragraph 63.

because they are so involved in permission giving, influencing and co-ordinating efforts to plan local mission.

The most obvious route for forming a fresh expression is for practitioners to make members within the newly emerging community but incorporate them into the membership list of the parent church, until the point at which those who attend are ready to constitute themselves into a new society. A further step might be to constitute a fresh expression as a class of the parent church; in doing so, the wider church may be more likely to recognise that the fresh expression is looking to develop its own identity, and allow them greater autonomy. Even so, despite these possibilities, the process of planting new churches will be new to circuit presbyters, most of whom will have more experience in managing church closures and forming new churches by uniting old ones. The Methodist Statistics Office states:

There are only one or two newly constituting Methodist churches each year (as opposed to several hundred we have to close)...newly constituting churches are usually formed from mergers of former Methodist societies.²⁵²

Crucially, the process of Methodist ecclesial formation appears at odds with that which is advocated by Fresh Expressions. Their vision is one in which an emerging Christian community begins life as a missional-ecclesial unit in its own right, providing the context in which new Christians are formed and nurtured in discipleship, *in situ*. However, the preoccupation for Methodist presbyters, if they take the ecclesial intent of Fresh Expressions seriously, is not one of simply engaging in evangelism with the intent of making new disciples, neither is it to incorporate people who have non-Methodist roots. Neither is it one of encouraging fresh expressions to adopt the classic marks of church, although all of these activities should be encouraged. Rather, the principle goal of the Methodist presbyter should be one of making members. Membership gives Methodists the right to vote in

²⁵² Alan Piggot, Research Officer (Statistics and Mapping), The Methodist Church. By e-mail, 8th June 2015.

church meetings and to take up office. It is also necessary if fresh expressions are to constitute themselves as churches. If they do not take this step, fresh expressions will exist as a subset of the parent church rather than existing as a church in their own right. Local projects will live under the perpetual grace of the circuit and the local church. Moreover, if the emerging fresh expression is not contributing to the financial costs of ministry, there is an argument that they are less deserving of support than those churches that, however fragile and declining, at least offer something.

Fresh Expressions suggests that the core leadership of new churches should comprise experienced Christians. This is understandable. However, within the Methodist Church, such people are also likely to be members of the Church who are a product of its culture. This raises a reasonable question about how the Methodist Church can draw from its traditions without imposing inherited processes, practices, and disciplines in a way that is unhelpful. This is more sophisticated than it might first seem. Methodist Tradition in any setting is, in part, a heady mix of what CPD requires and how this locally interpreted and enacted. It has shaped the communities that its members inhabit. I would argue that in some instances, in an effort to define and protect itself, the Methodist Church has created rather than bridged cultural divides. For example, CPD places severe restrictions on gambling. Church Councils must give permission for their societies to hold raffles. Door-to-door sales are forbidden, as are cash prizes, and the total spent on them cannot exceed £50. Consequently, few, if any Methodists would be seen in a betting shop. Tradition appears to have bred insularity rather than continued engagement. However, during a different period, Methodists were confident to protest against gambling whilst living alongside the working classes - in the pit, the foundry, or the mill - offering an alternative. Fresh Expressions argues that the established Churches have lost the ability to engage in a similar way with people who are *different*. The question for the Methodist Church is whether the requirement to include Methodist members will generate greater insularity, or educate adherents about their radical roots and stir their commitment to outreach. Whilst in theory, a presbyter could conduct membership classes within a fresh expression, it is highly unlikely

that twelve candidates for membership would emerge immediately and decide to constitute themselves as a church. Instead, the process is likely to be much slower. The fresh expression will meet and try to develop its own identity. New members will become part of the parent church but attend the project. As they negotiate their relationships with members of the wider church, they may feel obliged to meet expectations that undermine their involvement with the fresh expression.

Is CPD fit for use in fresh expressions contexts? Atkins' 2012 General Secretary's report is both uncompromising (unless practitioners interpret CPD properly, some of the new congregations that are emerging in Methodism will be stillborn or paralysed), and intriguing (practitioners should apply 'as light as touch as is proper to the rules and regulations pertaining to our local churches.')

In my view, this suggests that the disciplines and practices intended for inherited congregations are simply not suitable for fresh expressions. Moreover, if the purpose of CPD is to enable the Methodist Church to achieve its core aim of 'Advancing the Christian faith'²⁵³, the literature suggests that in terms of helping fresh expressions make the transition to 'church' (as understood in a Methodist-legal sense), the CPD's requirements will be difficult to attain.

Could it be that Atkin's view of connexionalism as a spiritual principle might be extended to CPD; that presbyters could argue that the spirit of the law carries more weight than the letter of the law, and that the 'light touch' already gives those who have pastoral charge the freedom to suspend or overlook certain standing orders? If this is the case, then how should the Church guard against inconsistent practice? What aspects of church discipline are negotiable and what is immovable? Who is the arbiter of CPD? Legally, it is the superintendent and thereafter the presbyter with pastoral charge? But what if the two do not agree? Moreover, at what point would a 'light touch' compromise rather than honour CPD?

²⁵³ CPD, Vol. I, (Norwich: Methodist Publishing, 2015), 8.

The ecumenical landscape in which Fresh Expressions was birthed, and the likelihood that fresh expressions in Methodist churches will incorporate individuals who have previous experience within other denominations, may also present a challenge. Whilst such diversity has the potential to enrich the Church, newcomers are likely to have understood and experienced oversight differently. This may influence their expectations on the extent to which presbyters will be present, pastorally involved, and how they will lead. In this respect, the 'distance' between Methodist presbyters and their congregations, the degree of local autonomy and conferring within congregations and the sudden arrival of presbyters to preside at Holy Communion, may feel unusual. Whilst Methodism has its particular strengths, one weakness is that this pattern of working, if not balanced with sufficient numbers of local leaders who are familiar with Methodism, is open to abuse. One possible area of conflict is at the interface between the positional authority owned by the minister and relational and experiential authority of a leader who can offer a more regular presence. It may be that presbyters are best placed to oversee projects with a high accountability, light touch approach, acting as spiritual directors or coaches.

Work in fresh expressions contexts will inevitably generate debate about Methodist doctrine and practice. The most obvious differences will surround baptism, Holy Communion, and crucially, membership. Another anomaly (most obvious in the local ecumenical partnership agreements between Anglicans and Methodists) is that whilst it is possible for Methodists to become members of multiple denominations at the same time, Methodists can be members of only one society.²⁵⁴ However, within fresh expressions, what would happen if Methodists were also permitted to retain their membership of the parent church, and become a member of the newly emerging church? This could have the effect of enabling a new church to be formed, with a mature and stable base, from a

²⁵⁴ One rare exception is when Methodists who wish to retain their membership to a church in the UK whilst worshipping for a period at a Methodist Church overseas. *CPD Vol. 2, S.O. 051. 304.*

much earlier point. It would also negate the need for a member of an inherited congregation to relinquish their association with the parent church before being able to commit to the fresh expression. Is this one way in which ecclesial formation could be catalysed?

My final point links to the vision for a mixed economy. This has not been the subject of enough reflection within Methodism. In one sense, I would argue that the Methodist Circuit is already an example of a mixed economy at work, although in many instances it will lack the diversity that Williams was hoping to encourage; unless fresh expressions are adequately represented, the circuit meeting will be a mixed economy of inherited churches, rather than a mixed economy of inherited and emerging churches. The potential for fresh expressions to become ecclesial begins with membership. One important area of concern is how membership affects the prospect of achieving a mixed economy in other ways. Within Methodism, whilst non-members are welcome, may be invited to speak, and may be listened to in local settings, they are dissociated from the wider ecclesiological process, debate and process. Non-members have a very lowly place on the Methodist family table. William's vision appears two-fold. First, the mixed economy should encourage Methodist Churches and circuits to embrace, rather than resist diversity. All forms of church are equally valid. They share the same theological root but express themselves differently according to cultural context. Second, the mixed economy is not intended to help churches justify their own insularity as if, 'they can do their thing whilst we do our thing.'²⁵⁵ Rather, the mixed economy should encourage mutual respect, reflection, and learning between different forms of church as they share stories and examples of good practice. In this respect, how is the church going to engage in mutual learning?

²⁵⁵ A quote from a church steward in one of my first churches.

2.3 Ongoing Methodist Experience and Debate

2.3.1 Research on Oversight and Leadership

Cockling in considering the role of superintendents across the Newcastle District of the Methodist Church offers insights on the difference between ‘the espoused and operant theologies of superintendency’.²⁵⁶ Whilst his work is not directly focused on the oversight of fresh expressions, it offers valuable insights into the wider context in which this ministry is exercised. Cockling tests the hypothesis that superintendents ‘exercise an effective ministry of oversight’.²⁵⁷ He identifies five key tensions:

The desire for leadership which seeks to help the church better serve the present age, which is in tension with the passivity of stable management and risk-aversion.

The normative view of shared and inclusive leadership compared with the practice of personal leadership.

How the circuit is structured and how a diversity of local churches operate in practice.

How personal episkopé can operate beyond or within collegial and communal episkopé.

Independence and accountability, and the search for mutual episkopé.²⁵⁸

Cockling finds that ‘the operant is in tension with the espoused’ in several areas, all of which are, arguably, linked to excessive workload. First, they struggle to relate the conference to the local circuit, with information often reaching members via hearsay. Second, superintendents are unable

²⁵⁶ Ian Cockling, "Watching over one another in Love: Methodist Superintendents and Oversight in the Church," (DThM diss., University of Durham, 2015), 16, http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/11372/1/Ian_Neil_Cockling_Thesis.pdf?DDD32+.

²⁵⁷ Ibid. 14.

²⁵⁸ Ibid. 16.

to preach around their circuits. Third, superintendents can struggle to provide their staff with adequate pastoral care.²⁵⁹ This is a serious concern for fresh expressions; local freedoms must be balanced with connexional accountability; preaching is a means by which superintendents can encourage new initiatives; practitioners are likely to need effective coaching. In terms of mission praxis, Cockling argues that ‘there needs to be a recognition that CPD can no longer be as prescriptive as it once was,’ and adds, ‘this could entail a transformation in ecclesiology which is as radical as was the first movement of Methodism.’²⁶⁰

Turning to the broader issue of leadership *within* fresh expressions, Cox conducted case studies of three contrasting VFX projects.²⁶¹ She concluded that the Methodist Church seems ambivalent to the nature of leadership and of how leaders function.²⁶² Cox uncovered ‘significant tensions between the personalities of superintendents and presbyters’ and has concluded that it is impossible to serve as a minister with oversight and pioneer a fresh expression at the same time.²⁶³

Cox’s thesis leads to three alternative suggestions:

1. The Church follows Wesley example further by recognising indigenous leadership and ordaining such people to celebrate the sacraments...or
2. The Church makes pioneer a separate authorised order of ministry that is facilitated through a pattern of training in which mission, church planting, pioneering and evangelism have greater focus...or
3. Presbyteral ministry is understood more broadly.²⁶⁴

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 192.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 202.

²⁶¹ Joanne Cox, "Challenging Leadership".

²⁶² Ibid., 220. Furthermore, Cockling argued that there ‘was a need for leadership skills to be imparted to Methodist superintendents’. “Watching Over,” 204.

²⁶³ Most likely presbyter-pioneers.

²⁶⁴ Cox, 227-230.

Cox similarly appeals to Methodist tradition by emphasising how it has relied on ‘inherent pragmatism’ since its conception. She argues that orthopraxis should have the ascendancy over orthodoxy (and missiology over ecclesiology) by citing John Wesley’s willingness to ordain Coke and Asbury as superintendents in 1784 – a move that made separation from the Church of England almost inevitable. In her most recent work, Cox-Darling (formerly Cox) argues that Methodism’s denominational distinctiveness is a vital component in helping fresh expressions develop into something new.²⁶⁵ In contrast to the ‘Anglican, tone, tenor and behaviour within Fresh Expressions’, she argues that Methodism has always been a fresh expression and has the potential to not only to broaden the ecumenical landscape but also to challenge ecclesial thinking. Methodism offers four distinct charisms; ‘a history of tensions and schism; Central Halls as a model example of context-driven mission; small groups as a vehicle for formation, accountability and fundraising; and an open table which speaks of both inclusivity and Christology at the heart of what can occasionally be the province of independent-minded leaders’.²⁶⁶ In terms of accepting tension and conflict as the cost of progress, Cox-Darling draws from Murray, Bruce and Gladwell²⁶⁷ to argue that Fresh Expressions will also need to understand power in a way that Anglicans do not experience it. She argues that Methodism originally appealed because it offered a voice of protest for those who yearned for change, mobilising this through small groups. For example, she writes:

Methodism is positioned in such a place that it has a history of schism and unity, small units of class meetings which are intentionally outward-focused for the purpose of mission, and a passion deep within its DNA which is about enabling people of every

²⁶⁵ Cox-Darling, "Mission-Shaped," 199.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 200.

²⁶⁷ See Stewart Murray, *Post-Christendom After-Christendom*. Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point : How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (London: Abacus, 2001) and Steve Bruce, *God Is Dead : Secularization in the West, Religion in the Modern World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

social class within society to have an identity and a respectability that other power structures have been and are keen to prevent.²⁶⁸

2.3.2 VFX Scheme Review

The VFX review of 2011 noted three key issues worthy of further reflection; 'the nature of the pioneer ministry, the emerging ecclesiology in pioneer localities and the Methodist identity of the pioneers themselves'.²⁶⁹ The review states that:

(i) The concept of pioneer ministry may be leading presbyters and deacons to question both their sense of call and how this is worked out (*thereby confirming Cox's findings*) and...

(ii) Whilst the relationships between pioneers, superintendents and Chair of Districts are often warm, there are examples where relationships with superintendents have proved difficult.²⁷⁰

As for the nature of the tensions; of the seven projects studied (forty-one interviews including eight active pioneers and seven district chairs), one concern was how the locus of VFX ministry was different to presbyteral ministry in circuits. Pioneers focus on working among people who had no prior experience of Church, and are intending to plant something new. Furthermore, VFX projects are managed by steering groups outside of the direct oversight of circuit presbyters. One pioneer stated, 'There were some who wanted me [the pioneer] to boost the numbers in the existing congregation.' In this instance, 'the local management group proved not to be helpful, and so it was disbanded.'²⁷¹ In another project, one superintendent (with whom the project had a constructive relationship) left, and was replaced by another who seemed less supportive. As the relationship

²⁶⁸ Cox-Darling, "Mission-Shaped," 206.

²⁶⁹ Vicky Cosstick, "Venture Fx Scheme Review," The Methodist Church, 2012, 8. <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/ev-venturefx-review-190312.pdf>.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

between the pioneer and the superintendent grew more difficult, support from the wider circuit waned, and what could have been a productive mixed-economy relationship became compromised. Concerns regarding the need for the Methodist Church to find suitable replacements for superintendents was evident in another project, 'We can't have someone who is not on side with VFX.'²⁷² Another pioneer found it difficult to communicate with their circuit, particularly at the beginning of the project where issues of housing and finance were unresolved. This led to the intervention of a mediation team, which was nonetheless 'an extremely positive experience.'²⁷³ The review recommended that it was too early to make judgements on the success of the pioneers' ministry. It advised against pioneers becoming an 'explicit religious community' and suggests that, 'Emphasis should be placed on continuing to develop the pioneers' commitment to their own Methodist identity and the Methodist identity of the work that they are doing in their localities.'²⁷⁴ Thus, although VFX is a particular form of fresh expression, early experience confirms the concerns that emerged about the link between Christian community and denominational identity that have surfaced from my previous analysis of Fresh Expressions Tradition and Methodist Tradition.

My own experience journeying with pioneers (as part of early explorations and the consultation), provided valuable insight into the nature of the relationship between them and their communities. Whilst some pioneers were comfortable with me visiting projects and would share their experience, they were less willing to permit research. In some cases, the presence of a researcher would alter the group dynamics beyond recognition. One pioneer was sensitive to any move that disturbed the relationship between them and the wider project, by projecting an image of church in which they were the leader, and the wider church were the congregation. Their model of mission was to work informally and non-hierarchically, developing friendships by meeting in homes and small community

²⁷² Ibid., 27.

²⁷³ Ibid., 24.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 8.

spaces. Whilst this pioneer was prepared to talk to churches and districts about his experiences, she was wary about sharing this more widely, for example on local radio or the BBC's Songs of Praise. For her, this would feel like a betrayal. They were not like a missionary church leader who arrived wearing a dog collar and carrying a bible, assuming a position of leadership. They were more a friend who was sent by the Church to discern how they could offer support, to encourage conversations about faith and life, and to introduce a spiritual rhythm and form of church that would be attentive to this context. One other concern, which was regularly repeated in the VFX support group, was that the wider church would judge fresh expressions against the accepted norms of the inherited church – something to which they were deliberately seeking an alternative.

2.3.3 Insights from Superintendent's Conferences

In support group meetings and at successive superintendents' conferences (most notably in 2014 and 2015), Bell has referred to the insights of the catholic anthropologist Gerald Arbuckle.²⁷⁵

Arbuckle argues that dissent within leadership, (the practice of proposing alternatives) is crucial to refounding the church in response to local need.²⁷⁶ However, he also suggests that this process can generate fear among the faithful. Arbuckle proposes that there are moments in history when the Church does not need repair or renewal but a complete change of approach. Whilst his focus has been to analyse how Vatican II continues to challenge Catholicism, Bell finds that Arbuckle's insights are helpful in understanding the relationship between VFX and the wider Methodist Church.

Arbuckle's position is that prior to Vatican II the Catholic Church tended to value those who maintained the status-quo. Post Vatican II, and writing in 1993, he is concerned that having made progress, the Catholic Church was now becoming more conservative.

²⁷⁵ Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church : Dissent for Leadership* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1993).

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, I.

Arbuckle states:

We require radically different and as yet unimagined ways of relating the Good News to the pastoral challenges of the world...we need pastorally creative quantum leaps in our thinking, structures and action. Thus prophetic people, or 'apostolic quantum leap' persons are needed within the Church to critique, or dissent from, the pastorally and ineffective pastoral wisdom of the present. Without these people the Church simply cannot fulfil its mission.²⁷⁷

The inference from his focus is clear. Pioneers are radical dissenters who although might struggle to find their place within the inherited church (and vice-versa), the Methodist Church needs to incorporate, listen to and learn from such people.

2.3.4 Joint Anglican-Methodist working party on Fresh Expressions

The report of the Joint Anglican Methodist Working Party on the Ecclesiology of Emerging Fresh Expressions of Church (JAMWPEEC), published as *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* (2012), affirms the mixed economy approach to managing fresh expressions. It also recognises that fresh expressions have 'ecclesiological implications' that both Churches should consider. It is the most recent statement from the Church on the subject of fresh expressions but has been received rather than adopted by Conference.²⁷⁸ Conference directed that the Methodist Council consider how its recommendations might be appropriately incorporated into the wider work of the Connexion.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 22.

²⁷⁸ "Faith and Order Committee of the Methodist Church and the Faith and Order Commission of the General Synod of the Church of England : Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church. A report of the Joint Working Party on the Ecclesiology of Emerging Expressions of the Church" (paper presented to the Methodist Conference, 2012), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf2012-pc-39-joint-working-group-on-the-ecclesiology-of-emerging-expressions-of-the-church.doc>. Conference motions were as follows - 39/1: Conference received the Report. 39/3: Conference affirmed the mixed economy of church as an enduring model for ministry and mission. 39/4: Conference directed the Methodist Council to explore how recommendations contained in the final chapter of the report may be appropriately incorporated into the wider work of all levels of the Connexion.

The working party noted seven concerns raised by other commentators, all of which I have already identified or are implicit in this review:

- (a) Is this Church-shaped mission or mission-shaped Church?
- (b) Is the *missio Dei* being applied in a limited way?
- (c) Is active participation in mission being discouraged?
- (d) Are Fresh Expressions an Evangelical-Liberal attack on tradition?
- (e) Is the role of the Church in salvation being neglected?
- (f) Is there a lack of focus on reconciliation?
- (g) Is there a rejection of the Christian tradition?

All of these concerns are, in the main, rejected; Hull's understanding of Church is unscriptural in the way that it emphasises the 'horizontal' love of neighbour over the love of God that is received vertically.²⁷⁹ Walton is considered to interpret the *missio Dei* too broadly; the Church is not a body of Christ among others that it seeks to work in partnership with, it is the body of Christ.²⁸⁰ Percy, Milbank and Davison raise issues that are 'not borne out by experience'.²⁸¹ However, Davidson's insistence that fresh expressions undervalue Christian Tradition is accepted. Nevertheless, the authors conclude:

²⁷⁹ JAMWPEEC. *Fresh Expressions*, 119. Paragraph 5.2.10.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 125. Paragraph 5.3.8.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 131. Paragraph 5.4.12 & 136. Paragraph 5.5.7.

The principal criticisms of fresh expressions do not provide convincing reasons to suppose that the mission strategy of the Church of England and the Methodist Church is seriously defective in its aim to develop a mixed economy....nevertheless these criticisms raise important issues...which cannot be dismissed...a number of practical safeguards are required in order to ensure that the mixed economy does not compromise the integrity of the Church.²⁸²

The nature of these safeguards are that from the outset, fresh expressions must keep the vision of 'becoming Church' (my phrase) in mind; they must strive to embody the Church's ministry of word and sacrament; they should look to develop a full *koinonia* with the wider Church; be subject to normal ecclesiastical discipline and work in partnership with other churches. In response, the wider Church needs to redouble its efforts to identify and train pioneer ministers. Finally, the report suggests a 'vocational checklist' for fresh expressions which states (among others):

Fresh expressions should be worshipping communities who are sent out to engage in mission and service.

The gospel must be proclaimed *appropriately* within the community.

Baptism needs to be conferred and the Lord's Supper must be celebrated by an authorised minister.

The report devotes a chapter to ecclesiology, asserting that fresh expressions need to preserve the dynamics of 'intensity' within fresh expressions (requiring an orientation towards the sacrament), and the 'connectivity' (between themselves and the wider Church).²⁸³ They should enable this through 'authorised ordained and lay ministries'.²⁸⁴

²⁸² Ibid., 181. Paragraph 7.4.1.

²⁸³ Ibid., 154. Paragraph 6.1.5.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 166. Paragraph 6.4.7.

In my view, one of the report's weaknesses is that there appears to be little evidence of detailed engagement with practitioners concerns apart from a single paragraph in the conclusions and recommendations section:

A number of voices, frustrated with what they perceive to be unnecessarily restrictive controls, argue that it is desirable in the case of fresh expressions to relax normal ecclesiastical discipline concerning the conduct of worship, preaching, and the celebration of the sacraments. Appeal is often made to 'missiological reasons' though these might not necessarily be stated. There is a regrettable tendency to imagine that 'the needs of Christian mission' justify almost any development. However there is little evidence to suggest that relaxing ecclesiological discipline would in fact facilitate Christian mission. On the contrary, there is good reason to support that such a move would impair mission.²⁸⁵

One troubling aspect of the report is that it does not present the evidence on which it makes these claims. Whom do these voices belong to? What, precisely, were the concerns? Response to *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* has been limited and mixed. Gay (2014) suggests that both Churches have failed to appreciate the scope of the Emerging Church movement (which is not only confined to North America).²⁸⁶ He senses a certain level of 'Whig' exegesis; in how the report portrays the development of early church order (underplaying the impact of Constantinianism); in not considering Puritan influences; in emphasising the importance of apostolic continuity whilst ignoring Henry VIII's separation from Rome; and in stressing the importance of Anglican liturgical conformity whilst lacking transparency on non-conformity in certain Anglo-Catholic or catholic evangelical contexts. Gay finds that the report treats Methodism, 'with a hint of patronisation, as if

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 184. Paragraph 7.72.

²⁸⁶ Douglas Gay, "Book Review: *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* : Report of an Anglican-Methodist Working Party (London: Church House Publishing, 2012)," *Ecclesiology* 10 (2014). 406-409. As to the key themes that have driven the movement, and how these are impacting attitudes to ecclesiology see Gay's *Remixing the Church: Towards and Emerging Ecclesiology* (London: SCM, 2011). Significantly Gay prefers the term, 'the Church emerging' (xiii), emphasising that the wider Church must resist the temptation to speak in terms of separation, and engage fully with its implicit ecclesiological questions. In terms of scope, the movement has proponents based in the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa.

this warm hearted, tunefully connexional movement got a bit out of hand and fell out of the Church of England through a series of (Limony Snicket like) unfortunate events.’²⁸⁷ His concern about Whig thinking is substantially correct. In my view the report encourages fresh expressions towards maturity but then limits their freedoms by implying, ‘and when you arrive there, you will find that you look like us.’²⁸⁸ Similarly, Karyl Davidson suggests that:

...the central question at play is whether or how fresh expressions can be properly regarded as ‘church’ in the ‘true’ sense of the term... However, for me it feels like driving with the handbrake on. While on the one hand the report wants fresh expressions to continue, the “essential elements” listed looks like the church is trying to pull fresh expressions into a mould that looks very much like the traditional church.²⁸⁹

Perhaps the most critical and sobering judgment has come from the Church Army Research Unit. Shortly after the publication of *Fresh Expressions and the Mission of the Church*, The Church of England Church Commissioners published *From Anecdote to Evidence*.²⁹⁰ As contributors to this, the Church Army examined 518 fresh expressions projects and outlined their deeper findings in their *Report on Strand 3b*.²⁹¹ Comparing their own criteria for fresh expressions with that offered within *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*, they stated:

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 407.

²⁸⁸ Douglas Gay stated in an e-mail message to the author, ‘I am using it [Whig] provocatively to suggest that Anglicans and particularly Anglo Catholics tend to tell the story of the past in such a way as to justify where they want the story end up – i.e. in justifying their own practice as the natural descendant of the original impulse. October 2015.

²⁸⁹ Karyl Davison, "Report of an Anglican Methodist Working Party," *Insights Magazine*, (Uniting Church in Australia), <http://www.insights.uca.org.au/reviews/fresh-expressions-in-the-mission-of-the-church>.

²⁹⁰ *From Anecdote to Evidence: Findings from the Church Growth Research Program 2011-2013*, (The Church Commissioners of England, 2014).

²⁹¹ George Lings, "Church Growth Research Project report on Strand 3b: Analysis of Fresh Expressions of Church and Church Plants begun in the Period 1992-2012," (The Church Army Research Unit. (http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/UserFiles/File/Reports/churchgrowthresearch_freshexpressions.pdf).

Our team accept that the search for such definitions is entirely proper...However, for many reasons we find it unhelpful and even unrealistic. At root it belongs within the stable that holds that practices are determinative of church identity, rather than relationships being foundational, which only then lead to practices that embody and fortify those relationships. This practice based approach is significantly prejudicial against young churches whose identity lies deeper than their performance, although that identity may be closer to their intentions and potential. The same critique would be true of arguing that children are not fully humans, because they are not yet adults with attendant possessions, employment, earning power or social patterns.²⁹²

The authors continue to argue that the presence and working of the Holy Spirit is also indicative of success, but recognise how this is a subjective measure.

In missiological terms, the Church Army focuses on Venn and Anderson's three self's of funding, governance and theologising, but replaces 'governance' with 'self-reproducing'. Fresh Expressions work should lead to a church that can support its structures on the financial realities of its context, whilst noting that, 'The last part of a person to be converted is their wallet.' Its leadership will need to be stable enough to survive the departure of a founding leader or change of minister. Its discipleship processes should be sufficiently lightweight so as to ensure ready reproduction.²⁹³

2.3.5 Oversight questions raised through Methodist Experience and debate

This literature review set out to explore the synergy and tensions between the Fresh Expressions movement, local fresh expressions projects, and the Methodist Church. I began by outlining Fresh Expressions vision, comparing this with Methodist tradition, and noting areas of concern. Having examined practitioner's experiences, it is clear that some of my reservations are a practical reality.

One initial concern was that Fresh Expressions was weak in stressing the importance of denominational affiliation. For Methodists, this is crucial. Unless those who attend fresh expressions

²⁹² JAMWPEEC. *Fresh Expressions*, 12-13.

²⁹³ "Church Growth Research Project. Report on Strand 3b," 13.

are members of the Methodist Church, the likelihood of the wider church being able to hear or listen is limited. Without membership, those who attend church are unable to take up office or take a full part in its decision-making processes. Without membership, a fresh expression cannot become a Methodist society or 'church'. It will therefore lack autonomy. One harsh reality is that out of approaching three thousand fresh expressions (arguably less, depending on the criteria), only one has constituted itself as a church in the Methodist-legal sense. Horsley's contribution on the possibility of the circuit incorporating new churches as classes is important. Circuits do indeed have the ability to confer a measure of legitimacy on a fresh expression and resource it as appropriate. Removing fresh expressions from the oversight of a local church might appeal, particularly if it gives the project greater freedom. However, there is little written and readily obtainable evidence that details the success, or otherwise, of this suggestion.

A second concern is that superintendents have a crucial role in setting the tone for mission and fresh expressions across a circuit. Although the potential for conflict in VFX is greater because they operate under a different model of oversight, early experiences suggest that superintendents can either enable or frustrate new work. Evidently, the Church needs to identify and appoint superintendents who will be supportive of fresh expressions. This raises questions for ongoing training; whilst for example, MSI and MSM provide a helpful grounding in fresh expressions, they are optional rather than obligatory. Yet it is the superintendent who recommends candidates for the new Pioneer Pathway.

Third, a significant shift is occurring as the Church moves from one model of selecting and training pioneers to another. It is tempting to assume that this will ease the vocational tension that Cox reported in presbyters and deacons, by giving them permission to engage in new work. However, having the warrant to serve in a pioneering way is different from having the freedom to live this out. Strikingly, deacons have now begun to market themselves as a 'mission focused, pioneering religious

community'.²⁹⁴ This still raises questions first about what pioneering opportunities are available for deacons locally, and second, how presbyters might also be able to serve in this way. Crucially, the difficulty of sustaining existing work whilst engaging with something new remains as a significant barrier. Furthermore, how will the church preserve the authenticity of pioneer ministry as the pathway expands?

Fourth, the appeal made through *Fresh Expressions and the Mission of the Church* that fresh expressions must balance locality, intensity, and connectivity, is a fair response to concerns raised by both fresh expressions practitioners and commentators situated in the wider church. The call for churches to incorporate baptism and communion from the earliest point is also undisputed by MSM. However, the argument that both Churches have the necessary ecclesiology in place to support fresh expressions is, in my view, suspect. Having the necessary ecclesiology to support fresh expressions is different from having the capacity to resource it by appointing the right people, to the right positions at the right time.

Finally, the most challenging proposition is rooted in Cox's view that early Methodist ecclesiology was shaped by praxis. John Wesley's willingness to defy ecclesial authority and endure disapproval for the sake of mission, seems difficult to refute. Moreover, it offers little warrant for Methodists to accept ecclesial discipline unquestionably. Atkins proposition that Methodism is a *discipleship movement shaped for mission* does little to calm this. John Wesley was an autocratic, High Church Anglican who, somewhat peculiarly, left behind a conciliar movement that became a *de facto* Church. Within twenty years of his death, Methodism entered a period of schism. Whilst, a degree of separation may have been due to differences in culture and the limits of geography, Methodist disagreements over leadership styles and the role of a minister, the nature and content of worship,

²⁹⁴ Methodist Diaconal Order," The Methodist Church, <http://www.methodistdiaconalorder.org.uk/>.

and the processes by which the church should be governed and disciplined, have been well-documented. Wesleyan Methodists (1791), New Connexion (1797), Independent Methodists (1806), Primitive Methodists (1811) and Bible Christian (1815), are just five examples of how Methodists separated from each other, with at least six other movements developing prior to 1907.²⁹⁵ My experience suggests that these contrasting perspectives remain as part of the varied inherited church tradition in which presbyters operate today, where, for example, the culture of 'Primitive', 'Wesleyan' or 'Independent' is, quite literally, carved into the stonework. The difficulty for the Methodist Church rests in balancing unity over uniformity and conformity over the freedom to adapt and respond appropriately to local context. To what extent should church members identify with John Wesley and the Methodist tradition that developed towards 1932, and to what extent should they identify with the (partly) unified Methodist Church after that point, when the Deed of Union was signed?

²⁹⁵ Tabraham, *Methodism*, 63-74.

Foreword to Chapters Three and Four

Animate and Messy Church

Chapters three and four began as two separate studies that explored the formation, practice and oversight issues raised by firstly Animate, a fresh expression of Church in Riverhead, and secondly, Messy Church in the Maltings. Whilst these two fresh expressions were the subject of a sustained period of ethnographic participation-observation, I was also able, in each centre, to visit and observe what was happening in other local projects. As the research progressed, it became obvious that a number of observations and findings were shared across multiple centres. These substantiated the central arguments of this thesis; that in many instances leaders had not fully understood, or were uncomfortable with the ecclesial intent of fresh expressions; that the Methodist construct of membership is inhibiting the mixed economy; and that the 'light touch' is too subjective a practice as to be workable.

Chapter Three

Animate:

A case study of a single fresh expression in a Methodist Circuit, amplified by observations at five additional projects throughout the region.

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3.0 Introduction to Animate

In this chapter, I outline the specific measures that I put in place to support Animate, a fresh expression that Riverhead Methodist Church developed in partnership with the Ark Youth Project. This research demonstrates how some of the concerns identified through the literature review did indeed surface in local contexts.

The Riverhead Circuit incorporated other fresh expressions that provided useful sources for reflection. Sonrise began ten years ago to meet the needs of young children and parents. Breakfast Church at Silsby began when the leaders of a small rural church decided to reach out to non-church people by hosting a monthly service for families, held in their village hall. When the parent chapel eventually closed, the team went on to develop an additional Tea Church. Café Church on the Marsh welcomed people from a number of villages to attend Sunday evening worship held in a church lounge, and, in time, gave way to a midweek 'cinema church'. Finally, the circuit recognised 'Coffee and Cakes' as a mission venture that was being undertaken in the spirit of Fresh Expressions.

The opportunity to observe Animate whilst participating as a mentor²⁹⁶ and guide²⁹⁷ provided a base from which I could explore the interplay between locality, intensity and connectivity in these other centres. However, a deeper problem became evident in that many leaders struggled to accept that fresh expressions were serious contenders for ecclesial development. Table 2 (overleaf) provides a brief overview of the fresh expressions considered, and the observations that raised immediate oversight concerns. In this chapter, my detailed account of what was happening in Animate serves as a lens through which I am able to bring all of these issues into focus.

²⁹⁶ Enabling people to reflect on their faith, feelings, behaviour, and practice.

²⁹⁷ Helping leaders to honour the teaching, disciplines and discipline of the Methodist Church.

3.0.1 Table 2: Predominant oversight observations: Riverhead case studies

PROJECT AND LOCATION	FREQUENCY DURATION & ATTENDANCE ²⁹⁸	LEADERSHIP ²⁹⁹	ECCLESIAL /MISSIONAL DYNAMIC	PRINCIPAL OBSERVATIONS IN RELATION TO OVERSIGHT
Animate. Riverhead Market town	Weekly 2 years 19/87	Two worship leaders, one local preacher, two other lay leaders & presbyter supporting as mentor. 4/6/2	Original intent was ecclesial but towards the close of the research, project was struggling to discern whether it was more missional/fellowship based.	Evidence of faith development and service to others. Locality of baptisms and membership raised questions about whether the wider church viewed Animate as having serious ecclesial potential. The superintendent and presbyter with local oversight disagreed on this, despite both being positive about fresh expressions.
Sonrise, Riverhead Market town	Monthly 6 years 27/87	One worship leader. One steward in support. Team of young people assisting with worship. Two presbyters taking a pastoral role. LL/6/2	Ecclesial but lacking the sacraments.	At Animate, membership drew people away from the fresh expression and towards investment in the inherited church. Despite the efforts made when starting the projects there was a lack of understanding about the ecclesial vision behind Fresh Expressions. Of the three who did grasp this, by the close of the research one of them disagreed. At Sonrise, the presbyters take a more pastoral role, welcoming people but are not involved in the delivery of teaching, apart from occasions when the main leader is not present.

²⁹⁸ The two figures indicate the average number who have attended the fresh expression throughout the year followed by the average attendance at Sunday services. Source: Statistical returns, 2014 figures.

²⁹⁹ The first figure indicates the number of team meetings I attended, If a team did not meet for separate planning meetings I have indicated who co-ordinated; LL = lay leader, ML = Minister leader. The second figure indicates the of church councils that I attended. The third indicates the number of church councils that I chaired across the research period.

PROJECT AND LOCATION	FREQUENCY DURATION & ATTENDANCE ²⁹⁸	LEADERSHIP ²⁹⁹	ECCLESIAL /MISSIONAL DYNAMIC	PRINCIPAL OBSERVATIONS IN RELATION TO OVERSIGHT
Breakfast Church Village	Monthly 5 years 30/16	Lay team of six, including two local preachers. Monthly team meetings. ML/4/2	Both ecclesial and missional. Holy Communion shared quarterly, but baptisms conducted in the parent chapel.	The potential for breakfast church to become more ecclesial was realised when it became obvious that the parent church would have to close. Breakfast Church expanded its mission to develop a new congregation, Tea Church. How a fresh expression might be formally recognised raised significant questions about what requirements of CPD were viable or even appropriate. Breakfast Church became a class of Riverhead, and the Circuit co-opted three of its representatives on to its Circuit Meeting.
Café Church Village	Monthly 2 year, closed mid-way though research phase 16/4	Local preacher prepares service and delegates aspects to the congregation. LL/4/2	Ecclesial.	Essentially, this was a fresh expression of worship led in a church lounge. The project eventually ceased because it struggled to attract non-members and all who came were reliant on transport from the leader.
Cinema Church Village	Monthly 2 years 12/29	Presbyter working in partnership with small team who provide refreshments. Presbyter arranges equipment. ML/4/2	Missional. No spiritual content in terms of worship or sharing gospel. Simply a fellowship activity.	Demonstrated some missional benefit in that it raised the profile of the Church and assisted in fundraising. The opportunity to discuss links between film and faith was not explored.

PROJECT AND LOCATION	FREQUENCY DURATION & ATTENDANCE ²⁹⁸	LEADERSHIP ²⁹⁹	ECCLESIAL /MISSIONAL DYNAMIC	PRINCIPAL OBSERVATIONS IN RELATION TO OVERSIGHT
Coffee and Cakes Village	Monthly 2 years 20/12	Lay team of three. 1/4/3	Created with missional rather than ecclesial intent.	Newcomers became involved in the life of the church though this venture – and grew in faith. It deliberately directed people towards the principal service on a Sunday.

3.1 Key findings

3.1.1 Leaders were uncomfortable with the concept of forming new 'churches' Despite encouraging Animate's leaders to focus on 'becoming church' from the outset, the language of fresh expressions and an understanding of what the movement was trying to achieve, was rarely evident in interview. One leader merely understood 'fresh' in terms of 'new or 'refreshing'. Another participant shared how she felt that Animate was a vehicle for evangelism and the nurture of new disciples. All of the leaders were nervous about how the wider church would receive the Fresh Expressions emphasis on self-determination and autonomy, and the tensions this might generate. This dynamic was present elsewhere. Sonrise was in constant negotiation with the wider church over how it might expand. Upscaling Sonrise would have meant downscaling other better established (but less well-attended) instances of children's and youth ministry. Riverhead did not recognise Sonrise's ecclesial potential and the fact that its *locality* was crucial. Meanwhile, Sonrise's leaders were not prepared to risk dividing the church by forcing this argument.

3.1.2 Projects require innovative and collaborative practitioners

Animate was developed from a circuit youth project which operated as a drop-in. This presented a range of pastoral issues in terms of sexual health, drugs, alcohol, homelessness, and relationship breakdown that were not present in other congregations. In addition, Animate attracted a number of people with specific learning differences including dyslexia and autism. This presented leaders with a different range of learning and pastoral needs which, when coupled with the need to preserve the doctrine and values of the wider church, required an experienced presbyter. In addition, and in contrast to way in which Methodist itinerancy is typically expressed, Animate selected a small team of local preachers who became resident and intimately involved in the pastoring and formation of young Christian leaders. Animate's diversity, coupled with their determination to embrace different learning styles, required worship leaders and preachers to innovate and collaborate. This was also

true at Sonrise, where a team of young people assisted in worship leading, at Breakfast Church, and at Café Church where worship leaders and local preachers facilitated sharing in small groups. On balance, local preachers and worship leaders had far richer ministries within fresh expressions than they did within the wider church.

3.1.3 Inherited church culture inhibited fresh expressions

In contrast to Bower's description of organisational culture as 'the way we do things round here'³⁰⁰ the worst aspects of church culture in Riverhead would be described through the dynamic of, 'The way we do things round here...*properly*.' Irrespective of whatever encouragement I gave, Animate's leaders lacked the confidence to see themselves as 'proper church', felt that they were substandard and were constantly concerned with how the church perceived them. One leader spoke of how they felt like 'a curiosity'. Animate's experience was not unique. Parent churches often viewed fresh expressions as peripheral congregations or fellowship groups rather than small communities that had the potential to develop their own ecclesial identity. For example, at Breakfast Church it was not until the point at which the parent church closed that its leadership became more comfortable with the concept of 'becoming church'. In every instance, the wider church appeared to exert what I would describe as a centripetal influence that led fresh expressions towards conformity rather than giving them permission to develop their own distinctive identity and become autonomous.

3.1.4 Membership as a particular concern

Methodist members are obliged to worship within a local church, take Holy Communion, pray, study the Bible, and join with other Christians for fellowship.³⁰¹ At Riverhead, newcomers to Animate followed the norm of becoming members of the parent church, rather than the fresh expression. The process of making members had the potential to be useful to Animate in that it gave newcomers

³⁰⁰ Bower, *The Will*, 1966, 22.

³⁰¹ "Membership," The Methodist Church, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentogod.content&cmid=1508>.

an opportunity to affirm their faith, to assert that this was their new spiritual home, to demonstrate their commitment to each other, and to take a fuller part in the decision making processes of the wider church. However, in reality, membership carried additional expectations that frustrated development. Members were expected to attend Sunday worship at Riverhead and to serve the wider church by taking up roles and responsibilities, rather than being able to direct all their energies towards the fresh expression. Conversations about membership often gave rise to questions about its legitimacy and appropriateness. Some struggled to equate Methodist practice with their previous experience; 'Why do I need to be made a member when I was baptised and/or confirmed?' Others even questioned its scriptural warrant. In ecumenical settings such as at Breakfast Church, the question of membership was deliberately avoided because it would force an unhelpful conversation about ecclesial identity. Were they Methodist, Anglican or Baptist? In some cases, these questions inhibited people from training as worship leaders or preachers, or helping with finance. On balance, the Methodist construct of membership impeded rather than enabled the development of fresh expressions.

3.1.5 Leaders should reflect on the locality of baptism and communion

The superintendent minister was nervous about baptisms and confirmations taking place within fresh expressions. This is an example of where the intensity and locality of the fresh expression lived in tension with the desire to retain connection with the wider church. It became a crucial point for reflection at Riverhead. Why, for example, baptise or confirm someone into a community that is different from the one that has brought them to the point of confession? Frequently, fresh expressions were caught in a mutually conflicting position. Animate and Sunrise could not incorporate baptisms because, in the opinion of the superintendent, they lacked ecclesial scope and depth. However, in the absence of being able to offer baptisms, both communities lost a valuable way of declaring the Christian faith to newcomers, encouraging parents to promise to live by these values, and requiring the newly emerging congregation to take responsibility for their welfare. At

Animate and Sonrise, baptisms took place at Riverhead's principal Sunday morning or evening services. The same was true at Breakfast Church. In this case, an even more powerful question surfaced as the wider church faced decline; why was it appropriate to baptise a child into a church to which they did not belong and had signalled to the wider circuit that it wished to close in less than a year?

3.1.5 Some of CPD's requirements were viewed as an imposition

The superintendent's request that Breakfast Church hold an Annual General Meeting, elect stewards, a pastoral secretary and a property secretary, was poorly received. Whilst its leaders recognised that these were statutory requirements, they seemed cumbersome and unnecessary. One leader stated, 'We would not do it this way if we had the option.' Another said, 'This is an old wineskin for new wine.' Similarly, a move to make Animate a 'class' of Riverhead, originally intended to afford Animate the freedom it craved whilst retaining its accountability to the wider church, was viewed sceptically. Three leaders felt that this was an imposition and shared how they were initially concerned about how it might lead to unhelpful expectations from the wider church about how Animate operated. Could Animate continue to select their own preachers, or would it be obliged to accept whoever was planned, as was the case with other churches? Would they be expected to raise a circuit 'assessment' and contribute financially towards the cost of circuit ministry? However, elsewhere, when I presented these as measures as a matter of common sense, and in a way that circumvented church language, the response was warmer; Animate, needed a volunteer to hold a list of contact details, keep us informed about how people were, and remind people about future events. This was welcomed.

3.1.6 The 'light touch' risked inconsistency in oversight

Research at Animate and across the region demonstrated how two ministers, both of whom were supportive of fresh expressions, differed in the extent to which they felt comfortable delegating oversight to fresh expressions leaders. This went beyond a matter of leadership styles. Staff shared a range of theological perspectives and interpreted the same situations differently. At Riverhead, the collaborative working between a superintendent with pastoral charge, and a presbyter-missioner enabled a constructive dialogue to take place between two ministers who although equally supportive of fresh expressions, disagreed over issues that they felt were crucial to the stability and pace of ecclesial development. These tensions might not have been as obvious within more standard circuit contexts, where presbyters are separated from each other and work individually within their own 'sections'. This case study suggests that whilst encouraging ministers to apply Methodist discipline with a 'light touch' appears liberating on first inspection, it is too subjective and risks authorising inconsistent practice. An additional observation which leads from this is that incoming ministers need to appreciate, and if necessary renegotiate, the oversight relationship that will exist between themselves and the leaders of a fresh expression. A year after I had left Animate, the group began to reflect on its future. My policy would have been to allow them to explore this for themselves and approach me once they had come to a mind. However, the superintendent wanted to take a more assertive role and chair their conversations. This change in the balance between personal episcopé, delegated authority, and the autonomy given to a fresh expression to determine its future, generated misapprehensions within Animate that arguably hindered its future development.

3.1.7 Fresh expressions must be adequately represented on Church Councils

The ecclesiology of the Methodist Church permits only members to serve as trustees. At Riverhead and in the surrounding churches, my impression was that their view of the Church was formed from the inside-out, from the perspective of sustaining the worshipping life of the church and inviting

people to support what was already in place, rather than from the outside-in, looking to expand the work of the church, and incorporate changes that would facilitate this. All of the churches had become bound to an attractional model of ministry where attendance at Sunday worship had become the principle measure by which churches rated themselves. Fellowship was on a 'come to us' basis. Meanwhile, the fresh expressions began from a missional perspective, deliberately seeking out those who were beyond the reach of the local church. Often these people originated from very different cultural backgrounds in comparison to those who had decades of experience in the life of the inherited church. This variance in cultural identity and perspective meant that it was difficult for some members of the established church to understand why Animate chose to operate differently. It also meant that it was difficult for those who attended fresh expressions to feel affirmed, and engage with the decision-making processes of the inherited church. Only five people who attended Animate were members of the Church Council. On average, three would be present at each meeting, among some twenty other representatives gathered from across the wider church. This meant that the voices from Animate were in the minority, silent. They did not feel qualified, worthy or confident.

3.1.8 Church decline impacts the sustainability of fresh expressions

Animate's growth was also limited by a model of working that although collaborative, placed too many demands on too few people. This was partly due to the pressures that the leaders faced as employees of the Church. Whilst Animate was growing, the wider Church was struggling with issues of funding, resulting in changes to staffing across the wider circuit. The subsequent increase in work responsibilities and the difficulties in managing staff turnover meant that the key leader of the project was able to offer less as the project demanded more. Meanwhile, the project had not reached the point where other leaders had emerged. Whilst volunteers can offer much, there is no substitute for ministers or paid staff, for whom a fresh expression is not an additional end-of-week activity. During the period of this research, the circuit reached a position where it could not afford to

retain two ministers. It therefore merged with a neighbouring circuit. Animate could not be supported to the same extent and its future became uncertain.

3.2 Culture and experience at Animate

3.2.1 How things began

There was already a deep tradition of Christian presence and prayer at the Ark Youth Project.³⁰²

Gordon, the manager, was highly experienced, had been influenced by the Taizé tradition, and was a champion of 24-7 prayer. Denise was a practising Christian and a member of a New Life Christian fellowship. Eric felt that God had led him to work for the project, but came from a non-Christian background. These leaders prayed weekly and invited young people to join them. Typically, they and three to five youth sat on beanbags around a lit candle. Some practices would have been unfamiliar to the Sunday congregations at Riverhead. On one occasion, a young person was giggling uncontrollably, saying that the Holy Spirit was tickling her feet.

Animate's journey began by asking its young leaders why they did not attend Sunday worship. The general response was that singing hymns was boring (they did not understand what they were singing about), worship felt impersonal, they did not know how to behave, and they felt conspicuous and 'judged'. The leaders agreed but nonetheless recognised how traditional worship helped others. I suggested that they develop a form of church for themselves: a fresh expression. We began by running a mix of youth and adult Alpha. Six other people attended. One left the course early and three, including Eric responded by saying that they had committed to Christ and wanted to take things further. Two were thankful for the experience but indicated that they needed more time to reflect. The group decided to continue meeting weekly in each other's homes, praying for each other and discerning how they might move forward. During this period, I used an exercise laid out in *Mission Shaped Ministry* that draws from Acts 2:42-47, inviting people to reflect on three questions; 'What do they [the early church] do that we don't do? What do we do that they don't do? What, therefore, makes 'church', 'Church'?' This provided a means by which I could outline some of the

³⁰² The project allowed admittance from the ages of 13-21.

fundamental components of what it is to be a 'form of church'; basing our lives on the teaching and example of Jesus, singing of psalms or spiritual songs, reading and interpreting scripture, praying to God, breaking bread, sharing possessions and giving to those who are in need, and accepting that the church is for everyone, and should grow naturally.

Shortly after that time, a homeless, middle-aged man attended worship at the Methodist Church. His name was Jack. He was befriended by an older lady, Mary, an experienced local preacher of some forty years and the leader of a very successful women's group. Mary pointed him towards the youth project and it was from there that he developed a friendship with Eric. Jack brought two things. The first was a stark reminder that not everyone was as comfortable in life as we were. Second, his arrival challenged us as to what it means to love your neighbour and give to those who are in need. Whilst Mary was a member of the Church, ecclesologically she was very much on the edge. She was a former nurse, had overseas experience teaching in a Methodist College in Africa, had been heavily involved in ecumenical work elsewhere but felt that Riverhead Methodist Church had become too comfortable, and had forgotten that the poor 'were less than the thickness of a wall away'. Mary allowed Jack to lodge with her for six months before moving on. The link that emerged between Mary and Eric became the first in a series of crucial relationships amongst other local preachers and Animate's leaders.

It took nine months before the suggestion to form a new church began to germinate. Eric rushed up to me in excitement with Leah (an eighteen-year-old youth volunteer) behind him. He said, 'We have a vision! We are going to do it.' This was followed by, 'Just listen to us, don't say anything first, just listen to us. We think that this will work!' I suspect that they were not sure about what I would permit. They had taken the elements of worship that would usually be present on a Sunday morning, combined them with their reflections on Acts, and reconfigured them in a way that they felt would be helpful to newcomers. This included teaching based on a theme and supported by audio-visual

material, listening to worship songs without forcing people to sing and allowing people the opportunity to break and have a cigarette half-way through, knowing that for some people the experience of coming together would be intense.

3.2.2 Leadership and Oversight

The community wanted to gather on a Friday night: my day off. Whilst I was disappointed, this became a blessing because it encouraged me to try to develop indigenous leadership from the outset. As a group we decided to follow the supportive relationships that already existed by pairing Eric, the main leader, with Mary. We then invited other local preachers to become part of a wider support network; leading worship, helping people to become part of Animate, and contributing insights on how the project was developing. My role was to mentor Eric, Denise, and Leah. Eric was a former social worker and was the youth development officer at Ark; Denise was in her thirties and was the circuit youth and children's worker. She was new to Methodism and brought a range of alternative and refreshing perspectives on how worship might be structured, and how Animate needed to create an environment where people felt able to confide in each other and express themselves. Prior to working for the Church, Denise had trained as a nurse, specialising in mental health issues. As someone who suffered with dyslexia herself, she was aware of how worship that relied too greatly on reading and listening to sermons could prove difficult. Leah was the youngest. She had grown up through the Ark project and was studying at University for a degree in Business and Hospitality. Within a year of working with Animate, she had transferred to train in Youth and Community Studies. The contrast between the pattern of oversight at Animate and my experiences elsewhere, was this deliberate intent to nurture new leaders, by linking them first with a minister for regular supervision, and thereafter, local preachers who pastored them, helped them plan worship and ultimately, grow in confidence.

3.2.3 Locality and Attendance

After six months, Animate moved from its original base at the Ark Youth Project to a new home in a church hall. Ark, with its two-up, two-down terraced house layout, was unable to provide a single room that was both accessible and big enough for Animate's needs. A number of new members were lost. At the time, I took the view that this was due to a drop in enthusiasm. However, in interview, Mary suggested that as a consequence, Animate became more 'visible' to the wider church in a way that discouraged some people:

The turning point was when moved from Ark into one big hall – even though we tried to make things informal. But outsiders are less likely to come into there. But then Ark was not big enough – and there is the problem that when we were in Ark, people in the church thought that it was nothing to do with 'church'. We had to move though because of size and because of accessibility with one person on stick and another in a wheelchair.

Within a year, an average of nineteen people attended every Friday night, with the wider community totalling thirty-five people. Animate involved people from the ages of ten to seventy. The greatest numbers were between the ages of fourteen to twenty and thirty-one to forty, with an equal gender balance. Whilst some people had a previous church connection, others had not. It was obvious from the outset that Animate was meeting two different needs. Some did not attend Riverhead Methodist Church. Others who did found that Animate offered something different. 36% of the twenty-one respondents stated that they had rarely been to church before. 60% attended Animate and another Church.

Whilst these figures were encouraging, they should be considered against the much larger numbers of young people who attended Ark.³⁰³ The number of young people who attended Animate was very low, at six. Of these, one moved away and two simply stopped coming. Thus, in total, Animate

³⁰³ Ark functioned as a drop-in and at its peak registered sixty-three individual visits in one single evening from young people.

helped four young people. However, the group also encouraged others who, in time, became key leaders, assisting at both Animate and serving within the wider Church. Notwithstanding, its original vision, to connect with those who were not yet members of any other church, was only partly achieved.

3.2.4 Form, Content and Feeling

Animate did not invite people to attend a 'service' but to a gathering at which worship took place alongside other activities. An evening at Animate lasted two hours, well beyond what would be expected for a regular morning or evening service where an hour was the norm. The term 'worship' does an injustice to what was essentially a blend of prayer, teaching, sharing, and singing the faith, all rooted in fellowship. Animate took place in the intimacy of a lounge and relied heavily on audio-visual presentation. People sat on comfortable chairs, sofas, and floor cushions. The team planned worship on a monthly basis – meticulously. An evening at Animate incorporated 'Meaningful Gossip' (sharing about life and faith), 'Worship' (listening and following the words to Christian music), 'Share the Prayer' (we thank God for and asking for...), 'Bite-size Bible' (an audio-visual talk given by a local preacher), 'Extended Fellowship' and 'Chillax'. Its leaders requested that I lead communion informally, on a monthly basis. Everything had a purpose. For example, sharing a coffee before Animate began was not an optional add on. It was at the very heart of being church. When the title for this was discussed the leadership suggested 'Meaningful Gossip'. Mindful that the word gossip might be unhelpful, I suggested that they should rename it 'Godly Gossip', but to no avail. Even so, during our discussions the leadership outlined how they felt that a mix of fellowship and sharing good news was a vital component of church life, and reassured me that they would ensure that the coffee break would remain a godly space.

Prayers at Animate would have challenged the practice of many inherited churches across the circuit. Rather than prayers being shared from a lectern and the congregation responding with

‘amen’, the leader handed a piece of paper no bigger than the size of a postcard to those present, and invited participants to write ‘Thank God for’ on one side and ‘Ask God for on the other. In silence and with some diligence, people would write (or draw) their own prayers and asterisk what they would be happy for the leader to share with the group. After a period, these prayers were collected and read out. There was an honesty and grittiness about these prayers – and a messiness when the person doing the praying could not read the handwriting. A second and profound contrast between this and prayers in ‘Big church’ (as they described it) was that at Animate the prayers were recorded in a book, and whoever was leading the following week reminded the group what they had prayed for last time. This gave an opportunity for people to share how, in their eyes, God had been at work.

‘Worship’ on the monthly plan was an opportunity to listen to songs that had been selected to match the evening’s theme. Eric compiled these into one continuous video stream and included the soundtrack so that people could read and listen to the lyrics, rather than feel forced to sing. This took four hours to prepare. ‘Extended fellowship’ was grounded in the understanding that whilst Animate looked to offer a whole experience of ‘church’, it needed to guard against insularity. Animate therefore dedicated one week per month to join Christians elsewhere for fellowship. ‘Chillax’ was time allocated within Animate for people to chill out and relax together. Reflecting on their own experience, Eric and Leah recognised how the mix of gospel, fellowship and navigating one’s own vulnerabilities whilst sharing, could be overwhelming for some. Chillax was also helpful because it helped people to keep their concentration all the way through the evening. In their view, the strength of the Animate model was that each element could stand on its own if need be. The comments of one local preacher who was a regular attender very much echoed my own feelings. Despite its relaxed approach, Animate was honest, humble, and centred on Christ. It was also inclusive, engaging with those who came in a way that would have been difficult in a traditional church service.

Many spoke of being able to 'just crash out and be themselves' as they laid back on bean-bags. The feeling was contagious. At Animate, you could be open about the fact that you were tired - and even unenthused – but being there was a show of commitment, underpinned by the conviction that by the end of the evening you would feel better. As a minister, I felt like more of a welcomed guest who could not help but contribute, rather than a leader.

Whilst Animate had a clear leader in Eric, its worship was planned in a highly collaborative manner, and the practicalities of preparing for worship were shared by everyone. If you arrived early you would observe people involved in simple tasks ranging from converting a small hall into a comfortable lounge space, setting up technical equipment, laying out worship materials, writing an opening prayer or reading a passage that they would recite that evening. To explain what it felt like if you were not part of this set-up team, I would contrast the welcome at Animate with that of Big Church. The latter began with organ music playing in the background and the congregation taking up a minority of comfortable seats in a large worship area. When the preacher and steward processed to the front, everyone fell silent, and stood. The steward walked up to the lectern, gave the notices, welcomed the preacher, and invited them to begin the service – which usually started with a prayer or a hymn. Animate was completely different. When people arrived, they kicked-off their shoes, flopped down into a sofa, and were offered a cup of coffee or tea by one of the helpers assigned for that week. *Koinonia* at Animate was rooted in the conviction that God was present and journeying with everyone present before, during, and after the evening. Whilst there was ritual and occasional liturgy, there was no space for 'Sunday best' or formality. There was a freedom about how people gathered; some chatted in the kitchen, others in the main worship space, others outside whilst smoking a cigarette. The group recognised that this fellowship was an integral part of the community. It was just as much 'holy space' as any other element of the evening. Gossip was meaningful because people were honest with each other about how they felt, and the joys and difficulties of the previous week.

On occasion, these conversations led people to pray together – often in full view rather than in a quiet corner. Some participants shared with me how Animate was like an emergency service that sustained them through challenging times; it was a space where they found dependable friends, prayer, and ongoing support. There were times during the evenings when I could see that someone was in intense conversation with a leader, perhaps even in tears, but would keep my distance - mindful not to disrupt a pastoral conversation. For those who attended Animate, the fact that someone was crying or praying with another was nothing extraordinary. This was perhaps reinforced by the candour of the leaders in talking about their own walk with God and daily experiences of prayer and discernment. From the outset, responding to need whenever and wherever it arose was promoted as being entirely natural, as was praying for each other. As Animate grew, so did the understanding that God was at work, that anyone might be moved at any time, and we should not be surprised to see open prayer. In my view, this also encouraged a permissive atmosphere where responding to God was more important than protocol. People could stand-up and walk around at any point. This was particularly noticeable when the group was reflecting on worship songs. Some would sit quietly. Others would walk and then kneel in prayer.

The use of audio-visual projection was significant in two ways. First, it provided an additional way of communicating beyond the oral and cerebral which dominated in traditional worship. Secondly, the availability of digital media meant that it was easy to compile material from across a range of cultures that was truly diverse. During one evening themed on the Lord's Prayer, I remember hearing three different versions; one from the theme tune of the *Vicar of Dibley* (as an opener), one from *Songs of Fellowship*, one from a Church choir in Nairobi (sung in Swahili) and one version in Christian heavy metal rock music. Animate was also sensitive to how people had contrasting learning styles or specific learning differences, such as dyslexia and made allowances for this.

A number of responses to the online survey were particularly moving and helpful in enabling such people to share something of their own experiences:

Animate [is] helpful in [its] relaxed approach to everything, [my] sense of being supported and being able to support, and gives insight into what is the essence of worship and being church for people [who are] unable to feel comfortable in traditional church.

(Male, Local preacher, 41-50).

Animate is very helpful to me as I have been in between not going to church for over 3 years before going to Riverhead. I find the bite size bible very helpful as I am dyslexic and it is not too heavy.

(Male, age 31-40, regular attender)

for me Animate is sooo many things , it is striped back of all the chirchy things that can sometimes get in the way of realy worshipping god and at Animate i can come into gods presents just as i am but also the atmasfear and relaxed enviroment is realy important its like worshipping in ya home with all ya family and all ages just mingle into one big family no arguing about how, when or in what styel we worship , but just all adoring and worshipping god together with no sterio types and fealing safe to explore, learn and grow together.

(Female, age 31-40)

The survey generated further responses about how people felt self-conscious when attending Riverhead Methodist Church whereas this was not the case at Animate. This was true of both adolescents and some of the adults:

I think Animate is some times more helpful than big church because i can talk with outhter people who are older than me about my faith in a way that is fun and relaxing and in a way that i can be myself and not scared of showing my feelings towards and about god without fealing embarised.

(Female 1, age 10-14)

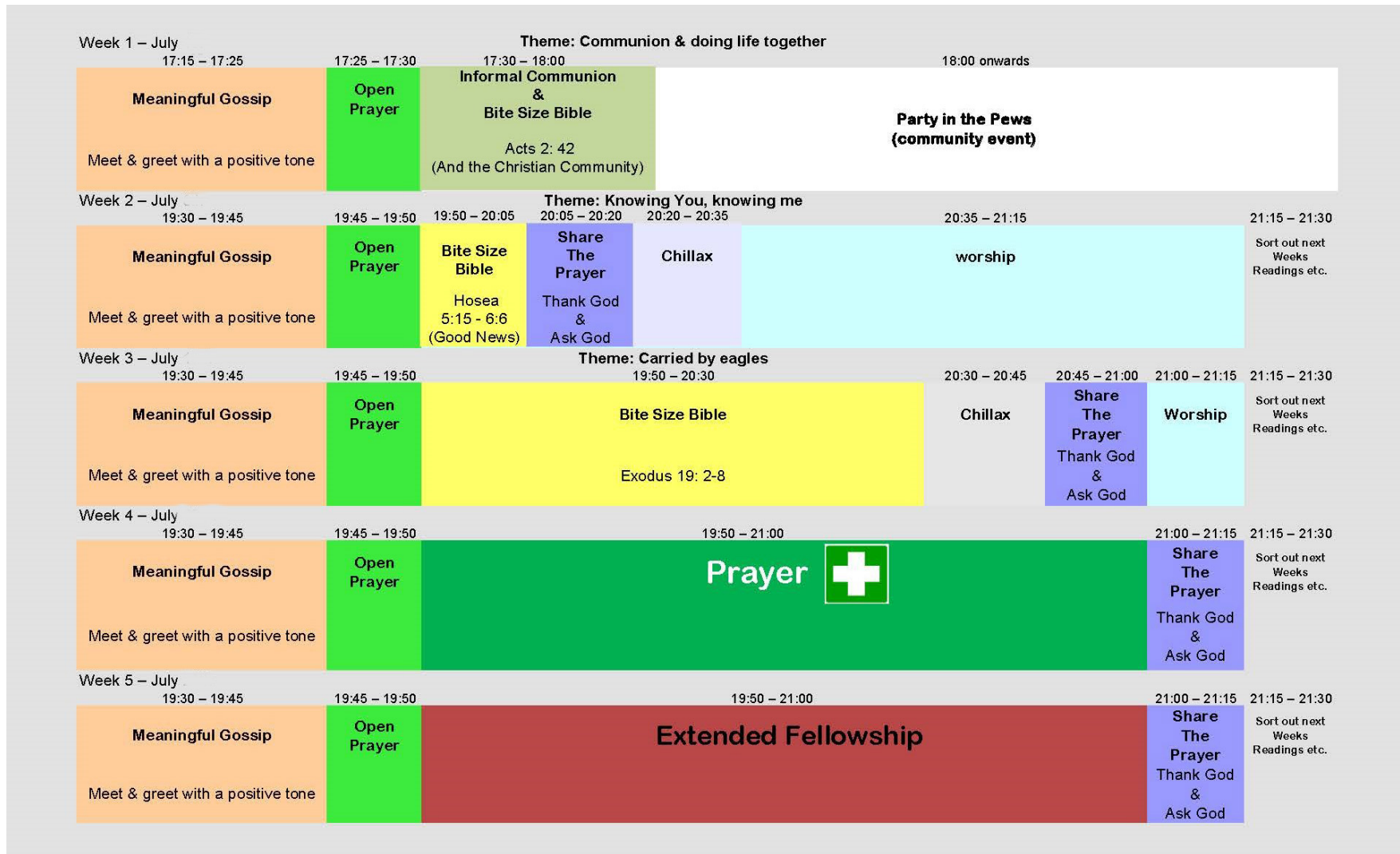
i feel that i can interact with the worship without being noteted as much as i would at the big church it also is a little more of my style of woship.

(Female 3, age 10-14)

I attend Riverhead; I find Animate useful as it lets me relax in Gods company; I also enjoy how informal Animate is and how you can just be you without people "staring". Its one big family atmosphere!

(Female, age 21-30, beginning to take a more active leadership role)

Diagram 1: Worship Timetable at Animate



3.3 Matters of tradition and oversight

3.3.1 Safeguarding

People who attended Animate had deep spiritual and pastoral needs. In terms of their ability to respond to the pastoral and safeguarding concerns of others, Eric, Leah, and Denise were professionally trained and well experienced. In terms of the role models and lifestyle options to which younger members of the project were exposed, this felt like a different world in comparison to my impressions of those who attended church. Sexual attitudes were a case in point. Whilst members of the wider church might have been able to conceive the presence and proliferation of internet pornography, they would not have been aware of the frontline concerns such as the circulation of videos and images of the young people, by the young people. Sexual experimentation was also rife. One young person once entered the Ark project out of hours with his girlfriend, having visited *Ann Summers*, and proceeded to show Denise what he had bought (which included a vibrating penis ring). He then proceeded to ask her, in front of his girlfriend, how it worked. Attitudes to drugs and alcohol were also liberal. Family relationships were often complex and confused. Mental health was an ongoing concern. Ark's purpose was to offer a place where, irrespective of people's background, leaders would offer love and support underpinned by Christian values. Some of these needs surfaced in Animate. Much of the pastoral support that was offered, and the changes made to accommodate people, went unseen by the wider church. Four people suffered with severe dyslexia. Two were on the autistic spectrum. Three suffered ongoing mental health struggles. Three lived with physical disabilities.

A number of safeguarding concerns arose at Animate. Some reflected on how they had been ill-treated in the past, or even how they had treated others badly. One young person, who wished to volunteer as a youth worker, was concerned as to whether a caution for common assault, received two years ago would count against them. Another, not associated with Animate but known to the

community and to Ark, was prosecuted for statutory rape - and was found not guilty. (He was aged 18, she was 15, and her family wished to press charges). He was barred from the project during this period – at my own recommendation and in line with Methodist practice - something that was misunderstood by the youth, generating considerable upset and controversy. One individual struggled with depression and would text me when they *felt* like taking their own life. Another young person self-harmed. There were a number of occasions where I led what might be termed ‘pause and plan’ meetings to review safeguarding situations and decide how we should proceed. Whilst clear safeguarding policies and practices were established and in place, safeguarding issues took a practical and emotional toll on everybody involved. The most difficult aspect of this was the extent to which I felt responsible, because I was the presbyter with oversight. And yet safeguarding issues at Ark and Animate often emerged as a collection of observed behaviours and accounts that steadily grew to become a concern, rather than the much more straightforward disclosure of abuse which would demand immediate intervention and police involvement. What then defines a concern? At what point should I alert others beyond this experienced team? Whilst safeguarding was an important consideration across all of the fresh expressions studied, the issues at Animate were much more concentrated, by far.

3.3.2 Engagement: what the survey revealed

The survey produced a number of significant findings, most notably how the different facets of Animate contributed to people’s belief in God and their sense of belonging. As suspected, faith-heavy elements helped people’s belief and fellowship-heavy elements contributed to their sense of belonging. The rituals of communion and prayer did both, although the understanding of why Christians shared in communion, and how meaningful it was to people, was slightly weaker in comparison to the numbers of people who said that they had experienced God in worship, or grown in their understanding of the Bible.

The survey uncovered significant evidence of behavioural change. Respondents spoke of how their faith had deepened. Seven individuals (out of twenty-one respondents) stated that they had ‘given their lives to Jesus’, predominantly because of Animate. Respondents also gave an indication of what other factors had been at work. I cannot account for my own scepticism over this, but it is difficult to see how anyone could have misunderstood the question, and if even if this was true for just three people, the result remains challenging. It also suggests that some people came to faith privately: had we not asked we would not have known. Two other findings were helpful. First, people were confident to invite newcomers to Animate. Second, for those who did have previous experience of Church, Animate had rekindled their faith or in the case of local preachers, helped them to see that whilst in other churches the trend was towards decline, growth was happening here.

3.3.3 Quality of worship, fellowship and teaching

It was difficult to fault Animate on the planning and content of its worship, mainly because it wove together the freedoms of working within a small group context, with teaching from experienced preachers who helped its leadership reflect continually on its flow and content. It also upheld the Standing Orders of the Methodist Church, for ‘Local Arrangements’ (a term used to describe services where local church stewards or worship leaders take responsibility for the planning of a service without a preaching element). Animate’s collaborative approach reflected the ideal laid out in S.O. 569(2):

Those responsible for a local arrangements service by and for a particular group (such as children, young people, elderly people or those with special educational needs) shall receive encouragement and guidance from persons working with the group and an appropriate member of the Local Preachers’ Meeting. The service should enable members of the group to discover and develop creative and culturally appropriate ways for them to meet with God in worship.³⁰⁴

³⁰⁴ CPD, Vol. 2, 500, S.O. 569(2).

It is clear that for a sustained period, those who attended Animate grew both spiritually and in their desire to serve each other. Moreover, from the outset and without deliberate intent, Animate was more Methodist than the traditional pattern of worship which was being planned and offered on Sunday mornings at Riverhead. Whilst those leading Animate might not have, in typical 1739 original class meeting fashion, been instructing those attending to 'flee the wrath that was to come', there was a genuine consciousness of sin and the desire for transformation, evidenced through its prayer life. The group shared a common conviction that God was alive and active among them – and that they should expect results. The content of the Bite-Size Bible was rarely, if ever, questionable at those times when I attended and was not delivering material myself. In addition, one of the dangers - that Eric, who very much emerged as the 'front man' for Animate, would begin to dominate - was mitigated through the involvement of others who assisted with prayers and readings, or delivered the teaching.

Table 3, derived from the online survey of Animate (see overleaf), highlights the extent to which attendees felt that the worship was helpful in developing their spirituality and encouraging particular aspects of religious observance. The total participants in the survey was eighteen and the scale included additional categories of 'strongly agree' and 'disagree'. The results show that frequently, more than twice the number of people partly agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements about worship as did those who were neutral or otherwise.

Table 3: Spiritual Growth at Animate

Quality	Neutral or otherwise	Partly Agree	Strongly Agree
I have sensed God's presence in worship	0	5	10
I am more aware of God's presence at other times in the day/week	5	6	5
I understand more about why we worship God	3	4	9
I pray more by myself than I did before	4	4	8
My knowledge of the Bible has increased	4	4	9
My faith has deepened	0	6	10
As a result of attending Animate, I have given my life to Jesus	2	6	6

There were times when I arrived at Animate so tired that I was unable to take much in. However, I always left encouraged in some way. The advantage of the mosaic pattern of worship that Animate had developed was that it looked at themes from a range of perspectives; you could for example, miss Bite-Size Bible or the prayers without losing the narrative that underpinned the worship. Arguably, one of Riverhead's weaknesses (and Methodism in general), is that it has placed too great an emphasis on preaching, at the detriment of other worship elements. What of the quality of fellowship before the service? What of the hymns? What of the prayers? What of the response? Another consideration is the extent to which Animate was nurturing faith and generating disciples; or as Kirby would put it, generating a sense of conviction in those who attended in which they were bothered about others who were struggling in their faith, and meeting their practical needs.

For some, even those who were very experienced in the life of the wider church, traditional sermons did not connect, whereas Bite Size Bible did. One member of Animate, a former Church Army Officer, stated:

My experience [of sermons at Riverhead] has been of not engaging with any of it. Somehow the more often that I've not engaged in it, the less likely I have been to engage in because there's almost this feeling of, 'oh, what's the point'. (laughter) The kids come to their groups and hopefully they'll get something out of it, but I'm just going to sit here and wait for them, you know? (laughter) Hopefully I'll get a reasonable cup of coffee at the end. I sometimes thought, 'What does this mean to me tomorrow morning when I am in the office?'

For Bite-Size Bible, local preachers crafted a simple message but also included points for further discussion. Preachers used projected images, video-clips, music, or craft activity to illustrate. The same respondent stated:

We shared together and reflected on the Word....it touches my reality... when we do that... the Lord is more rooted in people's lives when they share out of their own experience. They're applying scripture to their real life experience. You actually learn more out of the Word because you're hearing how it's spoken to other people and how it's connected with them.

(Male, 50-60)

Similarly, every local preacher shared how they felt that Bite Size Bible enabled greater engagement and discussion than was possible through their regular preaching before traditional congregations. One preacher shared how they felt blessed to be part of Animate because those who attended wanted to listen to what they said, and often wanted to know more. Another shared:

It was good for me personally to have the discipline of doing it, and to do it with understandable vocabulary....to get back to the nitty-gritty of the Bible which is what we should be doing as local preachers anyway. You can do some services in a rush – even in your head whilst driving! I was very nervous. I did have one or two people say, "I understand the Bible better since you have been talking to us" and I thought "mmmm".

Whilst the standard forms used to assess local preachers ask a number of useful and practical questions about appropriateness of readings, content, comprehensibility of prayers and sermon, audibility of leaders, the engagement and involvement of those who are present within the congregation, I found that these were helpful only to a point. Despite the broken sentences and uncertain pronunciation of those who led prayers, people were being touched in a profound way. The Holy Spirit was at work. And if by the power of the Holy Spirit, God can make a donkey speak the words of a human, can we, apart from examining motive, ever say that the Holy Spirit is not at work, despite any shortcomings that we see?³⁰⁵ Thus, whilst I recognise how the old and current forms of assessment need to provide a means by which assessors can comment on liturgy, teaching content and quality of presentation, my experience was that they were at risk of downplaying important factors such as the quality and depth of relationships. These too are likely to be an important in helping people develop as disciples and enabling ecclesial development.

What seemed undeniable was that Animate attracted new and disaffected people into the life of the Church. Irrespective of whether Animate was emerging as a new church, or becoming a stepping-stone to mainstream church, it was clearly enabling faith and discipleship. For example, Ron became a Church Steward. Maggie discovered her role in organising catering for groups in the Church. Terri took the principal parts in a Christian drama, co-ordinated by Churches Together in the local theatre; Sally was baptised, took a leading role in helping shape communion liturgy in Breakfast Church so that it was easier for people to understand; Eric linked up with Martin and Jack to support Tea Church.

³⁰⁵ Numbers 22: 21-39

3.3.4 Baptism, Membership and Holy Communion

One question that surfaced repeatedly at Animate and elsewhere, was whether baptisms should be conducted within the fresh expression or the wider church. The superintendent's policy was that baptisms should take place in the parent church, during a Sunday morning or evening service. One baptism and four confirmations were conducted for Animate. Two baptisms and one conformation were conducted for Sonrise. The arguments for baptising people within the fresh expression were particularly sharp in the latter. Sonrise was a monthly children's service that met at 9:30am. It incorporated twenty to forty adults and children (some of whom had little or no previous experience of church), and offered a contrasting style of worship to the 10:30am morning services, which at best, ministered to between fifteen and twenty-five parents and children (all of whom had been raised in the life of the church), amongst other adults. Bob as the superintendent and lead minister was nervous about conducting baptisms within these smaller fresh expressions congregations. He questioned whether Animate and Sonrise offered people an experience of church that provided enough depth in terms of teaching, nurturing discipleship, and connexion with the wider church. I found myself asking the opposing question. If Bob permitted baptisms at Animate and Sonrise, would it not encourage these emerging congregations to see themselves as 'proper' church and take seriously their promises to the family. At the baptism service, the minister asks, 'Will you so maintain the Church's life of worship and service that *they* may grow in grace and knowledge of the love of God and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord?' The congregation responds, 'With God's help we will.'³⁰⁶

At Animate, I spent much time explaining Methodist membership and what is required. Members should:

... avail themselves of the two sacraments, namely baptism and the Lord's Supper. As membership of the Methodist Church also involves fellowship it is the duty of all members of the Methodist Church to seek to cultivate this in every possible way. The

³⁰⁶ "Baptism of Young Children and Confirmation," *The Methodist Worship Book*, 110.

weekly class meeting has from the beginning proved to be the most effective means of maintaining among Methodists true fellowship in Christian experience. All members of the Methodist Church shall have their names entered on a class book, shall be placed under the pastoral care of a class leader or pastoral visitor and shall receive an Annual ticket of membership.³⁰⁷

The concept of membership was questioned regularly. Was membership scriptural; 'Why isn't baptism, and the fact that we have all been baptised into one body, enough?' was one particularly memorable question that came from an established Methodist member(!) who was concerned that beyond anything more than encouraging newcomers to make a faith commitment, 'membership missed the point of fresh expressions'. Another objection came from a lapsed Anglican who questioned the need for membership as a second step beyond confirmation. My response to these questions was to try and emphasise that by becoming a member we agreed to abide by common disciplines (without our safeguarding processes we could put ourselves or others in danger, and without financial regulations, our security could be under threat), and that without membership, we could not form ourselves as a church, if and when that time came. Defending membership also became difficult in cases where it was obvious that not all members of the wider church were in regular attendance (the membership figure for each church is listed on the plan, and a report on membership is given at church councils).

As we were joined by members of Riverhead Church and other churches across the circuit, and as we made a limited number of new members, it became evident that the wider Church expected members to fulfil more than these basic obligations. These say nothing about where members should worship or take communion, but do encourage members to belong to a weekly fellowship group. Meanwhile, many within the wider church assumed (despite signals to the contrary) that members who attended Animate would also attend Sunday morning worship, and serve Riverhead

³⁰⁷ "Deed of Union," *Constitution Practice and Discipline*, Vol. 1, (Norwich: Methodist Publishing, 2015), 215. Point 9.

Methodist Church by carrying out particular tasks and/or take up office. The question, 'When are we going to see them (Animate) at Church on a Sunday?' was raised by at least six individuals from the wider church, in general discussion, especially following progress reports at Church meetings.

In line with the survey feedback, Animate's leaders opted to help people develop their understanding of Holy Communion. *His Presence Makes the Feast* (2003), offers nine key theological themes within Holy Communion; thanksgiving, koinonia, anamnesis, sacrifice, presence, epiclesis, eschatology, mission & justice, and personal devotion.³⁰⁸ Animate explored each of these themes, once a month, for nine months. I was able to introduce a wide variety of liturgies, ranging from formal Methodist, liturgies from other traditions, and my own written and extempore material, crafted to illustrate a particular perspective. The consensus of the local preachers who attended was that this process brought them to a much deeper level of understanding than they had received through their own membership classes. The challenge for me, particularly in thinking through the structure and content of extempore prayer was, 'What needs to be present for this to be a communion service that gets the freedom and bare honesty that is valued by fresh expressions, and yet honours Christian – and beyond that, Methodist tradition?' For me, this was an initial prayer of thanksgiving, the Christian story being told with a link to how God releases his people from all that oppresses, an account of how Jesus emerged from the Jewish tradition of priests and prophets, of his life, death, resurrection and the Christian belief in his return. I honoured the four-fold pattern of taking, blessing, breaking and giving, the prayer of consecration, and a prayer that remembered how, in sharing in communion we were uniting ourselves with both the faithful, in earth as well as those who had gone before us. This undertaking, of explaining the theology and then disassembling

³⁰⁸ *His Presence Makes the Feast* (Werrington: Methodist Publishing House, 2003) and Brian Stone's *A Reader in Ecclesiology*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012) also proved helpful in uncovering the liturgical foundations for communion. Also, Simon Rundell's *Creative Ideas for Alternative Sacramental Worship* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2010).

and reassembling communion liturgy into a form that would translate well into Animate's context, was one of the most thought provoking and challenging aspects of my work.

Reflecting on practice elsewhere in the circuit, the question of whether to explore communion never surfaced at Sunrise. Whilst Breakfast Church requested communion, this was planned only once or twice a year. One difficulty in sharing communion across the other fresh expressions was that many of these met monthly for teaching, and including communion without disrupting this would have required a significant discussion with those who attended the project. Another argument was that the parent church was already offering communion services during mainstream worship, and if people wanted to receive communion, they could attend there. The central question for communion, as well as baptism, is whether to view them as a purely sacramental tools that are the preserve of the established church, or whether they are both sacramental and missional tools, that should be used within fresh expressions.

3.3.5 Issues of Practice and Discipline

My experiences at Animate and elsewhere across the circuit, suggested that there was a tension between the oversight processes, practices and disciplines of the Methodist Church on the one hand, and the freedoms that many who were involved in these fresh expressions yearned for, on the other. At Animate, when I outlined the need for stewards, treasurer, pastoral secretary and property secretary this was not well received.³⁰⁹ However, if I said, 'Isn't it great that we have all these people. Do we know where they come from and how to contact to see them? Can someone keep a book?' the response was much more favourable. Or if I said, 'Isn't it great to see all the money piling up in that collection jar, do you think we should have someone keep track of the money and open a bank account?', there was much more openness. Somehow, the language of the Church made people less receptive. Often fresh expressions leaders did not recognise the common-sense

³⁰⁹ As to the principles and general provisions of the local Church, see *CPD*, Vol. 2, 510-513, S.O. 600-609.

reasoning behind certain requirements of Methodist discipline. This is in part a weakness of CPD, in that it outlines process and discipline but does not explain why any given safeguard is in place. The Church therefore leaves practitioners to theorise this for themselves. For example, the requirement to give two weeks' notice of a forthcoming church council makes sense in that it gives people adequate time to make arrangements and prepare.³¹⁰

The Superintendent experienced this same dynamic in his dealings with Breakfast Church and Tea Church. Some individuals questioned whether certain aspects of CPD were required, and even considered them to be an imposition. One of the members of Animate who also volunteered at Tea Church stated:

The formal processes of the Church felt like an imposition – For example, the AGM – it was an add-on we needed to get out of the way before moving on to Tea Church. ...There was this hint to me of the institution always wanting to impose its structures and its rules and regulations on us. “If you’re doing this, we need this in place and that in place, and that in place.”

And:

Does any of that really fit and does it work? ...this is a group who meet in a village hall...how does it limit that community? Does it stop it growing if we don't do it? Bob talked about the need for us to have a steward. Keith said, “What do you mean? It's a village hall, we've got a caretaker. They open up, they lock up.” [laughter]. It seems just daft really. You don't need somebody to be responsible for that because it's covered.

A second area of difficulty was how the superintendent, who had been wholly supportive to me in setting up the fresh expression, was received by Animate when he tried to offer support and direction. Six months after I left the project, Eric began to share that he was wanted to step down from his role, focus on his paid work, and hand over leadership. The superintendent shared how he felt Animate should have involved him much earlier in their discussions on what the future might

³¹⁰ Ibid., S.O 502. 462.

hold. This however, contradicted the way in which Animate had worked with me. I saw myself much more as an enabler. My role was to help Animate discern among themselves where they felt God was leading them, and then to approach me and see how they might achieve this. Conversely, the superintendent wanted to contribute more:

They had two meetings, unfortunately, being the way that they are, they didn't involve me right from the start, which I think was a bad thing. They had a meeting to review things and came up with all sorts of questions, and they had a second one and somebody said, "Oh, you ought to come to this." I went and did I feel like the gooseberry? If at any time in my ministry I felt like I'm not welcome, it was there.

This is not a criticism of the superintendent but more an observation that different ministers can offer different models of leadership, and are comfortable with different degrees of delegated authority. Animate was used to a 'high accountability, light touch' management approach. The phrase 'being the way they are' is a telling one, if interpreted at face value. My inference is that he felt that it was in Animate's nature not to consult, and that he felt overlooked. Some of the feedback from the leaders in respect of the superintendent's role was particularly challenging. Mary suggested that he had been stirred into action at the news that 'his flagship fresh expressions project' was struggling and shared how in her view, he had approached the meeting by writing notes on everything that he had heard, and producing an Ofsted style report:

For me, the superintendent put the lid on Animate. We said to people 'Look, we are not sure how things are going, we need to make some changes'— I think Eric had given them a list of questions...we need to meet....but the super turned up without warning...in a very 'I am the Super mode' and made notes, and made comments. My impression was that he was extremely disappointed that his flagship fresh expressions was struggling. And that night before he went to bed he wrote a report – which was very much like a poor Ofsted report – and sent it to everyone. Since then it has just been the Smith family and the super landing it on Martha - they don't want to let it go but they want to go out for meals and bowling etc. but that is not what it was supposed to be about — and if we are reaching out to the right people most of them cannot afford to do that.

The superintendent's version of this was:

I didn't say an awful lot (hesitation) at all, I listened and I wrote down everything they said and presented it to them. One or two of them really had a go at me: "We haven't said this, we haven't said we're in a critical position." I said, "Actually, you have said that."

And,

They decided they would meet again in a month and that didn't happen, so the Smiths want more spiritual and the Browns want more, "We should be reaching out and getting people in. We need invitation things, go bowling, do a quiz, have a meal," all of these sort of things, because we are not getting new people in.

I find myself questioning whether this is about the way in which the superintendent approached Animate, or a reaction to his identity as a central authority figure in the wider church, who became the focus of Animate's scepticism.

3.4 Ongoing reflections on practice and ecclesiology

3.4.1 The centripetal inertia of the inherited church

Perhaps bizarrely, whilst Animate was clear in its intent to offer something to those who struggled with mainstream church, it was more liturgical (in terms of having established a pattern of worship), and more disciplined (in terms of not wanting to deviate from it), than was the case with traditional worship on a Sunday. For example, Eric felt that retaining the lectionary gave Animate an air of legitimacy and retained a sense of connexion:

The lectionary was important because we wanted to show that Animate wasn't this freaky, weird thing on the fringe of church for different people, that Animate was part of Riverhead. It's part of the circuit.

One of the most surprising instances was to be phoned by a member of the team asking when I would be free to attend over the next quarter (something that usually superintendents ask of local preachers as they compile the preaching plan), and best of all, querying the readings that we had printed in the last plan because they were not the same as those that were published on the Methodist Church website – and they were right!

Within Animate, many elements of Fresh Expressions vision were evident. However, the encouragement that Animate should continue to develop its own identity and become autonomous, generated a great deal of nervousness. Eric and Mary held that only those people who lived out their calling within the inherited congregation would be properly recognised by the church. Whilst ministers, local preachers, and worship leaders were appointed by the wider church and could devote themselves to fresh expressions, Animate would always be an ancillary event. 'Proper' church met on a Sunday morning or evening in the sanctuary. Moreover, Eric argued that the training for Worship Leaders and Local Preachers was similarly biased. Here, the ability to minister within a fresh expression was considered desirable but not essential. Eric, Mary, Leah, and Denise

felt that whilst they wanted to call for change, and invest more time into Animate, the credibility and social capital required to do this could only result from conforming to the wider churches expectations. The wider church had to see them actively supporting its mission; leading a women's fellowship meeting, running a stall at the main church coffee morning to fundraise for the redevelopment project; attending Sunday morning worship and worship leading when requested; carrying out urgent practical tasks; taking up office in the Church; and attending 'important' meetings. The inherited Church therefore exerted a centripetal pull on Animate that drew it towards the conformity of the wider church and misdirected its energies. There was a deep sense of accountability to the wider church, an awareness that they were a minority group (despite the fact that they had riches to offer) and a sense in which they could never see themselves as equals. Rather than Animate becoming confident in developing its own ecclesial identity, Animate was more concerned to preserve their relationship with the wider Church. Crucially, whilst Methodism is encouraging practitioners to develop new forms of church, these churches can only be valid if they conform to the Methodist ecclesiological model, which whilst having some degree of flexibility, has certain requirements that are not negotiable.

3.4.2 Not fully on board with Fresh Expressions

Despite my initial efforts in outlining the intention for fresh expressions, the language and even understanding of fresh expressions was largely absent when I interviewed both project leaders and helpers six months after leaving the project. At this point, Animate was rethinking its purpose. Leah placed more emphasis on the concept of 'fresh' rather than the deeper intention of 'fresh expression'. Mary saw Animate as a vehicle for effective evangelism rather than an attempt to plant a church. She did however reflect some Fresh Expressions thinking. She did not want Animate to become a cosy, insular fellowship group, nor did she want it to become a stepping-stone to recruit people to the wider Church:

A Church report has just come out. The second sentence is something that I disagree with totally... It says, 'Animate began as a step to get people into Church'...which is exactly what it was it not about... When it was looking like things were slowing down we asked people what they wanted to do and the response was that we should be taking the minibus and going out bowling and having dinners and all that social stuff – but that was not the reason we were supposed to be there. The purpose as I understood it was to raise awareness of the gospel and offer people an opportunity to think and make a commitment. As I was concerned if they made a commitment, yes I hoped that they would attach themselves to somewhere where their discipleship could be encouraged and supported, but I did not care where they went and I was not looking to supply bums on seats for this church.

I asked, 'Animate was an attempt to encourage people do church for themselves. Would you call it 'church'? Mary responded:

I was certainly not working on building a new church for people who don't yet come – I was not into that. When you are not finding enough for your own spiritual need you have to spread your wings a little.

I was particularly surprised by Mary's response to Animate having become a class of Riverhead Methodist Church:

I felt that...we were imposed upon when we were offered the label of 'class' ... I thought this was restrictive. I do half understand why the institution of the Methodist Church might want to do that. I think it was very premature.

Another attender who was a seasoned churchgoer (but was more comfortable at Animate than in mainstream church) did appreciate Fresh Expression's vision to engage people who are not members of any other church. However, the concept of ecclesial identity and development was absent:

Traditional people are thinking that they have got someone to save, but are not thinking about who they are saying the message to. Animate's purpose was to walking alongside young people who were starting to explore faith or ask questions of life ...informal, fellowship, sharing, worship, prayer. In an atmosphere where people could be more vulnerable with each other.

(Female, 40-50)

Eric *had* grasped the vision of fresh expressions and the concept of creating a fellowship where people could live out their calling:

If Animate is being recognised by the church, those within Animate should be given the same opportunities to grow and flourish with any God given skills or calling as someone from big church would...This should not include moving them to big church ... an alien environment. That is taking them away from where God had called them. If you find a place where you get a good signal with God, why move to somewhere that you can't get a signal?

Eric's reference to this sense of call is unique to much of the written material about fresh expressions; there is much about attracting people to fresh expressions and about making disciples through fresh expressions, but the language of being *called* to this role (apart from in the sense of offering for pioneer ministry) is not prominent within the literature. Eric seems to suggest that there are people who God is calling to work in a fresh expressions environment as opposed to within the inherited Church core.

3.4.3 Does employing skilled staff deskill the church?

For Eric, Denise, and latterly Leah, I suspect that another dynamic was at work. They were employees of the circuit. As such they were viewed as professionals who were paid to serve the congregation (Riverhead was the largest Church in the circuit), and were expected to take on tasks that others lacked the skills or confidence to perform. Whilst members of the Ladies Circle might recognise there was an issue with a young person from the Ark who was stood on the church roof, refusing to come down, it would be Denise, who would have the skill to talk them down. (I witnessed

this on one incidence – she had wisdom and experience to make a cup of tea and a bacon sandwich, suggest that he come down before it went cold, and ‘have a chat about whatever got him up there in the first place’. Whilst people who attended the Saturday coffee morning could recognise that the drunk who was sat on the church steps at the main entrance was an issue that needed dealing with, it was Eric who had the ability to befriend them. In my view, this employment dynamic had two effects. First, it inhibited members of the church from reaching out themselves: outreach had become outsourced. Whilst some members of the Church were involved in outreach, others were far less confident. Second, Eric and Denise had become servants of the church rather than pioneers in it. Whilst they were both involved in management decisions, I am not convinced that they were able to take a full part in the trusteeship of Ark or the wider Methodist Church – where leaders reflected on their vision, ethos, and strategy. There were times when they – as well as Mary – questioned whether the Church was fully aware of the needs of those who were on its fringes. In some cases, there was evidence of territorialism, where church leaders felt threatened rather than supported by their ministry. Whilst, Riverhead incorporated Denise and Eric on to the Church Council, both struggled to contribute.

3.4.4 Funding shortages suffocate mission work

A further issue at Riverhead was the funding of employed staff and the need to reduce costs. Gordon retired and was not replaced. The scope of Eric’s work increased, and Denise’s role changed as she became part-time circuit children’s and youth worker, and part-time manager of Ark. By the time that my initial five-year post had come to a close, the circuit lacked the finance to offer an extension or continue to support two presbyters. In line with *Reshaping for Mission*, the Riverhead Circuit decided to merge with a neighbouring circuit, combine its presbyteral staff and deploy them over a larger area, leaving Riverhead with a single presbyter-superintendent, supported by an administrator. In addition, two local preachers were authorised to preside at communion services. When I left, the circuit was not in a position to extend my role and therefore, I was not replaced.

Despite my attempts to remain on Animate's fringe from the outset, encouraging them to develop their own vision and indigenous leadership, Bob shared how, nevertheless, my leaving was detrimental:

We had that model of you being more that Pioneer, Fresh Expressions minister and me being [*hesitation*] the more inherited one. When you left, it left that gap, and we lost one or two people. Partly because you were free to do it, you built up those relationships and because I wasn't free to do it, I haven't been able to maintain them.

My personal reflection therefore is that mentoring had been crucial to the initial success of the project, and that a minister being present, even if they delegate as much as possible, adds something powerful to the ecclesial mix that is difficult to define.

3.4.5 Closing reflections

VFX encourages the Church to ask a number of questions in relation to Fresh Expressions as part of its 'checklist for health'.³¹¹ Animate shared a good relationship with the wider church. Whilst there were occasional tensions among the leadership, these were resolved without any intervention on my part. There was certainly good engagement with the question, 'What is the Good News in this place for these people?' evidenced in the constant reflection on everyday issues with which people struggled, and how Animate addressed these through its themes and content. In the beginning, there was indeed a fledgling community from which a fresh expression could grow. However, at the time of conducting the interviews, some three years after the project began and nine months after I left, Animate was in difficulty. Its long-term sustainability had been impacted by Eric's being unable to continue as leader, and how those who remained lacked the time or confidence to replace him. Ironically, the pressures that Eric faced originated from Ark - the ministry that had originally raised questions about how the Church was reaching young people. Unfortunately, Ark's remit was to focus

³¹¹ Ian Bell, "Journeying : Our Pioneer Mission. How Are We Doing? ," The Methodist Church, 2014, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/635996/venturefx-how-are-we-doing-0912.pdf>.

on service, rather than evangelism and ecclesial formation. This was complicated further by the need to honour the auspices under which grants had been given by agencies other than the church.

Animate should have responded to the challenge and affirmation to 'become' church in their own right. However, the shock for me (which became evident in the interviews) was the extent to which despite my continually emphasising the ecclesial intent behind Fresh Expressions, not all of its leaders were convinced. Animate's leadership hovered between offering a full experience of church as possible, whilst wanting to remain attached to the mainstream church, which despite its faults was seen as 'proper'. Eric's conviction that the inherited church is programmed only to recognise call and commitment within its 'traditional' space – and that it struggles to recognise that people might be called to work exclusively within fresh expressions, deserves further consideration. If it is valid to recognise pioneers for VFX for work on the very fringe of Church life, why should it not be possible to recognise local preachers and worship leaders who are may be called to work exclusively within fresh expressions? Whilst there is nothing to prevent local churches commissioning people in this way, in cultural terms it requires a considerable change in mindset. I submit that both the former worship leaders course, and the new combined worship leading and local preachers training course, set traditional worship as a baseline in which practitioners can become competent before tacking fresh expressions. However, why not expose learners to different styles of worship first, such as examples of Taizé, Café Church, Contemporary Worship or Messy Church, and present these as equal alternatives, rather than deviations from the norm or something that is specialised. As more detail became available on the form and content of the new course, my conviction about this grew stronger.

The question of membership also requires serious reflection. At Riverhead Methodist Church and across the wider circuit, the centre of gravity for the Church was its traditional core. Here the forces of finance and available personnel tended to favour what was established over what is new and

risky. There is a rational warrant for this. Ultimately, it is members of the church who fund this work and most of them attend traditional services. Meanwhile, a minority, albeit one that tended to be younger and have more energy, are committed to fresh expressions and new forms of mission. Whilst I was able to encourage some people to take up membership because of the way in which it helped people affirm their faith and demonstrate their commitment to Animate, it did indeed feel like an artificial construct, and institutional requirement that had to be accepted in order that Animate be seen as credible. Whilst membership would also allow the members of Animate a say in the running of the Church, most would only ever be likely to assert this at an Annual General Meeting. Because the Church Council was seen as the domain of the local church, rather than Animate, and because serving in such a capacity went against the natural gifts and inclinations of some of those who attended, Animate's representation on Church Council was limited. A minority of six people (out of twenty-five), including me, served on Church Council, of whom two were employees of the Church who struggled to attend. Across the research period the number of people involved with Animate, who attended the Riverhead Church Council or General Church Meeting, was between one and three out of an attendance of between twenty-two to twenty-four.³¹² At the Circuit Meeting the number was higher but still in a minority at between five and seven out of thirty to thirty-five. Fresh expressions were in a minority and arguably had been disempowered by an ecclesiology which appears to welcome alternative forms of church but then dictates the structures and expectations that will qualify them for recognition.

³¹² Source Riverhead Church AGM and Church Council minutes.

Chapter Four

Messy Church

A case study of Messy Church at the Maltings,
amplified by observations from eight additional messy
churches throughout the region.

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4.0 Messy Church: Introduction

As was the case in Riverhead, whilst my primary focus in the Maltings was Messy Church, I was also able to observe other fresh expressions across the region. I have provided a summary of the most prominent oversight concerns in Table Five (overleaf).³¹³

There were clear and useful differences between how Maltings Messy Church had emerged in comparison to Animate. First, messy church was formed with a high proportion of leaders and helpers from the local church; this was a whole-church project and required a greater proportion of the wider church to lead and organise.³¹⁴ Second, whilst messy church took its vision from the wider Messy Church movement, Animate began at first principles by exploring the ecclesial content and character evident in Acts Chapter Two. Third, messy church had been running for a period of six years. Fourth, Raquel the minister who inspired and co-ordinated messy church served part-time across two churches, and was arguably able to devote more of her time to the project. In addition, Raquel was approaching retirement and was preparing to transfer the project's leadership to Carl, a local preacher.

Despite these variances, messy church raised identical questions to those that surfaced in Riverhead. How does the wider church enable the ecclesial elements of a fresh expression to grow? How is the mixed economy working and, if the leaders of messy church were genuine in their understanding of fresh expressions as a church planting process, why was baptism (and in their case communion) not being celebrated at the heart of this newly emerging community? How can a fresh expression

³¹³ Messy Church is for both children and adults, investing in creativity, celebration, and hospitality. See Lucy Moore and Jane Leadbetter, *Starting Your Messy Church : A Beginner's Guide for Churches* (Abingdon: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2012); *Messy Church 2, Ideas for Discipling a Christ-Centred Community* (Abingdon: BRF, 2012); *Messy Church. 3, Fifteen Sessions for Exploring the Christian Life with Families* (Abingdon: BRF, 2012); Paul Moore, *Making Disciples in Messy Church : Growing Faith in an All-Age Community* (Abingdon: BRF, 2013).

³¹⁴ Animate's core leadership was four in number, taken from a wider church membership of 180 and an average Sunday morning attendance of 40. Messy church's leadership was 10, taken from a church membership of 60, and an average Sunday morning attendance of 30.

develop its own identity in contrast to the wider church? What does it mean for ministers to oversee emergent congregations with a 'light touch'? Finally, how might the Methodist Church ensure consistent practice.

4.0.1 Table 4: Predominant oversight observations: Swindon case studies

PROJECT AND LOCATION	FREQUENCY DURATION & ATTENDANCE ³¹⁵	LEADERSHIP ³¹⁶	ECCLESIAL/ MISSIONAL DYNAMIC	KEY OVERSIGHT OBSERVATIONS
Parkside Messy Church Suburban	Monthly 6 years 25/98	Worship leader and team of five lay leaders. Monthly team meetings 3/4/4	Missional but beginning to recognise its ecclesial potential.	Church was willing to incorporate baptisms and communion in fresh expression. However, the frequency of messy church, and difficulties in resourcing another monthly service (because leaders were also committed to the parent church) frustrated progress. Presbyter takes part but does not lead teaching session.
Parkside Café Church Suburban	Monthly 4 years 12/98	Presbyter 2/4/4	Ecclesial but struggling to become missional. The project provided support to a number of key leaders in the church,	Struggled to attract newcomers. For a period, the wider church tried to incorporate café church into its regular worship, but the established congregation, who reverted after a year, resisted this. The group explored the possibility of moving to a more public setting (a local café manager offered his premises) but the group rejected this.

³¹⁵ The two figures indicate the average number who have attended the fresh expression throughout the year followed by the the average attendance at Sunday services. Source: Statistical returns, 2014 figures.

³¹⁶ The first figure indicates the number of team meetings I attended, If a team did not meet for separate planning meetings I have indicated who co-ordinated; LL = lay leader, ML = Minister leader. The second figure indicates the of church councils that I attended The third indicates the number of church councils that I chaired across the research period.

PROJECT AND LOCATION	FREQUENCY DURATION & ATTENDANCE ³¹⁵	LEADERSHIP ³¹⁶	ECCLESIAL/ MISSIONAL DYNAMIC	KEY OVERSIGHT OBSERVATIONS
Maltings Messy Church Market town	Monthly 4 years 30/68	2 ministers and one local preacher. Presbyter plans and delegates. ML/1/0.	Missional. Instead of developing the ecclesial identity of messy church, the wider church started new messy church services elsewhere in the community.	Project is welcoming new parents and children. Locality of baptisms and membership raised questions about whether the wider church viewed messy church as having serious ecclesial potential. Ecclesial vision for fresh expressions understood by the presbyters but not lay leaders.
Westside Messy Church City Centre	Quarterly 3 years 15/42	Mission Enabler and lay team. Enabler plans and delegates. 2/4/4	Missional.	Fresh Expressions vision not fully understood: the wider Church hoped that children's activity would rejuvenate Sunday morning worship. Church leaders lacked confidence to lead and relied on support from circuit staff.
Arborough Messy Play based on Messy Church Village	Quarterly 1 year 12/10	Presbyter, Mission Enabler and volunteer. Enabler plans and delegates. ML/2/0	Missional. Struggling church opted to offer messy church as a means of exploring mission.	Well-received but also reliant on circuit staff to take the initiative. Messy Church developed useful links with the local school.
Croyhill Messy Church Town	Quarterly 3 years 12/29	Children's and Youth Outreach worker and mixed ecumenical team LL/4/4	Missional. Messy Church an extension of existing mission amongst children.	Leaders had not explored the link between evangelism and 'church' attendance. Ecumenical working raises particular questions about who has oversight. Whose procedures are followed? Could a resistance to discuss these issues result in a missional rather than ecclesial expression?

PROJECT AND LOCATION	FREQUENCY DURATION & ATTENDANCE ³¹⁵	LEADERSHIP ³¹⁶	ECCLESIAL/ MISSIONAL DYNAMIC	KEY OVERSIGHT OBSERVATIONS
Whitechurch Messy Church Town	Monthly 2 years 33/50	URC presbyter and lay team of six. ML/1/0	Missional – although the fresh expressions intent was understood.	Presbyter understood and agreed with the need for messy church to be ecclesial, but the leaders viewed messy church as an extension of church mission among children and parents — a means of growing the inherited church. Focus was more on craft and less on evangelism and faith-development.
Cater Messy Church Village	Intended to be Monthly but failed to progress.	Mission Enabler, Youth and Children’s Outreach worker, three presbyters (Anglican, Methodist, URC) one Methodist deacon. 3/2/1	Original intent was to form a new ecclesial community by working together as ecumenical partners. Methodist chapel had closed but the circuit wished to retain its commitment to children and youth in the area.	Rather than becoming the basis for a new ecclesial community, local churches only committed to messy church during the times that it was not happening in their own churches. Local community involvement was poor. One factor may have been the sale of the chapel by the Methodist Church. Ecumenical relationships between the URC minister and the Anglican Rector were difficult. Methodist staff felt that Messy Church was not a viable form of mission without the support of local volunteers. The Methodist Mission Enabler and Children’s and Youth Outreach Worker reinvested their time at other locations in the circuit where they felt there was greater potential for mission work.

4.1 Summary of findings: The Maltings Messy Church

4.1.1 Circuit presbyters in fresh expressions also experience vocational tension

Raquel, the minister of the Maltings Methodist Church served in a context that is all too familiar to ministers. The majority of those whom she served were retired and most of them were considerably older. She worked in partnership with her husband Mike, who was also the director of a UK based charity that is committed to helping churches become inclusive of young people and families. Its website states, 'Churches often need help in acting out this philosophy in their life and activities, for many have fallen into the trap of serving a limited sector of people. We are here to challenge, help, and equip churches to be fully inclusive by leading courses and providing resources'.³¹⁷ Mike also served part-time in the circuit and assisted in the running of messy church. One of the most striking features was the age of those who attended the Maltings – the majority of members were over retirement age.³¹⁸ Although Raquel was facing retirement herself, a tension was evident between her own spiritual and cultural needs being met, her desire to engage with people through mission, and the conservatism of the wider church. The vocational tension previously been identified by Cox as being present in pioneer ministers, was also evident in Raquel, a circuit presbyter who believed passionately that the Church should do more to engage with people who were new and different.

Raquel actively offered herself as a 'sympathetic ear' to those who were ill or had a problem, and encouraged members of the congregation to let her know if they are aware of anyone who was in such a position. One entry in the Church magazine stated, 'It would better that six people contacted me rather than none at all!' Raquel was mature, passionate, driven by a sense of what was 'just' (actively supporting honesty and fairness), what was 'right' (in how people were treated), and of

³¹⁷ Mike Bossingham, "The Family Friendly Churches Trust," 2015.
<http://www.familyfriendlychurches.org.uk/NewSite/index.php>. See also, IDEAS.
<http://www.ffctideas.org.uk/resources.php>.

³¹⁸ This is the standard demographic of the Methodist Church. See "Methodism in Numbers - Statistics at a Glance, July 2015."

how the church might have integrity by taking the gospel seriously. Strikingly, many of Raquel's letters to the wider congregation end with the words, 'your minister, and friend'.

Whilst Raquel exhibited a degree of mature emotional detachment, this was not enough to prevent her from feeling troubled when others were upset, or from feeling hurt in the event if anyone questioned her motives. We explored in general terms how conflict influenced her leadership. Raquel's difficult past experiences led her to take a cautionary approach to introducing change. In her ministry, Raquel tried to balance her own sense of vocation with what the church could achieve, and used the order and formality of Church process as a mechanism by which she could introduce new ideas (whilst accepting that this placed limits on how quickly change could be implemented). The prospect of holding a messy church was discussed a church council, then at an open meeting, and then individually with those members who might have felt disenfranchised. Whilst, presbyters who work in non-fresh expressions contexts experience similar tensions, the call for church leaders to develop new work whilst continuing with the old (in some form), risks placing them at increased risk of having to manage conflict. Crucially, Raquel stated that she had three key sources of encouragement; Mike, Betty (her senior church steward who she referred to as 'her rock'), and a relaxed Growing in Ministry Support Group at which she met for fellowship with other presbyters. Raquel shared that one of the most challenging concerns which surfaced from this group was how presbyters should interpret the phrase, 'Let no one suffer hurt though your neglect' (to which they had given their assent at ordination).³¹⁹ Raquel and her ordained colleagues (some of whom participated in the wider consultation) shared a deep sense of personal accountability but at times, this left them feeling guilty about what they could not achieve, and those church members who,

³¹⁹ *Worship Book*, 302.

rightly or wrongly, were ever upset or dissatisfied. Whilst presbyters can delegate and find creative ways of encouraging mission, it is highly unlikely that they will satisfy everyone.

4.1.2 Messy Church could not be integrated into morning worship

Messy church was held monthly, in the sanctuary and the hall, at 4pm. Different people attended and new relationships were developing. Strikingly, some parents resisted the idea of bringing their children on a Sunday. They did not want their children to be a distraction and were conscious that some members of the congregation might disapprove if their children were disruptive. The prospect of parents having to restrain their children during worship – and not being able to engage properly themselves – was a significant disincentive. One mother stated, 'I can't follow anything when I am at the back with my own child. It is such an effort to get to church in the first place, and for what?' Of the dozen children who attended messy church, only three attended Sunday morning worship. By the close of the research phase, this had reduced to one. Crucially, messy church needed to reflect on how it interfaced with the Maltings Methodist Church in a manner that complemented rather than compromised the spiritual development of those who attended.

The link between homogeneity and church growth has long since been the focus of practical reflection, especially in light of McGavran's Homogenous Unit Principle. Should churches build on the strengths of this or actively encourage greater diversity? My impression was that the messy church fostered an environment that was more conducive for ministry among families, where conversations about parenting, employment, and education occurred naturally. These provided a rich seam into which faith could be discussed, encouraged and lived.³²⁰ These discussions were rarely taking place during 'regular' worship. However, my impression was that the practice of

³²⁰ See Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980); Elmer L. Towns and Gary McIntosh, *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement : 5 Views*, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004); Gailyn Van Rheen, "The Missional Helix – an Overview," *missiology.org*, 2015, <http://www.missiology.org/the-missional-helix-an-overview/>.

meeting monthly was an inadequate base from which to begin a serious attempt at ecclesial development. It limited messy church in that it took longer for people to gain a sense of belonging. It also disabled the messy church community from developing a more robust spiritual rhythm and a broader curriculum for learning. It may also have contributed to how the wider Church viewed messy church as a periphery activity.

4.1.3 Leaders had not fully grasped the Fresh Expressions ethos

There was a tendency for helpers to think 'messy church equal's children's activity' rather than recognising that Messy Church is intended to be both a form of church and a form of church planting. Whilst Carl, who had recently completed *Mission Shaped Ministry* and, Leanne, a Girls Brigade Captain were confident to talk about all things 'messy', they were not able to describe what a fresh expression was, even in the simplest terms of it being a form of church that welcomes new people. Congruent with Riverhead, some core leaders and helpers understood fresh expressions to mean something that was new, novel, different and refreshing, rather than an attempt to form Christian community. Whilst the ministers and senior leaders across the additional case study centres tried to counteract this, communicating otherwise was proving a struggle. At the Maltings, messy church took place on the periphery. Sunday morning worship was 'proper church' or 'the place to be'.

4.1.4 Leaders value and do not want to undermine 'traditional' church.

In contrast to the assumption that inherited congregations are traditional, uninviting, and unwilling to change, the morning congregation at the Maltings enjoyed a mix of contemporary and traditional songs, communicated through different forms of media. Rather than declining inherited church, growing fresh expression, the situation at the Maltings was vibrant and steady inherited church serving adults, messy church serving children. The choice between investing more in messy church for the sake of the children, at the expense of receiving less from Sunday morning worship as an

adult, was a difficult one. In addition, whilst some messy church leaders only served within that context, others served both messy church and the wider church, and were unable to offer more time to messy church without compromising the latter. These leaders shared a deep loyalty towards the inherited church, despite any frustrations that they might have felt. This was also true of Parkside and Whitechurch messy churches. Tensions at Parkside messy church were sharper, perhaps owing to how differences in leadership styles and how the sessions were planned. Negotiations to plant an ecumenical fresh expression in Westside faltered when it became clear that the church would meet only when nothing else was happening in the other churches. It was an optional ecumenical activity, rather than an ecumenical church.

4.1.5 Consistency in who preaches and pastors can improve development

One clear difference between the Maltings, Swindon, and Riverhead, was that ministers at the Maltings conducted far more services than was the case with either of the latter. Raquel, Neil (the superintendent), or supernumerary ministers led at least half of the services on the plan – a significantly higher proportion than was the case at Swindon or Riverhead. Local preachers (as a whole) only took two to three of the services per month and therefore, Raquel and Neil were able to be more discerning about where people were planned. Whilst Raquel served part-time, she had been given pastoral charge of only one church. This difference between a full-time presbyter who serves fourteen churches with a superintendent (in the case of Riverhead) or solely among five churches (in the case of Swindon), and the situation at the Maltings, was particularly striking. Throughout my ministry I have only ever been able to offer my churches one morning a month (or even less). This issue raises a question about how, as Methodism declines, local circuits might achieve the best return from their presbyters and local preachers.

4.1.6 Methodist membership may encourage an unhelpful conformity

People belonged to messy church because they *attended*, even if they were relatives who were visiting their grandchildren over a weekend or were members of another church. As was in the case at Riverhead, whilst some people became members at the Maltings, the wider church expected them to commit to *both* the fresh expression and the inherited church. Similarly, the Maltings Church Council comprised a far greater proportion of those who served at the core of the church, rather than newcomers. The dynamics at play were also strikingly similar, and I observed four distinctive characteristics. First, the wider Church wanted those who had become members through an initial contact with messy church, to support them as they struggled to fill positions of responsibility. During my research, a series of notices appeared in the church magazine requesting that people consider becoming a pastoral visitor, a safeguarding officer, or attending a small group. Second, the balance of power within the Church Council was weighted towards traditional patterns of church worship and witness. Whilst messy church leaders recognised the need to change the regularity and content of their worship (to include a greater focus on discipleship), they were nervous about the conflict that this might generate. Third, this balance of cultural perspective and power made it difficult for members to break free from an attractional model of mission which hoped, quietly, that children and parents who attended messy church would make the transition to Sunday morning worship. Here, the ecclesiology of the Church mediated a form of centripetal witness that encouraged conformity rather than innovation. Fourth, and arguably as a consequence of these weaknesses, discussions about messy church were either totally absent from, or scheduled in the lower order on Church Council agendas. This suggests that the church was not properly recognising messy church's ecclesial potential; they viewed it as an important work of mission, but not something that had the potential to become a church in its own right. This inequality also limited the extent to which the mixed economy functioned, particularly the lessons that the wider church could learn from messy church.

4.1.7 New congregations rather than a new forms of Church?

During this phase of the research, the Fresh Expressions website began to publish material that, for the first time, linked the word 'congregation' (rather than 'church') into fresh expressions discourse. Suddenly a fresh expression could be a new congregation that exists alongside a traditional church. One article stated, 'The ecumenical fresh expressions movement...has seen thousands of new congregations being formed alongside more traditional churches since the initiative started in 2004.'³²¹ Admittedly, the definition of a fresh expression has always been a working one and is intended to be as inclusive as possible. Even so, for Methodists, the phrase 'fresh expression of church' and the use of the word 'church' has a particular significance. Churches have members, a church council, and contribute towards the costs of ministry across a circuit. The word 'congregation' has less weight. Multiple congregations can exist under the oversight of a church council who agree the level of autonomy that it gives to its fresh expressions leaders. The article that celebrated fresh expressions as new congregations has now been removed from its website but in my view, the question of whether a fresh expression is a church or a congregation generates a further line of enquiry about whether, as fresh expressions evolve, they can renegotiate the level of autonomy that they are trusted with, or whether it is best to seek autonomy from the earliest opportunity, by forming themselves as churches in the Methodist-legal sense of the word.

4.1.8 Future staffing issues

Two wider staffing issues were challenging the future of messy church because they either impacted the mixed economy (in that what limits traditional churches flows through to fresh expressions) or the direct leadership of messy church. First, mid-way through this research, the circuit began the process of replacing Mike and Raquel. The Maltings would lose the ordained leadership that planted

³²¹ "New Methodist Connexional Missioner for Fresh Expressions," Fresh Expressions, <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/news/grahamhorsley>. Prior to this, Fresh Expressions used the same describe Ian Bell's work as Horsley's predecessor in an article on 'Pioneering pathways.' (Since removed.)

and sustained messy church, and there was no guarantee that replacements could be found. Mindful of her immanent retirement, Raquel was training Carl, a local preacher, to succeed her.

Furthermore, the circuit superintendent was also due to leave during that same year, leading to discussions about the possibility of merging with a neighbouring circuit. This left the local church in a period of instability as they became uncertain about how they would resource themselves in the future.

4.2 Observations on messy church culture and experience

4.2.1 The wider church loves children but finds them distracting

One of my most profound experiences at the Maltings came from Elizabeth during an all-age worship service on a Sunday morning. I had been invited to preach at Harvest Festival. I began our reflections by displaying a loaf of bread on the screen and asking, 'Where does bread come from?' Elizabeth (front row, left) shouted out, much to the amusement of all present, that it came from Sainsbury's! I had, in fairness, deliberately left the label on, hoping that a child would shout this out. This device would allow me to remind everyone that bread does not just come from the supermarket; it comes from wheat, which comes from seed, which comes from the ground, which comes from God, who sends the sun and the rain. Elizabeth and I shared in the most effervescent and entertaining dialogue that I have ever experienced. As this played-out, I could see that folks in the church had a deep love for Elizabeth and were delighting in her cheekiness as she challenged me. Elizabeth had pride of place – and she knew it! Thus, despite the fact that the church's attempts to address the needs of children on Sunday mornings was not proving effective, the congregation was nonetheless open, accepting and willing to embrace them. Another more poignant observation was of how the Church allowed two grandparents to share bulletins in the monthly magazine about how their granddaughter was progressing. She had an inoperable brain tumour. Despite these positives however, some members of the congregation found that the children could be distracting.

Interviews with the much larger number of parents who brought their children to messy church suggested that despite all of this love, they would find morning worship difficult if their child was running behind the pulpit, dancing in front of the preacher in an adorable way, or protesting about the need to sit quietly. The desire to conform was not limited to the wider congregation. Parents also wanted to listen, rather than worrying about their child's behaviour. One parent stated:

We make all that effort for a morning service, we are exhausted by the time we have argued with the kids to get there, we sit through the service and don't hear a thing. And then we go back home again. Messy Church is just so much easier.

Messy church at the Maltings began with an open meeting led by the minister. Following success at a series of children's holiday clubs run at the Church, Raquel wanted to find a means by which the church could retain contact with those who were on its fringes. Having read Lucy Moore's text, she visited a number of established projects and then returned to the church and shared the idea of starting a Messy Church.³²² Referring to her original notes, she remembered how she introduced the idea:

Messy Church is not about making a mess or clearing one out – but reaching out to those who have a rough connection with the church. To reach those people who are neither in, nor out. A messy church will be an opportunity to help people of all ages to worship together, to help people feel that they belong in church and to each other, to help people have fun together, to give people an opportunity express their godly creativity, to invite people to belong to a Christian community, to introduce people to Jesus through hospitality, story and worship.

I went on to ask, 'Did you speak about fresh expressions?' There was something of an embarrassed silence and a rechecking of her notes, 'No I don't think I did', she replied. In that moment she searched herself and could not quite believe that she had missed such an obvious link. Those who were helping with messy church may have heard of fresh expressions. However, neither of us could be certain that the leaders of messy church had made this connection for themselves. This explained much the evidence gathered from open conversations and interviews, which suggested that most people helping at messy church were less familiar with the movement's language, vision, and principles.

³²² Moore and Leadbetter, *Starting*.

‘What is the purpose of this fresh expression?’ was one of the key questions in the initial questionnaire (Appendix B). All of the respondents wrote or shared that messy church was a way of catering for the needs of children and adults that were not being satisfied through morning or evening worship. Four shared how messy church met their *adult* needs to create and express themselves. Two people, one of whom was a core leader, and one of whom was a newcomer who had recently transferred from another church, stated that the project intended to make new disciples. None wrote or spoke about the project as a fresh expression, or as a form of church. Yet, according to Moore, the founder of the Messy Church movement, the desire to develop ‘a form of church’ is indispensable. Moore states:

Messy Church is a form of church for children and adults that involves creativity, celebration and hospitality. It is not a way of getting people to come to church on Sunday - There are examples of people starting in Messy Church and deciding to join Sunday church as well but these are the exception rather than the rule. If people wanted to go to established church, they would be going by now. Messy Church is interdependent with established church, but will usually operate as a separate congregation or church.³²³

Raquel similarly shared no expectation that those who attended messy church would attend Sunday morning worship:

I think for some people, that [messy church] is their way of going to church and I would not expect to see them on a Sunday. If you are expecting people to make a transition from Messy Church to Sunday morning you are probably mistaken. My concern about this is that what people get through messy church is pure spiritual milk but not meat. When I did my MDR [Ministerial Development Review] the other year, my accompanist suggested doing a bible study – so when you had messy church going on others could be doing something deeper....and I think it is still a good idea.

³²³ Lucy Moore, "What Messy Church Is or Isn't," Bible Resource Fellowship, 2016. <http://www.messychurch.org.uk/what-messy-church-and-isnt>.

Even so, whilst Raquel recognised this, my observations was that rather than progressing this idea, the church was experimenting with developing a second messy church in partnership with the local Anglican Church in the Maltings, and a third messy church in a neighbouring village. Meanwhile, the wider church saw no need to alter the content or pattern of its worship. Progress was therefore limited.

4.2.2 The messy church experience

One important feature of messy church was its relaxed start-time. Whilst the session officially began at four, this was more of a gathering for fellowship where the team served refreshments before the worship began. This relaxed approach stood in stark contrast to the prompt start of Sunday morning worship. Messy church was informal, although Raquel did wear a clerical collar. Leadership was collaborative. Whilst the planning group did assign a co-ordinating leader for each week, I could not discern who this was until they welcomed everybody at the beginning.

The American comedian Jerry Seinfeld once described having a two-year-old as being 'like having a blender without having a lid'. This is how I would describe worship dimension of Messy Church. It was fun, playful and energetic. The freedom and circumference in which worship took place was much greater than the restricted space that is occasionally offered to children in the event that they are invited to come to the front of the Church during morning worship. Interestingly, given all this 'space', there was very little anarchy. There were times where some children preferred to sit with their parents - and this was permitted. If children ran around and simply played, leaders encouraged them to return to the centre and join in. Settling the children for worship or to hear a story could be a challenging process but the leaders persevered. The level of tolerance at messy church was far greater than in any morning or evening church service that I have ever attended.

In contrast, whilst Sunday morning worship was relaxed, it still possessed an air of formality.³²⁴ The beginning of services were stage managed (the steward would escort the preacher from the vestry), the congregation would fall silent, the steward would introduce them. The service had a liturgy which although not necessarily written, was punctuated with hymns and was, to a degree, predictable. Somehow, the pace of the service and its formality would have been disturbed in the event that the wider congregation had to wait for younger children to arrive and settle. Rightly or wrongly, the congregation equated silence and calm with reverence. My overall impression of messy church was that it was a place where the children, rather than the adults, were the priority.

Messy Church followed a simple pattern. Introduction, worship, bible story, craft, food (much like a birthday tea), and then closing worship in which efforts were made to reinforce the children's learning. The leader called the children to the centre of the room, introduced the theme and directed worship. Songs were frequently accompanied by actions. Rarely was any instruction given from the front; anyone new simply copied the nearest child or adult.

The Family Friendly Churches Trust resources blended a range of age-appropriate teaching materials for each session including prayers and stories shown on video. In comparison to other children's resources, such as those produced by *Scripture Union for Holiday Clubs* or *Hillsong Children*, these were less slick. They were however fit for purpose, and whilst the tawdry graphics did not appeal to me, the children enjoyed worship. They found the animated mountains (*If you have Faith a Small as a Mustard seed you can move Mountains*) and righteous Christians running to take sanctuary in a strong tower (*Blessed be the Name of the Lord*), entertaining. Preparation for prayer took around ten seconds as the children traced a circle with one hand, then the other, then clapped their hands together, and closed their eyes for prayer. At the end of the prayer, the spinning hands came out

³²⁴ I refer there to regular morning worship, rather than a monthly All-Age Worship.

again; first one, then the other, whilst the word 'Amen' built into a loud crescendo and fists pumped the air.

Very quickly, I was asked to carry out simple but important tasks such as helping oversee a particular piece of craft. Herein, a distinct ethos emerged. Whilst adults led, children and adults worked together and on occasion, children who had been shown how to carry out a particular activity helped adults who moved from table to table. At the core of messy worship was a creativity and expressiveness that gave permission for children and *adults* to lose their inhibitions. Once, when there were no children present, the adult leaders and helpers continued regardless!

4.2.3 Vibrant parent church, growing fresh expression

Whilst new people attended messy church, the Sunday morning congregation also attracted newcomers. In two cases, and against the direction of travel envisaged by both Mike and Raquel, messy church did indeed serve as a stepping stone to morning worship, and to Methodist membership. This said, both of these individuals had previous experience of Methodism and were therefore comfortable with the concept. One of them shared:

I grew up in xxx – I went to xxx Methodist Church from birth until about the age of 18 and then I moved here and went to a couple of churches before I found the Maltings. So I went to the one in town, xxx Church...that was for a while but they don't have any Sunday school. We lived in xxx then and I knew a friend that went to Parkside. I was there for 8-9 months. Then I went to xxx Methodist for 2-3 weeks.

And in respect of the welcome she received:

Xxx and Xxx welcomed me straightway...Its just a nice place to be. I liked the person who was preaching. And then I think the same was true for two or three weeks in a row. I think with the Maltings there were not too many people that came over to me... when you are new at a Church you can get swamped...but sometimes you want to sit at the back and take it all in.... a few people said hello, not too many for me... Then I brought Elizabeth along which was an attraction for everybody...child!...William and Jack were there – Jill’s two boys. Elizabeth has always like Sunday School and that has been the way ever since really.

This said, as time passed, William and Jack stopped attending Sunday school, whilst Elizabeth remained.

4.2.4 Effective engagement

Unfortunately, the survey produced for Animate proved less helpful at messy church despite repeated invitations to contribute, in person and via Facebook. Only five individuals responded. Whilst this was disappointing, people remained open to sharing in research conversations. Did people feel blessed? Yes. It was clear that the worship and the shared activity were equally important in facilitating a fellowship where people did life together. On one occasion, I witnessed a child run across the room, rejoicing out-loud, as she said, ‘Mummy, Mummy, Mummy. Look. I did it, I did it, I did it!’ She was holding a piece of craft that for her, had been a challenge to complete. Were they growing in their understanding of God? Yes. At the beginning of each session the leader would ask everyone present if they could remember what the theme of last month’s messy church was, after which a dialogue would flow between them and the children. If they did not remember the theme, they certainly remembered the story behind what they had made. I was left wondering that if I returned to a church a month after I had preached and said to those present, ‘Can you remember what I said when I was here last?’ there would be silence, either because people genuinely could not remember or because they were too embarrassed to speak up at the risk of being wrong. Was there

a ritual supporting this learning? Certainly, in the sense of a timetable with people, places and spaces set aside where different facets of church would surface naturally.

Mindful of Kirby, I was keen to explore whether the messy church experience was leading those who attended to 'bother' about inviting and encouraging new people. This was indeed the case, although the tendency was for people at the messy church to invite people to activities shared in partnership with the wider congregation. Messy church did not run anything exclusively. In terms of my own engagement, the fact that messy church was held monthly meant that it took a long while for me to form relationships. However, I had a very clear memory of the point at which I felt accepted, some nine months after the research began. I had been invited to attend a pantomime at the Church that had been directed by one of the leaders of messy church, during which Mike, playing the lead dame rushed down the stage and forced me to dance – and a young mum hugged me on the way out and said how good it was to see me. For me, I had to make the effort to join messy church rather than fitting in naturally. I suspect that another reason for this was that I was a single man (I did not bring my own children to messy church) and therefore struggled to become part of the same friendship groups and complimentary networks.³²⁵ I was not likely to be invited to a girlie night in. This betrays two important issues. First, whilst some social media networking sites come natural to me, I do not regularly view Facebook or post material. This disadvantaged me. Second, one of the weak aspects of messy church was its lack of engagement with men and boys. Men did attend as helpers and parents but the majority of those who attended were women. One of the points of feedback from Leanne, the Boys Brigade captain from a neighbouring circuit, was how few boys were present and how in her view there was a lack of constructor type activities (as opposed to art and craft based activities).

³²⁵ Pete Ward has written on the fluidity of community networks in *Liquid Church* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 2002).

4.2.5 Harmony

There was little evidence of conflict between the messy church and the wider church. In fact, relationships were harmonious. Messy church and Sunday morning worship were equally good at doing different things. When Raquel and Mike arrived, the sanctuary was refurbished with an audio system and visual projection equipment. My experience of working with the stewards, a worship band and the audio-visual team in preparation for the harvest festival service was excellent. The congregation were open to learn new songs, willing to engage in dialogue (I had planned an all-age service with two opportunities for teaching and discussion), were relaxed, and had a sense of humour. Significantly, the Maltings Methodist Church was the only church that as well as suggesting hymns that the congregation might know, have offered to teach me something new. In morning worship my blend of traditional and contemporary songs was well received. When discussing worship with church members, three people stated independently, 'Our old people love the band!' This challenged two generalisations that I have encountered frequently in my ministry. The first is that the 'old people' might usually be the awkward ones, somehow inhibiting progress. The second is that 'old people' would dislike contemporary worship songs. Neither have been particularly true in my own ministry, and they were not true at the Maltings.

In comparison to Riverhead, there was less internal tension or 'divine disquiet' (as Atkins has put it) between the leaders of the project and the wider-church membership about the need for the church to engage effectively with children and young people. In their view, the church had recognised this and through the minister, had responded. In terms of its ecclesial development, whilst Messy Church in the Maltings quickly established its niche and identity, the need for it to become more autonomous and independent from the wider Methodist Church simply did not surface in general conversation.

4.2.6 Social Media and messy church

The rise of Facebook as a means of enabling social networking in Church communities became more noticeable as the research period progressed. Facebook enabled a level of interaction that was difficult to replicate though more traditional websites. It was also attractive because it is free, does not require people to sign up (unless they wish to post comments), and provides an efficient way of allowing a trusted people to post material such as photographs and notices. Some of the strengths and challenges that the wider church faced were immediately apparent. The entries below are from people who were both members of Maltings Methodist Church and helpers at messy church:

11th May 2013

Xxx: The Maltings Methodist Church is a lovely place to worship and also meet friends. xxx asked if I would like to go one Sunday when I first moved into the area and I am so pleased he did. The church and everyone involved has been a big help to me.

Xxx³²⁶: I have been attending for about 30 years and get a lot from the services as well as having made many good friends.

Xxx: I first came to the Church in the summer of 1994 and found a warm and friendly welcome. I have made some wonderful friends.

Xxx: I have been attending this church for the past 23 years and am a Local Preacher and Church Steward. It is like my family and has something for everyone.

³²⁶ xxx: anonymised entry. All entries were from different individuals.

Facebook provides a way in which people who attend messy church can celebrate what has been happening and, to an extent, enable its leaders to gauge how the leaders and helpers are feeling:

2nd June:

Messy Church Helper: This afternoons Messy Church was all about the Baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. Here is what the children (and adults) created... — at The Maltings Methodist Church....xxx, Mike xxx, xxx xxx and 10 others like this.

Local Preacher and occasional leader: As far as I can remember there has only been one other that has been busier and that was when all the invites went out to the Tots at Ten group. Very well led Raquel and xxx, also well done to all the helpers. Another excellent Messy Church.

Church member: Raquel thought it would be quiet this afternoon with it being half term, sunny and Deeping Show. But I think it was as busy as it ever has been. It was great.

Kitchen helper: Great messy church and yes many turned up may need to make more jelly next time! Look forward to the next messy church.

This entry, calling for people to pray for someone who was dying, was particularly striking:

26 May at 05:33, xxx and Raquel: Please, can you find a moment to pray for our friend and Anglican Colleague xxx. He fell down the stairs at home this morning and rushed into hospital. We don't know the exact problem, but we have just heard that he has now been transferred to Addenbrookes, which suggests it is really serious. Prayers for Mike too, please, as he has been drafted in to lead and preside at the Presence service at St John's xxx that is planned for this evening. (Received four 'likes')

26th May 0907, xxx: Thanks for the request will pray for those needs.

26th May at 0921, xxx: ...praying.

26th May at 1601, xxx: Adding my prayers for all those who need them.

27th May at 1046, xxx: Rev xxx Smith has passed away! RIP!!

27th May at 1124, xxx Methodist Church: Really sorry to get this news. xxx was a good friend and colleague.

27th May at 1209, xxx: So sorry to hear this. My prayers with his family and friends at this difficult time.

3rd June at 0856: xxx Growing list of tributes on www.ctspad.org.uk/news/2015/peter-garland

I also found the following entry poignant. The practice of displaying information about funerals and offering space for tributes was new to me:

Xxx xxx funeral will take place at Swindon Crematorium on May 12th at 2.30pm, and everyone is welcome. No flowers, please.

xxx: xxx was a wonderful person who loved life & everyone in it. My parents were very close friends with xxx & I have so many fond memorable visits including falling into the river at the bottom of her garden. RIP xxx - much loved & sadly missed.

Facebook was one of the common ways in which people shared what took place at messy church, through posting material or messaging each other. From the images, it is easy to see how activity and spirituality were wedded together. The pattern of 'craft, paste and pray' was particularly evident and provided a contrast to other forms of prayer which rely more on the cerebral and oral. One example is of how at Christmas, the community remembered that God would meet their needs as they made cardboard cut-outs of bread, wrote prayers about their present needs, and hung them on a white Christmas tree. On another occasion, whilst remembering the needs of others and the call to love their neighbour, people decorated paper hands that had been cut out, wrote their prayers on them, and placed the finished article on an offering plate. There were links here between the priority given to prayer, the simplicity with which people were able to respond, and the pattern of prayer at Riverhead. By writing prayers, I thought more carefully about what I wanted to say. I had to construct something for myself, rather than having a preacher say a prayer for me and inviting me to reply 'Amen' at the end. There was also a value in producing something that was lasting – in much the same way that I might say a prayer and light a candle – and the candle remains alight whilst I have gone.

This research highlighted the extent to which social networking was impacting fresh expressions across the region. Elsewhere, Westside Methodist Church, a suburban Methodist Church on the edge of the city had constructed a Facebook page over a weekend and had seen great success in terms of not only the numbers of people from the immediate community who joined, but those who had moved on some years ago and re-established contact. One expectant mother at Parkside messy church announced she had fallen pregnant via Facebook. However, the less palatable aspects of social networking were also apparent. Parkside Methodist Church suspended its site for over two years and took disciplinary action owing to tensions that surfaced between two leaders, a group of young people, and their parents. At Riverhead, I remember one instance where a parent arrived at the youth centre intent on entering the project to confront a group of young people who were reposting unfavourable comments about her daughter on Facebook. The project leaders refused her entry and called the police.

For the Maltings messy church, the impact of the Facebook was wide-ranging. At one point the site received attention from a member of Methodists Evangelicals Together who struggled with the idea of a labyrinth being used as part of a Good Friday reflection, arguing that this was a pagan practice. Mike became involved, pointing to the Christian rather than pagan heritage that has been part of labyrinthine tradition. He permitted debate and then closed the thread down at the point where he felt that no new perspectives were emerging. In doing so, Mike showed considerable expertise. However, Mike, who holds a PhD in Computer Studies and is familiar with the working of Facebook, has much greater experience than that of other ministers. My observations across all of the fresh expressions has been the ease with which people share their feelings and views via Facebook. Familiarity with how Facebook (and a plethora of other social media sites) function; how they are administered, how people are authorised to post material and how unhelpful conversations can be terminated, is a new skill that ministers will either have to learn for themselves, or delegate. Social

media has added an additional weave to the complex tapestry in which presbyters minister to churches and fresh expressions.

4.2.7 How children see church

I found one particular account of a young toddler who attended messy church particularly striking. For him, messy church was 'church' and he struggled to grasp how another congregation, another form of church could exist! Carl shared:

My cousin's little boy Richard, who is only three...if you say to him. 'Do you want to go to Messy Church, he will shout 'Yes!' He loves it. I took him to normal church [*Sunday morning worship*] the other week and I told him we would go to messy church in the afternoon...but when he arrived he really struggled...I know he is only three... he thought the church building was 'messy church', so I tried to explain. I said, 'We are going to big church now, to normal church...but he was saying, 'But this is messy church!'...and then he said, Where is messy church? I know he is only three but he just couldn't get it...

I saw something profound in this briefest of accounts. There is a difference between what I mean by 'church' and how those who attended messy church understood 'church' to be. For Richard, messy church was 'church'. Because he had no prior experience of Sunday morning worship, there was no alternative in his mind as to what else could exist. Thus, just as we ask the question, how can a messy church be 'Church', he was asking how could it not be. For me, this raised a further question about why, Sunday morning worship should have the ascendancy over all else?

This resonates with the Church Army Research's group critique of *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* as they query the extent to which Christian *koinonia* and the work of the Holy Spirit have been overlooked. This is not to say that the Church is wrong to focus on other ecclesial dynamics. It does however, highlight how the wider church might have something to learn from the Fresh Expressions principle that local projects should be living out a church planting process and developing the marks of church. Although the separation is somewhat crude, it could be argued that

half of the marks of a mature expression of church were present at messy church and half were present in Sunday morning worship.

4.3 Oversight Matters at messy church

4.3.1 Leaders bring a rich blend of skills and experience

The initial survey (Appendix B) generated meaningful data that demonstrated how messy church's leaders and helpers brought considerable life experience, professional expertise and familiarity with Methodist process and discipline. One steward who helped lead the craft activities had over fifty years of experience of Methodism. Another helper was a Girls Brigade Captain. One band member was a primary school teacher. Of the four people who assisted in the kitchen, two were local preachers and one was the former treasurer at the Church. This meant that project leaders looked naturally to Raquel as their minister, and provided a stable foundation from which the mission of the church could be developed.

4.3.2 Connectivity: Whatever you do, do not mention church!

When I pressed leaders gently about the project's development as a church or what aspects of 'church' were present, they would use the word 'congregation' in their responses. I sensed that the word 'church' did not fit; it was unwieldy and divisive; it risked setting up an unhelpful and opposing dynamic between themselves and the wider church. In their view, messy church stood alongside other acts of worship as an equal and vibrant partner, perhaps even more valid than the other traditional evening congregations that were struggling. In Raquel's view, any discussions at this point concerning the creation of a new forms of church, how messy church needed to be autonomous and whether the wider church should expect those who attend to visit the Church for Sunday morning worship, were premature and even potentially unhelpful. Whilst Raquel recognised that messy church could grow to the point where it was church in its own right, she felt that it was best not to mention it. There was a distinct sense of, 'We know it might happen, but keep it quiet!' If this became a reality, the wider church would deal with it then, by which time feelings, attitudes and

insecurities might have changed. In meantime, Raquel felt that this active neglect was an important move that allowed people to offer help whilst reducing the prospect of conflict.

4.3.3 Ecclesial development: Monthly is not enough

One of my most frustrating experiences was in finding the church in the first instance, and remembering the way the following month. This may reflect my own lack of organisation and in fairness, few people drove to messy church: they walked. On one occasion I struggled to find the church and returned home, embarrassed and frustrated because to miss one messy church service is to lose contact for a further four weeks. Whilst, messy church bridged this divide by signposting people to fellowship events that were run by the wider church, and whilst informal networks (such as Facebook) allowed people to retain a sense of connexion, messy church did not offer any related acts of worship of small groups to help sustain people between services. In my view, on its own, messy church did not leave people with the spiritual tools and practical disciplines which could sustain them between gatherings. No one at messy church was asking the question of where people might receive this and whether there was a need to offer more – in addition to the messy church sessions.

4.3.4 Mediating a sense of belonging

People believed and belonged at messy church without having to be a member of the Methodist Church. Raquel stated:

We don't tend to get people there who are utterly unchurched. Sheila and her daughter – they only come to messy church. She is not ignorant of Church though. Jill goes go regularly to the Baptist Church. Some visit at Christmas with family and cousins...

Messy church enabled a network of deep friendships and supportive relationships. The format of messy church, rather like the format of Animate, incorporated fellowship and sharing as part of the ecclesial mix, rather than as an optional add-on. An additional finding was that for the two families

who did attend morning worship (which dwindled in my time there to one), messy church provided an opportunity for all the family – and indeed extended family, including grandparents – to attend church together. Raquel stated:

There is a church family, well in integrated in to the life of the church – where Mum and one of the daughters always come on a Sunday morning but Dad doesn't generally come, but always comes to messy church with the other daughter. So you see whole families, whereas you would only see half of in a Sunday morning.

This said, it was evident that Messy Church was not questioning where people 'belonged' and what prescribed their locus of church. Rather than considering that messy church had ecclesial potential in its own right, it was viewed as a significant piece of mission but one that was nonetheless subsidiary to the Maltings Methodist Church.

4.3.5 No baptism or communion but a messy wedding?

The policy for baptisms at messy church was the same as for Riverhead; baptisms took place in the principal service of worship. Significantly, the superintendent rejected a request for Carl (the co-leader, a local church steward, and a circuit steward) to conduct a baptism at messy church, because it would have created an 'unhelpful precedent'.³²⁷ Yet, the family concerned attended messy church rather than Sunday morning worship and Carl was both a relation and the primary pastoral contact.

Once again, this episode highlights that it is not only presbyters who are asking questions about where baptisms should take place; this is also surfacing amongst lay leaders (the same was true at Sunrise, Animate and Breakfast Church). It also serves as another example of where presbyters might take a different view on the same scenario. Here, Raquel deferred to her superintendent.

However, whilst a presbyter would normally administer baptism, there is warrant in standing orders for 'local considerations' to take precedent:

³²⁷ According to the local preacher who was declined.

Normally baptism shall be administered by a presbyter, or by a presbyteral probationer appointed to the Circuit...However, where local considerations so require, it may be administered, with the approval of the Superintendent, by...a local preacher. In an emergency baptism may be administered by any person.³²⁸

Curiously, this discussion did not surface in conversations with Raquel – but was deeply significant to Carl. Since I did not want to inject any potential conflict into Raquel’s working relationships, I did not explore this further. However, this scenario demonstrates how difficulties might arise in the event that one minister who oversees a fresh expression is replaced by another who might not be familiar with, or even agree with, the allowances made by their predecessor. It also illustrates how in all situations the decision of the superintendent is final.

Messy church did not celebrate Holy Communion. Conversations with the leadership suggested that this was simply because the account of the Last Supper had not yet been the focus of any messy church sessions. Given the potential to develop links between the messy church meal and the practice of sharing communion, and the self-evident capability that the leaders of messy church had to craft something that was both simple and meaningful, I struggled to understand why communion was not being shared. Did this reflect, once again, a view that communion should be shared at ‘proper’ church on a Sunday morning? Did communion have less importance for those who gathered? Why should the church offer communion to a women’s fellowship midweek but not at messy church? I probed this in interview and Raquel responded:

We have not done Communion. It has been a conscious decision but as we are working through the life of Jesus it will be happen – the feeding of the five thousand or the Last Supper...it needs to be at the right time...and it needs a degree of preparation.

Tellingly, Raquel then recalled her difficult experience of sharing communion in a different style, in an evening service:

³²⁸ CPD, Vol. 2, 276, S.O. 010A(2).

I have done informal communion before....I have done it in café style.... Some people really liked it. There was one couple who walked in the door and immediately walked out because if they wanted to have a cup of coffee they would go to a café they wont come to church....the less said about that the better...we agreed to differ on that one...that was not a nice experience.

In my view, this signalled a wariness of how some in the wider church might have felt about her leading communion at messy Church. She went on to share that even though this might only concern one person, having the energy to both manage the emotional drain of these kinds of difficulties, and the time to diligently visit such people, was difficult.

I could not see any evidence of forward planning for messy church to incorporate communion.

However, Lucy Moore has developed resources for this. In addition, she writes:

To those who don't agree with HC in MC, I would suggest that they think about what they believe the Eucharist is really all about and what they think Messy Church really is... I would suggest we are in a very different position from the early Christians who could only receive initiated candidates into HC because they were in such danger of being infiltrated and persecuted by those who opposed them. In other words, we have the luxury of welcoming people to the Lord's Table with less discrimination (not to our table, note)...And if anyone suggests MC cannot do HC respectfully and in an orderly way without eating and drinking judgment on themselves, all I can say is, try it, do it well, and they'll be surprised and perhaps shocked at the attitude of those who take part.³²⁹

The Messy Wedding blessing however was different. Originally, the couple had planned a civil ceremony but after having attended messy church, decided that they wanted to be married in the 'eyes of God'. Messy church offered a space in which the whole family could be present, where preserving the formality of a traditional Church service would not be a pressure, and at which the

³²⁹ Lucy Moore, "Messy Communion or Not?," Bible Reading Fellowship, 2015.
<http://www.messychurch.org.uk/messy-blog/messy-communion-or-not>.

couple could receive a prayer of blessing. This had been composed by Raquel who blessed the couple, and the wider family, whilst messy church stood in a circle, holding hands around them.

4.3.6 Safeguarding

One of the key questions asked of me when I walked into the Maltings messy church was 'Who are you?' At the time I was enjoying a craft activity. The tone was not entirely inviting; I felt that I needed to justify myself and confess that I was the neighbouring superintendent who wanted to learn more about Messy Church. This important safeguarding question had come from Pam, the Maltings youth group leader. Whilst messy church had no named safeguarding officer, a culture of safeguarding was immediately apparent as members of the community looked over each other in love. As was the case with Riverhead, a number of the children had learning differences that compounded their ability to focus for a length of time. This could leave them feeling frustrated. Parents were present, supporting their own children and available to guide others.

Methodist Church safeguarding policy, procedures and training are constantly evolving. All members of Church Councils and all leaders who work with children, young people, and vulnerable adults, have to undertake basic safeguarding training. This has evolved from having to declare that one has not previous convictions relating to the 1933 Children and Young Person's Act, to those who have regular contact with children having to apply for a Criminal Research Bureau disclosure, to having to apply for a Disclosure and Barring Service Disclosure. Safeguarding basic training has incorporated lessons learnt from the President's Inquiry of 2011, where the Church identified shortfalls in safeguarding practice after a Methodist lay employee sexually and emotionally abused a number of children and young people over a period of years, whilst serving in a variety of posts. It also incorporated the findings from a number of nationally publicised serious case reviews. Herein, one significant concern was the failure to share information within and between agencies. During this

research, the Methodist Church Past Cases Review³³⁰ was underway; the Church asked all of its members to report on any issues of concern that they had been aware of over the past seventy years. Changes to safeguarding policy in terms of training patterns and who needs to apply for disclosures were met with a resigned acceptance by Church leaders across the region; arguing against changes to safeguarding policy was difficult, especially when the Past Cases Review was uncovering instances of abuse that required immediate intervention.

This chain of events resulted in safeguarding becoming a central issue in the minds of Mike, Raquel and many other leaders within messy church. Mike shared one of his experiences, from a former post, where he had to respond to concerns about someone who had walked into a church and offered to help with the children in a holiday club. Despite the Past Cases Review being 'horrible' for him, Mike stated:

I don't know why people make such a fuss about DBS and safeguarding... they are not hard to do... (*Speaking of another church in the early 2000's*)...We had someone come in from the street and offer to run the holiday club, and I took one look at this guy and I thought straight away, you are not getting away anywhere near our kids mate. And I so I blamed CRB and said that we could not process him in next three days. Everyone was of the same opinion....it did not feel it good... I contacted the police and I got passed from pillar to post and eventually I was put on to this woman who said, "Give me his name and I will get back to you." ...Twenty minutes later my phone rang and it was a local police detective, "Can I come to see you?" I found out that he was on the Sex Offenders Register. In time, we did welcome him into the family of the church and set up a contract of care....

³³⁰ "Courage, Cost and Hope: The Report on the Past Cases Review" (paper presented to the Methodist Conference, 2015), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/1683823/past-cases-review-2013-2015-final.pdf>. Also, "Church Issues 'Full and Unreserved Apology' to Abuse Survivors," The Methodist Church, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/news-and-events/news-releases/church-issues-%E2%80%98full-and-unreserved-apology%E2%80%99-to-abuse-survivors>.

And most tellingly:

We realised that we were most vulnerable during coffee after worship when the Sunday School leaders had finished their responsibilities and the parents have not picked them up – and the kids were going ferrell around the church.

Raquel and Mike had managed other safeguarding issues in the past. Their experiences had been highly formative and led them to guard against complacency. The attitude and the compliance that they modelled cascaded down through the church leadership to every area of church life. Somehow, merely saying that ‘all was well’ does an injustice to the pattern of oversight and mutual care that was evident at messy church. When asked about who they would approach in times of pastoral need, participants referred to the natural relationships that they had developed with each other. The local preachers were particularly trusted for their approachability and expertise. Raquel was particularly proactive in encouraging people and every leader stated that they would approach her in the event that they were concerned for someone else’s welfare.

The question ‘Who are you?’ made me feel somewhat uncomfortable and awkward. I already felt conspicuous when I was attending the project without any of my own children, irrespective of whether or not I was wearing a clerical collar. (Most of the time I would take it off but from the outset people knew that I was a minister looking to learn from what they were doing, so on occasions, I would still be wearing it). This however, was no different to how I had felt attending other toddler groups elsewhere in my ministerial capacity. Without a child in tow I felt that I should not be present.

There was an important side-issue here. Messy church affirms that anyone can come. However, I would have found it difficult to attend unless I had children of my own to bring. What would people really make of a grown man who wanted to dance to children’s worship songs, throw themselves into craft and eat jelly? Can Messy Church really be for adults who do not have children in tow? One

attender was indeed an older woman who visited messy church before staying on to the evening service, but that is not the same as, potentially, a man in his early forties.

4.3.7 Ministering with a 'light touch'?

Raquel and Mike applied a 'light touch' to both CPD and the Messy Church formula. Curiously, whilst participants used the term messy church, they also used the term 'tea church'. Whilst the project began with the Messy Church, Mike blended this with his own worship resources and teaching material, subsequently marketed by the Family Friendly Churches Trust, as 'Tea-Time Church' resources. In addition, Raquel changed the number and order of activities recommended by Messy Church:

We started off following the template quite closely on a weekday and we changed the format – it is quite personnel heavy; five to seven people for each table, plus kitchen plus people leading worship ...We found that we were getting the children to do the craft before they heard the anything of the story ...Now I take the point that every table should have a discussion point on it about the story and what it is about – but that is easier said than done when you have got a number of children who are coming and they want to do it quickly, whilst having their own conversations. So we changed it round so that they had some themed worship before the craft, so that they knew that we were making rock cakes because Jesus told the story about building your house on rock. Another thing...we dedided to move messy church to a Sunday....becasue we realised that there were some people we would never get to see after schooltime. We would never get the working half of the family.

This resembles something of the flexibility that Walton describes as he reflects on how churches adapt small group material for example.³³¹ His research suggests that local churches rarely accept programme materials without making changes.

³³¹ See Roger L. Walton, *The Reflective Disciple : Learning to Live as Faithful Followers of Jesus in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Epworth, 2009).

As was the case with Animate, messy church was also highly selective in who it invited to lead worship or preach. Once again, not every preacher within the circuit had the required skillset. In comparison to other churches, messy church exchanged diversity for quality and consistency, drawing from a reduced team of two local preachers and Raquel. This is a luxury that is not afforded to other churches, in that whilst Raquel and Neil (the superintendent) might try to match preachers to congregations, the tradition is one of preachers accepting where they are sent, and churches welcoming them, realising that each preacher has different gifts and brings a different perspective.

One of the most influential and helpful assets of the wider local church was the worship band, something which grew independently of messy church. The band were rostered to lead a messy church session once every three months. On a number of occasions, a band member led the teaching. None were worship leaders and only one was a local preacher. Raquel took the view that the offer of worship leaders training was unnecessary, even unhelpful but did not rule it out in the future:

The band...they have skills and gifts that I trust 100%. They have not done a worship leaders course. In lots of ways I would not insult someone like Malcolm by asking him to sit through one. I would rather say to the Church Council, 'Look we know these people, we know their gifts and graces as worship leaders...they have done their porridge...by their fruits shall we know them.

Raquel went on to share her concerns that the worship leaders training course did not adequately prepare people to serve in fresh expressions contexts. I probed these concerns at greater depth.

Raquel stated:

People need to be open and flexible ... you need someone who is not tied to the structure of the five hymn sandwich, or even anything like it... a group of worship songs and then the Word and then the preaching.... You need to have people who see themselves as part of a team... in some ways messy church is easier for the preacher than other services, but in some ways it is harder because you and I both know if we want to do a five hymn sandwich, we can do it standing on our heads...and if we plan it

ourselves and even more if we go to a place where there is no-one to read, we can read it all ourselves... it might be tiring but it is very easy to put together because we have not got to think about anybody's contribution except for our own.

In terms of working with others, Raquel stated:

You are not going with your own theme but the theme that the Messy Church is going with...you have to be able to have that willingness to share the choice of what you have to do...you have then got to negotiate with the church for people who will do the craft.... so thinking about it on Thursday afternoon is probably not sufficient. You need to be there and to trust them to do it. You have got to accept that there are little children, so the act of worship that you prepare it has to be brief, and at a level they can comprehend. So you need someone who is flexible, who is ready to work as a team and who sees preparation for worship as a team activity.

At the time of the research, the Methodist Church was developing a new worship leaders and preachers course – but this had been in progress for five years. The regional learning network stated that the course would continue to train people as worship leaders who would be capable of leading traditional worship, but aspects their worship portfolio (which would be submitted for assessment) could contain material that they had used in fresh expressions. Thus, my initial suspicions at Riverhead were confirmed; the default position is one where competency in traditional settings comes first, before encouraging people to support fresh expressions.

Importantly, some of Raquel's views and attitudes differed with the guidance given by the Faith and Order Committee of the Methodist Church at the Methodist Conference of 2015. Specifically, this relates to how churches use worship leaders within 'Local Arrangement Services' when local preachers cannot be found. A request for Faith and Order to look at the question of what is meant by a 'preaching element' in S.O. 569(1), since local arrangements must not have this, took four years to process. The report makes the recommendation that all those leading local arrangement services should be required to take the worship leaders training course (or an adapted version of it). It states:

It is suggested that Superintendents keep a record of those who take responsibility for Local Arrangements and, where appropriate, encourage the Local Preachers' Meeting to offer support and training. Where people are frequently taking responsibility for Local Arrangements then the following guidance is offered:

- a. They should be approved by the Church Council;
- b. Their name should be passed on to the Superintendent;
- c. They should go through the Safeguarding processes applicable for local preachers;
- d. They should receive direction on what is meant by the "preaching element";
- e. They should be required to take the Worship Leaders' Training Course (or an adapted version of it);
- f. They should be encouraged to consider whether they have a call to worship leading or to local preaching;
- g. The Church Stewards should be asked to present a report to the Church Council from time to time on those who regularly take responsibility for Local Arrangement services and any feedback on their services.³³²

Whilst Conference adopted these recommendations, four delegates spoke to raise concerns about whether these measures were achievable for rural chapels. One presbyter shared how, in her context, the requirement for such leaders to undertake the new Worship Leaders course was unworkable. Her experience was one of ministering to small, mainly elderly congregations in which there would be little energy or desire to comply with the demands of a course that would be likely to last at least a year. Another delegate shared concern about the difficulty of defining the difference between preaching (to expound a text) and worship leading, in the event that a leader wanted to speak of their own experience.

³³² "Conference Agendas 1 and 2 Combined: Faith and Order Committee Report" (paper presented to the Methodist Conference, 2015), 350, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-2015-38-Faith-and-Order-Committee.pdf>.

4.4 Closing Reflections on practice and ecclesiology

4.4.1 Assessment of Worship and community

Worship at messy church was appropriate to the season and to the congregation; its leaders related as well, if not better to those who attended, guiding them and encouraging them by name; people were encouraged to use their gifts; appropriate resources were in place to aid encounter and response. No aspects of worship were obviously absent; the teaching content was basic (but nonetheless profound), the different elements of messy church connected together well and the theme was explored from a variety of perspectives.

Was there a good relationship amongst everyone at messy church? Unequivocally so. Was there good engagement with the question, 'What is the Good News in this place for these people?' Yes. The good news was that of being loved by God, being accepted for who you were and being able to express yourself in a variety of creative ways. Was messy church a fledging community from which a fresh expression could grow? Unequivocally so. Perhaps the most significant observation for this study was the nature of the relationship between messy church and the wider church, and that there was an active neglect in encouraging messy church to develop a deeper ecclesial identity. The locality of baptism and communion services betrayed the fact that 'proper' church took place on a Sunday (where few children attended) and whilst messy church was a vibrant piece of mission and a place of deep fellowship, it was nonetheless an addition to the inherited church, rather than a church in its own right.

4.4.2 Fresh expressions of worship as opposed to fresh expressions of church

The situation at Maltings messy church was also evident in other churches across the region. Whilst many churches purported to offer a fresh expression or a messy church, these were not attempts to create a 'form of church'. Leaders did not envisage that their fresh expression might become the

principal locus of Christian worship and fellowship for those who attended.³³³ They were new forms of worship, or outreach activities of local churches who were still operating a 'come to us' attractional ministry. Genuinely engaging with people who were from a different cultural background proved difficult. There were no Bread Churches³³⁴ (where the Methodist Church in Liverpool invested in a city centre unit to provide a base from which to reach a new group of people). There were no Zac's Places (where the Church of England in Swansea responded to the needs of a biker community by booking a room in a local pub to allow people to grow in fellowship and discuss matters of faith).³³⁵

At Whitechurch Methodist/United Reformed Church, messy church was an additional mission activity within the life of the Church. Meanwhile, efforts to plant a messy church ecumenically between three partners - Anglican, Methodist and Church of England - in Cater (a village in which the chapel closed but has retained a Methodist presence), encountered difficulty because instead of planting a community it planted an outreach activity when nothing was planned elsewhere. Rather than Messy Church being held monthly, and becoming a place from which its leaders could develop other activities, the team planned only three messy churches in May, September and January. At Westside, a Methodist church where over eighty parents and toddlers attend a toddler group midweek, a mission enabler and a minister are trying to develop a faith group for parents and are experimenting with fresh expressions against a backdrop of voices that are saying, 'It is great that so many people are attending midweek. When are we going to see them on a Sunday?' At Arborough

³³³ Claire Dalpra and Steve Hollinghurst probe how Messy Church relates to the Fresh Expressions ecclesial ethos and what factors might distinguish them as 'church', strengthening this position. See Claire Dalpra, "When Is Messy Church 'Church'?" and Steve Hollinghurst, 'When is Messy Church 'not church?', in *Messy Church Theology : Exploring the Significance of Messy Church for the Wider Church*, edited by George Lings (Abingdon: The Bible Reading Fellowship, 2013), 12-30 & 31-47.

³³⁴ See Barbara Glasson, *I Am Somewhere Else : Gospel Reflections from an Emerging Church* (London: DLT, 2006).

³³⁵ "Zak's Place," *Fresh Expressions*, <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/stories/zacsplace>.

chapel, messy church was being used as a way of exploring what mission opportunities might be possible, rather than forming a new church *per se*.

Thus, the same arguments surface here as was the case with Riverhead. Even if these projects might be considered as new congregations rather than churches, I would argue that their development was still being inhibited by a failure to take *locality* seriously, accept that those who attended fresh expressions were unlikely to attend Sunday morning worship, and therefore conduct services of baptism and communion in the midst of these newly emerging communities. Whilst I recognise that one argument against doing this is to safeguard the church and prevent the sacraments from being cheapened in some way, without the sacraments an emerging Christian community cannot be challenged to take responsibility for those who are under its care. Moreover, the ecclesiology of the Church and in particular, the nature of membership, affected the balance of power between the fresh expression and the wider church, and inhibited the prospect of formal ecclesial formation and increased autonomy.

Chapter Five

The Methodist Church, CPD and fresh expressions

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5.0 Introduction

Thus far, in surveying Methodist Tradition and Oversight, recent Methodist Experience, and through case studies, I have demonstrated how the state of decline in the Methodist Church has frustrated the scope and depth of its mission. As the age profile of the church increases, so do the pastoral needs of those who attend. As its membership decreases, the Church struggles to find the finance and personnel required to sustain development. This consultation considers how this situation is impacting presbyters from the perspective of how they apply CPD. Its findings identify a number of tensions and, in turn, help generate a much more nuanced understanding of how these interconnect.

I begin with a summary of key findings. Thereafter, Section One provides detailed evidence on how ministers viewed CPD, how they applied it, and how they felt it enabled or frustrated their practice. Section Two examines how CPD might enable or frustrate work within fresh expressions. The insights from this consultation provide further evidence in support of the second and third points of my thesis; membership in the Methodist church is frustrating the development of fresh expressions and making the mixed economy difficult to achieve; instead of gifting fresh expressions and presbyters with freedom, the 'light touch' approach to oversight risks introducing fresh expressions to inconsistent practice.

5.1 Key findings: Four broad themes

Whilst this consultation was small scale, the mix of participants (lay and ordained), the high proportion who are directly responsible for implementing the mission strategy of the Church, and the experience from which they draw insight, makes any commonalities worthy of further investigation. There were a number of instances where a consensus was apparent.

First, there was life before Fresh Expressions! Despite its decline, the Methodist Church has always planted new churches. This has risen in the main through the merging of declining congregations and/or through partnership with other denominations. Furthermore, in recent years the Church has noted that a range of fellowships have appeared that cater for the needs of distinct ethnic groups. The Church accommodates Christians who have (among others) Chinese, Ghanaian, Nigerian, Rwandan and South Korean cultural roots. Some of these belong to overseas conferences but are nonetheless able to thrive on the hospitality provided by the Methodist Church. Others are indigenous and have developed less deliberately. Notably, none of these fellowships are fresh expressions and some of them even challenge a negative view of cloning. This is a significant finding in that aside ongoing debate about fresh expressions, a parallel conversation is taking place about how the Church continues to support these kinds of groups, particularly in instances where the nature of oversight is complicated (because for example the South Korean Methodist Church is worshipping in a British Methodist building, or where the oversight is simply unclear, such as in the case where a group with Nigerian heritage opt to join together for their own style of worship). This is raising further questions about what models of partnership might be appropriate, and how such fellowships or churches are integrated connexionally. Whilst the consultation did not allow for a detailed examination of this, and the 'Working Report on Fellowship Groups' has only recently been

formed, insights from this new area may also be valuable to the Church in its further deliberations on fresh expressions.³³⁶

Second, Fresh Expressions has changed the dynamic of Methodist Church planting. Formerly, new churches were planted by presbyters and circuit leadership teams who turned to Districts and the wider connexion for advice about personnel, finance and nurturing leadership teams. Although VFX operates in this way, the drive to develop fresh expressions now involves activists situated in local congregations, on the edge of the Church. Given such a large number of fresh expressions, the Methodist Church can no longer provide the level of centralised support that it once did. This increases the imperative that the Church ensures that its patterns of delegated oversight are as effective as possible.

Third, once again, the consultation suggested that few, if any, circuit fresh expressions, were intent on forming a new church. There was a general acceptance that some ‘fresh expressions’ existed before the movement began, and then registered on the national website when the opportunity arose. Whilst these projects might not have been ecclesial – as Horsley has stated, they are more fresh expressions of worship, rather than fresh expressions of church - the Fresh Expressions vision, and its critique of how the inherited church was struggling to engage with non-traditionalists, appealed. Most participants disclosed that their own fresh expressions, or those that they had visited, were new forms of worship that catered for groups of people who struggled with traditional worship, or new mission initiatives that had a strong fellowship element.

Fourth, *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* states that:

Fresh Expressions...should be subject to normal ecclesiastical discipline...those who have oversight should exercise ‘a permissive interpretation of ecclesial discipline...[This

³³⁶ “Report on the Working Group on Fellowship Groups” (paper presented at the Methodist Conference of 2015), <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-2015-39-Fellowship-Groups.pdf>.

should be] interpreted in ways that take account of [fresh expressions] circumstances and needs....It is impossible to legislate for a light touch and that this should depend on mutual trust.³³⁷

This consultation suggests that applying normal ecclesiastical discipline in inherited church contexts is already proving difficult, and that this is likely to be compounded in fresh expressions. The argument for permissiveness appears helpful at first; it allows presbyters to defer or suspend standing orders if they frustrate rather than enable church mission. Importantly, this consultation revealed how some presbyters were already applying a light touch' in inherited church contexts, because CPD was difficult or impossible to implement. Whilst this could be used as an argument in favour of the light touch policy – in that it would be an extension of what was already happening, one clear weakness is that it potentially reduces processes and discipline of the Church to mere guidelines ('spiritual principles') rather than ensuring unambiguous and consistent practice.

The consultation generated other responses in relation to a wide-range of issues, not all of which were directly relevant to fresh expressions. However, since work with fresh expressions rarely occurs in isolation from other aspects of church mission, all of the following are relevant:

- The impact of stationing on accountability and strategic development.
- The role of local church stewards and circuit stewards.
- An increasing burden of administration on local church leaders.
- Growth in Lay Ministry
- The planning and quality of local preaching & worship leading.
- Tensions between connexionalism and congregationalism.
- Broader observations on culture.

³³⁷ Ibid., 183, paragraph 7.7.1 & 185, paragraph 7.7.7.

- Issues concerning Methodist Church property.
- Relationships with the Church of England.
- General attitudes towards CPD and authority in the Church.

All of these present circuit leadership teams with difficult choices that will impact the mixed economy ideal in different ways. The initial success of fresh expressions is due principally to Methodism's army of local church stewards, local preachers, worship leaders, and natural evangelists, who have been able to mobilise other people and resources in response. However, if church decline continues, leaders who serve both fresh expressions and the wider church will be forced to choose between the two. In local circuits, where struggling inherited churches live alongside fresh expressions, which should take priority? What forms of authorised lay ministry might be advantageous? How might ecumenical partnership be a benefit or a burden?

Section One

5.1.1 What Circuit Ministers Really Think

It is helpful to set the context for the survey by returning to Hailey and Francis' work in 2004, just at the point where Fresh Expressions was encouraging churches to develop new work. In surveying the work of over three-quarters of all Methodist ministers engaged in the circuit work, Hailey and Francis addressed a range of themes, including:

- Sunday Services
- Methodist Preaching
- Competing demands
- Doctrinal diversity
- Non-conformist conscience
- Multiple pastorates

- Local church growth
- Closing churches
- Itinerancy
- Ecumenical considerations
- Stress and burnout
- Satisfaction in ministry

A decade ago, ministers struggled most in managing the competing demands of different churches.

There was a concern in younger ministers that:

Many now feel frustrated by spreading their ministry too thinly and by failing to recognise that each individual congregation fails to recognise the competing claims made by the other congregations of the time, attention, and resources of the minister whom they share in common.³³⁸

Most ministers felt that they needed to conform to their congregations' expectations. They were unconvinced that the system in which they operated incentivised church growth and felt that if they had the more time in one place they could have a greater impact. Herein, some felt that the Plan inhibited church growth because of its tradition of appointing preachers across a circuit rather than in sections or just one church. The majority of ministers lacked confidence in the quality of their own preaching and only a quarter considered that local preachers were 'good'. Local leadership was a concern in that in some places it may, 'not be up to the challenge of doing the work of ministry and mission for which there is not an adequate supply of ministers'.³³⁹ The survey reported that an unacceptably high proportion of Methodist Circuit ministers felt emotionally drained by

³³⁸ John M. Haley and Leslie J. Francis, *British Methodism : What Circuit Ministers Really Think* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2006), 247.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*

‘professional burnout or poor work-related psychological health.’³⁴⁰ Despite this, the majority of ministers felt well motivated to serve the Church: ministry could be satisfying and enjoyable.

5.1.2 The Circuit as the driver for mission?

One of the most striking set of collective responses, relating to this strained link between congregation and circuit, was in response to my statement that, ‘the circuit is the driver for mission, not the local church.’ This was rooted in Standing Order 500:

The Circuit is the primary unit in which Local Churches express and experience their interconnexion in the Body of Christ, for purposes of mission, mutual encouragement and help....The purposes of the Circuit include the effective deployment of the resources of ministry, which include people, property and finance, as they relate to the Methodist churches in the Circuit, to churches of other denominations and to participation in the life of the communities served by the Circuit...

In addition, SO 515 states:

The Circuit Meeting is the principal meeting responsible for the affairs of the Circuit and the development of circuit policy. It shall exercise that combination of spiritual leadership and administrative efficiency which will enable the Circuit to fulfil its purposes as set out in Standing Order 500, and shall act as the focal point of the working fellowship of the churches in the Circuit, overseeing their pastoral, training and evangelistic work.

As I have outlined previously, the wider Methodist Church has placed a significant responsibility on circuits to see themselves as centres of mission and to look for ways of working in partnership with others as part of *Mapping the Way Forward* (2006). However, a number of respondents disagreed with the notion that the circuit was the driver for mission. They considered that the relationship was more mutual:

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

To see the circuit as the primary driver of mission rather than the local church is a CPD principle but one that I think can be overstated. The local church and the circuit have in my view complementary roles in mission and cannot be effective unless they work together'.

(Superintendent with responsibility for Ministerial Development)

I would question the bold statement: 'The circuit is the driver of mission not the local church - is that always the case? It hasn't been in my experience!!

District Mission Enabler 2

The circuit is indeed the unit of mission in principle but congregationalism is the de facto outlook of so many Methodist congregations... This is the standing order that us Development Enablers are being pushed to work to but I would want to question it, because in reality it is local churches who push the circuits to focus on mission. The more that I reflect on my practice, the more I see that it is an absolute two way process...with the circuit having to kick some places up the backside, saying 'Come on churches, where is your mission', and other places where churches are pushing the circuit forward and it is circuits having to say, ok how does this fit in with the strategic picture of the wholeso I think that the circuit plays both roles and the church plays both roles, whatever the Standing Order says.

(District Development Enabler 2)

I now recognise this subtler position. Local churches need the circuit because for the most part, congregations cannot meet the costs of a minister on their own, and the circuit provides a means of sharing the burden. In addition, the ecclesiology of the church places local preachers at the dispensation of the circuit, working in partnership with ministers across its churches. Without the investment of the local churches in finance and resources, the circuit cannot function. This therefore challenges the view that the circuit leadership team is able to take the initiative and drive an agenda for change in the circuit. The membership of the circuit meeting is comprised of representatives

from local churches and those churches need to be convinced of the need for change, and perhaps even to act in ways that are self-sacrificing, to allow for growth elsewhere.

5.1.3 The impact of Stationing on accountability and strategic development

A total six respondents commented on the issue about stationing, all of them ministers. Three further responses arose from interviews. All but one was concerned about the impact of stationing on future planning. Circuits typically appoint presbyters for a period of five years with the opportunity for re-invitation. District Chair 1 highlighted the significance of stationing by stating that ‘every year approximately one-seventh of Methodist ministers move appointment’. If a presbyter wishes to quest an extension they need to state this by the end of year four (in time for the September meeting³⁴¹ at the beginning of year five). It therefore follows that most presbyters will be thinking about their future options during the middle of year three. District Chair 2 shared how stationing continues to challenge local circuits. In his view, all appointments were now ‘priority appointments’ as a consequence of circuit amalgamations. In 2015, the connexion was thirty-five presbyters short of the number required to fill all posts. In 2014, an excess of probationary presbyters matched a similar shortfall of deacons, meaning that some circuits in his District were forced to adapt their strategy to incorporate the staff that were available.

The leader of the ministerial support group wrote:

How can you do appropriate strategic planning if you have no certainty at all about getting a person, let alone an appropriate person? (I am) not sure what the solution is, but I am getting more frustrated by the process that is hindering planned growth by the circuits.

District Chair 3 termed some aspects of the stationing process as ‘bonkers’. In her view, it was particularly unhelpful for probationers, who were required to think about whether they should move

³⁴¹ The Methodist Church year begins in September.

only shortly after their ordination. She believed that presbyters were at their most effective once they had been in post for seven or eight years.

There is also provision in Methodism for ministers to 'curtail' and leave their appointment early. Even so, Deputy Chair of District 1, who had served a member of a District curtailment committee, stated that 'curtailment is such a negative word.' In his view, 'curtailment' spoke of breakdown in relationship, failure, and irreconcilable difference, rather than simply the fact that a minister wishes to move post mid-term to take up a new opportunity elsewhere.³⁴²

One unhelpful consequence of the stationing process is that it encourages conformity rather than dissent. Rather than resourcing churches who are experiencing decline, presbyters and circuit leadership teams may wish to disproportionately resource those fresh expressions that are small, fragile, but growing. However, the constitution of the circuit meeting mediates against this. Once again, membership is a factor. Because fresh expressions are not churches, they have no circuit representation (apart from leaders who attend because they have an additional role within the wider church). Inherited churches therefore occupy the centre-ground in any decision making. Even when some of those churches may be small and struggling, they nonetheless contribute financially to the costs of ministry in a way that many fresh expressions cannot (because they work among the poor, or because they comprise people who already give to the wider church). Therefore, these smaller churches have a greater influence than the fresh expressions in agreeing the terms under which presbyter's re-invitation is granted.

5.1.4 Growth in lay ministry

Mission enabler 1 suggested that the shortage of presbyters was an opportunity to accelerate the development of volunteer lay ministry in the Church:

³⁴² Superintendent and Deputy Chair of District, interview with the author, June 2015.

Can the perceived shortage of presbyters in stationing been seen as an opportunity to develop new and enhanced models of lay and diaconal ministry to serve the mission of the church?

Evidence suggests that this is already being realised. The thinking in two districts was that if membership figures remained in their current state of decline, circuits would be less able to afford ministers in the future, and therefore they would have to explore different patterns of lay ministry. However, at a Regional Training Network Day³⁴³ for superintendents, District Chair 1 (who was developing a lay ministry scheme), shared his frustration about the time that he would have to wait in order for the Church to resolve this centrally. He spoke of how colleagues in London would say, 'It's not Methodist policy', 'It's not our current practice'. Yet he argued that he needed to respond quickly and effectively to local need. And yet the original request for the Methodist Church to consider some form of lay ministry, *A Pastor for Every Church* was first suggested some sixteen years ago by the former President of Conference, Nigel Collinson.³⁴⁴

5.1.5 Finding volunteers

One concern raised by circuit stewards, local preachers and local church stewards was the extent to which local churches were required to fulfil more statutory requirements in terms of compliance with church legislation. Notable areas included safeguarding and issues such as health and safety, property and finance. The consultation also generated data about the difficulties of finding members of churches who were willing to take up office. District Mission Enabler 2, who had worked with both circuits stewards and local church stewards to engineer four circuit and church amalgamations stated:

³⁴³ 9th March 2015 at a Regional Network Day of fellowship, consultation and teaching.

³⁴⁴ Naomi Oates, "Local Pastoral Ministry Update," The Methodist Church, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/891002/local-pastoral-ministry-updatejune2013.pdf>.

I have been involved in helping volunteers understand their roles and creating job profiles and valuing them so that folks aren't stepping into the unknown abyss and signing their life away...they have to know what is being required of them. It is getting harder to find people. This great swathe of seventy-plus folk who have done the bulk of the church for however long, they aren't being replaced by a similar bulk of younger people.

They went on to state that given that this is a problem at District level, one can appreciate how this is similarly reflected at local level:

It might be difficult for a deprived circuit to find people, but for a large district not to be able to find people of the right calibre raises significant questions....working patterns have changed and the size of the jobs have changed... health and safety, safeguarding all these kinds of things which fifty years ago we nodded in their direction. Now these are major pieces of work. Statutory regulation, trusteeship, charity law...someone has got to get their heads round it and for the most part, our lay folk, if they are of that calibre, are still working. My Dad retired at fifty-six, early retirement. He has been a circuit steward, local preacher and very connected. But those are becoming fewer and further between. People are working until they are 65-67 and haven't got that active. By the time people are getting to sixty-seven, I reckon that a lot of them are beginning to be burnt-out and are beginning to think, 'actually I deserve a retirement'. And a lot of jobs these days demand a life blood. Both husband and wife working, partners working.

The Development Enabler wrote:

We have high expectations of our volunteers in terms of the hours they commit and there is often a feeling that they are doing skilled work without the proper training or back up - or pay!!... Volunteers will only go so far and so skilled officers and ministers will often get involved in time-consuming administration and organisation because it is not possible to get the regular commitment from volunteers that is needed to drive long-term and far-reaching projects.

In all of the cases studied, a minority (but often the core) of fresh expressions leaders also held office or were also active in the parent church. Theoretically, this generates two tensions. First, they feel a deep loyalty to the local church who support them in their efforts, even though they might be

sceptical of its ability to relate to their own culture. Second, because leaders feel obliged to serve both the inherited congregation and the fresh expression, the potential for burnout through lack of energy and/or managing conflict is high.

5.1.6 Congregationalism versus Connexionalism

A superintendent who had served in a connexional capacity made this striking statement:

I suspect growing tension between congregationalism and connexionalism. [This is particularly] manifest in growing churches which are now almost post-denominational in character. New attendees [are] likely to have little understanding of denomination or Circuit and are probably attached to [particular] personalities in church leadership such as minister, layworkers and preachers etc. Where such a church is in a Circuit, this could be a problem re. invitation etc. and tensions over the plan.

This tendency towards congregationalism is driven primarily by the fact that local churches want to prioritise their own needs over that of the wider circuit. The plan was a particular source of tension with many superintendents facing repeated requests from larger churches that they be sent specific preachers, even requesting that those who were less suited to the congregation should not be planned. Participants shared how this was accentuated by the fact that less people were familiar with Methodist tradition and practice, especially if they originated from a different denominational background.

The District Training Officer shared:

How do we help people understand who we are as Methodists and what we stand for when people frequently come from other traditions or none? Where is the modern-day language equivalent and what are our immovable objects?

Thus, whilst the Methodist Church is concerned that fresh expressions invest in their connectivity, this research suggests that connectivity is already an issue within the wider church. Another area of weakness has been the demise of the circuit service – where churches from across the circuit join

together for fellowship and worship. The minister who was responsible for probationer support wrote:

This reflects the extant spirituality of the average member in the pew. A day elsewhere is more often seen as a chance for a day off than a chance to worship differently.

Meanwhile, Deputy Chair of District 1 suggested that this might be due to consumer choice, since there are now other opportunities to gather with Christians of like mind:

I have heard folk from all around the country moan at this one. [This is] probably worse now Circuits are getting bigger. Has Easter People, Cliff, Spring Harvest etc. burst this one? Folk can go to where they want, and hear who they want without joining with others.

A probationer in their first year of service suggested:

A lot of churches are very blinkered with regards to connexionalism. For some, distance to travel is an issue; for others it's the fact that they have to close their doors when potential visitors may come. [I am] Not quite sure what the answer is.

The Superintendent responsible for Ministerial Development stated that that the desire to invest in ecumenical relationships may have effected a shift away from circuit services:

I think this takes a lot of working at and the increasing focus on ecumenical relationships means that in some places, joint services with other local Christians need to take their place alongside circuit services.

5.1.7 The question of membership

One concern, particularly from those directly engaged in fresh expressions, was that of membership. This also emerged within two other contexts that were tangential to this review; a *Fresh Expressions Partners and Supporters Vision Day* held at Westminster Central Hall in 2015, and the *Fresh Ways Working Group* held at Leeds in the same year. For some practitioners, membership posed a specific challenge in that it created a further barrier to belonging. One view was that the primary locus for belonging in fresh expressions is the emerging community itself, rather than the wider church. Thus,

from a newcomer's perspective, membership of the wider Church seems superfluous. As per my experience at Riverhead, the concept of membership worked against some of those who attended fresh expressions but who had been (or were still) associated with other denominations. One practitioner recalled how an attender who was previously a member of the Wesleyan Independent Methodist denomination (which is separate from the Methodist Church), asked why Holy Communion had to be shared by an ordained person.

One former district Director of Mission shared how in his view, some people felt that to become a member of the Methodist Church was to deny one's roots. He stated that people seemed less willing to take up membership of associations and societies in a way that they had done in previous generations. Another superintendent, who was in the process of uniting two closed Methodist churches into a new congregation shared this view, and added that in his opinion, to make someone a member was to impose a model of church upon them in an unhelpful way. At the time of the research, he was simply gathering people together for 'church' under the oversight of a leadership team established by the circuit, and had not broached membership. Another superintendent felt that membership was 'new wine that the church was trying to introduce in an old wineskin'. In contrast, the former Methodist Church Planting Secretary (and now Connexional Fresh Expressions Missioner) stated that in his opinion, the issue was not so much about the concept of membership but how it was introduced. This concurred with my observations from the case studies.

5.1.8 Authority in the Church

In their discussions about fresh expressions and in response to the consultation, the focus group became concerned with authority in the Church – and where this had gone. One participant shared:

Where is the authority? There is so little authority in the Church. Anything goes..... If we are a member of the Church, we should come under the authority of the Church.

The focus group agreed with the proposition that the Church was now witnessing in a post-denominational age and recognised the potential for someone to reach the end of an Alpha course, be prepared to come under the authority of Jesus, and yet resist coming under the authority of the Church. 'What should we do?' I asked. 'That's a difficult one!' was the response, with no further suggestions. Even so, the group began to explain how they felt life in the Church had changed since the 1960's. One supernumerary stated:

I don't think that there was the respect that there once was for the church. When I started my ministry - just being a probationer - I had an authority that was acknowledged. Things were much easier somehow...There was a sense I think of reverence as well as authority in those days, they put the minister on a pedestal in those days....I used to love it you know [said as a joke], and now it is all very causal. The minister is nothing more than one of the congregation – one among them – and they criticise the minister more freely. One of the dangers with this kind of thing [referring to a lack of authority] is that we lose our distinctiveness.

The conversation developed into a discussion about why this change had happened. In their view, members of the Church seemed less grounded in a sense of being under the authority of God and therefore accountable to Him. This was driven by a loss in the extent to which people saw their faith with God as based on a relationship with the Father mediated through Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. The Covenant Prayer, a prayer from one of Methodism's most distinctive services, highlights the nature of the relationship that should exist between believers and God. God calls us to serve as part of His Church and we are accountable to him. Another supernumerary stated, 'To be in relationship with Christ is to be in relationship with God and to be accountable to God through the Holy Spirit. And God calls us to be part of His Church.'

Another area of discussion arose in relation to how two stewards had tended their resignations somewhat destructively in a church council, in protest at the actions of a circuit steward who was urging the Church to commit to support the wider circuit. One participant shared satirically, 'I used

to love resignations. I used to accept them like sweets!’ A deeper discussion followed in which the group explored the difference between how they were committed to the Church through ordination and covenant and did not have the luxury of being able to resign, whilst some of those under their oversight had acted in way that betrayed a lack of Christian maturity. Whilst the group recognised that there were times when people resigned under significant stress and exhaustion, there were cases in which the gravity of resignation was not fully realised by those who tended it. ‘To resign from an office in the Church is to resign from something that not just the church has called you to but from something that God led you to – isn’t it?’, is a fair summary of what the group was saying.

Finally, the focus group also shared a common concern about the decline of the class meeting and a lack of small groups within churches today that focus on developing personal discipleship. One member stated:

What I like about this group - we can all say about what we feel, what we experience....I like it and even with Jo, even though we see things very differently I will sit and I will respect him and I will try to see where he is coming from. Some of the things he says I would not say....but it is this respect and our being under a greater authority...of God.’
Is this a kind of group that we have got away from in Methodism?

5.1.9 Broader issues of Culture

The Training Officer who had experience of working across two Districts commented on some of the cultural challenges that she had encountered in the Church. In her view, Methodists remained nervous about sharing what we believe ‘out loud’. This reflects one of Methodism’s priorities (laid down some nine years earlier) in trying to encourage people to develop confidence in evangelism and in the capacity to speak of God and faith in ways that make sense to all involved.³⁴⁵ She felt that some people’s outspoken personal preferences brought into question their faith commitment and

³⁴⁵ "Priorities for the Methodist Church," The Methodist Church, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/who-we-are/vision-values/priorities-for-the-methodist-church>.

their understanding of mission. In her view, for some of these people, the colour of the mugs in church kitchens seemed to be more important than the numbers attending worship. In her experience, some Methodists seemingly valued style over substance and were obsessed with hymn singing. Enabling congregations to be honest with each other, rather than avoiding or skirting their concerns was a particularly difficult process.

District mission enabler 1 shared how in her view, there continued to be a lack of understanding about the nature and drive behind fresh expressions. This was epitomised by the question once asked of her, 'When are they going to stop having fun and come to proper church?' ('Proper church' being on a Sunday). Another question 'How long will it take for these people [who attend a fresh expression] to come to church and do some of our jobs?' arose during an event that explored how churches could engage in outreach and mission. To her, this illustrated that whilst fresh expressions work was taking place, the immediate focus of some within the inherited church was on preserving tradition. This sentiment surfaced repeatedly within the interviews.

One particularly helpful insight originated from Mary, a superintendent minister whose previous experience included twelve years' church planting in the United States. In response to my suggestion that Fresh Expressions were intent on this, she questioned the extent to which the movement was serious at all. In her view, church planting had to be a much more determined affair, following a detailed model where targets are clear and the end goal is to achieve numerical and financial self-sustainability. She referred to a mother church model (where a new church emerges and retains a direct link with its partner church), a satellite church model (where the intention is to plant an autonomous church which separates itself from the mother church), and a Lazarus model of church planting (more akin to the VFX pioneer model). This is an interesting argument in that the precursor

to *Mission Shaped Church, Breaking New Ground* indeed does suggest a range of models.³⁴⁶ Yet, beyond the template for Church as taken from Acts Chapter Two, these models are absent from MSC. Strikingly, Mary also spoke of how Fresh Expressions needed to encourage leaders to explore the question of finance seriously. In her American context the wider church funded the plant for the first three years on a decreasing sliding scale, after which the emerging congregation should have become self-sustaining. Moreover, the wider church refused to support the construction of any new buildings until the emerging congregation had reached a minimum of two-hundred people and had sustained itself for two years.

Mary spent a further ten years serving in the Methodist Church of Great Britain and was presently journeying with a new church that was planted twenty-five years ago. Her own experiences echoed some of the themes that emerged in the literature review and in the Animate case study. The core leaders of the church ‘went out of their way to avoid any language of church’. She felt as if some people saw her as a threat because, despite her experience, she was representative of the wider institution. Mary shared how in her view, in their desire to find freedom, the church had developed practices and structures that were too imprecise. The church did not hold church councils but ‘leadership meetings’ and ‘family gatherings’. They did not take minutes but made notes – and these were not made available, even to her. Whilst the church did have a safeguarding officer, their attitude to Methodist disciplines and processes were shockingly lax; ‘We don’t really need all this safeguarding. We know each other’. Whilst Mary had been able to make progress, this had required a direct challenge to the church, ‘Do you want to remain under the umbrella of the Methodist Church?’ with the proviso that if they did, some things would have to change.

³⁴⁶ *Breaking New Ground : Church Planting in the Church of England, a Report Commissioned by the House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England.* 6-7. The ‘runner’, ‘graft’, ‘transplant’, ‘seed’, ‘pioneer’ and ‘progression’ are cited as contrasting examples of church planting strategy.

Section Two

5.2.0 On CPD

Throughout my ministry I have been encouraged by successive Chairs of District to view CPD as a permissive rather than restrictive document. This approach was evident in some of the consultation responses. One individual shared how there were times when they argued that the spirit of the law should carry greater weight than the letter of the law. Another two presbyters spoke of how they had delayed invoking some of CPD's requirements, justifying this for practical or pastoral reasons. However, some were wary that their interpretation of CPD might be open to challenge. In their view, to criticise a presbyter's use of CPD is to question their competence. Significantly, in *Unmasking Methodist Theology*, Bates and Smith state that, 'Methodists often use procedural questions to challenge something that is of logical importance to them.'³⁴⁷ The consultation also generated evidence of where attention to CPD was lax, particularly in contexts where churches were in decline. Importantly, the interviews generated examples of how some have used CPD to argue against fresh expressions. This inconsistency, of the wider Church accepting laxity in one area, whilst insisting that fresh expressions comply with standing orders in another, seems incongruous.

5.2.1 Attitudes to CPD and how ministers feel challenged

Firstly, some participants felt that CPD was not particularly user-friendly (one superintendent shared how they found its index to be 'a nightmare' and another, a former solicitor stated, 'if I were I were writing a legal document for the church, I would not write it that way'). One participant, referring to the age during which CPD was written, joked at how the Church lists its regulations concerning alcohol under the title, 'intoxicants'. Another superintendent felt that the church must have

³⁴⁷ Jane Bates and Colin Smith, "Controversy Essential: Theology in Popular Methodism," in *Unmasking Methodist Theology*, ed. Clive Marsh (New York ; London: Continuum, 2004).

compiled CPD with city churches in mind, and that this was why some ministers ignored certain regulations. Despite this, no ministers seemed burdened by CPD and few Church Councils or church members were unduly preoccupied with it. There was however an unspoken assumption that the manner in which presbyters conducted their meetings, and the decisions that the church made would honour CPD. One superintendent shared their greatest fear - of steering a church in the wrong direction and in a way that required connexional intervention:

In terms of my leadership style, I'm hopeless on procedure and CPD. I naively hope that fostering a good and trusting environment in a Circuit will fend off many of the conflicts where people end up arguing over what CPD says. People are happy to muddle through because they trust we will always try to act well and do the right thing.

This would be a warm quote on its own. However, the participant added, rather tellingly:

Which is probably a recipe for disaster if the shit hits the fan!

Another superintendent with previous experience in planting a fresh expression said how having a copy of CPD next to him at a meeting was helpful. 'I don't draw attention to it: it is simply there for everyone to see.' In his view, it served as a reminder of how the local church was subject to the authority of a wider church, thereby strengthening the connexional principle.

Whilst, presbyters were not particularly fearful about members of local churches might challenge their use of CPD, three shared independently how they were wary of supernumerary ministers. Active in congregations and respected for their lifetime of experience, supernumerary ministers are uniquely placed to influence congregations. In two cases, this led to local difficulties. Generally, presbyters in the active work had differing views on the contribution that supernumeraries made; some found them supportive, whilst others found them to be unhelpful or even undermining. My own experience has been entirely positive. However, the potential for conflict to develop, should a supernumerary question the actions of a presbyter, is significant.

5.2.2 Where CPD is applied inconsistently

CPD contains precise requirements. However, one District Training Officer (who had worked across two Districts) cited two areas in which she felt that CPD was being ignored. One was the 'six-year rule', a means by which the Methodist Church seeks to ensure that the leadership within its churches is refreshed. Whilst churches can make exceptions (voting must be by ballot in the event that the individuals concerned will exceed this limit, with 75% of the meeting needing to agree), the situation in many rural church contexts was difficult. Appointments often continued for beyond the ideal of six years, and balloting did not take place. Often this felt awkward and in any event, if the church could not fill a position, it would have to accept support from elsewhere, or close. The second area concerned how many small, rural churches continued to exist when their membership had been less than the prescribed six persons for six months. According to CPD, this should usually activate a process whereby the circuit intervenes to appoint others to increase the numbers, after which, if there is no improvement, the circuit can insist that the congregation become a class of another church.³⁴⁸ According to the training officer, presbyters and superintendents often failed to implement these measures. This was corroborated by a local preacher and two church stewards from separate circuits in three other Districts.

This may be an example of where presbyters with pastoral charge opt to ignore CPD, taking the view that to apply it would hinder rather than enable local mission. One District Director of Mission who had previously served as a circuit minister of a small rural church stated:

³⁴⁸ CPD, Vol. 2, 513, S.O. 605(2).

One village Church I had was just not doing anything by the book at all (laughs) because there were not enough of them and they were doing all sort of really good things...and so we had to find ways of thinking...what is the spirit of this CPD standing order...how can we be true to the spirit of it in such a sense that we feel we can say we are honestly doing this when actually we are not doing it in the way that it is written down at all.

One local preacher (who was also experienced as a circuit steward) argued that the requirement to become a class of another church was 'ridiculous'. Whilst the membership and numbers at worship in many small rural churches was low, their commitment to community life and mission could be exemplary.³⁴⁹ They provided a space in which local groups could meet at low cost, could be vibrant with creativity, well networked with other community organisations and were sometimes in a better financial position than their larger counterparts. One superintendent shared how struggling congregations often viewed becoming a class as a failure, stating, 'class means second-class and a step to closure'. This had led him to resist the standing orders requiring a church to become a class.

5.2.3 Orthodoxy versus orthopraxis?

Although the group of retired ministers who met together monthly for mutual support was varied in terms of theological outlook, there was universal agreement that in certain cases they had wilfully ignored CPD and beyond that, some of the theological principles of the Church. One presbyter who had served as an NHS Chaplain spoke of how he had baptised children 'who had died at birth and yet were still warm'. For him, the pastoral needs of the family were paramount. Another spoke of how when he was a probationer the minister who was due to preside at communion did not arrive at Church and so he took his place – without a dispensation. In both cases, the logic behind their actions was one of giving greater weight to the pastoral needs of the family (or church). Moreover, in the case of the probationer who presided, there was a concern that if he did not act, he would

³⁴⁹ One church had only four members.

undermine the senior minister and the credibility of the Church. There followed a conversation about 'exigencies of need' and a recognition that 'whether you call it pastoral or missional need there are times when the need takes priority'.

5.2.4 Unhelpful use of CPD and the call for Special Oversight Provision (FESOP)

The Chair of the Venture FX Oversight Panel, which evaluates the progress of VFX projects, gave an indication of how opponents of fresh expressions could apply CPD in manner that could be unhelpful and undermining:

People just say, 'What are you? Are you a Church? Ok, you say you are a Church? How many members do you have? What do you mean you don't have any members? How can you be a Church if you don't have any members? What about the church council? How can you be a church without a church council? And who pays for this work?

A number of superintendents (the exact number is not known) have raised concerns about pioneer projects that are situated in their circuits, not all of which were entirely justified. They were however significant because of how they illustrated some of the tensions that may be at work. Questions have surfaced about how pioneers practice baptism or communion, or their adherence to standing orders with respect to alcohol (which elsewhere led to objections over a fresh expression that met in a pub). These concerns, and this appeal to CPD has the potential to delegitimise fresh expressions and hamper progress.

Bell, the present co-ordinator for VFX and Lindridge, the former Fresh Expressions Connexional Officer and now a Chair of District, have argued that to guard against this, fresh expressions might benefit from additional legislation, in the form of *Fresh Expressions Special Oversight Measures*.³⁵⁰

These concerns were not formally published but shared with Atkins, but were rejected; Lindridge

³⁵⁰ Ian Bell and Steve Lindridge, "Pioneer Ministry and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Methodist Context", (Church House: Methodist Church, 2012). Hardcopy only. Bell is the co-ordinator for Venture FX. Lindridge is the former Connexional Fresh Expressions Missioner.

(now a District Chair) states that it was felt that they were 'like using a sledgehammer to crack a nut.' He and Bell's primary concern in 2012 was that not all circuits and circuit superintendents are capable of overseeing the development of pioneer projects. However, I submit that their insights are equally valuable for circuit fresh expressions. They call for the suspension of standing orders to protect fresh expressions from local difficulties and strengthen their link with the connexion. One proposal is the formation of a national framework, enabled through the creation of a non-geographical (virtual) district, facilitated by staff that are experienced in fresh expressions and have some measure of jurisdiction. This touches on both the concerns raised by VFX, and my more recent case study observations. In both instances, fresh expressions need consistency from ministers, rather than a 'light touch' approach whose weakness is a subjectivity which leaves projects vulnerable when one presbyter is eventually replaced by another.

In synergy with my research observations, Lindridge and Bell also argue that those who are leading worship and preaching within fresh expressions are bypassing the established means of oversight, since they are not accredited. They also concur with the view that only local preachers who are suitably gifted should resource fresh expressions. At the same time, they are concerned that whilst placing fresh expressions on the plan might be helpful in conferring legitimacy on fresh expressions, it may re-enforce unhelpful expectations about membership and finance.

In contrast to FESOP, *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* stated that no changes to ecclesial process or discipline should be required in order for the Church to accommodate fresh expressions; 'Fresh expressions, no less than any other Christian community, should be subject to normal ecclesiastical discipline.'³⁵¹ However, Lindridge shared how at the point of its publication, changes concerning the criteria by which the Methodist Church Dispensations Panel could permit or

³⁵¹ (JAMWPEEC), *Fresh Expressions*, 184. Paragraph 7.7.3.

deny authorisations for lay presidency at Holy Communion, had already been recommended to Conference. This call for change arose from both fresh expressions and the wider church. Prior to this, Bell suspected that a variety of practices took place, some of which were contrary to the Church discipline; extended communion; presbyters being invited by the project to preside; presbyters being imposed; agape or love feasts being shared in place of communion; or, communion being shared under another name. Thus, whilst Methodist Conference *received* a report which was resistant to changing church discipline for the sake of fresh expressions, it *adopted* a Faith and Order motion that amplified the grounds by which the dispensations panel could authorise lay people to preside at communion by adding a second category, 'missional need', to the original one of 'deprivation'.³⁵²

³⁵² For the original position, see "Lay Presidency at the Lord's Supper (1984)" in *Statements and Reports of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order*, (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 2000), 123-127, http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/Faith_and_Order_Statements_Vol2_Part1_0409.pdf. As to how this debate progressed, see, "Memorials to Conference" (paper presented to the Methodist Conference, 2009), 604. Conference directs the Faith and Order committee to explore, 'a more flexible system of local preachers being authorised to administer communion.' <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf09-58-memorials-241109.pdf>. In response, Faith and Order presented proposals in its 2011/2012 report to extend the criteria by which persons could be authorised to preside at Holy Communion, to include 'missional need' in addition to numerical deprivation. Conference adopted these proposals. See Report of the Faith and Order Committee to the Methodist Conference, 2011/12, Section 1. <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf2012-pc-35-faith-%20and-order-committee.doc>.

Chapter Six:

Conclusion and Suggestions for Immediate Action.

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6.0 A thesis supported by evidence from multiple perspectives

The three arguments of this thesis are that:

- Not all fresh expressions are true fresh expressions, in that they lack ecclesial intent.
- The Methodist construct of membership creates an unequal power balance between fresh expressions and their parent churches, such that the ecclesial formation of the fresh expression is inhibited. Thus, the prospect of achieving a mixed economy, whereby fresh expressions can grow and co-exist alongside inherited churches, is proving difficult within Methodism.
- Rather than gifting fresh expressions with a freedom in which they will flourish, the light touch risks destabilising fresh expressions. Instead, more, rather than less legislation is required to safeguard their development.

6.0.1 Lacking ecclesial intent

This has been a small-scale piece of research. I am not proposing that all of these arguments are valid for every church and circuit, but that further investigation is warranted. One immediate observation is that the Church needs to be careful in its use of language. According to the Statistics Office, only one fresh expression has formed itself as a 'church' in the Methodist-legal sense. Meanwhile, Faith and Order state that, 'A small but significant number of fresh expressions have become a church of the circuit in which they reside.'³⁵³ Herein, either the Statistics Office is wrong, or the word 'church' is being used figuratively. At a deeper level, these findings suggest that Methodist ecclesiology, and in particular its standing orders in relation to ecclesial formation, are inhibiting rather than enabling fresh expressions to become self-governing, and mature further.

³⁵³ Nicola Price-Tebbit, "Report of the Faith and Order Committee"

Previously, the suggestion that not all fresh expressions possessed ecclesial identity or intent was anecdotal. My research has now evidenced this empirically, examined the dynamics that are present, and suggests why this might be the case. The majority of parent churches were saying yes to 'fresh', yes to 'creative', yes to 'cultural sensitivity', yes to 'newcomers', yes to 'new forms of church' (since they could interpret the word 'form' to fit their own context), but 'no' to new churches. Thus, whilst Fresh expressions leaders became uneasy when I talked about the prospect of their project becoming 'church', they responded positively to the idea of forming a new congregation. Fresh expressions projects exist in a symbiotic relationship with their parent church who provide accommodation and funding, and allow their ministers to devote their time work, sometimes at the detriment of other church activities. Meanwhile local churches are able to count fresh expressions as part of their mission. Fresh expressions leaders were wary of disrupting this balance.

6.0.1.1 When is a fresh expression not a fresh expression?

Three presbyters; a Chair of District, a Deputy Chair of District and a superintendent used the terms 'fresh expressions of *worship*' and 'fresh expressions of *mission*.' Whilst these were not independent of the parent church, they had been a significant force in helping them refocus and reenergise. This research suggests that fresh expressions are engaging with people who are on the fringes of the church, and who struggle to connect through traditional worship. Should presbyters be concerned about this? Is my own understanding of fresh expressions too narrow? I believe not. Whilst Fresh expressions admit that:

a phrase like 'fresh expression of church' can be vague and unclear. Sometimes the label is used to cover almost anything - even a new church noticeboard! But the important thing is intention: When a new mission project or group begins, what is the intention?³⁵⁴

³⁵⁴ "What is a Fresh Expression?" Fresh Expressions Website.

They also state:

A fresh expression of church is not:

- an old outreach with a new name ('rebranded' or 'freshened up');
- a bridge project, to which people belong for a while before going to 'proper' church - some people do end up moving into a more traditional church, others see the fresh expression as their church, while others again have a foot in both.

And:

If the intention is to work towards establishing a new community or congregation especially for those who have never been involved in church (un-churched) or once were, but left for whatever reason (de-churched), then it is a fresh expression of church in the making.

If...the intention is to do mission better or more imaginatively in order to attract people to an existing church, it isn't a fresh expression (although doing that is always an excellent idea). The aim of a fresh expression is not to provide a stepping stone into existing church, but to form a new church in its own right.

It would therefore seem that for something to be called a fresh expression, it has to be journeying towards becoming a new church.

6.0.1.2 Ecclesial intent and the limits of Methodist process

In the literature review I evidenced how Fresh Expressions were firm in their presentation of what constitutes 'Church', but weak on encouraging denominational affiliation. There is, within MSM, an expectation that the new forms of ecclesiology that arise from fresh expressions will be embraced by the wider denomination. This is echoed by the independent VentureFX review that recognises how the ecclesiology of VentureFX communities was *still emerging*. I maintain that one reason why there has been such a low uptake of circuit fresh expressions becoming Methodist churches is that there is mismatch of ecclesiology between what is emerging in local projects, and what the Methodist Church demands. Ecclesiology is not simply a matter of church structure, discipline and process. It is

concerned with who holds authority, how power is mediated, and how informal authority is in operation. On the one hand fresh expressions are being encouraged to develop their own rhythms of life, structures and processes, but on the other they are being asked to constrain this within what CPD will permit. The argument that fresh expressions should receive holy communion from those who have a more regular presence, and therefore a deeper pastoral connection, rather than an itinerant presbyter, is a case in point.

Accountability to the parent church undermines their ecclesial development:

Fresh expressions are accountable to the parent church. However, in order to become self-financing, self-replicating, and self-theologising, they need to be self-governing, or be afforded considerable freedom. The advantage of fresh expressions being part of the parent church is that they are able to avoid immediate questions of finance and accommodation, and focus on the task of becoming 'church'. The disadvantage is that they may be viewed as no more than self-interest groups for people who are searching for an alternative style of worship, and find themselves ranked alongside the Women's Fellowship or the Men's Breakfast. This is doubly dangerous not only because it devalues fresh expressions, but *because these activities are intended as a stepping stone to Sunday worship*. Messy churches who meet monthly are faced with an additional challenge, in that unless they make efforts to create a distinctive church community in the interim, they leave a vacuum in which newcomers drift towards the parent church, and the fresh expression does not fulfil its potential. The situation is complicated further by the fact that in order for fresh expressions practitioners to gain credibility and social capital within the parent church, they have to commit to both communities.

The need to review the processes by which the Methodist Church forms new churches:

Despite Fresh Expressions call to plant *new forms* of church, the Methodist Church has made no comment on how this might be legally possible. New churches can be formed only when twelve, locally resident Methodist members unite. This research exposed two difficulties. First, whilst it might be possible to initiate newcomers into faith and discipleship, making church members was an additional and much more challenging step. Progress towards membership was slow (in many cases the question of membership was not even being raised), and *those newcomers who did become members became a member of the parent church*. Second, Methodism's one member, one society rule prevents fresh expressions leaders from being a member of the parent church whilst establishing a new one. Strikingly this question has also surfaced in the *Baptist Times* in an article entitled. 'Church membership: why so rigid?' Here, Michael Shaw, a Baptist minister, asks whether there might be circumstances when Baptists could become members of different churches at the same time. He states:

When we think of membership with regard to churches, we are much more solid in our thinking. We are a member of one church, which we go to on a Sunday. We serve it and it serves us. If we get fed up, feel called somewhere else, move, fall out with the leader, then we leave that church and eventually either join another or transfer our membership. However, it strikes me there is little thought or provision made to the idea that we could be members of different churches for different reasons.

And also:

Why do we see membership as so inflexible? Why can we only be a member of one church at one time? Why can't we become part of different churches at the same time? Because they can serve different purposes. Maybe we could be part of mid-week house group near our work, go to a local small church in the morning to serve and support, and

then to a bigger church in the evening to get some input. Why have we made membership so inflexible, so limited?³⁵⁵

Currently, there is an exception to the one member, one society rule in Methodism, in cases where a member of the Church spends half of the year in one location, the remainder in another, and wishes to belong to both churches. However, this rule cannot be faithfully applied in settings where one *local* leader wishes to take up membership of two *local* churches. At the same time, members of other denominations may take up dual membership with the Methodist Church. Moreover, whilst a member of one church can serve on the church council of another – a move that is used to support declining churches or churches who lack expertise in key areas – they remain members of their sending church. The one-member, one-society rule therefore forces practitioners to choose between whether they should retain their membership of the parent church or relinquish this, so that they can plant a new one. To draw from our contemporary political scene in the United Kingdom, the current legislation forces the equivalent of a Brexit vote. In order to achieve a greater level of self-determination, fresh expressions are forced into a debate about whether they should stay or leave.

The church councils that I observed within this research were not expecting their fresh expressions to strive towards independence. Indeed, such a move was beyond their collective experience. The Statistics Office have stated that the primary means by which local churches are formed is via the amalgamation of declining congregations, or by establishing Local Ecumenical Partnerships.

Historically, the Circuit Meeting has coordinated this work, rather than local churches, who are inexperienced and underprepared for the task of helping fresh expressions to become new churches. It was simply not in the psyche of churches or church councils which featured in this research. Fresh expressions were not held back simply by *what* people thought of them, they were held back by *how* people thought of them.

³⁵⁵ http://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/421770/Church_membership_why.aspx

6.0.2 Questioning the Methodist membership construct

Whilst within church councils, the power-balance between fresh expressions and their parent churches was weighted strongly towards the latter. Membership is the crux issue. Only members of the church are entitled to vote at General Church Meetings, serve on church councils and take up office. The challenges of making new members within fresh expressions projects, and the fact that their locus for worship and fellowship was one step removed from the local church, made it difficult for the two engage in dialogue.

Membership is also a fundamental concern for the Salvation Army, the United Reformed Church, and the Church of Scotland (three of the other five Fresh Expressions National Church Partners). Membership is not a feature of the Church of England apart from in the sense of communicants being made members of the Parochial Church Council (PCC), the governing body of a parish church. Mission Shaped Ministry's lack of attention to the importance of denominational affiliation is arguably a reflection of Fresh Expression's Anglo-centrism. The language of membership is absent from much of the Anglican literature intended to encourage newcomers. I could find only one Anglican province that responded to a question about taking up membership. It appeared on the Diocese of Toronto's website. The Church states:

A person becomes a member of the Anglican Church of Canada ("an Anglican") by regularly attending a local Anglican church and contributing to its life and work (its "ministry"). It really is as simple as that.³⁵⁶

For the other Free Churches, membership has a greater part in conferring belonging. It is important to differentiate between two distinct, but interlinked concepts. The first is that of membership as it appears in scripture, whereby all believers are part of the Body of Christ, and are *members* of that

³⁵⁶ "Becoming and Anglican," Diocese of Toronto Website, 2016. <http://www.toronto.anglican.ca/about-the-diocese/being-anglican/becoming-an-anglican/>

Body, by virtue of their baptism.³⁵⁷ The second is what, I would term, ‘the Methodist construct of membership’, whereby any believer can affirm their commitment to a local Methodist Church.

The Church’s Faith and Order Committee has scrutinised membership on three occasions. In 1938 after Conference had raised questions about how membership was being practised, they stated:

...the regulations of the conference are not observed, and sometimes not even known. Members are frequently admitted or excluded from membership [by the minister] without any reference to the Leader’s Meeting [which would now be known as the Church Council]. The care of the membership of the Church’ is not even considered.³⁵⁸

Faith and Order stressed that membership was open to ‘all who desire (sic.) to be saved from their sins’, reasserted the legal status and role of the leaders meeting, and insisted that newcomers who request membership be given membership classes. Arguably, the phrase ‘all who desire’; is significant in that it reflects early Methodism’s openness. Meadows contribution is of value here; Methodist societies were inclusive and welcoming to anyone who wished to seek salvation and ‘flee the wrath that is to come.’³⁵⁹ Meanwhile, as their level of commitment deepened, members progressed from classes to bands. Also, membership in early Methodism was uncomplicated by the Anglican rite of confirmation.

Faith and Order returned to membership in 1961 in response to questions about how children were recognised and incorporated into the life of the Church. They considered that Junior Membership, offered to children at the age of twelve, was inadequate; ‘the very people we are preparing are lost

³⁵⁷ I Corinthians 12:12-27.

³⁵⁸ *Statements of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order 1933-1985* (London: Methodist Publishing House, 1984), 68-72. 70.

³⁵⁹ Philip Roger Meadows, "Conference Notes: D.N.A of Methodist Discipleship

to us four years earlier.’³⁶⁰ Conversations with the supernumerary focus group gave rise to a fuller explanation. During this period, Methodist families were being lost to local Anglican Churches who could offer parents better educational prospects for their children. In response, the Methodist Church produced an *Order of Service for Members in Training* to try and retain family commitment to local Methodism.

Faith and Order’s most recent intervention on the subject of membership came through *Called to Love and Praise* (2008). In part, it was published in response to the following 1991 Minute of Conference:

The Medway Towns (4/20) Circuit Meeting (Present 49. Vote 42 for, 1 against, 6 neutral) requests that a review be made of the Church’s policy and Standing Orders concerning membership (Reception into Full Membership), considering: 1. the importance of baptism as being ‘received into the congregation of Christ’s flock’; 2. the contemporary understanding of the term ‘membership’ and the searching questions posed by non-Methodist Christians participating in our acts of worship; 3. the bearing of office and voting rights; 4. the importance of ecumenical co-operation and emphases (e.g. inclusion of members of other Christian denominations without ‘transfer’; 5. the questionable use of membership as a basis for statistics, assessments, finance, etc.; 6. that sharing in the Lord’s Supper (with counts and averages if need be) and/or baptism (with certification) would be more appropriate possible criteria.³⁶¹

Called to Love and Praise rightly recognises that the central issue is how the Church understands membership and its practical consequences.³⁶² Whilst outlining why confirmed members of other denominations should become members, *Called to Love and Praise* states that the word ‘membership’ means, in effect, ‘committed membership.’³⁶³ The report also stresses how

³⁶⁰ *Statements of*, 68-88.

³⁶¹ *Called to Love*, 4. 1.3.3.

³⁶² *Called to Love*, 5. 1.4.5.

³⁶³ *Called to Love*, 23. 4.4.3.

membership and pastoral care are linked intrinsically, since church members are allocated to classes, each class being under the oversight of a class-leader.

This research suggests that membership is a troublesome issue for fresh expressions practitioners. Three key questions are apparent. First, how can the Methodist Church mediate belonging, and is the current system of membership classes, the membership service, and pastoral care, fit for purpose? Second, should the Church separate membership from confirmation, given the stringent declarations of faith that are required? ('Do you turn away from evil and all that denies God?' and 'Do you turn to God, trusting in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, and in the Holy Spirit as Helper and Guide?')³⁶⁴ Was early Methodist membership more seeker-friendly? What is the difference between these faith assertions, and the '*desire* to be saved from one's sins through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ'?³⁶⁵ Could the church mediate belonging more effectively by making membership more inclusive, and mediate belief through confirmation classes? Third, if membership were to be abolished, how would the Methodist Church fulfil its trusteeship obligations under charity law? The link between membership and trusteeship is not explored at any depth within *Called to Love and Praise*. Here the focus is on how the Methodist Conference, which sets out the constitution, practices and disciplines of the Church, has legal authority. In recent years, the church has brought clarity to the difference between membership and trusteeship, stressing that all members of church council are trustees.³⁶⁶ Hypothetically, the system could be changed by giving the circuit greater powers. If, for arguments sake, membership was to be abolished, the Church would have to develop an alternative system of trusteeship. Whilst the Anglican PCC model might be one source of

³⁶⁴ *The Methodist Worship Book*, 99.

³⁶⁵ *Statements of*, 70.

³⁶⁶ See "The Role of a Trustee in the Methodist Church," Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, 2009. http://www.methodist.org.uk/static/rm/role_of_a_trustee_A5.pdf

inspiration, it is open only to confirmed communicants, and as is the case with Methodist church councils, its members are voted into office by the mainstream.

Horsley asserts that the problem is not so much with membership, but how membership is communicated.³⁶⁷ Methodism may well benefit from a series of resources which demonstrate how an individual can fulfil the obligations of Methodist membership through their commitment to a fresh expression. The deeper question however, is why are people not attracted by the prospect of membership? Is this a question of faith, or is it a resistance towards associating in the way that is offered? How is membership perceived within wider society? It seems odd that whilst beyond the Church people are willing to take up membership in a variety of forms; as members of health or sports clubs, through loyalty cards, or through political affiliation, fresh expressions are struggling to incorporate Methodist Church membership. Since September 2014 (the Day of the Scottish Independence Referendum), the Scottish National Party membership has quadrupled to over 100,000 members.³⁶⁸ Similarly, despite internal divisions within the Labour Party, its membership has grown to 450,000, with 60,000 new people registering to have their say in the future leadership election.³⁶⁹ In these cases, membership is empowerment; an opportunity to align oneself with a vision, and to have a part in delivering it by being entitled to vote. Yet, within fresh expressions, this similar institutional construct is viewed less favourably. Is it that Methodist membership is an assertion of both association and of faith, and that newcomers are struggling with this faith aspect? This research would suggest not; faith was clearly evident in Animate and messy church. Could it be

³⁶⁷ In conversation with the author. 13th July 2016.

³⁶⁸ “Boost for SNP as membership hits 100,000 mark.” The Scotsman, 22nd March, 2015. <http://www.scotsman.com/news/uk/boost-for-snp-as-membership-hits-100-000-mark-1-3725308>

³⁶⁹ “Labour Party gains 60,000 new members in one week following attempted coup against Corbyn,” The Independent, 30th June 2016. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/labour-party-gains-60000-new-members-following-attempted-coup-against-corbyn-a7112336.html>

that Church membership demands a commitment that is not required in other contexts? This is plausible; whilst membership of a political party or a sports club provides opportunity, a deeper level of commitment, such as weekly attendance is not required. Here, membership is association at a distance. Alternatively, does the inherited Methodist Church simply lack credibility? Has Fresh Expressions become a victim of its own negative rhetoric about the church's inability to break free from structures, practices and disciplines that are outmoded? How can newcomers trust a Church whose recent history is of rapid decline in both membership and attendance? Finally, what has been the impact of the Past Cases Review? This uncovered 1,885 past cases, which included sexual, physical, emotional and domestic abuse, as well as neglect. Granted, not all of these occurred within the life of the Church. Shockingly however, in a quarter of these cases the perpetrators or alleged perpetrators were church ministers or lay employees. In sixty-one cases there was contact with the police, and when the review was published, there were six ongoing police investigations.³⁷⁰ Has this have a negative impact on people's view of the Church? Much more research is needed to investigate the factors that might inhibit people from becoming members, but for the moment, this research suggests that people are saying yes to Jesus, but no to the offer of membership, or being only partially open to it, such that conversations to encourage it are hard work.

6.0.3 The Light Touch

The third argument, that presbyters adopt a light-touch to implementing Methodist discipline and practice has also gained further traction, firstly, through the case studies, and secondly through the consultation. The most challenging reflection is derived by logic. If standing orders are fit for purpose why is a 'light touch' required? This research suggests that *for the inherited church*, some standing orders, particularly in relation to ecclesial formation and decline are already unworkable or unhelpful. Why then, should the Church expect them to be workable within fresh expressions?

³⁷⁰ Church issues 'full and unreserved apology', Methodist Church website.

Moreover, whilst a permissive and light-touch approach might seem appealing on first inspection, this research found that it places too much emphasis on the personal view of the presbyter with oversight. Differences in policy become apparent when superintendent and presbyter have different views, or when one presbyter replaces another. Oversight, therefore, becomes less collegial and more parochial, contradicting the principle of it being corporate in the first instance and then delegated to individuals *who are supported by other bodies within the connexion*. The difficulty rests not so much with the suspension of standing orders or the introduction of a novel approach, but with how this is discerned between the parties involved, how local discretion is authorised, and how the rationale for this can be incorporated into wider Church reflection. Innovation requires openness, experimentation, and adaptability. More legislation, rather than less, is required to enable this.

6.0.4 In search of a fair and equitable assessment of Fresh Expressions

This research has uncovered a range of concerns from those who are wary of fresh expressions, much of it written from the standpoint that what the Church offers currently is safe, workable and productive, and what Fresh Expressions offers is new and risky. To its credit, *Fresh Expressions and the Mission of the Church* has rebuffed an array significant reservations. However, at the same time, it calls fresh expressions to conform to the ecclesiology of their respective parent churches, rather than considering properly how fresh expressions challenge it. The ease at which practitioners' concerns are dismissed, and the lack of transparency about what practices and disciplines are proving questionable, is disappointing. The statement that 'there is no need to relax ecclesial discipline'³⁷¹ (in context, the word 'relax' could also be taken to mean change), is unconvincing.

³⁷¹ JAMWPEEC. *Fresh Expressions*, 184.

Lings' argument, that the way in which the two Churches are assessing fresh expressions is prejudicial, in that it rates practices over relationships, is a fair one.

One difficulty for fresh expressions' opponents is that their theological criticisms often point both ways; when the wider Church questions whether fresh expressions are church-shaped-mission, one riposte might be to question whether the church has been too focused on mission and has neglected the call to evangelism as a dimension of it. In fact, the Methodist Conference, through its priorities, has already recognised that some church members lack the capacity to speak of God and share their faith.³⁷² In response to the question a whether Fresh Expressions are a liberal attack on tradition, many a fresh expression practitioner might feel that their freedom was being inhibited by a brand of fundamental Christian conservatism. Whilst questions might be raised about whether fresh expressions enable reconciliation, in the sense of being a force for encouraging diversity and unity, fresh expressions may point to the fact that they are bringing a sense of fellowship and healing to individuals who have felt excluded from their church owing to their having experienced prejudice or discrimination. To those who suggest that fresh expressions are a rejection of the Christian tradition, fresh expressions' practitioners would argue that tradition is never static. In response to the argument that without communion, fresh expressions are not 'proper' church, practitioners might argue that this is (quite literally) in the hands of presbyters who could, if they wished, share communion in much the same way as they would share it by a hospital bedside or at a nursing home. I should add that not everyone who raises a criticism against Fresh Expressions is wholly unsupportive of the movement, but my point still stands.

³⁷² Priorities for the Methodist Church.

6.0.5 Espoused and Operant Theology and Practice

There is, in all of this, a separation between the espoused and operant theologies³⁷³ of the Methodist Conference and local Methodist churches, and between Fresh Expressions and local fresh expressions projects. A more nuanced presentation of this is recognise a contrast between espoused theology and operant *practice*. Here, I take the view that practice is always an embodiment of theology, irrespective of whether it has been properly appraised. It is important to note that not all of these observations are new, and that it would be unfair to suggest that the Methodist Conference is unaware of these issues. The Methodist Conference is in itself a forum for the prophetic voice, which by definition identifies what is wrong in the church, and seeks to put it right. However, the following tensions became sharply evident through this research.

Methodist Conference and local Methodist Churches:

The espoused theology of the Methodist Conference (as the most senior leadership 'group' within the Church) is that it needs to return to its roots as a 'discipleship movement shaped for mission'. The central question is whether the Church can be both an institution and a movement at the same time, balancing the spirit and fluidity of early societal Methodism, with the permanence of today's Methodist Church. A multitude of conference documents on mission and fresh expressions act as a centrifugal witness, encouraging practitioners to develop new work. Meanwhile, this espoused theology has yet to impact the normative theology of the church to the extent that it results in changes to normative practice. This is evident locally where the unchallenged and operant ecclesiology results in a centripetal inertia that inhibits fresh expressions.

³⁷³ See Helen Cameron et al., *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London, SCM Press, 2010), 54.

The espoused theology of the Methodist Conference is that Fresh Expressions has enabled the development of new churches, whereas the operant theology was one of developing new forms of worship and new forms of mission.

The espoused theology of Methodist membership is that membership is a means by which people affirm their commitment to Christ, to the Methodist Church nationally, and work out their discipleship through a local church. The operant theology of membership in inherited congregations was one where commitment to the local Church was greater than commitment to the circuit, evidenced by a shift towards congregationalism.

The espoused theology of the Methodist Church is that the circuit is the principle driver for mission, whereas this research suggests that it is the local churches who hold the power, since they provide the finance and the resources (through people and buildings) required, and hold the circuit stewards to account.

The espoused theology of Methodist mission is that leaders and churches should be open to risk. The operant theology was more risk averse. Perhaps one of the most resonant observations within this research was how presbyters were withholding both baptism and communion from fresh expressions (or more precisely insisting that these would be conducted at the principal Sunday Service), because they did not want to devalue the rite or give newcomers a warped understanding of what it was to be 'church'. However, without the opportunity to conduct baptisms for example, fresh expressions would never have the opportunity to take responsibility and reach maturity.

The espoused theology of Methodist practice and discipline is that it should be used permissively. A summary of this might be that the spirit of the law was more important than the letter of the law. The operant theology however was one in which opponents of fresh expressions used CPD as a means of justifying their argument and hindering new work.

Cocklington's contribution in regard to the role of Methodist superintendents is important. The espoused theology of superintendency is that the superintendent relates local churches to the circuit and vice-versa, preach around their circuits rather than simply within their own churches, and care pastorally for their staff. The operant theology is that the link between conference and circuit is often weak, and that owing to pressures in their own churches, superintendents are unable to preach across the circuit, or care for their staff as they would wish. These differences illustrate the difficulty that the Church is experiencing in fulfilling its own oversight obligations within inherited settings. At the same time the Church is demanding fresh expressions to conform to standing orders unquestionably.

The espoused theology of the Methodist Church is that 'there is little evidence to suggest that relaxing ecclesial discipline would in fact facilitate Christian mission'. The operant theology was that change was needed on several fronts. On this point there may be some latitude, since *Fresh Expressions and the Mission of the Church* was received but not adopted by Conference. Even, so this work illustrates that there has been or remains a component of Methodist leadership, involved in reviewing the mission of the Church, that sees no need for change.

Espoused and operant theologies within Fresh Expressions

The espoused theology of Fresh Expressions is one of unity with the Church Catholic, but locally, the operant theology is one where preserving the unity of the Church by emphasising the importance of membership within Free Church contexts, is underplayed. This research exposed how the operant theology was, at times, one of encouraging practitioners to draw inspiration from the discipline and practices from a wide-range of denominations, but to underplay the importance of denominational affiliation. Given the number of Free Churches and parachurch organisations that have affiliated to Fresh Expressions, this is an area requiring urgent review.

The espoused theology of Fresh Expressions is that local projects are not intended as a bridge back to inherited Church. This research exposed examples of operant theology where this was indeed what members of the parent church hoped for, and a lack of assertion to develop a locus of opportunities for fellowship that were networked with the fresh expressions community, rather than the wider church.

The espoused theology of Fresh Expressions is that they should be missional, serving those who are outside the church. This research success that the operant theology was that fresh expressions were serving a mix of both insiders and outsiders, but performing a vital function in providing a focus for developing lay ministry, and retaining engagement with church members and adherents who otherwise would have struggled to find their place in the life of the Methodist Church.

The espoused theology of Fresh Expressions is that they could be contextual, listening to people and entering their context. In contrast, this research found limited evidence of fresh expressions taking place outside of Church buildings; in general, the *modus operandi* remained one of 'you come to us' rather than 'we'll come to you.' The exceptions to this were a successful Breakfast Church (and its associated Tea Church), and a messy church which was piloted (unsuccessfully) in a village hall.

In local fresh expressions contexts, there was very little evidence of an espoused theology in terms of *articulation of beliefs* about the *purpose* of their project. In general, participants referred to their project as a church activity, organised by the parent church, and intended as an alternative to Sunday Worship. Here, the espoused theology matched the operant, but it contrasted sharply with Fresh Expression's normative voice.

6.1 Returning to culture: a deeper analysis

My methodology acknowledged how the Whiteheads' method requires practitioners to explore the impact of experience, tradition, *and culture*. However, it postponed a more academic analysis of what cultural theory might have to offer until the end of the research. Culture as a theme was never disregarded during the research, to scrutinise Church Tradition or Fresh Expressions is to, in effect, identify contrasting cultural perspectives and to become embroiled in its arguments. This research examined how these arguments surfaced in practice. I now turn to Organisational Culture for insights that may explain what is happening at a deeper level.

Martin defines organisational culture as, 'The way we do things around here'.³⁷⁴ I would sharpen this latter definition in relation to the dynamics that were at work between the fresh expressions and their parent churches. The culture of the inherited church was one of, 'The way we do things round here...*properly*'. It was a blend of normative theology, translated into operant theology. Occasionally it was betrayed by the espoused; 'When are we going to see these people come to church?'

Cameron has suggested that Methodist Churches may be understood, to some extent, as voluntary associations.³⁷⁵ This is an important observation and one that I would support. Whilst members of the Church are not bound, as they would be in an organisation, by contract, they are bound to each other through a corporate spiritual commitment. However, as the supernumerary focus group shared, not everyone views this commitment in the same way. In the workplace, employees are obliged to develop operant practices that enable the normative, and if they fail in this, they are dismissed. The Church, however, being comprised in the main of volunteers, cannot operate in this way. Deviation from the normative is difficult to regulate, and the espoused voice can be louder.

³⁷⁴ Bower, *The Will to Manage*.

³⁷⁵ Helen Cameron, *Resourcing Mission : Practical Theology for Changing Churches* (London: SCM Press, 2010), 56.

Martin states that when an idea is presented that does not conform to the underlying assumptions of an organisation, it can be rejected outright without any thought or debate.³⁷⁶ This, he asserts, 'can be accompanied by resistance, fear and sometimes irrational behaviour.' In the churches studied, these underlying assumptions were reflected in operant practices, but did not become espoused until they were challenged by fresh expressions. Martin also relates the likelihood of change occurring to the 'climate' of the organisation - the feelings of those who are present. For the Methodist Church, the climate has been, arguably, poor. The Church is experiencing numerical decline, chapels are closing, and finding volunteers to support the inherited church can be difficult. These tensions have the potential to force an 'either-or' debate rather than a 'both-and' debate in respect of the inherited church, independent fresh expressions and the mixed economy.

Deal and Kennedy's description of Process Culture³⁷⁷, Handy's description of Role Culture³⁷⁸, Cameron & Quinn's description of four cultural hierarchies³⁷⁹, and Schein's three levels of artefacts, espoused values, and underlying assumptions³⁸⁰, all provide useful ways of understanding the relationship and contrasting *modus operandi* between fresh expressions and the wider church/Church. Parent churches frequently exhibited the markers of a process culture that sought comfort and security, and minimised risk. Formally or informally, local churches exhibited hierarchical patterns of leadership, applying the same processes (through CPD) across all churches.

³⁷⁶ M. Jason Martin, "'That's the Way We Do Things around Here': An Overview of Organizational Culture," *Electronic Journal of Academic and Special Librarianship* 7, no. 1 (2006).

³⁷⁷ Terrence E. Deal and Allan A. Kennedy, *The New Corporate Cultures : Revitalizing the Workplace after Downsizing, Mergers, and Reengineering* (Reading, Mass.: Perseus Books, 1999).

³⁷⁸ Charles B. Handy, *Gods of Management: The Changing Work of Organizations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 21.

³⁷⁹ Kim S. Cameron and Robert E. Quinn, *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture : Based on the Competing Values Framework*, Third edition. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011). See also "The Competing Values Framework," *Changing Works*, http://changingminds.org/explanations/culture/competing_values.htm.

³⁸⁰ Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 4th ed., (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

Schein's treatment would suggest that because fresh expressions are new they carry less tacit assumptions and unspoken rules. They develop rituals that are useful to them, rather than what has been valued by the wider church.³⁸¹ This is a helpful observation. The foremost tensions between fresh expressions and members of the wider church did not concern rites of passage or theology; they centred on unspoken rules about where worship took place, when it happened, who had access to the kitchen, and who should have the ascendancy. The intensity and locality of fresh expressions – something that the Church wants to preserve – became the basis of difference and a quiet unease amongst members of the wider church. Schein also argues that the tacit assumptions of an organisation may surface in such a way that appear to run counter to mission statements and operational creeds. In other words, what is espoused is different from what is operant. Crucially, then, whilst churches might give permission for fresh expressions to develop, once its deeper traditions come under threat, support waivers. Thus, churches say 'yes' to fresh expressions, but, will hope that eventually, newcomers will support the parent church.

Handy's approach has led me to view fresh expressions as a blend of task culture and power culture. In a task culture, the focus on outreach through mission will have greater energy and focus. In power culture, greater autonomy rests with a small group or core leaders who are able to make rapid decisions, and who keep bureaucracy to a minimum. Meanwhile, Cameron and Quinn's work on competing values and hierarchies is evident within fresh expressions as blend of clan culture (where leaders were closely involved in the nurture of newcomers) and adhocracy (where innovation and dynamism are championed). This clashes with a wider church culture that is 'hierarchical' (having a more traditional structure and a chain of command and respects policies, processes and procedures), and a 'market' culture in which participants are ever mindful of 'transaction cost'. In commercial terms, market cultures are outward looking but look to engage with minimal cost and

³⁸¹ Schein uses the term ritual, as does Kirby in his Pitsmoor Cycle.

delay. Whilst some of Handy's competitive and profit focused aspects of market culture were alien to the churches studied, other facets, such as a focus on what the members want (who could be similarly termed stakeholders) and questions of future finance, do reflect themes that are characteristic of market thinking.³⁸² A market culture was also evident in the tendency to look for tried-and-tested short, achievable, and low-cost means of engaging through outreach. Back to Church Sunday (now Invitation Sunday), Alpha and Christian Aid activities were three such examples. Significantly, a brief examination of the parent churches suggested that they were operating in a hierarchy model, whereas the fresh expression mirrored the clan model. Importantly, Cameron and Quinn suggest that organisations are more limited by weaknesses than propelled forward by their strengths.

Whilst these models are helpful in terms of identifying why tensions exist, the fundamental question is one of how cultures can change? Shein states:

The bottom-line for leaders is that if they do not become conscious of the cultures with which they are embedded, those cultures will manage them. Cultural understanding is desirable for all of us but essential to leaders if they are to lead.³⁸³

Shein suggests that for change to happen at a core, cognitive level, leaders need to oversee 'a process of unfreezing' or 'disequilibrium'. First, people need to feel 'serious discomfort' about a state of affairs. Second, they must understand that they could make a difference if they wanted (to the point of generating anxiety or guilt). Finally, they must believe that they can solve the issue without compromising their own identity or integrity. One difficult aspect of this transformation is that of unlearning deeply embedded and constantly reinforced inherited values. Another is the presence of both Survival Anxiety (the conviction that change is bad because it threatens role or

³⁸² "The Competing Values Framework," *Changing Works*, http://changingminds.org/explanations/culture/competing_values.htm.

³⁸³ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. 22.

identity), and Learning Anxiety (a feeling of lostness or incompetence as a new approach is embraced). Survival anxiety (which practitioners may experience as 'change resistance') is rooted in fear; about loss of power or position, of being exposed as incompetent, of being punished, of losing one's personal identity or loss of group membership. The implications for presbyters is that however unwelcome the news, they must ensure that leaders, church councils, and congregations, are all exposed to the data of disequilibrium. Local churches must discuss their own state of decline, and their lack of diversity, rather than ignore the reality of their situation. Whilst the need to generate anxiety or guilt seems unpalatable, at the same time presbyters are encouraged to help congregations recognise that their actions can make a difference. Meanwhile, the solution to power struggles rests in reassuring the parent church that their own identity and traditions are not under threat, that in supporting a fresh expression they will gain credibility, and that they will benefit from mutual learning.

6.2 Returning to the Nature of Oversight

Where exactly does the balance lie between empowering and encouraging creativity in the Church, with the need for unity and order? The *Nature of Oversight* makes two significant statements. First, the Church should develop structures that are appropriate to God's mission. Second, the principle of subsidiarity requires a means by which local practitioners' can incorporate their insights into the learning cycle of the wider church.³⁸⁴ Yet, the literature review, the case studies, and the consultation all suggest that some of those who call for change within the Church are often left feeling more like troublesome dissenters who are defying connexional authority, rather than valued contributors. Returning to the statement made within *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*:

A number of voices, frustrated with what they perceive to be unnecessarily restrictive controls, argue that it is desirable in the case of fresh expressions to relax normal ecclesiastical discipline concerning the conduct of worship, preaching, and the

³⁸⁴ "The Nature of Oversight," 72. Point 1.14.19.

celebration of the sacraments. Appeal is often made to ‘missiological reasons’ though these might not necessarily be stated. There is a regrettable tendency to imagine that ‘the needs of Christian mission’ justify almost any development. However there is little evidence to suggest that relaxing ecclesiological discipline would in fact facilitate Christian mission. On the contrary, there is good reason to support that such a move would impair mission.³⁸⁵

The tone of this statement does not appear to be one of grace and mutuality but superiority.

Moreover, it illustrates what Leach would term a silent, or even silenced voice in the scenario, owing to a lack of transparency and how the statement generalises what has been said (which could be used to add weight to an argument that is based on weak evidence).

It is difficult to see how creativity, innovation, and experimentation can take place within the Methodist Church outside of limited environments such as VFX. Whilst some might argue that presbyters can view CPD as a permission-giving document, it does not permit experimentation through the temporary suspension of its standing orders. Indeed, experimentation is a rare word within Methodism, and to date only has prominence through the work of Bell.³⁸⁶ Rather than developing appropriate safeguards and trialling changes to ecclesiastical discipline and process³⁸⁷, the default position seems to be one where the Church is wary of experimentation and prefers theoretical and abstract reflection. Returning to my earlier reflections on culture, I submit that a power struggle is at work between hierarchical and adhoc practices within Methodism, in which hierarchical survival anxiety resists any form of local experimentation on the fear that this could not be managed or undone, without compromising the wider mission of the Church. Yet it seems incongruous that whilst the wider church is calling for an attitude of *Holiness and Risk*, and for presbyters to exercise a ‘light touch’ with respect to ecclesial discipline, it cannot relax standing

³⁸⁵ JAMWPEEC, *Fresh Expressions*, 184. Paragraph 7.72.

³⁸⁶ As the current coordinator of VFX.

³⁸⁷ Whilst the church does engage in pilot projects, for example in developing new courses, I refer here to trailing changes in standing orders.

orders in such a way that permits experimentation. Whilst the insights generated by VFX will prove significant, its workers are situated in a different context, adopt a different style of leadership, and have greater freedoms than presbyters who serve circuits.

An additional concern – linked to the need for subsidiarity to be balanced by corporate reflection - is the length of time it takes for the Methodist Church to process suggestions for change. For local churches and Districts, the Methodist learning cycle operates on an annual basis, with requests for reflection and changes to discipline surfacing as memorials to Conference. If the Conference deems further exploration necessary, this takes place during the following connexional year, meaning that the minimum time required for a statement or changes to standing orders is some fifteen months.³⁸⁸

This research cites examples of how questions about lay presidency at communion, worship leading and local church pastors required much more immediate responses than the connexion were able to deliver. One important question is who, in the interim, gives permission for innovation to take place?

³⁸⁸ Based on the dates published for submission to the 2015 June-July Methodist Conference, requiring memorials are submitted by the end of March 2015.

6.3 Conclusion: Six suggestions for immediate action

1. Despite the early adoption of Fresh Expressions by presbyters and key leaders in the church, this research suggests that practitioners need to establish and reinforce the vision of Fresh Expressions in local congregations. Whilst few of the projects investigated here demonstrated ecclesial intent, there are, at present no criteria by which circuits and local churches can discern those fresh expressions that have ecclesial intent, and those who do not. In reply to my questions about the numbers of fresh expression that had become church in the legal sense, the Statistics Office stated:

For the 2014 Statistics Round, churches identified 2,705 out of 25,583 reported groups and outreach activities as “Fresh Expressions”. If definite criteria were developed to identify Fresh Expressions, as opposed to this system of self-reporting, we would expect numbers to be much smaller (arguably, many of the groups and outreach activities which churches currently list under “Fresh Expressions” are refreshed expressions of “traditional” church). The other deficiency of the current system is that if a Fresh Expression develops to the point of independence from a parent church, and yet does not elect to constitute itself as an authentic CPD Methodist Church, there is in theory no facility to report it. We have just addressed this issue, so that for the upcoming 2015 statistics round Circuit entities that are not fully constituted Methodist Churches will have the facility to be reported. These will include some larger Methodist Fresh Expressions, of which some will be “non-member” Circuit entities.

Whilst this does not quite address the issue – such ‘churches’ may still be more missional than ecclesial - it will identify fresh expressions that are seeking autonomy. I would suggest that the Church offers material to help churches assess and review their fresh expressions as part of the October count; the process by which the Church gathers data on its membership and attendance. Also, churches should be encouraged to incorporate more fresh expressions leaders on to church councils. All too often, the constituency of church councils and the place occupied by fresh expressions on agendas of meetings, signalled that these projects were subsidiary activities of the wider church rather than serious attempts at evangelism and community building.

2. The Methodist Church might explore whether the concerns raised about the appeal of membership within this research are indeed present elsewhere. To this end, the Methodist Church would benefit from a deeper conversation about the nature and place of membership, examining at depth the difference between the admission criteria for early Methodist societies, and present requirements. The Church may wish to examine other models by which people can affirm their faith and develop a sense of belonging and covenant relationship, within any given fresh expression.

This research suggests that there is a need to separate the legal requirements of membership from the inherited expectations of local churches, and to show how it might be possible for newcomers to fulfil the requirements of membership by attending a fresh expression. If membership remains as the only route by which the wider Methodist Church can mediate belonging and the right to stand for office, a resource intended to inform and support those who are transferring membership from another denomination to the Methodist Church, outlining Methodism's distinctive theology and contrasting practices, would be helpful.

3. Fresh expressions development might be encouraged and safeguarded by conferring a special status on those fresh expressions that are intent on forming a new church; that of being a Fresh Expressions Mission Church (FEMC). FEM Churches would live under the discipline of a Fresh Expressions Mission Order (FEMO).³⁸⁹ They would remain under local church and circuit oversight,

³⁸⁹ Within the Church of England, a Bishop's Mission Order is used 'to promote or further the mission of the Church through fostering or developing a distinctive Christian community.' Examples include establishing a new network congregation for young adults across a town or city, revitalisation of an existing congregation in a socially and economically deprived part of a city which enables structured partnership between two or more parishes and the drawing in of new resources, the ecumenical appointment of a schools worker to three local secondary schools with the intention of creating a Christian community, a congregation which primarily serves the needs of a particular ethnic group that seeks affiliation with the Church of England, collaborative work between three parishes and the Methodist Circuit to engender a missional Christian community in an area of new housing development. See "Working text reproduction of House of Bishops' Code of Practice on Bishops' Mission Orders," The Church of England, <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/1499290/workingtextbmocop.doc>. Point 1.2.12 & 1.2.13.

but would benefit from the support of a District Mission Team. The option for a circuit, rather than a church, to nurture a fresh expression, would remain. Standing Order 051 would be expanded to allow Methodist members to take up dual membership of both an inherited church, and a fresh expression with FEMC status. This would enable fresh expressions to constitute themselves as churches with greater ease, and at an earlier point. The Mission Team would be authorised to suspend standing orders on pastoral or missional grounds. Nevertheless, the broader aims of Methodist oversight would be honoured. This more corporate outworking of the 'light touch' would allow the Methodist Church to explore alternative ways of achieving this. It would also mediate against any unhelpful local personal episcopé and help retain connexional accountability.

4. The Methodist Church might explore further how presbyters view and apply CPD. In terms of the call for leaders to exercise a 'light touch' in the interpretation of Church discipline, the Church needs to guard against a view that CPD offers guidelines or principles rather than formal requirements. This research has identified the need for further work on how presbyters are applying Standing Order 605 in forming new churches, and how this relates to fresh expressions, and Standing Order 607(4), which requires churches who are in a state of sustained decline to become a class of another church. Conversely, in situations of decline, in how many cases are circuits involved in appointing additional representatives to the local church council? What are the pastoral or mission considerations that presbyters or superintendents are making in applying or resisting the standing order? What examples exist of churches who have converted to class and retained or expanded their mission? This suggestion may link coherently with ongoing questions about how the requirement for churches to convert to a class is hampering mission:

Is the number of members too low? Are the periods of time involved too long? What are the implications of increasing the minimum number of members that can trigger such processes (recognising that many parts of the Connexion have very many very small Local Churches)? And because we can all think of very small congregations which are potent witnesses to the gospel, and/or occupying premises that are critically important to a local community; and equally think of quite large churches that appear devoid of fruitfulness over lengthy periods, is a minimum number of members too blunt an instrument? And if it is, what is a sharper instrument, or what a better 'toolbox'? ³⁹⁰

5. The potential for fresh expressions projects to be properly authorised through an approved lay ministry programme is significant. However, the process of connexional consultation that Methodism offers appears slow and out-of-step with the needs of presbyters who, at times need to act rapidly. This is an example of where the Chair of District, in consultation with superintendents, could be given permission to take initiative (or suspend standing orders) on the grounds that delay would undermine the local mission of the church. This would have the effect of decreasing the influence of the superintendent and increasing the influence of the Chair. At present, superintendents are the final authority in circuits. Such a move might strengthen connexionalism at a point where the call for freedom at a local level might weaken it.

6. The quality of preaching surfaced as a particularly deep cause for concern. Fresh expressions may well require considerable skill on the part of the preacher and superintendents may wish to reflect on how they allow fresh expressions to receive ministry from a select group of local preachers, thereby safeguarding quality of teaching and consistency. Whilst this is permissible under CPD, it may well run counter to the culture of preaching in some circuits, where preachers are expected to minister across the whole. Similarly, the new training course for worship leaders and preaching will

³⁹⁰ Martyn Atkins, "Contemporary Methodism," (Methodist Conference, 2011), 8.
<http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/intra-contemporary-methodism-280611.pdf>.

be undoubtedly be kept under review as it is implemented across the connexion. However, two questions remain. Firstly, further guidance is required on the difference between what it is to preach, and what it is to lead worship; the current definition of preaching as being where someone 'takes a text and expounds it'³⁹¹, has its limitations. To what extent can a worship leader expound based on their own experience of how a text has spoken to them? Second, whilst the new course will encourage more diverse approaches to worship, the Church (which assesses candidates both locally and centrally) might wish to reflect on the extent to which traditional worship is the baseline from which experimentation can take place. If this is the case, how might traditional worship be the spur to further creativity? My personal experience of attending three different Local Preachers Meetings has been that whilst the majority are keen to offer something different, only a minority have direct experience of alternate worship such as café, contemporary or Celtic-reflective. How might the church educate such people – not only those who are in initial training? (At the time of writing, the new course is not fully accessible). Finally, whilst in theory, it might be possible for worship leaders to offer to serve exclusively within a fresh expressions environment, how would this be received locally? This is a fundamental question, as it is with the wider issue of Fresh Expressions. Whilst the conference can prioritise the need for more appropriate and inclusive worship, one difficulty is how this is communicated and enacted in local settings. The ultimate arbiter in many situations is the Local Preachers Meeting. Fundamentally, Methodism is a grass roots movement and the challenge for its leaders is one of catalysing and managing a change of culture.

³⁹¹ Cited by Nicola Price-Tebbit, the convenor of the Faith and Order Committee of the Methodist Church, at the 2015 Methodist Conference.

Appendix A: Consultation on CPD

Dear X

Thank you for your interest in my research. I would value your input greatly

Currently I am working on a chapter for my thesis entitled 'critiquing Methodist Ecclesiology'. Part of this is historical-theological and part of it is grounded in the practical, everyday experiences of Methodist ministers.

I am using the Methodist definition of oversight – theologically driven governance, management and leadership and have used these as separate headings. As you can see, I have added my initial reflections on the kinds of questions and issues with which we have to deal on a regular basis. There is of course some crossover.

My own reflections are tabled. I would welcome any further insight that you might have, either on what I have already identified or on something different that you feel I have overlooked. The aim of the exercise will be to demonstrate how our missional experience as a tradition has driven our own distinctive ecclesiology. As such, it will also show how we contrast with other denominations. It may be that as a result I would appreciate a deeper conversation, in which case I will be in touch and will require formal consent.

To my knowledge, no one has presented what ministry can throw up like this. Whilst all responses will be anonymised, in the final thesis the position that each contributor holds will be made clear.

Every blessing

Langley

Governance: non-negotiable areas dictated by our constitution.

ISSUE	QUERY/STATEMENT	CONTEXT	MY EXPLANATION	YOUR COMMENTS
Stationing	“Ministers need to stay for longer” (or conversely, “If minister X was to leave a year early, the merging of our circuits would be easier.	Circuit Steward in leadership team meeting, frustrated at the limitations of stationing, feeling that it disrupts strategic planning.	Ministers are invited to serve for an initial term for five years and then extend. However, most ministers will begin to reflect on whether they wish to request an extension in year four. Each time ministers request this, the agreement of the circuit meeting must be higher.	
Safeguarding	“Why do I have to do safeguarding training? “Why do I need a DBS clearance?”	Pastoral visitor, visiting mainly the elderly. Volunteer serving teas and coffees in a youth project.	All members of church council and all workers with children and young people are required to attend safeguarding training. This is linked to how abusers often seek positions of trust and responsibility – and ensuring that the church is a safe environment.	
Baptism	“I want to be baptised as an adult”	From someone already baptised as an infant. Individual witnessed the full-immersion baptism of her friend who was dedicated (when her family attended a Baptist congregation). Adult who was baptized as a child, never engaged with the Church and came to faith aged 50.	Re-baptism is absolutely prohibited. This is both theologically driven (baptism is a once and for all rite which welcomes people into the worldwide church) and ecclesiologically driven (rebaptism undermines the rites of other Christian Churches). The Methodist Church has approved a liturgy for reaffirmation of baptismal vows using water at the 2012 Conference	

ISSUE	QUERY/STATEMENT	CONTEXT	MY EXPLANATION	YOUR COMMENTS
Communion	“Why do we need a minister to do communion?”	<p>Medium sized local congregation requesting communion but ministers unable to preside because of pressures on the plan.</p> <p>Some questioning about the suitability of ministers who were pastorally distanced from the congregation.</p>	<p>Faith and Order have challenged the idea that the person presiding need have an immediate pastoral link, stressing the connexional principle. There are dispensations for lay-presidency at communion in the case of deprivation or missional need. In 2012, the Methodist Conference made changes to the previous qualifiers.</p>	
Marriage	We are divorced. We want to marry each other. Can you marry us?	<p>Conversation with couple seeking marriage, having heard that the Methodist Church permits the marriage of divorcees.</p>	<p>All Methodist presbyters serve as registrars within their own building, although candidate must apply to their local registrar to request permission in a legal sense. The Methodist Church is generally willing to marry people who have been divorced, while their previous spouse is still alive, as long as there are not major obvious reasons why it would be inappropriate to do so. If a presbyter feels unable to marry divorcees as a matter of principle, they must refer the couple to a minister who is willing. Presbyters should consult with their Chair of District.</p>	

ISSUE	QUERY/STATEMENT	CONTEXT	MY EXPLANATION	YOUR COMMENTS
Civil Partnership	Would you bless a same sex couple	Question from a member of a Methodist Church in light of media coverage.	The blessing of civil partnerships and the Church's response to same-sex weddings is the focus of much ongoing reflection from the Church. Rather than this issue being reflected upon locally, the Church has responded rapidly and at a national level in reply to government legislation. It is now possible for ministers to bless civil partnerships, provided the local church is in agreement.	
Preaching	"I want to preach – but only in my home church."	Prospective local preacher in strongly evangelical congregation with Wesleyan Reform Union background.	The connexional principle is reflected in the circuit structure of local preachers serving multiple churches. Whereas worship leaders serve in one church, local preachers serve across a circuit.	
Preaching	"Should this preacher continue 'on trial'?"	Local Preachers meeting.	'On note', to 'on trial' and 'accredited' are three stages in the formation of Methodist preacher, overseen by the superintendent, a local tutor and the local preachers meeting.	

ISSUE	QUERY/STATEMENT	CONTEXT	MY EXPLANATION	YOUR COMMENTS
Worship Leading	“We would like at least two worship leaders in every Church. “	Circuit Leadership Team, strategy meeting.	Worship leaders assist preachers in local churches but do not preach. They are appointed by the local Church council and are trained under the oversight of the superintendent and the local preachers meeting. Some worship leaders can serve across a number of Churches. Their role is evolving to include assisting local preachers to taking services, using recommended resources, where no preacher is free to take an appointment.	
Circuit Governance	“Please can plan dates be in by the end of July?”	Superintendent requesting dates to prepare the plan of worship for the next quarter. Involves local preachers stating when they are free and blocking dates. How presbyters plan themselves is negotiated with superintendents.	<p>The first call on a presbyter’s appointments is to preach and preside at communion services. This can be complicated by chapels who invite preachers independently for special occasions and circuit services where all of the local churches may come together.</p> <p>Requests such as baptisms need to be incorporated ahead of the plan, in line with where presbyters are available. This can often result in local churches not being able to easily meet the date required.</p>	

ISSUE	QUERY/STATEMENT	CONTEXT	MY EXPLANATION	YOUR COMMENTS
Local Church governance	"I did not realize I was a trustee!"	Church Council meeting as part of discussions about whether the council should take out insurance should it face legal proceedings and be found liable.	In larger churches, the stewards and other members of the congregation are appointed through a majority vote by members at the Annual General Meeting. Further to this, the council can appoint additional members. In smaller churches, all members are entitled to serve on the church council but must agree to do so.	
Spiritual nurture & pastoral care	"Have you thought about meeting as a class?"	Stewards meeting	'Bands' and 'classes' were introduced in early Methodism to provide a place where leaders could support each other (in the case of the former) and newcomers could seek salvation (in the case of the latter). Class leaders would be appointed at the AGM. Whilst local churches may incorporate small groups, few meet as bands and classes.	

ISSUE	QUERY/STATEMENT	CONTEXT	MY EXPLANATION	YOUR COMMENTS
Local donations	“Thanks but no thanks, we don’t want a dishwasher!”	Church offered a dishwasher as a gift but this was turned down by Church Council; folks in the Church enjoyed drying-up and chatting together.	The Church Council must first decide whether it wishes to accept a gift rather than accept it without discussion. Where finance is concerned, the local church can set-aside funds for particular projects, but the first call on any local church’s finances is towards meeting the assessment.	
Gambling	“Will you draw the raffle-ticket for us?”	Frequent at church fairs.	CPD dictates that raffles are only permitted with the prior agreement of the church council, that the equivalent of the prize fund cannot exceed £50 and that ticket sales cannot take place door to door. Raffles can be an extremely sensitive issue for congregation, given Methodism’s opposition to gambling.	
Alcohol	“Can we serve wine at our Christmas lunch?”	Hall user group	Alcohol is prohibited on Church premises.	
Gambling	“Can the Derby and Joan play Bingo?”	From leaders, aware that this might be a sensitive issue.	This opposition to gambling includes any game of luck or chance, including a simple game of bingo for prizes. Often presbyters need to make a judgment about whether the prize constitutes an inducement to play.	

ISSUE	QUERY/STATEMENT	CONTEXT	MY EXPLANATION	YOUR COMMENTS
Connexionalism	“Those people in London and Manchester have no idea what it is like here in the real world.”	Comment on the Property Division in Manchester by a member of the congregation frustrated about the time required to have planning applications passed.	In theory, the Methodist Church has ecclesiastical exemption from planning legislation but the process can prove time-consuming and therefore costly. The need to seek permission illustrates how local churches cannot act autonomously.	
Ecumenical relations	“How do we know this is not going to be an Anglican takeover?”	Meeting with local Methodist congregation to discuss a joint project with the local Anglican church.	In this sense there was a feeling that because the Anglican Church was the larger church, their influence would dominate.	

Leadership: Local decisions intended to inspire and motivate

ISSUE	QUERY/STATEMENT	CONTEXT	MY EXPLANATION	YOUR COMMENTS
Stationing	Should we look to invite a deacon?	Leadership Team meeting.	Within Methodism, deacons are a separate order of prayer and service. They may be stationed in local projects and community work. Deacons are part of the circuit staff meetings but have their own convocation.	
Preaching plan	“Why are you with them ‘X’ times but are only with us ‘Y’ times?”	Church leaders questioning why a minister is spending a disproportionate time in one place. Often preceded by the logic that since X is bigger than Y, X is more deserving.	Presbyters have the right to focus their energies according to local need. It may be that Y requires some form of preparation for mission or support through difficulty. However, presbyters should work collaboratively with superintendent and stewards and agree priorities.	
Building connexionalism	“Why are we struggling to get people to circuit services?”	Circuit leadership team	Whilst not all circuits will be struggling, Methodism has cherished, historically the idea of local churches joining each other for shared worship. The circuit is the primary driver of mission in any given area, not the local Church.	

ISSUE	QUERY/STATEMENT	CONTEXT	MY EXPLANATION	YOUR COMMENTS
Worship	“Why do we have to sing so many hymns - why can't we sing more choruses?” (and vice-versa)	Complimentary feedback following an all-age service with contemporary music led by a band.	Within services the choice of the hymns rests with the local preacher or minister. However, options are often limited by the receptivity to the congregation to new material and the adaptability of an organist (if a band is not available). There is huge diversity in the hymnbooks that local churches use.	
Resourcing	“X Church is closing. Why can we not sell the building at low cost to this registered charity?”	Circuit Leadership Team exploring whether a church which was due to close could be sold to a community group.	Charity law states that the Methodist Church needs to sell its buildings to the highest bidder, unless it can be demonstrated clearly that a low cost sale fulfils local mission.	
Publicity	“I read in the Methodist Recorder that....”	From congregation members commenting on issues within the wider church as they leave by the door.	The Methodist Recorder is not the official newspaper of the Methodist Church, in the sense that it offers independent editorial insight. Letters to the editor do not necessarily represent accurately the views of the wider church.	

Management: planning and co-ordinating

ISSUE	QUERY/STATEMENT	CONTEXT	MY EXPLANATION	YOUR COMMENTS
Local church	“We need a new steward.”	Local church stewards meeting. Church Council meeting	Church Stewards have a clear leadership and management function within the life of the Church. Stewards work in partnership with presbyters to plan and deliver the church’s mission.	
Local Church users	“The toddler group are using up all of our space.”	Vibrant evangelical congregation frustrated that their storage and mission is being frustrated by an external church group.	Local churches often depend on lettings to meet their costs but may not engage effectively with such groups. In this instance the presence of a toddler group was an opportunity for evangelism and community development, but this was not recognized by the wider Church.	
Local Church funding	We won’t be able to afford our “assessment”	Local church council meeting. Circuit Treasurer’s Meeting.	The first call on any finance in the Church is on the assessment; the sum required by the circuit to support its ministers, administration and property. Churches raise the assessment through offerings and other income, such as lettings. Circuit Treasurers agree how the assessment is split between churches.	

ISSUE	QUERY/STATEMENT	CONTEXT	MY EXPLANATION	YOUR COMMENTS
Worship	“Our service lasts from 6-7pm!”	In response to the question, ‘What time does your service start’ from a visiting preacher.	There is no stipulation about how long services should last: this is the responsibility of the preacher. However, local custom often dictates when the congregation believes it should finish!	
Preaching	“Why have you Y down to preach here? He was awful last time!”	Negative feedback about a local preacher who struggled to relate to children and whose last service focused more on local history than the gospel.	Feedback on local preacher services (apart form ‘on note’ and ‘on trial’ assessed services) is invariably second-hand. Local preachers are accredited for life and although further development is supposed to take place, there is no further assessment of services unless a complaint is made.	
Fees	“Should we charge members for funerals?”	Local churches, query passed on to local churches.	Local churches are entitled to charge fees for weddings and funerals. Those who serve as ministers, stewards and organists are also entitled to a fee. The decision about whether churches should charge for the use of the building and the level of any church is a matter for their own discretion. At a deeper level the issue is one of whether it is right to charge someone who has already been giving to the Church throughout their life.	

ISSUE	QUERY/STATEMENT	CONTEXT	MY EXPLANATION	YOUR COMMENTS
Worship	“We can’t find a preacher for harvest festival.”	Local stewards meeting	In some cases, stewards can invite preachers whom they deem suitable to lead particular celebrations such as harvest or church anniversaries.	
Pastoral	“Nelly is ill and needs a hospital visit.”	Pastoral visitor	Local churches have a pastoral secretary (who holds the details of all those who are associated with the life of the Church) and a team of pastoral visitors who meet people in their homes. However, this may be subject to considerable variation. Nonetheless, pastoral visitors have a key role in informing ministers when people are hospitalized.	

ISSUE	QUERY/STATEMENT	CONTEXT	MY EXPLANATION	YOUR COMMENTS
Pastoral	“Our minister does not visit (people in their homes)”	Comment by visitors to a local church following a pastoral visitors’ recognition service.	The scope of pastoral work to be carried out by ministers needs to be agreed with the pastoral team. Often ministers respond to those cases where the surrounding team has less expertise, or to greater need such as those who are in hospital. Pastoral needs in any church are endless. As the membership that ministers support increases, the scope to visit people in their own homes can diminish. Also, our pastoral mission needs to extend to those outside of the fellowship of the Church.	
Strategic	“Even though X Church is closing, can we not retain the building and use it for mission?”	Circuit Leadership Team meeting	This is possible if a nucleus of people remains as a class, and that class is supported independently by the circuit. However, responsibility for the running of X remains with the circuit.	

ISSUE	QUERY/STATEMENT	CONTEXT	MY EXPLANATION	YOUR COMMENTS
Strategic	"Can you put this in the notices?"	Notice of a cream tea happening in a neighbouring church.	Local churches distribute notices in different ways; via notices given by the steward on duty before the service or in written pew notes. What needs to be communicated and how is a major issue. There are times when one notice is more important than another; there is often a need to ensure that the focus remains on the priorities of the local church.	

Appendix B: Consultation participants, by role

Key: X = 'yes'

PARTICIPANT	ORDAINED?	DIRECT OVERSIGHT OF A FRESH EXPRESSION?	CONSULTATION SENT	CONSULTATION RETURNED	CONSULTATION NOT RETURNED	SHORT RESEARCH CONVERSATION	FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW
Chair of District (1)	X		X	X		X	X
Chair of District (2) and Chair of the VFX review panel.	X		X		X	X	X
Chair of District (3)	X		X	X			X
Deputy Chair of District (1).	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Deputy Chair (2) (Also a member of Faith and Order).	X	X	X	X	X	X	

PARTICIPANT	ORDAINED?	DIRECT OVERSIGHT OF A FRESH EXPRESSION?	CONSULTATION SENT	CONSULTATION RETURNED	CONSULTATION NOT RETURNED	SHORT RESEARCH CONVERSATION	FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW
Connexional Church Planting Secretary.	x					x	
Connexional VFX co-ordinator.	x					x	X
Former Connexional Fresh Expressions Missioner.	x		x		x	x	
Superintendent & Chair of a District Ministerial Development Group.	x		x	x		x	
Former District Director of Mission, now a training officer (1).	x	x	x	x		x	x
District Director of Mission (2).	x		x	x		x	x

PARTICIPANT	ORDAINED?	DIRECT OVERSIGHT OF A FRESH EXPRESSION?	CONSULTATION SENT	CONSULTATION RETURNED	CONSULTATION NOT RETURNED	SHORT RESEARCH CONVERSATION	FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW
District Mission Enabler (1), serving across two Districts.	x	x	x	x		x	x
Development Enabler serving across two Districts.			x	x		x	x
Training Officer (lay) serving across two Districts.			x	x		x	x
Learning Network officer experienced in House Church planting.			x		x	x	x
District Mission Enabler 2 (managing a Pioneer).			x	x		x	x
Leader of a District Ministers Support Group.	x	x	x	x		x	x

PARTICIPANT	ORDAINED?	DIRECT OVERSIGHT OF A FRESH EXPRESSION?	CONSULTATION SENT	CONSULTATION RETURNED	CONSULTATION NOT RETURNED	SHORT RESEARCH CONVERSATION	FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW
Three probationary ministers (at different stages of training).		xxx	xxx	xxx			xxx
One superintendent (market town).	x	x	x	x			x
One superintendent (city centre).	x	x	x	x			x
One superintendent with overseas experience of church planting.	x	x					x
Two presbyter-pioneers.	xx	xx	xx			xx	xx
One Deacon serving in a circuit mission context.	x	x	x	x			x

PARTICIPANT	ORDAINED?	DIRECT OVERSIGHT OF A FRESH EXPRESSION?	CONSULTATION SENT	CONSULTATION RETURNED	CONSULTATION NOT RETURNED	SHORT RESEARCH CONVERSATION	FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW
Co-leader of a Methodist Church plant, pre-Fresh Expressions.						x	x
Circuit Administrator.			x	x		x	x
Local Preacher's Tutor based in a suburban church.			x	x		x	x
Local Preacher, Church Steward, and Former Circuit Steward (single individual).			x	x		x	x
URC minister working in a Baptist/URC ecumenical Church.	x	x				x	x
Anglican minister serving in a Methodist-Anglican LEP.	x	x				x	x

PARTICIPANT	ORDAINED?	DIRECT OVERSIGHT OF A FRESH EXPRESSION?	CONSULTATION SENT	CONSULTATION RETURNED	CONSULTATION NOT RETURNED	SHORT RESEARCH CONVERSATION	FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW
One Anglican minister developing a Methodist-Anglican partnership.	x	x				x	x
Free Church minister working with Churches Together, experienced in change management.						x	x
Local Preacher and Circuit Steward. (One individual).			x	x		x	x
Focus group: Five Methodist supernumerary ministers, still active in circuit.	xxxxx		xxxxx	xxxxx		N/A Focus group	N/A
Four local Church stewards.			xxxx	xxxx		xxxx	xxxx

PARTICIPANT	ORDAINED?	DIRECT OVERSIGHT OF A FRESH EXPRESSION?	CONSULTATION SENT	CONSULTATION RETURNED	CONSULTATION NOT RETURNED	SHORT RESEARCH CONVERSATION	FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW
Circuit Mission Enabler		x	x	x		x	x

Appendix C: Initial Questionnaire

This simple questionnaire is intended to help me understand the 'makeup' of your leadership, the expertise that you bring and the contribution you have been able to make. Because many of the projects that are contributing to my research, it is not possible to provide complete anonymity; once the geographical location together with the nature of the project are outlined, it will be easy for people to be identified. Whilst in the final thesis I will anonymise names, I will need to state the position that you hold. There will be an embargo on the thesis for three years, although I would be happy to talk about the outcome of my research so far, once the visit to your project has been completed.

The first section of the questionnaire collects some standard information about your position, ethnicity, and whether you have a disability. The second section asks some deeper questions about your role. If you do not want to answer any question, please simply leave it blank.

NAME					
DATE					
Your role		Brief description (how many hours a week, what this involves)			
AGE		DATE of BIRTH		MALE <input type="checkbox"/>	FEMALE <input type="checkbox"/>
DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF DISABLED?			Y <input type="checkbox"/>	N <input type="checkbox"/>	
ARE YOU REGISTERED DISABLED?			Y <input type="checkbox"/>	N <input type="checkbox"/>	
WHAT IS YOUR ETHNIC GROUP?					
Choose one section from (a) to (e) and tick the appropriate box to indicate your cultural background					
(a) WHITE <input type="checkbox"/> British <input type="checkbox"/> Irish			(b) BLACK or BLACK BRITISH <input type="checkbox"/> Caribbean <input type="checkbox"/> African		

<input type="checkbox"/> Any other White background <i>please write in below</i> 	<input type="checkbox"/> Any other Black background <i>please write in below</i>
<p>(c) ASIAN or ASIAN BRITISH</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Indian <input type="checkbox"/> Pakistani <input type="checkbox"/> Bangladeshi <input type="checkbox"/> Any other Asian background <i>please write in below</i> 	<p>(d) MIXED</p> <input type="checkbox"/> White and Black Caribbean <input type="checkbox"/> White and Black African <input type="checkbox"/> White and Asian <input type="checkbox"/> Any other Mixed background <i>please write in below</i>
<p>(e) CHINESE or OTHER ETHNIC GROUP</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese <input type="checkbox"/> Any other Mixed background <i>please write in opposite</i>	

PLEASE ANSWER SOME DEEPER QUESTIONS ON YOUR ROLE

1/ What is or has been your chosen area of work or career? (Raising children counts!)

2/ What attracts you to this place?

3/ What skills are you using here?

4/ What is the most enjoyable thing about what you do?

5/ What is the most challenging thing about what you do?

6/ Who are you responsible to here?

7/ Who do you confide in when you are here?

8/ What training have you received for your role?

9/ If you could change one thing about this work, what would it be?

10/ Do you have any prior religious affiliation? (Have you been a member of any faith groups; Christian, Jewish, Islamic etc.)

11/ Has your spirituality (belief in a higher power) or faith in God been encouraged here?

If yes, then please share. Similarly, if no, please expand

Appendix D: Animate Survey

Welcome to the Animate Survey: Discover Faith, Explore Faith, Reignite Faith

1.

1. This survey is private but we may want to talk with you so that we can clarify anything you share. If this is acceptable, write your name in the space below:

2. Please indicate your age range AND your sex

- Under 10
- 10-14
- 14-20
- 21-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- 61-70
- 71-80
- 81+
- Male
- Female

3. We need to know something of your previous experience of Church. Please tick all of the boxes that apply and give further detail

- I have rarely been to Church before
- Before coming to Animate I used to worship at another Church
- I attend Animate and another Church.

Tell us something of your Church history - ie Attended Methodist Church as a child, then left as a teenager; or used to worship regularly at.....

1

4. We need to know how often you have attended Inspire and in what capacity. Please tick the boxes that apply to you.

- I have attended Animate once
- I have attended Animate twice
- I have attended more than twice but less than once a month
- I attend Animate at least once a month
- I attend Animate most weeks (ie 2 or 3 out of 4 weeks)
- I attend Animate every week
- I am a local preacher
- I am a minister who supports Inspire

Do you attend both Inspire and another Church? If yes, please state where and tell us why Inspire is helpful.

5. Tell us how important each of the following were in making you feel welcome at Animate (1 least important, 10 most important)

	1 (least)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 (most)
Invitation of friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Welcome of the leaders	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Advertising material	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Refreshments beforehand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Seating arrangements	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Music on offer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
'Breaks' during the evening	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

6. Rate from 1 (least helpful) to 10 (the most helpful), the following activities in terms of helping you to believe that God can change your life.

	1 (least)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Meaningful gossip	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sharing bread and wine	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Worship	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Share the Prayer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bite Size Bible	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Extended Fellowship	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Caring for each other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Chillax	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

7. Please do the same, thinking about how the same aspects help you feel that you belong to the group.

	1 (least)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 (most)
Meaningful gossip	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sharing bread and wine	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Worship	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Share the Prayer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bite Size Bible	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Extended Fellowship	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Caring for each other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Chillax	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

8. Rate these statements from 1 to 5. as a result of attending Inspire....

	1 Strongly disagree	2 Partly disagree	3 Neutral	4 Partly Agree	5 Strongly Agree
I have sensed God's presence during worship	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am more aware of God's presence at other times in the day/week	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I understand more about why we worship God	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I understand more about how we can worship God in different ways	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I know more about prayer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I pray more by myself than I did before	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My knowledge of the Bible has increased	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I understand more about why we share in bread and wine	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sharing bread and wine has become more important to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My faith has deepened	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have given my life to Jesus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel more confident to talk about what I believe with others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I sense God is calling me to do serve others in a particular way	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Is this just about Inspire or have other factors been at work?

9. (a) What is least helpful about Inspire
(b) How could we change it?

10. Would you be happy to ask your friends to come to Inspire? Again, please tell us what holds you back (if anything)

Appendix E: Messy Church Survey

Messy Church Survey at the Maltings

1.

1. This survey is private but we may want to talk with you so that we can clarify anything you share. If this is acceptable, write your name in the space below:

2. Please indicate your age range AND your sex

- Under 10
- 10-14
- 14-20
- 21-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- 61-70
- 71-80
- 81+
- Male
- Female

3. We need to know something of your previous experience of Church. Please tick all of the boxes that apply and give further detail

- I have rarely been to Church before
- Before coming to Messy Church I used to worship at another Church
- I attend Messy Church and another Church (including The Deepings Methodist Church)

Tell us something of your Church history - ie Attended Methodist Church as a child, then left as a teenager; or used to worship regularly at.....

1

4. We need to know how often you have attended Messy Church and in what capacity. Please tick the boxes that apply to you.

- I attend Messy Church occasionally
- I attend Messy Church every other month on average
- I attend Messy Church almost every time it is planned
- I am a local preacher
- I have helped deliver the teaching but am not a local preacher
- I am a worship leader
- I have helped lead worship but have not done the worship leader's course
- I help with preparing and serving food
- I help in another capacity (please indicate in what way)
- I help with laying out tables and opening up
- I am a minister

Please tell us any other ways that you help out.

5. Tell us how important each of the following were in making you feel welcome at Messy Church (1 least important, 10 most important)

	1 (least)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 (most)	N/A
Invitation of friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Welcome of the minister	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Welcome by other leaders	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Advertising	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Seating arrangements	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Style of worship	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Style of teaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please share anything else that has been really important in terms of making you feel welcome and part of a family at Messy Church.

6. Rate from 1 (least helpful) to 10 (the most helpful), the following activities in terms of helping you to believe that God can make a difference to your life.

	1 (least)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Talking with others who I meet at Messy Church	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Worship songs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching on the Bible	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Craft activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Prayer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please let us know if there are any other aspects of Messy Church or any experiences that have encouraged your belief that God can make a difference to your life.

7. Please do the same, thinking about how the same aspects help you feel that you belong to the group.

	1 (least)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 (most)
Talking with others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sharing refreshments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Worship songs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Praying together	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learning together	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working on craft activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

8. Rate these statements from 1 to 5. as a result of attending Messy Church....

	1 Strongly disagree	2 Partly disagree	3 Neutral	4 Partly Agree	5 Strongly Agree
I have sensed God's presence during worship	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am more aware of God's presence at other times in the day/week	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I understand more about why we worship God	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I understand more about how we can worship God in different ways	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I know more about prayer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I pray more by myself than I did before	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My knowledge of the Bible has increased	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe more than God can make a difference to my life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have renewed my commitment to Christ and given more of my life to him	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel more confident to talk about what I believe with others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I sense God is calling me to do serve others in a particular way	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Is this just about Messy Church or have other factors been at work?

9. (a) What is least helpful about Messy Church?

(b) How could we change it?

10. Would you be happy to ask your friends to come to Messy Church? Again, please tell us what holds you back (if anything)

Appendix F: Interview probes

**Supplementary Questionnaire for Fresh Expressions,
providing probes for interview**

QUESTION	AIM	SPECIFIC AREA BRING PROBED
What is or has been your chosen area of work or career?	<p>Consider how the participant's gifts are reflected in the project.</p> <p>Explore the extent to which the participant recognises their God-given gifts and how these are put to use.</p>	Belonging, in the sense that the participant has a role that fulfils them.
What do you see as the purpose of this project?	Explore any difference between the participants understanding of the project and those of the main leader.	<p>Understanding about the nature of the project and how this translates into action.</p> <p>Explores the extent to which the participant is bothered to reach out to newcomers – is this for them or for others, or both?</p>
What teaching on the Bible exists here?	One of the fundamental marks of life in a Christian Community.	How understanding is linked to study of the scriptures and how the ritual of learning supports faith-development.
Do you share communion within this fresh expression?	Taken as one of the marks of Church according to Fresh Expressions and the Mission of the Church	<p>Understanding about what the rite of communion means to people.</p> <p>Exploration of how this is shared.</p> <p>Examines the link between what is offered in the fresh expression and what is offered in the wider Church.</p>

QUESTION	AIM	SPECIFIC AREA BRING PROBED
Have any baptisms, weddings or funerals been included as part of this fresh expression?	As above, baptism is considered to be a fundamental mark of Church, and inherited churches would expect to exhibit other rites of passage.	Baptisms and confirmations are significant rites through which the wider church enables a sense of belonging. The same might be said of when the Church marks important moments of people's lives; these often generate valuable pastoral links.
Do you belong to any other congregation or church?	Explores whether the participant sees this congregation as 'Church'.	Considers how participants develop a sense of belonging and the extent that they belong to multiple communities.
What attracts you to this place?	May reveal helpful differences between traditional church and emerging church.	Explores themes of belonging, behaviour (in the sense of making time to attend) and bothering in cases where the participant has understood the broader missiological aims of the project which might exist.
What previous training (not necessarily from the church), do you draw from in your role?	Interested to see what informal skills might be present.	Explores the participant's prior experience of belonging in a faith community.
What do you enjoy most about being part of this project?	Open question that explores all aspects of the cycle.	Belonging, believing, behaving, bothering
Who do you confide in when you are going through a difficult time with your faith?	Explores pastoral networks within the project and allows comparison between what is put in place by the church, and what informal networks exist.	Allows for a discussion about the participant's faith and how they experience God. Can explore how their behaviour has changed. Looks to see how the project is able to bless them.

QUESTION	AIM	SPECIFIC AREA BRING PROBED
Who do you consider that you are responsible to when you are attending this project?	Probes how oversight is functioning within the project.	Explores what the default behaviours might be for those who are involved in the project and allows for any contrasts between formal and informal oversight to be recognised.
What kind of things do you struggle with in your role as a leader or visitor?	Probes what needs ministers might have to address.	Probes participant's experience
If you thought someone was in personal danger, who would you contact in the group?	Probes oversight and safeguarding.	As in (k)
If you could change one thing about this project, what would it be and why?	Probes what needs ministers might have to address.	Allows expansion of (l)
Have you been involved before with any other Church?	Expands on (f) if necessary	Explores prior experience in any other faith community. Allows further questioning about what has led people to move from one congregation to another.
Have you been involved before with any other religion?	Allows me to examine the extent to which participants have been exposed to other faith communities.	Probes experience of God and how this influences the participant's understanding and viewpoint.
Has your spirituality (belief in a higher power) or faith in God been encouraged here?	Allows both an evaluation of how people have or have not grown in faith as a result of the project. The question is deliberately closed to provoke further discussion.	Belonging, believing, behaving, bothering

Appendix G: A statement on my personal; reflexivity

By nature, social scientists, particularly those who turn to qualitative methods of data gathering, will be susceptible to questions about how much significance they give to one source over another. The strength of Leach's approach in attending to the voices is that it encourages practitioners to recognise not just the audible voices but also those that are quiet, silent, or even silenced. This research has identified a range of voices and some common themes. The question remains as to the extent to which the concerns uncovered by this research are also true of the wider church. In some cases, the voices of dissent have been particularly striking.

Where is my bias in this research? Am I making the data fit the thesis? To what extent have I given greater weight to sensationalist statements? In my research, I have been reassured by moments of surprise; moments when I observed something that I was not expecting to see. Despite the fact that this thesis was forming in my mind, I was open to evidence that either confirmed or denied my initial reflections. The account of how people understood Fresh Expressions at Animate, despite my own mentoring, and their honest response to my suggestion that they become a class of another church, shocked me. The fact that some fresh expressions leaders were both frustrated but at the same time deeply loyal to the wider church was a surprise. In the consultation, my view of how a 'light touch' approach might be unhelpful within fresh expressions was reinforced as I began to see how stationing compounded the issue. As for the mixed economy, my view shifted again from one where initially I felt that the mixed economy was not working, to a much more nuanced view; that it was proving difficult to implement. Thus, whilst I cannot – and would never claim - that my conclusions are made objectively, I recognise the potential for bias, and recognise in myself, a shift from simplistic arguments towards those that are more subtly nuanced.

One concern, particularly in relationship to the case study at Animate, was the extent to which my role as a presbyter, albeit one acting as an enabler and mentor, influenced my observations. My conclusion, particularly when I compare the ease at which I was able to generate data at Animate in comparison to messy church, was that this relationship enabled rather than inhibited the research process. Here, research was a joint activity, with the members of Animate assisting me as we tried to offer insights for the wider church. The fact that I was able to visit Animate once I had moved from the Riverhead Circuit to the Swindon Circuit, allowed final conversations to take place without any concern that I had a conflict of interest. Thus the issue is not so much about whether presbyters can research a project under their oversight but whether participants feel able to share honestly without fear of criticism. However, in a forum of Christian formation, honesty and transparency are exactly what is required to ensure success. The crucial aspect is not therefore the nature of the research but the openness, warmth and grace of the researcher. In the event of any conflict, the role of the researcher is to understand the dynamics at work, and the role of a presbyter is to encourage participants to resolve tensions for themselves. These need not be mutually exclusive.

Perhaps one of the most telling observations as to the extent to which my interpretations are balanced is the fact that I am, to a degree, uncomfortable with my research findings and my thesis. The concept of the mixed economy once appealed to me. It challenges inherited congregations to accept that the Methodist Church needs to sustain what remains whilst engaging in new work. The 'light touch' approach allows presbyters to use CPD as a document of principles and guidelines rather than fixed regulation. However, this is simply not borne out by the evidence.

As I reflect on what I might do differently, I find myself questioning whether I should have used deeper tools for interview analysis such as NVivo. The combination of a simple questionnaire, coupled with a template that helped me explore key areas during interview, was particularly helpful. It provided a level of flexibility and helped me adjust my questioning to help the participants tell

their own story. Whilst codification and computational analysis might have yielded greater certitude, in terms of identifying common themes, it ran the risk of obscuring the story and the lived-in experience of what it feels like to oversee fresh expressions. It may have generated a range of observations in which emotion and non-verbal signals were lost; the frustrations of trying to build community and yet remain faithful to Methodist tradition and standing orders; the practical difficulties in terms of training and resourcing that CPD does not recognise; and what it feels like to be involved in calling for change in the Methodist Church – these are but three examples. What would complement the consultation on CPD, particularly in the areas of how the decline of the Church is impacting the thoughts and feelings of ministers, is a second and perhaps modified repeat of Hailey and Francis’ much more quantitative survey.

I am pleased to report that this thesis is likely to influence the method and scope of future research in the Church. At the Methodist Conference this year, a request will be brought forward for Church to conduct further qualitative research on fresh expressions. Insights from this research have also been presented by a pioneer minister and member of a VentureFX support group, at the One Mission forum.

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