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Exploring the Lived Theology of Small Missional Communities: Uncovering Charismatic Practices and Beliefs to Enable Sustained Engagement in Social Action

James Butler

Abstract:

This thesis explores the lived theology of Small Missional Communities focusing on how they have developed practices and beliefs to help sustain their engagement in social action. These small groups of Christians are seeking to be both a worshipping Christian community and engage in social action in their local area and have been strongly influenced by the Emerging Missional Church, charismatic evangelicalism and what I have called the Evangelical Turn to Social Action. Using a practical theology approach through a qualitative study of four Small Missional Communities this research reveals the way that these communities have developed practices to discern and experience God in the world to enable a more sustained engagement in social action retaining the Charismatic Evangelical emphasis on experience and encounter with God. The key shift made by these Small Missional Communities is theological; a change in understanding of where and how God acts. Through developing new practices and understandings the communities have moved from an intensive focus on God acting in the gathered worship service to an extensive focus on God acting in the world. These practices and understandings are described as 'moving the location of belonging', a change in the understanding of the relationship between God's action and human action, and developing practices of seeing and experiencing God in the world. The thesis then explores the insights and challenges both for Small Missional Communities and for the traditions which have influenced SMCs concluding that greater attention needs to be paid to the Charismatic Evangelical background of such groups, whose practices continue to shape the communities, and how practices are already developing which help to tackle some of the challenges facing Small Missional Communities.

Exploring the Lived Theology of Small Missional Communities:

**Uncovering Charismatic Practices and
Beliefs to Enable Sustained
Engagement in Social Action**

James Edward David Butler

**Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of
Philosophy**

Department of Theology and Religious Studies

Durham University

2017

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Introduction

At the beginning of my research I had a conversation with the leader of a charity that works with the homeless and runs a food bank. One particular moment in this conversation captured what I was exploring in my research. He told me how he constantly felt the tension between his desire to serve those in need and the prayer and worship in church. He told me how he was focused on 'what goes on out *there*, not what goes on in *here*' and how he felt at home on the street with the homeless or working with young people whereas church on a Sunday felt a struggle. He shared a story of a time in a church service when the congregation was asked to form a circle by holding hands and he found that he was the only one facing outwards. It was a visual representation of his frustration; he felt that church should be about facing out towards the world whereas everyone else seemed to want to face in towards each other. He was from a Charismatic Evangelical church, and although this tension is not exclusive to charismatic evangelicalism, it is charismatic evangelicalism that I will particularly explore in this thesis.

Charismatic evangelicalism has often been accused of promoting a privatized and personal faith which has this inward focus and therapeutic emphasis.¹ Although this is an overly simplified account, it points towards the way experience of God and the worship service tend to dominate Charismatic Evangelical practice.² Despite a rise in concern for social engagement within charismatic evangelicalism over recent decades the centrality of the worship service has remained and social action has normally been understood in relation to it.³ With an increasing number of Charismatic Evangelicals seeking to engage in social action it is important to explore how they engage. What are the practices, resources, understandings and beliefs which help them both to engage in social action and sustain it? Academic treatments have tended to focus on numbers and trends⁴ or attempted to provide theological rationale for such engagement. Some have looked more specifically at particular examples of social engagement but have tended to focus on individuals.⁵ The traditional evangelical approach to social action has been to see it as

¹ Martyn Percy, *Words, Wonders and Power: Understanding Contemporary Christian Fundamentalism and Revivalism* (London: SPCK, 1996); James Steven, 'Worship in the Spirit: A Sociological Analysis and Theological Appraisal of Charismatic Worship in the Church of England.' (PhD Thesis, King's College London (University of London), 1999); Robert Warner, 'Fissured Resurgence: Developments in English Pan-Evangelicalism, 1966-2001' (PhD Thesis, Kings College London, 2006).

² Chapter 1 develops a more nuanced account of charismatic evangelicalism describing a lived theology which is primarily focused on the worship service.

³ See p14

⁴ Matt Bird, 'Cinnamon Faith Action Audit National Report' (Cinnamon Network, May 2015), <http://www.cinnamonnetwork.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Final-National-Report.pdf>; Geoff Knott, 'Investing More for the Common Good - National Church Social Action Survey Results 2014' (Jubilee Plus, December 2014), <https://jubilee-plus.org/docs/Report-National-Church-Social-Action-Survey-2014-Full.pdf>.

⁵ Gregory C. Stanczak, *Engaged Spirituality: Social Change and American Religion* (New Brunswick; London: Rutgers University Press, 2006); Matthew T. Lee, Margaret M. Poloma, and Stephen G. Post, *The Heart of*

the context for evangelism and this conversation as to the relationship between social action and evangelism continues within Evangelical circles.⁶ With the rise in social action this traditional Evangelical understanding of the relationship between social action and the church is being challenged and by turning to practice this thesis seeks how this understanding is changing.

A particularly interesting strand of this rise in social engagement within charismatic evangelicalism is the development of Small Missional Communities (SMCs). SMCs are part of a growth in what the Church of England has called *Fresh Expressions of Church*⁷ but I will refer to here as part of a broader ecclesial development, the Emerging Missional Movement.⁸ They are small groups of Christians who are seeking to be Christian community and engage in holistic mission, reaching out to their local area. Many SMCs have been started by Charismatic Evangelicals with similar frustrations to the leader in the opening example. Finding their churches to be difficult places to engage in the kind of social action they envisage they have been inspired by the likes of Shane Claiborne⁹, the Eden Network¹⁰ and 24-7 Prayer Boiler Rooms¹¹ to attempt to engage in social action in a more active, sustained and intentional way. It is these SMCs and how they have sustained their social action which is the focus of this research. This then locates this research within the Emerging-Missional conversation which is exploring missiology and ecclesiology in light of the changing context of Europe and North America. Much of this conversation has focused around moving away from particular models and practices of church adopting terms like 'post-Evangelical', 'post-modern' and 'post-Christendom'.¹² However not all groups have taken this path, and many SMCs continue to draw on Charismatic Evangelical patterns and practices.

This all leads to the principle research question:

Given their Charismatic Evangelical roots how do Small Missional Communities sustain their social action?

Which is broken down into three sub questions:

Religion: Spiritual Empowerment, Benevolence, and the Experience of God's Love (New York, N.Y.: OUP USA, 2013).

⁶ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, New edition (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books (USA), 1992), 405.

⁷ Graham Cray, *Mission Shaped Church* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004).

⁸ The Emerging Missional Movement will be explored in detail in chapter 2

⁹ Shane Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical*, Soft Cover edition (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2006).

¹⁰ Matt Wilson, *Concrete Faith: The Inside Story of the Eden Network* (Manchester, England: The Message Trust, 2012).

¹¹ Andy Freeman and Pete Greig, *Punk Monk: New Monasticism and the Ancient Art of Breathing* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2007); Pete Greig, *Red Moon Rising* (Lake Mary, Fla: Survivor, 2003).

¹² Dave Tomlinson, *The Post-Evangelical* (London: Triangle, 1995); Robert J. A. Doornenbal, *Crossroads: An Exploration of the Emerging-Missional Conversation with a Special Focus on 'Missional Leadership' and Its Challenges for Theological Educational*. (Delft: Eburon, 2012), 89–120.

What are the practices, beliefs, structures and understanding of the SMCs of being Christian community and engaging in social action in relation to God and their Christian faith?

How do these the practices, beliefs, structures and their understandings help them sustain social action given the struggles found in the account of charismatic evangelicalism?

How do SMCs challenge and extend the theological accounts of charismatic evangelicalism, the Emerging Missional Movement and the Evangelical turn to social action?

This thesis takes a practical theology approach to explore the lived theology of these SMCs in relation to their social action.¹³ This approach follows Graham's assertion that practice is normative¹⁴ and that practice is both the location of new theological insight and a key location of theological reflection and discernment. For this reason this research focuses on actual communities with the understanding that through their own practice and discernment, new theological insights have developed. In this understanding the goal of practical theology is renewed practice, but this renewed practice is not decided by the theologian rather it is developed within the practice of community. As a result, the outcome of this practical theological work is a description and analysis of lived theology rather than a definitive theology of Small Missional Communities. The thesis is offered back to the communities and others as providing description, insight, challenge and the raw material to encourage the development of renewed practice rather than being prescriptive in the way forward. Through a qualitative study of four SMCs the lived theology of the SMCs will be described and then analysed. Descriptions of the lived theology of the SMCs are developed through a case study approach and these descriptions are then analysed in conversation with the account of charismatic evangelicalism, the Emerging Missional Movement and the Evangelical Turn to Social Action. The conclusion then consists of both the insights for sustaining social action from the lived theology of the SMCs and a summary of the challenges and insights from the research for both the SMCs themselves and the accounts of charismatic evangelicalism, the Emerging Missional Movement and the Evangelical Turn to Social Action.

This thesis demonstrates that SMCs have made significant developments in bringing social action into the centre of the life of the community and that at its heart this shift is a theological

¹³ The term lived theology has been used by both Ward and by Marsh et al. but with slightly different emphases. See Pete Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology: Mission, Ministry, and the Life of the Church* (S.l.: Baker Books House, 2017); Charles Marsh, Peter Slade, and Sarah Azaransky, eds., *Lived Theology: New Perspectives on Method, Style, and Pedagogy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

¹⁴ Elaine Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty* (London: Mowbray, 1996).

one; a move from an intensive to an extensive understanding of where God is at work, that is from a focus on God at work in the church service, to a focus of God at work in the world. This theological shift is one that has come about through practice, in particular through seeking to experience God at work in the world through their social action. Retaining the Charismatic Evangelical focus on experiencing God and attempting to find ways to bring social action into the centre of the community these SMCs have extended and developed Charismatic Evangelical understanding and practices in significant ways. These include 'moving the Location of Belonging', a change in the understanding of the relationship between God's action and human action, and developing practices and vocabulary to discern and experience God in the world. It also highlights some of the potential weaknesses and blind spots of the SMCs, particularly regarding the relationship with the world and discerning the *Missio Dei*, suggesting that the SMCs give greater attention to recognising God at work in the world beyond their own work.

My Own Story

My motivation for engaging in this research was from both my own frustrations with the tension between social action and the life of the church and my own experience of being part of a Small Missional Community and seeking to overcome this tension. I grew up attending Charismatic Evangelical Anglican churches with their lively worship and focus on prayer and hearing from God. At University I was introduced to the 24-7 Prayer movement, which at the time was still in its infancy, and was caught up in the excitement of setting up prayer rooms and running weeks of non-stop prayer. University was also the place where I became aware of the Emerging Church movement and the questions they were raising about church for a post-modern society. Influenced by these two strands I became increasingly aware that church felt out-of-step with my experiences of prayer and mission on one hand and the world I was living in on the other. During this time the 24-7 Prayer movement was growing and developing rapidly, particularly connecting with young people and developing an interest not just in prayer but also in social action. Conversations began to develop in various quarters as did the idea for Boiler Rooms. These were permanent places of prayer which also drew on the ideas of New Monasticism and community coming out of the Emerging and Missional Church conversations. The first Boiler Room was in Reading, UK and others began to appear in other locations. Although not directly involved I followed the development of these Boiler Rooms with great interest.

After graduating from University I spent two years working with a number of churches in Uruguay which continued to feed my imagination about mission, prayer and social action. I returned to the UK to get involved in a Boiler Room in 2007. By this point it was clear that for these permanent prayer spaces to be sustainable they needed to be built around communities; much of the focus on my involvement in the Boiler Room was around trying to build community to facilitate prayer. The venture was ultimately unsuccessful due to the small number of people

involved and the level of commitment required. In 2009 I moved to Reading to connect with people starting a Small Missional Community there. This community was also seeking both to develop a prayer community and engage in social action locally. Attending various conferences around 24-7 Prayer and Fresh Expressions I found there was a common frustration that the churches we were involved with seemed to be unable to connect social action to the life of the church. In the church I attended this was highlighted very clearly in the vicar's sermons; whenever it came to social action and engaging with issues of poverty the only example he ever seemed to draw on was buying the Big Issue. Although a worthy cause, the lack of imagination around social action and tackling issues of poverty was disheartening. Social action seemed to be understood as something that was primarily done by individuals through charities. Those involved in these Small Missional Communities appeared to be united around the idea that social action and mission needed to be more central in the life of the church. Once again, despite an encouraging beginning our SMC proved unsustainable and gradually petered out mainly due to key people moving away, but I was aware of other SMCs on similar journeys who were showing that such an arrangement could work, at least in the medium term. It was this observation that caused me to begin to ask questions about what it was that helped them sustain their social action and what could the wider church learn from such groups. The idea for this research was formed in the midst of those ideas and desires around the question of how Small Missional Communities sustain their social action.

Introducing the Small Missional Communities

The SMCs selected for this research were chosen for their background and their particular emphasis. SMCs come out of the Emerging Missional Movement which is demonstrated by their focus on community and their understanding of missional and being engaged in wider society. They come from a variety of backgrounds and have a variety of different foci. For this research I focused in on those SMCs which came from a Charismatic Evangelical background and had a particular area of social action they were engaged in.¹⁵ The four SMCs in this research are based in Lynwood, Airbury, Hilchester and Eastbark (pseudonyms) and will be referred to by their town names.¹⁶ All four were started by people from Charismatic Evangelical churches and all have a focus on a specific area of social action, be that school or youth work, working with the homeless, people suffering with mental health issues and people struggling to provide for their families. All have been influenced to varying amounts, by charismatic evangelicalism; some would own that label more happily than others, but the focus of this research is on which elements of charismatic evangelicalism continue to influence their practice, and the ways they have developed these charismatic practices to suit their focus on community and social action.

¹⁵ More detail about the process of selection of the SMCs is given in Chapter 2

¹⁶ The SMCs will be described in detail in Chapter 3

The Structure of the Thesis

In seeking to explore the ways that SMCs have sustained their social action given their Charismatic Evangelical roots, chapter 1 traces the theological influences on SMCs which situates them in the broader church landscape and provides the conversations partners for the analysis later in the thesis. It locates SMCs within the broader turn to social action within Evangelicalism and explores the tensions that have arisen within Evangelicalism as a result. It sees the Emerging Missional Movement as one consequence of the Turn to Social Action and a particularly strong example of it. It describes how the Emerging Missional Movement has provided the imaginative space in which SMCs have been able to develop and particularly explores the words 'missional' and 'community' in the movement. Finally the chapter turns to charismatic evangelicalism, describing its intensive focus around the worship service and developing the key conversation partner in the analysis of SMCs.

This research is focused on describing and analysing lived theology and chapter 2 explores this in greater detail firstly exploring this practical theology framework before relating it to the qualitative approach of the extended case study. Each SMC was treated as its own case and studied through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentation. The chapter concludes with an account of the field work discussing the issues that arose and the decisions that were made. The theological descriptions of each SMC are then presented in chapter 3 describing their history, practice and drawing out the key themes in their lived theology.

These accounts are then brought together in chapter 4 through a conversation with the theological account of charismatic evangelicalism to analyse the lived theology of these SMCs exploring the way they continue to draw on Charismatic Evangelical practices and understandings and extend them. I describe their lived theology as having an extensive charismatic focus, in contrast to the intensive charismatic focus of charismatic evangelicalism which is dominated by the worship service.

The conversation is then broadened in chapter 5 to include the Evangelical Turn to Social Action and the Emerging Missional Movement. This conversation is focused around the tensions arising in the lives of SMCs particular in the engagement with Charismatic Evangelical practices and in the fragility of the SMCs. This chapter draws out practices developing within the SMCs in response to these tensions and brings them to consciousness as ways in which they continue to develop and sustain their social action.

The thesis concludes in chapter 6 by highlighting the significance of the lived theology of SMCs and drawing out the key insights from the developments within these SMCs and discussing their consequences. In line with the methodology which sees practice as the primary location of theological discernment and the site of renewed practices, this account of the lived theology of SMCs is offered back to the communities, to charismatic evangelicalism, to the Emerging

Missional Movement and to the Evangelical Turn to Social Action along with other insights, challenges and suggestions which have arisen through the conversations between the different theological accounts.

Chapter 1: The Theological Influences on Small Missional Communities

This chapter explores the theological influences on the Small Missional Communities (SMCs) participating in this research are seen as principally coming from three ‘traditions’; The Evangelical Turn to Social Action, The Emerging Missional Movement and charismatic evangelicalism. I describe these as lived theologies, carrying theological meaning and practice developed through Christians living in and responding to the tensions of everyday life.¹⁷ The chapter begins by exploring the Evangelical Turn to Social Action and the Emerging Missional Movement to describe the theological influences which lead to SMCs, namely the focus on social action, the prominence of the term ‘missional’ and the focus on community. Describing SMCs as having their origins in these two traditions I then turn to focus on the SMCs in this study. All four SMCs have come from Charismatic Evangelical backgrounds, and unlike some of the SMCs, which have developed labels such as post-evangelical or post-modern, these SMCs have continued to draw on their Charismatic Evangelical practices and understanding but have developed and extended them in new ways. I argue that these SMCs should be understood as a significant new development within charismatic evangelicalism which will be explored through the rest of the thesis. In light of this the second half of the chapter explores charismatic evangelicalism and describes it as having an intensive charismatic lived theology. This intensive focus will be compared with the understandings, beliefs, structures and practices of the SMCs, which I describe as having an extensive focus, in chapter 4.¹⁸

The Roots of Small Missional Communities

Two trends have been particularly influential in the forming of Small Missional Communities, the Evangelical Turn to Social Action and the Emerging Missional Movement. In this section I will draw out the key themes of each and explore the theological influences and implications for Small Missional Communities.

The Evangelical Turn to Social Action

This Evangelical ‘turn’ to social action is in reality a ‘return’ to social action. There is a broad consensus that after a strong emphasis on social action within Evangelicalism in the 18th and 19th

¹⁷ The concept of lived theology is explored in detail in Chapter 2

¹⁸ My use of the terms Intensive and Extensive have similarities with Hardy’s terms Intensity and Extensity, see Daniel W. Hardy, *Finding the Church: The Dynamic Truth of Anglicanism* (London: SCM Press, 2011). However where Hardy uses intensity to describe divine-human encounter and extensity to describe how God participates in the social life of the world, I am using intensive to describe divine encounter within a gathered or congregational context and extensive to describe divine encounter in the world beyond the congregation.

centuries¹⁹ there was a rapid decline in the early 20th century.²⁰ However in the 1960s and 70s there was evidence of a reawakening of social concern within Evangelicalism. In the United States in 1973 around 40 Evangelical leaders came together to confess their failings and commit to a socially engaged Evangelicalism in *The Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern*.²¹ These included Ronald Sider who wrote *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*²² and founded the organisation Evangelicals for Social Action and Jim Wallis who started the Sojourners Community. In the UK Evangelicals were also engaging in social action; the Evangelical Alliance launched The Evangelical Alliance Relief Fund, which later became known as Tearfund, in response to the 1967 Famine in Biafra,²³ and in 1971 there was the Nationwide Festival of Light, a gathering of an estimated 35,000 people in Trafalgar Square who were protesting against what they saw as the erosion of morals in the United Kingdom.²⁴ In 1974 the Lausanne Congress concluded that social activity is a consequence of evangelism, a bridge to evangelism but also that it accompanies it as a partner, a significant move in Evangelicalism which up to that point in the 20th century had understood social action primarily as the context for evangelism.²⁵

These paved the way for the Turn to Social Action within Evangelicalism witnessed in the second half of the century²⁶ leading Warner to state;

If it could have been claimed in the mid 20th century that evangelicals were indifferent to social action, the same charge could not reasonably be made at the century's end. In terms

¹⁹ According to Bebbington 'Wesley's generosity was legendary. He would scatter coins to beggars, he waded through snow in old age to raise money for the relief of the poor and he died worth virtually nothing because his considerable income from publications was given away'. D W Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730's to the 1980's* (London; New York: Unwin Hyman, 1989., n.d.), 70.

²⁰ This is generally referred to as 'the great reversal', a term first coined by Timothy Lawrence Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America*. (Charleston, SC: Nabu Press, 2011). It was later popularized by David O. Moberg, *The Great Reversal: Evangelism versus Social Concern* (London: Scripture Union, 1973). It points to a decline in social action and a focus on individual salvation within Evangelicalism rejecting the 'Social Gospel' preached by liberal Christianity. See Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 214–17; Mathew Guest, *Evangelical Identity and Contemporary Culture: A Congregational Study in Innovation* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), 37; Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 322–23.

²¹ 'Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern - Evangelicals for Social Action', 25 November 1973, <http://www.evangelicalsforsocialaction.org/about/history/chicago-declaration-of-evangelical-social-concern/>.

²² R. J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*. (SI: Hodder & S, 1973).

²³ David Hillborn and Ian Randall, 'The Evangelical Alliance: A Brief History' (Evangelical Alliance, n.d.), http://www.eauk.org/connect/about-us/upload/The-Evangelical-Alliance_-A-brief-history.pdf.

²⁴ Amy C. Whipple, 'Speaking for Whom? The 1971 Festival of Light and the Search for the "Silent Majority"', *Contemporary British History* 24, no. 3 (2010): 319–39.

²⁵ 'LOP 21: Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment - Lausanne Movement', chap. 4 C, accessed 22 February 2012, <http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lops/79-lop-21.html>.

²⁶ Social action Guest identifies 'clear signs of a widespread return to social activism' in Evangelicalism (Guest, *Evangelical Identity and Contemporary Culture*, 38.) and Scotland identifies a similar move within the Charismatic churches. (Nigel Scotland, *Charismatics and the New Millennium*, 2nd Revised edition (Guildford: Eagle, 2000), 33.) Steensland and Goff identify similar trends in the United States stating 'The current breadth and prominence of social concerns is more akin to the social impulses of nineteenth-century evangelicalism.' (Brian Steensland and Philip Goff, *The New Evangelical Social Engagement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014, 2014), 9.)

of budget and staffing, evangelicals are now investing more heavily, and in a more sustained way, in social action than evangelism.²⁷

This is supported further, more recently, by reports by the Cinnamon Network²⁸ and Jubilee Plus²⁹ which highlight the growth and the significance of Christian social action in the UK.

At the same time there is plenty of evidence that social action does not always sit naturally within the life of the church. The place of social action is often understood as being in tension with or balanced by another practice, be it between evangelism and social action³⁰, worship and social action³¹ or prayer and social action³² and raises the question of whether Evangelicals consider social action to be of value in its own right? Similarly other research indicates that Christians often fail to connect their volunteering in social action projects to their Christian faith.³³ Activists and those in the church who are particularly motivated by social action issues often end up operating outside of church structures where they can find space to engage in the activities they feel passionate about.³⁴

Orton's work provides a useful framework for exploring the relationship between social action and the life of the church further. He observed how Christians often came together from a number of congregations to engage in a particular project.³⁵ He describes how they used a 'diversity of structures to create distinct organisational (and often physical) spaces for themselves. These new spaces occurred on the previously clear demarcated boundary between the congregation and the wider community'.³⁶ He saw how these 'hybrid spaces' allowed activists to engage together away from the hierarchies of the church.³⁷ What he discovered was that they tend to follow one of two trajectories; either there is an 'expansion of community-related activities to a particular point before the development collapses and turns back inward'³⁸ or the

²⁷ Warner, 'Fissured Resurgence', 128.

²⁸ Bird, 'Cinnamon Faith Action Audit National Report'.

²⁹ Knott, 'Investing More for the Common Good - National Church Social Action Survey Results 2014'.

³⁰ Bosch describes how evangelicalism has always had 'The Two Mandates' of evangelicalism, the spiritual and the social. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 403.

³¹ In the Vineyard churches a diagram of 'Vineyard Person' shows two legs of 'worship' and 'compassion' (Vineyardchurches.org.uk, 'The Vineyard Person', accessed 6 July 2016, <http://www.vineyardchurches.org.uk/uploads/Resources/The%20Vineyard%20Person.pdf>.)

³² In the 24-7 Prayer movement prayer and social action are related through the metaphor of breathing in and breathing out. See Freeman and Greig, *Punk Monk*.

³³ Clare Watkins and Helen Cameron, 'Epiphanic Sacramentality: An Example of Practical Ecclesiology Revisiting Theological Understanding', in *Explorations in Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Christian Scharen (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2012), 71–89; Henk de Roest, "'We Learned It at Our Mothers' Knees". Perspectives of Churchgoing Volunteers on Their Voluntary Service', *Reformed World* 59, no. 3 (2009): 213–26.

³⁴ Andrew Orton, 'Faith, Dialogue and Difference in English Christian Community Work: Learning "Good Practice"?' (Thesis (Ph.D.), University of Durham, 2008), 207.

³⁵ Orton, 201.

³⁶ Orton, 203.

³⁷ Orton, 207.

³⁸ Orton, 210.

project develops its own identity and loses its formal connection with the founding congregation.³⁹ The first is a drift back to an inward focus on the worshipping community and the second is an embrace of charity and a drift away from the worshipping community. Orton's trajectories provide insights into the mechanisms of how social action and the Christian community become separated but does not seek to explore this problem theologically. He suggests that it is current policy and 'good practice' guidelines that lead projects down these trajectories.⁴⁰

The issue regarding the place of social action and social engagement in the life of the church can be seen more broadly in academic work. In Christian Ethics this problem is identified and solutions are sought in reconnecting worship and ethics.⁴¹ Hauerwas is particularly known for his desire to see Christian Ethics not as precepts to be followed but embodied in the life of the Christian community leading him to state that the church doesn't have a Christian ethic, it is a Christian ethic⁴² and to describe liturgy as social action.⁴³ Missiology tends to focus on the role of the *Missio Dei* with many suggesting poor doctrinal understanding as the principal problem.⁴⁴

The tendency therefore is to bring solutions from outside, normally suggesting that the church be encouraged to improve their doctrinal understanding and improve their practice. One example of this is in the *Theos Think Tank's* report *Doing Good*. Noticing the significant rise in the engagement in social action by British churches and contrasting it with the decline in church attendance the report warns that social action risks emphasising good over God and risks becoming separated from the church and the faith that motivated it.⁴⁵ This is the trend noted above. In response the report suggests the term social action be replaced with the term 'social liturgy', which sees 'love of God in love of neighbour, worship as service'.⁴⁶

Work is needed to encourage churches and Christian groups to see social liturgy as central to their common life and worship, to understand how the church community might live and

³⁹ Orton, 212.

⁴⁰ Orton, 214.

⁴¹ Wannewetsch sees the problem as the privatization of faith and claims that 'if we fail to understand the assembly of believers politically, 'church service' and 'moral service' necessarily fall apart'. (see Bernd Wannewetsch, *Political Worship: Ethics for Christian Citizens*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 31.) In *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, Hauerwas and Wells start with the following, 'So often it appears that lay Christians have a thriving life of personal devotion, an active life within a worshipping community, and an engaged life fulfilling a range or professional and public roles in the workplace, neighbourhood, and family, but comparatively seldom do lay Christians have an equally developed way of bringing these three parts of their life together' (Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells, *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, 1st ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 4.)

⁴² Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2003), 99.

⁴³ Hauerwas, 108.

⁴⁴ This is explored later in the chapter, see p28

⁴⁵ Nick Spencer, *Doing Good: A Future for Christianity in the 21st Century* (Theos, 2016), 50, <http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/files/files/Doing%20Good%205.pdf>.

⁴⁶ Spencer, 58.

work alongside those with particular needs and concerns that may not be visible on a Sunday morning.⁴⁷

Here the problem is seen as being primarily with the understanding of the Christian community. The change of name seems to be proposed to highlight the importance of connecting social action to the life of the church but offers no concrete proposal of how this might be done. The bigger problem is the failure of the report to recognise any distance between churches and Christian charities, confusing the two and ignoring the trajectories suggested by Orton. This all leads to a clear picture of a struggle to locate social action in the life of the church leaving it at the periphery. What is needed is an approach to social action which explores the reality of Christian engagement in social action and acknowledges the complexities of life.⁴⁸

Christian Practice and Social Action

A number of ethnographic studies into social action from the perspective of Christian practice offer some insights into the problem of social action ending up on the periphery of the church.⁴⁹ Perhaps the most comprehensive is Lee, Poloma and Post focusing on Pentecostalism and looking at the influence of 'Godly love' on benevolent service.⁵⁰ They explain that 'Godly love is a scholarly concept and is related to the Christian 'Great Commandment' of loving God above all and loving neighbor as oneself, but it also includes the additional elements of receiving God's love and working with others in benevolent ways'.⁵¹ In the context of a shift in American culture away from a God of judgement to a God of love⁵² they found that experience of divine love correlated with community outreach; experience of divine love was a strong factor in benevolent action.⁵³ They expand on this further, 'it is not simply a matter of men and women loving God but *the knowing that they are loved by God* in the very depths of their being that empowers them to live

⁴⁷ Spencer, 67.

⁴⁸ Responding to Hauerwas' suggestion that 'liturgy is social action', Scharen, through an ethnographic study of three churches, demonstrated that the relationships between worship and social action is complex and attempted to articulate a more realistic understanding which acknowledges the huge variety of influences that shape the congregation. See Christian Scharen, *Public Worship and Public Work: Character and Commitment in Local Congregational Life* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2004).

⁴⁹ Stanczak, *Engaged Spirituality*; Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement*, 1 edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Andrew Davey, ed., *Crossover City: Resources for Urban Mission and Transformation* (London ; New York, NY: Mowbray, 2011); Paul Cloke, Justin Beaumont, and Andrew Williams, *Working Faith: Faith-Based Communities Involved In Justice* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2013); Lee, Poloma, and Post, *The Heart of Religion*; Andrew Peter Wier, 'Tensions in Charismatic-Evangelical Urban Practice : Towards a Practical Charismatic-Evangelical Urban Social Ethic' (Ph.D., University of Chester, 2013); Heather Buckingham and Andrew Davies, 'Megachurches and Social Engagement in London - Policy Options and Opportunities', Policy Briefing (Edward Cadbury Centre: University of Birmingham, October 2016), <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-artslaw/ptr/theology/news/Megachurches-Policy-Options.pdf>.

⁵⁰ Lee, Poloma, and Post, *The Heart of Religion*.

⁵¹ Lee, Poloma, and Post, 15.

⁵² Lee, Poloma, and Post, 23.

⁵³ Lee, Poloma, and Post, 29–30.

lives of benevolence'.⁵⁴ Benevolent service is seen as a journey which begins with an experience of divine love and a call to service and is sustained through further experiences of divine transformation and through prayer.⁵⁵ Prayer is seen not only at a devotional level but also as dialogue with the divine and of mystical union with the divine. Social action then has moved from being Christian duty to being motivated by experience of God's love; it is both initiated by and sustained by experience of God. It is worth highlighting, where Lee, Poloma and Post fail to do so, that this has a profound impact on the practice of social action, no longer is it seen from an institutional level, but rather from that of individual calling. The use of 'exemplars' in this research, people who embody the particular traits they are looking at, highlights this individualized nature of social action within the church. Although they do describe the influence and work with others they spend little time looking at how Christian communities engage in social action together.

They describe three types of benevolent service; Servers who engage in community service, Renewers who look for supernatural revitalization of the church, and Changers who engage in social action through advocacy or direct action.⁵⁶ Where Renewers are focused on change coming through a Spirit-filled life and seen in miracles and mysteries, the Changers focused on change through advocacy and direct action. This plays out in how the different types understand human activity. They suggest;

The social activists are more likely to align with the busy Martha of the biblical story who complained to Jesus about her sister Mary's failure to help put dinner on the table. The Renewers, on the other hand, have an affinity for Mary, whom Jesus said had chosen 'the better part' by sitting at his feet and listening to his words.⁵⁷

What is interesting is the differences they draw between these groups and how they overlap. The Servers appear to overlap with the Changers or Renewers reasonably regularly but they claim that there are few examples of synthesis between Renewers and Changers.⁵⁸ This is perhaps another insight into the trajectories of Orton; an activism towards social change can be at odds with an emphasis on personal spiritual transformation. As a whole, *The Heart of Religion* highlights the importance of experience of God in motivating and sustaining social action and the need to understand human activity in relation to divine activity to give a theological account of social action. It is also interesting to note that for most of the exemplars the call to social action has been one which has caused them to start things beyond the church community in which that call took place.

⁵⁴ Lee, Poloma, and Post, 49–50.

⁵⁵ Lee, Poloma, and Post, 71.

⁵⁶ Lee, Poloma, and Post, 53.

⁵⁷ Lee, Poloma, and Post, 114.

⁵⁸ Lee, Poloma, and Post, 114–15.

There are two ethnographic studies in a British context which bring further clarity to the place of social action within the church. Wier's *Tensions in Charismatic-Evangelical Urban Practice*⁵⁹ describes similar tensions within Charismatic Evangelical social engagement, to those described above, around its practices, structures, aims, motivation and impact. These tensions demonstrate the contested space of social action within charismatic evangelicalism but rather than exploring how the churches he is studying work within these tensions Weir turns to ethics and social theory for solutions. Birmingham University's *Megachurches and Social Engagement in London* project confirms and extends a number of the strands already discussed. They describe how the megachurches prioritize 'what they see as a universal need for relationship with God above all other concerns'⁶⁰ and how 'it is impossible to understand the social concern priorities of megachurches without appreciating this underpinning, cardinal assumption about the possibility of relationship with God.'⁶¹ God's love is the primary motivation for social engagement and the emphasis is on personal relationship rather than proselytization or evangelism.⁶² They found that activities within the church should also be considered as social engagement which provided significant supportive friendship networks.⁶³ This was often described in terms of the church as family. They also noted that the churches' focus was often on individual transformation and encouraged churches to consider systemic social challenges as well.⁶⁴ Their research shows that megachurches do have sustained and wide-reaching social action programmes and are actively engaging in the wider community. However the language of volunteers coming from the church congregation still suggested the church was seen as a continual source of volunteers rather than social action as something integrated into the life of the church.⁶⁵

The Turn to Social Action within Evangelicalism reveals a strong return to emphasize social engagement, an increased awareness of social problems and significant growth in engagement in charities and social action projects. However, it also reveals a disconnect between the life of the church and the social action they engage in. There is a tendency for social action projects and those passionate about engaging in social action to drift to the periphery of the church. Although traditional Evangelical motivation for social action was in relation to Evangelism, increasingly God's love is seen as the primary motivating factor.

⁵⁹ Wier, 'Tensions in Charismatic-Evangelical Urban Practice'.

⁶⁰ Buckingham and Davies, 'Megachurches and Social Engagement in London - Policy Options and Opportunities', 2.

⁶¹ Buckingham and Davies, 2.

⁶² Buckingham and Davies, 3.

⁶³ Buckingham and Davies, 4.

⁶⁴ Buckingham and Davies, 7.

⁶⁵ Sarah Dunlop, 'Anglican Megachurches: Transforming Society One Person at a Time' (Megachurches and Social Engagement in London Conference, Royal Geographical Society, London, 2016), <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-artslaw/ptr/theology/research/2-Dunlop-Transforming-Society.pdf>.

The Emerging Missional Movement

When the Turn to Social Action within Evangelicalism is discussed many of the key examples comes from what I am describing as the Emerging Missional Movement, for example Steensland and Goff highlight the Emerging Church and New Monasticism as exemplifying the trends in Evangelical social engagement⁶⁶ and Ganiel suggests that concern for social justice was a key reason for the rise in the Emerging Church.⁶⁷ In this section I will introduce the Emerging Missional Movement and in particular explore the themes of ‘missional’ and ‘community’ which are key to understanding its emphases and approach.

I have chosen the term the Emerging Missional Movement influenced by Doornenbal who sees it as principally two overlapping movements; the Emerging Church movement, which talks about the need for church to respond to the postmodern society around it and the Missional Church, which focuses more on what mission to a ‘post-Christendom’ society looks like. Whereas Doornenbal prefers to use the terms ‘conversation’ and ‘milieu’⁶⁸, I have persisted with ‘movement’, despite the argument that this risks seeing a series of movement and strands as a single whole rather than the complex mix of practices and theologies that comprise it. It does however represent a broad trend within the church, and specifically within Evangelicalism and I therefore continue with the concept of movement given that caveat. Others have sought to use a different terms such as New Evangelicals⁶⁹, Progressive Evangelicals⁷⁰ or Contextual Churches⁷¹ but Emerging Church and Missional Church are more recognisable and are terms which have been used by those within the movement.

The Missional Church movement was driven by academics from mainline churches such as Guder⁷², Hirsch⁷³, Frost⁷⁴ and Van Gelder⁷⁵ whereas the Emerging Church movement is from Low Church Protestantism and driven by lay practitioners.⁷⁶ Both movements have been strongly influenced by developments in missiology around culture and the ideas of holistic mission through

⁶⁶ Steensland and Goff, *The New Evangelical Social Engagement*, 13.

⁶⁷ Gladys Ganiel, ‘Emerging from the Evangelical Subculture in Northern Ireland: An Analysis of the Zero28 and Ikon Community 1’, *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 6, no. 1 (2006): 39.

⁶⁸ Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 5–8.

⁶⁹ Steensland and Goff, *The New Evangelical Social Engagement*.

⁷⁰ Warner, ‘Fissured Resurgence’, 248.

⁷¹ Michael Moynagh, *Church for Every Context: An Introduction to Theology and Practice* (London: SCM, 2012).

⁷² Darrell L Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998).

⁷³ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2013).

⁷⁴ Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody, Mass.: Baker Books, 2006).

⁷⁵ Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2011).

⁷⁶ Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 5–7.

people such as Lesslie Newbigin⁷⁷ and David Bosch⁷⁸. Other significant movements and groups which fit within the Emerging Missional Movement, as I am using the term, include Fresh Expressions within the Church of England and Methodist Church in the UK⁷⁹, New Monasticism⁸⁰, and Alternative Worship⁸¹. The ongoing conversation to which all of these groups and movements contribute has provided an imaginative space which has given others permission to think creatively about church and mission. It is in this imaginative space that SMCs have formed and have been influenced by the conversation.

Broadly speaking this imaginative space has been created for two reasons; as a reaction to perceived deficiencies in Evangelicalism and as a response to today's culture.⁸² This reaction can be seen in the use of the preface 'post', for example post-modern and post-Christendom. Post-modern points to the scepticism of founding Christian faith on a rational modernist foundation and post-Christendom is an attempt to understand the church in a society where it is no longer seen as a central institution of public life. Both reveal a distrust of institution, hierarchy and meta-narratives, particularly in relation to the church. Other terms used include post-Evangelical⁸³ describing this reaction against Evangelical subculture and post-charismatic⁸⁴ reacting to the centrality of charismatic worship. Jamieson's *Churchless Faith*⁸⁵ recounts the journey many have taken away from evangelicalism and is connected to notions of deconversion which is recounted in stories similar to the testimonies of born-again Christians about that journey.⁸⁶

Lee Poloma and Post are helpful in locating the Emerging Missional Movement within the rise in social j

⁷⁷ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. (London: SPCK, 1989).

⁷⁸ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*.

⁷⁹ Mission and Public Affairs Council (Church of England), *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context.*, 2nd ed.. (London: Church House Publishing, 2009).

⁸⁰ Wes Markofski, *New Monasticism and the Transformation of American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015, 2015); William Samson, 'The New Monastics and the Changing Face of American Evangelicalism' (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2016), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1789882604/>.

⁸¹ Doug Gay, *Remixing the Church: The Five Moves of Emerging Ecclesiology* (London: SCM Press, 2011); Guest, *Evangelical Identity and Contemporary Culture*.

⁸² Bielo describes what he calls an 'Emerging Evangelical' as 'someone taking the cultural critique of conservative evangelicalism seriously and attempting to live a response'. James S Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals: Faith, Modernity, and the Desire for Authenticity* (New York: New York University Press, 2011). 6)

⁸³ Tomlinson, *The Post-Evangelical*.

⁸⁴ Gay, *Remixing the Church*, 9.

⁸⁵ Alan Jamieson, 'Churchless Faith: Trajectories of Faith Beyond the Church from Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches to Post-Church Groups', *International Review of Mission* 92, no. 365 (2003): 217–226.

⁸⁶ Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals*; Philip Harrold, 'Deconversion in the Emerging Church', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 6, no. 1 (2006): 79–90; Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014, 2014), chap. 3.

ustice. As discussed above, they saw that synthesis between Renewers and Changers was rare and concluded this was mainly due to their different social and political viewpoints. The argument in this chapter is that it is also due to the problem of relating social action to the life of the church. However, Lee, Poloma and Post did identify a unique few who combine mystical prayer and social action by drawing on ancient Christian tradition giving the examples of Shane Claiborne and Tony Campolo.⁸⁷ This locates many of the communities in the Emerging Missional Movement in a unique position where they have started to bring together these two elements which has previously proved difficult. It is in this space that I locate the Small Missional Communities in this research bringing both Charismatic Evangelical background and a commitment to social action.

The next question which arises is what is a Small Missional Community (SMC) and how does it relate the broader Emerging Missional Movement. There is of course no clear definition or consensus. The word missional is one which has gained a lot of traction in a small space of time. Developed out of the ideas of holistic or integral mission in missiology the word missional has come to mean having an understanding of every part of life as being connected to mission or as Bielo puts it 'being a missionary to one's own society'⁸⁸.

Being missional is not, however, just an ideal. It encompasses ways of speaking, everyday acts of embodiment, the design of institutions, desired aesthetic; or as many consultants described it, 'a mind-set and a way of living.'⁸⁹

Missional is connected to the idea of being 'incarnational' and highlights the importance for the Emerging-Missional Movement of having contextual expressions of church rather than a particular standard model.⁹⁰ This missional impulse is articulated by Gibbs and Bolger as 'identifying with the life of Jesus, transforming secular space and living as community'⁹¹. The Emerging-Missional Movement has been wrestling with issues of missiology and ecclesiology by seeking to find ways to describe church which resist a move to institutionalization and keep the emphasis on relationships and networks over formal structures.⁹² For example Moynagh describes 'New Contextual Churches' as 'missional, contextual, formational and ecclesial'⁹³ defining them principally around mission and practice rather than structure and doctrine.

⁸⁷ Lee, Poloma, and Post, *The Heart of Religion*, 115–17.

⁸⁸ Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals*, 119.

⁸⁹ Bielo, 119.

⁹⁰ Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 54.

⁹¹ Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 45.

⁹² Ward has described this as the liquid church, as opposed to solid church which is focused on place and structure. Pete Ward, *Liquid Church* (Peabody, Mass.; Carlisle, Cumbria: Hendrickson Publishers ; Paternoster Press, 2002).

⁹³ Moynagh, *Church for Every Context*, xv.

Small Missional Communities have been defined in a variety of ways and the term has been used to describe a multitude of groups and entities. For some there is little difference between an emerging church and an SMC⁹⁴ whereas others see them as having a particular emphasis on practice. For example Moynagh states that they are ‘less interested in radical theology than they are in being radical church’.⁹⁵ The Church Growth Report in the UK distinguishes between Community Development Plants, Intentional Community and New Monastic Community; where New Monastic Communities explicitly draw on monastic traditions and are based around a ‘rule of life’⁹⁶ but a number of studies in the US see the term New Monastic more generally including all forms of missional community.⁹⁷ Bessenecker talks about *The New Friars* who have moved into poor neighbourhoods to seek justice and mercy.⁹⁸ There has also been a more institutional approach to developing missional communities where churches are intentionally split into smaller groups for mission, which might also be referred to as mid-sized communities and clusters.⁹⁹ There has been a growth in SMCs both through organisations such as Eden¹⁰⁰, Innervision and UrbanExpressions sending groups into un-churched urban environments and through a large number of independent groups inspired by the examples of other communities to do something similar in their own neighbourhood. The Church Missionary Society (CMS) and the Anglican Diocese of London are two organisations who have sought to support such groups. CMS describe ‘Christ centred communities’, which ‘look outwards, to engage lovingly and creatively with the world around them, to experience the risen Jesus sharing his life, and so to see lives changed and a world transformed’ and their ‘smallness enable real transformations, authentic relationships and gritty engagements with the world’.¹⁰¹ The Anglican London Diocese talks of SMCs as ‘outside the parish system’ and having the attributes of family, missionaries, servants, disciples, reproducing and Pan-Church.¹⁰² The range of definitions demonstrates the diverse nature of groups called Small Missional Communities. The definition

⁹⁴ Gibbs and Bolger use the two terms almost completely interchangeably (Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*.)

⁹⁵ Moynagh, *Church for Every Context*, xiii.

⁹⁶ George Lings, ‘Church Growth: Fresh Expressions (Strand 3b)’, Church Growth Research Program (Cramner Hall, St John’s College, Durham, 16 January 2014),

<https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/sites/default/files/churchgrowthresearch-freshexpressions.pdf>.

⁹⁷ Markofski, *New Monasticism and the Transformation of American Evangelicalism*; Samson, ‘The New Monastics and the Changing Face of American Evangelicalism’; Steensland and Goff, *The New Evangelical Social Engagement*.

⁹⁸ Scott Bessenecker, *The New Friars: The Emerging Movement Serving the World’s Poor* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2006).

⁹⁹ Mark Stibbe and Andrew Williams, *Breakout*, Reprint (Milton Keynes: Authentic, 2008); Bob Hopkins and Mike Breen, *Clusters: Creative Mid-Sized Missional Communities* (Pawleys Island, SC: ACPI, 2008).

¹⁰⁰ Wilson, *Concrete Faith*; ‘Joineden.Org’, Join Eden, accessed 24 May 2017, <http://joineden.org/>.

¹⁰¹ ‘Small Missional Communities | Church Mission Society (CMS)’, accessed 9 October 2013, <http://www.cms-uk.org/default.aspx?tabid=442>.

¹⁰² ‘Missional Communities | Diocese of London’, accessed 9 June 2016, <http://www.london.anglican.org/mission/missional-communities/>.

adopted in this research is a broad one namely that Small Missional Communities are groups which have formed within the last decade, who are inspired to reach out to their local community, engaged in some form of social action within their local community and seeking to build Christian community by gathering together and engaging in Christian practices of worship, for example prayer, communion and Bible study. The terms 'community' and 'missional' carry with them particular theological meaning and practices which have helped to make these groups distinctive and it is to these terms I now turn.

Community

The term community is key to understanding the shape of church and mission envisaged by the Emerging Missional Movement. It captures for them the emphasis on relationship and building community rather than institution, denomination, and religious activity.¹⁰³ Ward has described it as a move from solid church, based around place and time, to liquid church formed around relationships and communication.¹⁰⁴ Words such as authentic,¹⁰⁵ safe space¹⁰⁶ and family¹⁰⁷ are used to try and capture the focus of community for these groups.

A particular inspiration for the SMCs in this research has been Shane Claiborne and the Simple Way Community in Philadelphia, US. It began in 1997 with six friends moving into a house in Kensington, one of the poorest neighbourhoods in Pennsylvania. Claiborne states 'We had no idea what we were getting into. We had no big vision for programs or community development. We wanted only to be passionate lovers of God and people and to take the gospel seriously as a way of life'.¹⁰⁸ He talks about being an 'ordinary radical' and they focus principally on building relationships with their neighbours and developing community. Their website says 'We paint murals, help kids with homework, share food, host neighborhood celebrations, and try to live as one big family... which means eating together, praying together, doing life together'.¹⁰⁹ Claiborne's book *The Irresistible Revolution* has sold over 300,000 copies and has been hugely influential in inspiring people to replicate some of what they do. The Simple Way has been 'a compelling vision for Emerging Christians'¹¹⁰ even though few have taken such drastic steps as Claiborne and his community.¹¹¹

¹⁰³ Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 99; Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 50.; Jones, through his ethnographic study of eight emerging churches, seeks to describe a 'Relational Ecclesiology' which he constructs with the help of Moltmann's Ecclesiology. Tony Jones, *The Church Is Flat: The Relational Ecclesiology of the Emerging Church Movement* (The JoPa Group, 2011).

¹⁰⁴ Ward, *Liquid Church*, 2.

¹⁰⁵ Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals*, 16.

¹⁰⁶ Cory E. Labanow, *Evangelicalism and the Emerging Church: A Congregational Study of a Vineyard Church* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), 82.

¹⁰⁷ Marti and Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church*, 54–55.

¹⁰⁸ Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution*, 121.

¹⁰⁹ 'About', The Simple Way, accessed 29 September 2016, <http://www.thesimpleway.org/about/>.

¹¹⁰ Marti and Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church*, 150–53.

¹¹¹ Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals*, 102.

Another group which all four SMCs mentioned as being influential to them was the 24-7 Prayer movement. The 24-7 Prayer movement began in 1999 in Revelation Church in Chichester, a Charismatic Evangelical church within the Pioneer network of churches. Having attempted a fortnight of non-stop prayer in their church they were inspired to gather 52 churches to encourage non-stop prayer for the year 2000. The movement quickly gathered momentum and people found having prayed about things they wanted to also make a difference. A vision for permanent prayer rooms began, originally called Boiler Rooms and now being more generally termed 'communities'. These groups were inspired by ideas of New Monasticism and the focus on community in the emerging-missional conversation and developed six values of Prayer, Mission, Justice, Creativity, Hospitality and Learning.¹¹²

There are of course questions about the understanding and practice of community within the Emerging-Missional Conversation. Terms such as community and family can become idealised which can lead to these ideas becoming an end in themselves.¹¹³ This turn inwards is what Guest reports in his study of the Visions community in York.¹¹⁴ This is Percy's criticism of Fresh Expressions, that despite rhetoric around outreach and engagement, many actually 'desire fellowship and individual sustenance.'¹¹⁵ Doornenbal also suggests that many of these groups are still highly individualized¹¹⁶ although some see this individual focus as a strength. Ganiel and Marti describe it as 'cooperative egoism' where people are enabled and encouraged to be individuals through a supportive community.

Rather than cultivating communities in which they can lose themselves or find a means to adopt a larger collective identity, Emerging Christians join emerging congregations that promote a religiously individualized self, one that strives for a type of nonconformity that commingles ambiguity and conviction.¹¹⁷

Rather than challenging individualism they see the emerging church as encouraging it and adapting to what Heelas and Woodhead describe as 'the subjectivization of society'.¹¹⁸ Markofski, describing what he calls a neo-monastic community, states,

Although it is a neo-monastic community that opposes individualism and prioritizes intentionality, commitment, and community as central markers of faithful Christian

¹¹² Freeman and Greig, *Punk Monk*.

¹¹³ Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 64.

¹¹⁴ Guest, *Evangelical Identity and Contemporary Culture*, 142.

¹¹⁵ Martyn Percy, 'Old Tricks for New Dogs? A Critique of Fresh Expressions', 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), 31.

¹¹⁶ Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 67.

¹¹⁷ Marti and Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church*, 77.

¹¹⁸ Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality, Religion and Spirituality in the Modern World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 78.

spirituality, the right of the individual to choose for herself how to participate in community life remains sacrosanct.¹¹⁹

He identifies the 'voluntaristic individualism' common in Evangelical and American life as present even where there is a deep commitment to community.¹²⁰

Another demonstration to the commitment to community and relationships is the way the Emerging Missional Movement has suggested a move away from a behave-believe-belong model of becoming a Christian to a belong-believe-behave model. Moynagh describes how in this model people come into contact with a community and their 'attention is drawn towards Jesus' through acts of kindness, testimonies and what he describes as 'missional worship'.¹²¹ Harris also notices the idea of belonging before believing becoming more popular noting its emphasis on community and the challenge it presents to individualism. He, however, questions the simplicity of the model asking whether in either case it is really that linear, whether it is, in fact, possible to belong before believing, whether belief should be secondary, and whether it encourages 'cheap grace'.¹²² He explores the nature of belonging suggesting a shift away from formal church membership to 'a place where one feels one has found a "place"'.¹²³

The focus on community is around building strong and authentic relationships which are seen as the opposite of hierarchical and institutional structures. Community for some becomes a substitute for the word 'church' which they see as tainted. What the research does not reflect is how the ideas of community operate in the day-to-day life of the community, and importantly how it relates to the 'missional' aspect of the communities. SMCs have embraced this focus on building community and this was emphasised in each of the SMCs in the research.

Missional

Missional, as already described, is about a lifestyle. Ganiel and Marti describe how Emerging Christians seek to 'live differently' and 'follow Jesus in the Real World'.¹²⁴ This is a move away from evangelism towards political engagement and social action where 'What you do is more important than what you believe'.¹²⁵ They describe how neo-monasticism, moving into an economically disadvantaged area and living outside the structures of consumer capitalism, is seen as an ideal and something even groups who have not fully embraced neo-monasticism strive to live out.¹²⁶ Missional is used to describe a diverse range of approaches and understandings.

¹¹⁹ Markofski, *New Monasticism and the Transformation of American Evangelicalism*, 272–73.

¹²⁰ Markofski, 273.

¹²¹ Moynagh, *Church for Every Context*, 334.

¹²² Brian S. Harris, 'From "Behave, Believe, Belong" to "Belong, Believe, Behave" - A Missional Journey for the 21st Century', in *Text and Task: Scripture and Mission*, ed. Michael Parsons (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2012), 207–8.

¹²³ Harris, 210.

¹²⁴ Marti and Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church*, 137.

¹²⁵ Marti and Ganiel, 160.

¹²⁶ Marti and Ganiel, 153.

Despite this diversity, Van Gelder and Zscheile identify the following common themes appearing regularly in 'missional' literature:

1. *God is a missionary God who sends the church into the world.* This understanding shifts the agency of mission from the church to God. It is God's mission that has a church rather than a church that has a mission.
2. *God's mission in the world is related to the reign (kingdom) of God.* This understanding makes the work of God in the world larger than the mission of the church, although the church is directly involved in the reign (kingdom) of God.
3. *The missional church is an incarnational (versus an attractional) ministry sent to engage a postmodern, post-Christendom, globalized context.* This understanding requires every congregation to take on a missionary posture for engaging its local context, with this missionary engagement shaping everything a congregation does.
4. *The internal life of the missional church focuses on every believer living as a disciple engaging in mission.* This understanding makes every member a minister, with the spiritual growth of every disciple becoming the primary focus as the body is built up to participate more fully in God's mission in the world. (Italics original)¹²⁷

These four points give a clear indication of the emphasis and priorities of a missional approach. The first two points show broadening out of the understanding of mission and God's action in the world through the doctrine of the *Missio Dei* and the idea of Kingdom. The third is a critique of 'inherited' church and an 'attractional' approach which sees mission in terms of people coming to the church rather than as the church reaching out to society.¹²⁸ It also introduces the idea of being 'incarnational', again pointing to the priority of practice over belief describing an 'embodied' faith¹²⁹ and seeing Jesus becoming flesh in the incarnation as an example to be followed. The fourth is a focus on every believer being involved in mission.

The doctrine of the *Missio Dei* is often seen as the starting point of a missional approach. It states that all mission is derived from the very nature of God and is participation in God's mission.¹³⁰ Critics of the *Missio Dei* claim that it has become a term which has been used to justify varied and opposing positions on mission.¹³¹ Flett suggests that the problem that needs to be overcome is the separation of Church from mission, which he believes is connected to the gap between God and the world within the doctrine of the *Missio Dei*.¹³² By rooting the doctrine of

¹²⁷ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 4.

¹²⁸ Moynagh, *Church for Every Context*, xii.

¹²⁹ Frost, *Exiles*, 76–77.

¹³⁰ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390.

¹³¹ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 17; Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 392; John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2010), 5.

¹³² Flett, *The Witness of God*, 1–10.

the *Missio Dei* more carefully in the doctrine of the Trinity, using a Barthian framework, Flett attempts to overcome the separation of mission from the life of the church by arguing that God's act isn't separate from God's being.¹³³ He claims that once a truly Trinitarian basis is established for the *Missio Dei* then the relationship between human agency and God's agency becomes clear.¹³⁴ 'Because God is a missionary God, worship as a term for the community's life is wrongly contrasted to mission and the external orientation of the community'.¹³⁵ Similarly Van Gelder makes the suggestion that understanding the *Missio Dei* through a more robust Trinitarian framework emphasizes relationship, mutual indwelling and moves from imitation to participation.¹³⁶ They are frustrated that 'missional' and *Missio Dei* does not have the same meaning for everyone.¹³⁷

What these and other accounts miss is that the common themes recounted by Van Gelder and Zscheile and the diverse use of the word 'missional' within the Emerging-Missional Conversation and Evangelicalism more broadly demonstrate the traction that 'missional' and *Missio Dei* have gained. The assumption of Flett, Van Gelder, Zscheile and others is that good doctrine shapes the practices of the church. However, I am suggesting that the relationship is more complicated and that theology disclosed in the words and practices of Christians brings insight to the discussion. The fact that the idea of missional and *Missio Dei* are being used so frequently and diversely suggests that there are theological insights in practice which are underexplored.

Social action within the Emerging-Missional Conversation is frequently understood through these ideas of missional and incarnational. There is little attempt to distinguish between evangelism and social action which has historically been a big topic of discussion for Evangelicals.¹³⁸ There is also a huge range of practices which might be considered social action by the Emerging-Missional Conversation;

¹³³ Flett, 211.

¹³⁴ Flett, chap. 7.

¹³⁵ Flett, 279.

¹³⁶ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 104–15.

¹³⁷ This frustration is particularly clear in Van Gelder and Zscheile's mapping of the use of the word 'missional', where every stream they identify comes in for critique apart from the stream where they identify themselves which it becomes clear is how they think 'missional' should be understood.

¹³⁸ Evangelicalism in the 19th Century emphasized that both body and soul should be cared for. (Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 120.) Bosch describes 'The Two Mandates' of evangelicalism, the spiritual and the social. He describes them as 'inseparable' in Evangelicalism until the late 19th century when 'a subtle shift towards the primacy of the 'evangelistic mandate' was discernible'. (Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 403.) The Lausanne congress on world evangelisation, a key point in reintegration of social action within Evangelicalism describe evangelism and social action as 'like the two blades of a pair of scissors or the two wings of a bird'. ('LOP 21: Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment - Lausanne Movement', chap. 4.) Bosch, however, points out that this was a continuation of the 'two mandate' approach and upheld the priority of evangelism. Bosch goes on to trace this 'two mandate' idea through evangelicalism in the 1980s showing that despite the affirmations, evangelism continued to be prioritized over social action. (Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 405.)

Emerging evangelicals pursued personal and public transformation through actions as diverse as organizing prayer walks, in which small groups of fellow congregants ambled throughout city sections praying for people and place; planting community gardens, in which small groups of congregants maintained food-bearing plots and distributed the produce to local residents; joining neighborhood associations and other forms of local governance to contribute voluntary labor and influence decision making; and entrepreneurially establishing businesses that focus on serving local neighborhoods.¹³⁹

This focus on social action issues over theological ones was also noticed by Guest in his study of the 'Visions' community in York; 'the group maintained a consistent focus upon social justice and environmental responsibility, incorporating these into their service and small group themes'.¹⁴⁰ Social action then is understood as a vital part of a 'missional' approach. Missional, in this sense, is best understood as a way of looking at and relating to the world; it understands the world as a place where God is already active in mission and therefore a place where Christians should participate in every aspect.

As with ideas of 'community' there is an inherent critique of Church. Doornenbal is cautious about this critique and accuses them of lumping all traditional churches together and being anti-institutional without a clear understanding of what institutional means. He critiques the use of missional suggesting in some circles it has become either a new trendy word losing its intended meaning, the next strategy or purely used to encourage more activity.¹⁴¹ Marti and Ganiel are equally suspicious describing it as 'an evangelistic method or strategy'.¹⁴²

Ruddick sees this focus on community and relationship and on missional practice as key elements of the Eden Network she studies developing an account of Missional Pastoral Care which she presents as a new model of mission.¹⁴³ Of particular interest to this study is the way she sees it adapting evangelical mission practice through the act of physically moving into urban estates.

For SMCs, missional describes a focus on society and the world. They embrace this outward emphasis and join the critique of an inward-looking church. What is of particular interest in this research is how they sustain this outwards focus, and in contrast to the approach of Flett and Van Gelder it begins with practice rather than a doctrinal account.

Ecclesiologies at the Margin

The Emerging-Missional movement and SMCs can be understood in part as a response and critique of charismatic evangelicalism, what De Roest calls Ecclesiologies at the Margin. He

¹³⁹ James Bielo, "'FORMED" Emerging Evangelicals Navigate Two Transformations', in *The New Evangelical Social Engagement*, ed. Brian Steensland and Philip Goff (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 35.

¹⁴⁰ Guest, *Evangelical Identity and Contemporary Culture*, 155.

¹⁴¹ Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 55–56.

¹⁴² Marti and Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church*, 149.

¹⁴³ Anna E. Ruddick, 'Missional Pastoral Care: Innovation in Charismatic Evangelical Urban Practice' (Thesis (D.Prof.), University of Chester, 2016).

explains how ‘Communities at the edge tend to focus upon one or two core beliefs or on practices with regard to the community, mission and worship which are under-emphasized in mainstream churches’.¹⁴⁴ Ecclesiologies at the Margin have major elements which come from the mainstream tradition they are critiquing, but seek to embody an alternative way. They are creative and innovative, more self-aware, develop a collective identity and are often confronted with criticism from the established church. These are all features seen in the Emerging Missional Movement and will be seen in the descriptions of the SMCs. What Marginal Ecclesiology does help to clarify is the need to understand the SMCs in relation to the tradition they are critiquing. It is noticeable that many of the studies focus on difference and how the Emerging Missional Movement departs from charismatic evangelicalism, but it is equally interesting to explore the continuities. Bretherton suggests that the Emerging Missional Church should be understood as ‘part of the penumbra of the Pentecostal/charismatic movement’¹⁴⁵ and it is with this conviction that this research is carried out.

A striking example of how this continuity is often missed is demonstrated in the work of Labanow; while claiming to be exploring the *Emerging Church* his ethnographic study was actually of a Charismatic Evangelical Vineyard Church in England which demonstrated some of these Emerging-Missional concerns. Markovski also noticed this continuity in the ‘neo-monastic’ community he studies which has a Sunday gathering which looks like a typical Charismatic Evangelical church service.¹⁴⁶

The SMCs in this research have developed in the midst of the imaginative space and conversation developed through this focus on social action, on developing Christian community and on ‘being missional’. Unlike other groups, these SMCs haven’t abandoned their charismatic lived theology, but have allowed the conversation and its practices to shape their charismatic practices to develop something new. With this in mind, I now turn to explore the lived theology of charismatic evangelicalism.

Charismatic Evangelicalism

Given the diversity of groups associated with the Emerging Missional Movement I am not claiming that all SMCs are Charismatic, nor am I claiming that all SMCs have Charismatic Evangelical roots. However, I have particularly focused on SMCs which have come from a Charismatic Evangelical background and assert that this background is reasonably common.

The Intensive Nature of Charismatic Lived Theology

¹⁴⁴ Henk de Roest, ‘Ecclesiologies at the Margin’, in *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Church*, ed. Gerard Mannion and Lewis Seymour Mudge (London: Routledge, 2008), 252.

¹⁴⁵ Luke Bretherton, ‘Beyond the Emerging Church’, in *Remembering Our Future: Explorations in Deep Church*, ed. Andrew Walker and Luke Bretherton (London: Paternoster Press, 2007), 36.

¹⁴⁶ Markovski, *New Monasticism and the Transformation of American Evangelicalism*, 264.

In this section I describe charismatic evangelicalism as having an intensive nature. The term intensive is used to suggest a focus on the gathered meeting as the place of encounter with God. This account of charismatic evangelicalism will be used in the analysis in Chapter 4 to explore the lived theology of SMCs which I will describe as having an extensive nature, which is outward looking with an expectation of the encounter with God taking place in the world. In this section I will show that in charismatic evangelicalism the worship service is seen as the primary location of encounter with God and that that encounter is most anticipated in the practices of intimate worship and 'ministry time'. I will also show that although mission and social action are described as important they often get pushed to the periphery of church life.

Charismatic evangelicalism has always emphasised experience and the gifts of the spirit and has brought new forms and styles of worship.¹⁴⁷ It was, however, John Wimber, a California pastor who led the Vineyard network of churches and who visited the UK regularly in the 1980s, who has perhaps had the biggest influence of charismatic evangelicalism in the UK. Steven describes the arrival of John Wimber and his 'signs and wonders' ministry as a 'fresh turn' in the Charismatic Movement.¹⁴⁸ Wimber's ministry was intended to train people in 'Power Evangelism' where they would see people become Christians through demonstration of God's power through 'signs and wonders' such as healings outside of the church. The training events which he ran incorporated this new intimate style of worship, teaching about 'power evangelism' and 'ministry time' where participants were encouraged to pray for each other in preparation for doing the same on the streets. It was, however, the focus on intimate worship and the practice of 'ministry time' which would be Wimber's legacy within charismatic evangelicalism.

Experience and Encounter

Experience and encounter are key to understanding charismatic evangelicalism. Cartledge states 'The phrase "encountering the Spirit" encapsulates the essence of charismatic spirituality'.¹⁴⁹ Charismatics expect these frequent encounters because they believe 'God is not absent but deeply present'.¹⁵⁰ He celebrates the way charismatic spirituality has brought an emphasis on experience allowing a connection of spirituality to everyday life.¹⁵¹ This is also seen in the work of Luhrmann who observes American Evangelicalism as having 'an intense desire to experience

¹⁴⁷ Mark J Cartledge, *Encountering the Spirit: The Charismatic Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2006); Thomas A. Smail, 'In Spirit and Truth: Reflections on Charismatic Worship', in *Charismatic Renewal: The Search for a Theology*, ed. Thomas A. Smail, Andrew Walker, and Nigel Wright, Rev. and expanded ed. (London: SPCK, 1995), 109–16; Peter Hocken, *Streams of Renewal: Origins and Early Development of the Charismatic Movement in Great Britain*, 2nd ed. (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1997), 159–78; Scotland, *Charismatics and the New Millennium*.

¹⁴⁸ Steven, 'Worship in the Spirit', 39.

¹⁴⁹ Cartledge, *Encountering the Spirit*, 19.

¹⁵⁰ Mark J Cartledge, *Practical Theology: Charismatic and Empirical Perspectives* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 25.

¹⁵¹ Cartledge, *Encountering the Spirit*, 134.

personally a God who is as present now as when Christ walked among his followers in Galilee'.¹⁵² She talks about the 'democratization of God.. [and] intense spiritual experience'¹⁵³ and paints a picture of experiencing God, intimately and deeply personally as the primary focus of charismatic evangelicalism. Where Cartledge sees this development as positive, Percy is concerned that in charismatic evangelicalism the distance between God and humanity has been eroded through focusing on intimacy and experiencing God.¹⁵⁴ This emphasis on intimacy and experience can be seen clearly in the writings of many Charismatic Evangelical leaders. Wimber's desire was that through *Power Evangelism* and the 'power encounters' he advocated people would experience the presence and power of God.¹⁵⁵ Godwin, the leader of a Christian retreat centre in Wales, describes it as 'a place where the presence of God comes and people's lives are changed because they encounter him'.¹⁵⁶ For charismatic evangelicalism, God is primarily encountered through worship¹⁵⁷ and intimacy is the key to that encounter.¹⁵⁸ An article in the New Wine¹⁵⁹ network's magazine entitled *Encounters with God* recounts stories from of their events and demonstrates this encounter. It states 'When we make space for God, he meets with us! Here are just some of the stories you've shared with us of experiencing Encouragement, Healing and Blessing at our events'.¹⁶⁰ The stories included phrases such as 'I met with God in a deep and intimate way', how someone was 'assured again that I am loved by God', 'I really enjoyed being in God's presence' and one lady describes how she began to experience God's love for the first time, 'I began to feel his love; gentle yet present, strong and powerful'.¹⁶¹ This also draws attention to another key element of the encounter; the understanding of divine power. The concept of power within Wimber's ministry was a particular focus of Percy's work. He is suspicious and critical of the way power understood and used by Wimber.¹⁶² Others also point to this use of the language of

¹⁵² T. M. Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God* (New York: Knopf, 2012), 13.

¹⁵³ Luhrmann, 35.

¹⁵⁴ Percy, *Words, Wonders and Power*, 145.

¹⁵⁵ John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *Power Evangelism* (Sevenoaks: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992), 78.

¹⁵⁶ Roy Godwin and Dave Roberts, *The Grace Outpouring: Blessing Others Through Prayer*, n.d., 20.

¹⁵⁷ Matt Redman, *The Unquenchable Worshipper* (Eastbourne, UK: Kingsway Publications, 2001), 36; John Coles, 'Editorial', *New Wine Magazine*, Winter 2010, 4; Graham Kendrick, *Ten Worshipping Churches*. (Bromley: Marc, 1987), 21.

¹⁵⁸ Nick Drake, 'Intimacy vs Accessibility', *New Wine Magazine*, January 2010, 18; John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *The Way To Maturity: How To Live In The Spirit And Grow To Maturity As A Child Of God* (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light Pubns, 1993), 72; Mike Pilavachi, *For the Audience of One: The Soul Survivor Guide to Worship* (London: Hodder & Stoughton Religious, 1999), 4.

¹⁵⁹ A Charismatic Evangelical Summer Festival which has produced a network of churches, which was originally started by St Andrew's, Chorleywood.

¹⁶⁰ 'Encounters with God', *New Wine Magazine*, 2015.

¹⁶¹ 'Encounters with God'.

¹⁶² Percy, *Words, Wonders and Power*.

power, some more positively than Percy, but all demonstrate the importance of power and particularly experiencing God's power is within charismatic evangelicalism.¹⁶³

The search for and expectation of encounter with God makes being a Charismatic Evangelical an exciting pursuit. There is an adventure to following God. They talk about being 'surprised by the work of God'¹⁶⁴ having 'Divine Appointments'¹⁶⁵, the importance of encountering and experiencing God, and the need to 'discern what God is doing and to bless that'.¹⁶⁶ There is encouragement to take risks and to 'step out in faith'.¹⁶⁷ Stories are told as adventures where God appears in surprising ways and uses individuals, sometimes despite their selfish actions or their lack of faith, to heal, encourage, or bring particular messages to others.¹⁶⁸ Charismatic evangelicalism is always looking for the next encounter with God, a fresh call and has a narrative of sacrifice and self-denial in order to follow God.¹⁶⁹

Intimate Worship and Ministry Time

Two key features of charismatic evangelicalism are the intimate worship which principally happens in the 'time of worship' and 'Ministry Time' also referred to as 'prayer ministry'.¹⁷⁰ The 'Times of Worship' are described by Steven as 'periods of sustained sung worship, with a group of musicians leading the congregation in a succession of modern songs'¹⁷¹ and he describes intimacy as the goal of charismatic worship.¹⁷² Intimate worship was one of the main emphases of Wimber's ministry.¹⁷³ It was the expression of intimacy through worship songs which drew many of the church leaders to Wimber's teaching and practices.¹⁷⁴ According to the Charismatic Evangelical 'Worship Leader' Matt Redman there is a 'Vineyard model of worship', which he

¹⁶³ Stephen Hunt, *A History of the Charismatic Movement in Britain and the United States of America: The Pentecostal Transformation of Christianity. Book 1* (Lewiston, N.Y: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 430–31.

¹⁶⁴ David Pytches, *Living at the Edge the Autobiography of David Pytches* (Bath: Arcadia, 2002), 348.

¹⁶⁵ John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *Power Evangelism: Signs and Wonders Today*, 2nd edition (Hodder & Stoughton Religious, 1985), 102.

¹⁶⁶ Pytches, *Living at the Edge*, 256.

¹⁶⁷ Wimber and Springer, *Power Evangelism*, 1992, 22.

¹⁶⁸ Percy particularly picks up the importance of adventure within charismatic spirituality, see Martyn Percy, 'Adventure and Atrophy in a Charismatic Movement: Returning to the "Toronto Blessing"', *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 20, no. 1 (1 January 2005): 84.

¹⁶⁹ Pilavachi, *For the Audience of One*, 9–25.

¹⁷⁰ Steven, 'Worship in the Spirit'. Also E. Mary Neve, 'Power Praying: An Evaluation of Prayer Ministry in the Teaching of John Wimber and the Vineyard Movement' (Thesis (Ph.D.), University of Birmingham, 2012). And Cartledge, *Encountering the Spirit*.

¹⁷¹ Steven, 'Worship in the Spirit', 128.

¹⁷² Steven, 163.

¹⁷³ Hunt, *Charismatic Movement*, 343, 414; Nigel Scotland, *Charismatics and the next Millennium: Do They Have a Future?* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995), 51.

¹⁷⁴ Sandy Millar, *All I Want Is You: A Collection of Christian Reflections*, ed. Mark Elsdon-Dew (London: Alpha International, 2005), 44; Terry Virgo, 'A House Church Evaluation', in *John Wimber: His Influence and Legacy*, ed. David Pytches (Guildford, Surrey: Eagle, 1998), 239–40; Nigel Wright, 'A Baptist Evaluation', in *John Wimber: His Influence and Legacy*, ed. David Pytches (Guildford, Surrey: Eagle, 1998), 246; David Watson, *Fear No Evil: A Personal Struggle with Cancer*, Hodder Christian Paperbacks (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984), 51.

attributes to Wimber, that has a five stage journey starting with the call to worship, then engagement, exaltations and adoration, and arriving at intimacy with God.¹⁷⁵ Mike Pilavachi the leader of Soul Survivor, a Charismatic Evangelical network of churches which runs large summer festivals for young people, states that 'At Soul Survivor we [...] consider worship to be our highest value and our first priority. It is neither the warm-up nor the wind-down; it is, in fact, the main event of our gatherings'.¹⁷⁶ He describes it as 'the ultimate expression of relationship with God' and 'coming home'.¹⁷⁷ In his first experience of 'Wimberite' worship Pytches, a vicar strongly influenced by Wimber, describes how the songs wooed them 'into the presence of God'¹⁷⁸ and how it was 'the real thing... Worship without pretending!'¹⁷⁹ Steven describes these themes in his research; 'For individual participants in case study worship, the success of the flow in the 'time of worship' was measured in terms of whether it brought them 'close to God', helped them be 'open' or 'tuned-in' to God and whether it allowed God to 'get through' to them'.¹⁸⁰ Intimate worship then became, and remains, the location of intimate encounter with God and demonstrates this intensive focus of encountering God in the gathered worship service.

'Ministry time' or 'prayer ministry' is a period of prayer for individuals normally towards the end of the service emphasising praying for the Holy Spirit to bring physical and emotional healing. According to Leach, particular worship songs and raised hands are no longer a sign of a Charismatic church, instead it is identified by its prayer ministry.¹⁸¹ St Andrew's Chorleywood followed a typical pattern for 'ministry time'. During 'ministry time' individuals would come to the front and be asked by those praying what they wanted Jesus to do.¹⁸² The people praying for them stand around them, perhaps placing their hands on the person and then invite the Holy Spirit to come.

Those ministering should always keep their eyes open and observe what God is doing.... Those ministering can bless and honour what God is doing for his people. Lay a hand lightly upon the person under the power of the Holy Spirit, using words such as 'We bless you, Lord for what you are doing in this person', 'We honour the work of the Holy Spirit in this person now, Lord' or 'Increase your power Lord, upon this person' [...] Those ministering should seek for 'words of knowledge' or other gifts of the Spirit, to show them what more God wants to do. Through a 'word of knowledge' the Lord may reveal a problem which is

¹⁷⁵ Matt Redman, 'Worshipper and Musician', in *John Wimber: His Influence and Legacy*, ed. David Pytches (Guildford, Surrey: Eagle, 1998), 65–66.

¹⁷⁶ Mike Pilavachi and Craig Borlase, *Life Beneath the Surface: Thoughts on a Deeper Spiritual Life* (Ventura, Calif: Regal Books, 2006), 34.

¹⁷⁷ Pilavachi and Borlase, 26.

¹⁷⁸ Pytches, *Living at the Edge*, 16–17.

¹⁷⁹ Pytches, 17.

¹⁸⁰ Steven, 'Worship in the Spirit', 163.

¹⁸¹ John Leach, *Developing Prayer Ministry: A New Introduction for Churches*, Grove Renewal Series ; 1 (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2000), 3.

¹⁸² David Pytches, *Come Holy Spirit: Learning to Minister in Power* (London: Hodder & Stoughton Religious, 1985), 275.

preventing the power of God reaching a certain area of life in the person being ministered to.¹⁸³

The emphasis is praying for physical or emotional healing and there is an understanding that this may be accompanied by signs that the Spirit is working such as, 'feeling of heat; shaking or trembling; deep breathing; weeping – even very gently; laughing; peace; falling and even bouncing on the floor'.¹⁸⁴ The Soul Survivor Prayer Ministry Guidelines reminds people that '... one of the most important things to remember is that this is a time to let God do His own thing.... We are there to watch and hear what the Father is saying to us and what part He wants us to play as He works in the person's life'.¹⁸⁵ And the New Wine Ministry Time guidelines state; 'This is the Holy Spirit's ministry: the person who ministers is not important'.¹⁸⁶

God, through the work of the Holy Spirit, is seen as the primary actor in 'ministry time'. The role of the person praying is to 'discern what God is doing and to bless that'.¹⁸⁷ They begin by inviting the Holy Spirit to move and trying to discern what the Holy Spirit is doing both through observing the physical signs and by listening to God themselves, asking for 'words of knowledge' and figuring out the part He wants them to play. They are encouraged not to rush but to be happy to wait and be 'assured the Holy Spirit is active'.¹⁸⁸ For Charismatic Evangelicals hearing God and discerning what He is saying is something which is learnt over time, a process which is recounted in detail by Lurhmann.¹⁸⁹ There is often a concern that the individual praying could actually get in the way of God's work.¹⁹⁰ God leads and acts, the person praying follows and discerns when to act in response to God. The key is relationship and the patterns of 'ministry time' are the patterns of relational interactions which are rehearsed but always open to the spontaneous and new. Pytches describes it as 'an uncomfortable ministry' where 'God is unpredictable', 'God can often be untidy' and asserts, 'We must let God be God'.¹⁹¹ This pattern

¹⁸³ Pytches, 275.

¹⁸⁴ Pytches, 145.

¹⁸⁵ Aaron Adams, *Prayer Ministry Guidelines, First Edition* (Soul Survivor, 2002), 18.

¹⁸⁶ 'Prayer Ministry | New Wine', accessed 1 December 2015, <https://www.new-wine.org/content/prayer-ministry>.

¹⁸⁷ Pytches, *Living at the Edge*, 256.

¹⁸⁸ Adams, *Prayer Ministry Guidelines, First Edition*, 18; Pytches, *Come Holy Spirit*, 145.

¹⁸⁹ Lurhmann, *When God Talks Back*.

¹⁹⁰ 'We want God to do what he wants to do, we don't want to get in the way of that'. ('Soul Survivor Prayer Ministry Guidelines' (Soul Survivor), accessed 14 September 2016, <https://soulsurvivor.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/SS-prayer-ministry-guidelines.pdf>.) Leaders recount how ultimately they need to get out of the way and let God act; John Wimber disappears half way through the first ministry time at St Andrew's Chorleywood (David Pytches, *New Wineskins: A Plea for Radical Rethinking in the Church of England to Enable Normal Church Growth to Take Effect beyond Existing Parish Boundaries* (Guildford, Surrey: Eagle, 1991), 258–59.) Godwin describes how, having led people into the chapel where they have started to experience God they slip away saying 'I wanted people to have direct dealings with God'. (Godwin and Roberts, *The Grace Outpouring*, 21.) Carol Wimber states 'It wasn't the teaching, or the programme or the building, or anything man had a hand in doing. It was just plain God and it was wonderful'. Carol Wimber, *John Wimber: The Way It Was* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1999), 106.

¹⁹¹ Pytches, *Come Holy Spirit*, 146–47.

of 'discern and bless' becomes key to understanding the relationship between God's action and human action in charismatic evangelicalism as a whole, not just in 'ministry time'.¹⁹²

'Ministry time' was part of Wimber's training for Power Evangelism. He wanted 'the church to do the work of the church'¹⁹³ and saw his role as 'equipping the saints'¹⁹⁴ to engage in the ministry of power evangelism themselves. But as Neve comments;

The practice that took root was that which was practised and demonstrated at the time of the conferences, that is Christians ministering to each other, rather than that which was advocated, that is, people who were not Christians encountering the power of God through signs and wonders, being convinced of Christianity and converted.¹⁹⁵

Hunt calls it a 'selective approach' which focused on emotional healing and did not embrace the whole package of power evangelism.¹⁹⁶ This is clearly seen in Pytches' autobiography;

We decided that in the future, every time we preached the kingdom, we could rely on the Holy Spirit to back up the message with signs and wonders. From the next day on we would invite people forward for prayer ministry at the communion rails after the service, and the team could continue with ministry to them following the formal blessing of dismissal.¹⁹⁷

Rather than being a means to engage with wider society it became a means to experience God in the worship service again demonstrating this intensive nature of the encounter with God in charismatic evangelicalism. Ward comments;

For the charismatic worshipper, though many still value the sermon and indeed, the act of communion, encounter with God is located primarily in the singing of songs and in the intimate times of prayer and ministry which are often the climax of a time of worship. This means that as the Mass is for Catholics and the Sermon is for Protestants, so the singing of songs for Charismatics.¹⁹⁸

Similarly Miller describes how 'ministry time' 'was as important as the preaching and the worship'.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹² Redman states, 'If we do what the Father is doing, when He is doing it, God will break into our service in powerful and surprising ways. That's the key to all effective ministry – to do what the father is doing – exactly at the right time'. Redman, *The Unquenchable Worshipper*, 38.

¹⁹³ Wimber, *John Wimber*, 132.

¹⁹⁴ This is a phrase regularly attributed to Wimber which comes from Ephesians 4.12 see for example Don Williams, 'Theological Perspective and Reflection on the Vineyard Christian Fellowship', in *Church, Identity, and Change: Theology and Denominational Structures in Unsettled Times*, ed. David A Roozen and James R. Nieman (Grand Rapids, Mich; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2005), 176; Thomas A. Smail, Andrew Walker, and Nigel Wright, eds., *Charismatic Renewal: The Search for a Theology*, Rev. and expanded ed.. (London: SPCK, 1995), 72.

¹⁹⁵ Neve, 'Power Praying', 10–11.

¹⁹⁶ Stephen Hunt, 'The Anglican Wimberites', *Pneuma* 17, no. 1 (1 January 1995): 116.

¹⁹⁷ Pytches, *Living at the Edge*, 261.

¹⁹⁸ Pete Ward, *Selling Worship, How What We Sing Has Changed the Church*, first (Bletchley, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 2005), 199.

¹⁹⁹ Donald E. Miller, 'Routinizing the Charisma', in *Church, Identity, and Change: Theology and Denominational Structures in Unsettled Times*, ed. David A Roozen and James R. Nieman (Grand Rapids, Mich; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2005).

Of course the Charismatic Evangelical focus on worship and 'ministry time' has received much criticism. For Percy this move to experience and intimacy is a sign of the church embracing individualism where 'Salvation, judgement and healing are turned into individualistic notions; the idea of corporate sin or redemption is lost'.²⁰⁰ He particularly highlights the, personal, suggestive and even erotic nature of the worship.²⁰¹ Although there is a personal and individual focus there is also a strong emphasis on community and relationships. Social time before and after the worship is seen as important because it provides a friendly and informal context for individuals to 'meet with God'.²⁰² There is also an important corporate element to both prayer²⁰³ and worship.

It is tempting to look at this modern evangelical experience of God and see it as profoundly individualistic: me and my relationship with God. And that view certainly captures something real. But it takes a great deal of work for the community to teach people to develop these apparently private and personal relationships with God.²⁰⁴

The importance of the social and corporate can be seen in various Charismatic Evangelical accounts; Redman states 'John Wimber firmly believed that although an individual may have times like these alone in private, when the church comes together the manifest presence of God is both multiplied and magnified'.²⁰⁵ Gumbel, the Vicar of Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB) states 'There is a level of friendship in the church which I have certainly never experienced outside the church'.²⁰⁶ Soul Survivor Watford describe their cell groups as 'the place where you really feel and become part of the family'.²⁰⁷ HTB have 'connect groups' which are 'a group of people that meets, throughout London, to build lasting friendships and grow spiritually'.²⁰⁸

Percy is also worried about the focus on the leader and their power and control but spends little time discussing Wimber's focus on lay-led ministry and encouragement for people to minister to each other. In fact, in other places, Wimber is regularly described as modest and humble in contrast to Percy's description.²⁰⁹ Another criticism of charismatic evangelicalism is that it is therapeutic religion which 'tends to shift the focus from loving God, receiving instruction and serving others to finding and fulfilling my own potential; more about phobias, neuroses and

²⁰⁰ Percy, *Words, Wonders and Power*, 155.

²⁰¹ Percy, 'Adventure and Atrophy in a Charismatic Movement', 79; Percy, *Words, Wonders and Power*, 62–68.

²⁰² Cartledge, *Encountering the Spirit*, 57.

²⁰³ Cartledge, 60.

²⁰⁴ Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back*, 279.

²⁰⁵ Redman, 'Worshipper and Musician', 65.

²⁰⁶ Nicky Gumbel, *Questions of Life: Alpha Course* (London: Alpha International, 2010), 202.

²⁰⁷ 'Belonging', Soul Survivor Watford, accessed 11 December 2015, <http://www.soulsurvivorwatford.co.uk/belonging/>.

²⁰⁸ 'Find a Connect Group | HTB Church', accessed 11 December 2015, <https://www.htb.org/connect-groups>.

²⁰⁹ Miller, 'Routinizing the Charisma', 146; David Pytches, 'A Man Called John', in *John Wimber: His Influence and Legacy*, ed. David Pytches (Guildford, Surrey: Eagle, 1998).

the pursuit of personal happiness than sin and forgiveness, truth and obedience'.²¹⁰ There is no doubt that this is a more personal, intimate form of Christianity with a focus on emotional healing and experience of God but it not clear that this can automatically be seen as opposed to loving God, receiving instruction and serving others. For example according to Redman it is through loving God that this emotional healing and encounter take place;

The best way to overcome past hurts is to experience our heavenly Father's love and acceptance. By experiencing His love we know – really know – in the depth of our being that we are His children, beloved and accepted by Him. He longs for us to worship him in intimacy.²¹¹

This love, as I will explore below, is then expected to propel people into mission. The issue that arises then, is not, as Warner worries, that in the personal encounter Christian doctrine and love of God get lost, but rather that the worship gathering dominates all other aspects of Christian life. Encounter and intimacy are the goal, worship and 'ministry time' are the principle practices and therefore the gathered worship service, where these practices take place becomes the focal point of charismatic evangelicalism which is what I am describing as its intensive nature. This is illustrated in a story shared by Gumbel from a young couple who started coming to church;

Both of us find that Sunday services and Wednesday gatherings are two highpoints of the week. At times it feels like coming up for air, especially as by Wednesday it is to be drowning in the deep waters of working life! If we miss either, we feel somehow 'diluted'. Of course, we can keep talking to God together and alone, but I feel that the act of meeting together is the bellows that keep on fanning the flames of our faith.²¹²

The Place of Transformation: Worship and 'the rest of the week'

This leads to the question of how charismatic evangelicalism understands the relationship between the Sunday service and the rest of the week. In *Worship, Evangelism, Justice* Pilavachi laments the 'artificial divide that has been created between worship, evangelism and justice'²¹³ and suggests the connection between worship and 'the rest of the week'²¹⁴ is through transformation. He explains how through intimate worship individuals are changed²¹⁵ and it is through that transformation and filling with God's love that they begin caring about the things God cares about.²¹⁶ This means worship is not just something you do at church but is a 'lifestyle'.²¹⁷ This connects with Gumble's assertion that God has a plan, not just for the world but

²¹⁰ Warner, 'Fissured Resurgence', 85.

²¹¹ Wimber and Springer, *The Way To Maturity*, 72.

²¹² Gumbel, *Questions of Life*, 203.

²¹³ Mike Pilavachi and L. Hoeksma, *Worship, Evangelism, Justice* (Eastbourne, England: Kingsway Publications, 2006), 7.

²¹⁴ Pilavachi and Hoeksma, 52.

²¹⁵ Pilavachi and Hoeksma, 28–29.

²¹⁶ Pilavachi and Hoeksma, 52.

²¹⁷ Pilavachi and Hoeksma, 47.

for each individual which the individual begins to discern through the encounter with God.²¹⁸ The intensive focus of worship is expected to have a centrifugal effect equipping people to reach out to those around them. This is articulated in a worship song written by Tim Hughes which contains the lines ‘Stepping forward, keep us from just singing, Move us into action, we must go’ and ‘Fill us up and send us out’.²¹⁹ In this song the gathered service is envisioned as the place of filling and sending describing a move from the encounter in church to being sent into the world. The worship encounter with God is expected to transform the individual; as Pilavachi states ‘worship may start with singing a song, but before long it invades our money, our time, our talents and the rest of our lives’.²²⁰ This is described both as the response to intimate encounter and the experience of others who have experienced that intimacy with God.²²¹ This relates to the concept of the Kingdom of God for charismatic evangelicalism, which had the effect of helping ‘believers to see beyond the confines of their local church or fellowship to something which is much broader and wider’²²² and points to how it led to engagement in social action.²²³

Cartledge in his study of charismatic spirituality describes a journey of Search, Encounter and Transformation²²⁴ in worship where ‘the offer of praise turns to encounter with the Spirit so people draw close to God through words of intimacy [...] This intimacy is also empowering so that lives are changed.’²²⁵ In another paper he describes the church as ‘a missionary community’ as a key feature of Renewal Ecclesiology and explains that from a renewal perspective the ‘experience of worship fundamentally dethrones idolatry, renews the church, and provides the greatest missionary impulse the world has ever seen!’²²⁶ Experiencing God leading to engagement in society was also reported among the volunteers interviewed in the research into social engagement in London megachurches.²²⁷ God’s love, experienced in worship, transforms the

²¹⁸ Gumbel, *Questions of Life*, 94; Millar, *All I Want Is You*, 33.

²¹⁹ Hughes, God of Justice in Les Moir and Matt Weeks, eds., *The Survivor Song Book 3* (Eastbourne, UK: Survivor, 2005), 34.

²²⁰ Pilavachi and Borlase, *Life Beneath the Surface*, 37.

²²¹ Heidi Baker and Rolland Baker, *Always Enough* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Chosen Books, 2003), 26.

²²² Scotland, *Charismatics and the next Millennium*, 294.

²²³ Kingdom is the starting point for Wimber’s teaching on Power Evangelism which understand the Kingdom of God as the rule of God which is initiated by Jesus coming to earth but is only completed by the Second Coming meaning that the Kingdom has both present and future aspects. He sees demonstration of ‘signs and wonders’ as signs of God’s Kingdom. He warns against equating the Kingdom with the church seeing God acting beyond the church. (Wimber and Springer, *Power Evangelism*, 1992, 29–40.) Ellis and Mitchell describe how churches focused on the Kingdom of God will be ‘caught up with pursuing the reign of God in every area of life and existence.’ (Roger Ellis, *Radical Church Planting* (Cambridge: Crossway Books, 1992), 15.) They go on to describe how this means Evangelism, signs and wonders, righteous living, social action, reconciliation and ‘where God’s heart is – loving the world’. (Roger Ellis, 26.)

²²⁴ Cartledge, *Encountering the Spirit*, 25–26.

²²⁵ Cartledge, 68.

²²⁶ Mark J. Cartledge, ‘Renewal Ecclesiology in Empirical Perspective’, *Pneuma* 36, no. 1 (1 January 2014): 23.

²²⁷ Sarah Dunlop, ‘What Does Faith Do to Social Capital? Some Examples from UK Megachurches’ (Ecclesiology and Ethnography Conference, Durham University, 2016).

individual and commissions and sends them into the world. The problem is that the worship service remains the focus of mission and they are continually drawn back to the worship gathering as seen in the story of the couple in the previous section.

The expectation is that intimacy with God through worship will lead to ministry and service, a view held by Wimber, who produced the magazine *Equipped*, which would focus on different areas of everyday life and ministry, including service to the poor and social justice.²²⁸ Despite this emphasis on mission, social action and service, charismatic evangelicalism keeps a primary focus on the Sunday service. This trend is also seen in Pytches autobiography where he describes how Christians working with the poor in Mexico are 'quietly getting on with a ministry so near and dear to the heart of God'²²⁹ but despite his admiration for the project and it inspiring them to do similar in their own community in Chorleywood, the work seemed to peter out²³⁰ and although he recounts some inspiring individuals and fund raising²³¹ the majority of his autobiography focuses on worship and 'ministry time' within the worship service.²³² The Alpha course, the most popular Charismatic Evangelical introduction to the Christian faith, has faced criticism for its lack of engagement with social issues and how very few of its examples focus on challenging social injustice.²³³ The accompanying book *Questions of Life* encourages social action only once when it says, 'It is at [the congregational] level that we can also go out as a group to serve our community. This could involve for example, visiting the sick and elderly, painting the home of someone in need or helping out at a homeless shelter or youth group'²³⁴ and yet dedicates whole chapters to 'being filled with the Spirit' and healing the sick.

Ward is critical of charismatic evangelicalism stating 'outside of an encounter with God in worship there seems little, if any, imperative towards mission'²³⁵ and Steven similarly describes how the prayer ministry in the services he observed led to the marginalization of the final dismissal which compromised 'the whole sense of the 'prayer ministry' leading to a corporate engagement with God's mission in the world'.²³⁶ A tension within charismatic evangelicalism is apparent; it both values mission and social action but at the same time allows it to be pushed the periphery of church life by the dominance of the worship service and the intensive nature of their understanding of encounter with God. It is certainly the experience of many of the Charismatic

²²⁸ Scotland, *Charismatics and the next Millennium*, 214; Hunt, *Charismatic Movement*, 427.

²²⁹ Pytches, *Living at the Edge*, 285.

²³⁰ Pytches, 286.

²³¹ Pytches, 286–91.

²³² Pytches, *Living at the Edge*; Wimber, *John Wimber*.

²³³ Mike Booker and Mark Ireland, *Evangelism - Which Way Now?: An Evaluation of Alpha, Emmaus, Cell Church and Other Contemporary Strategies for Evangelism*, Reprinted edition (London: Church House Publishing, 2010), 26.

²³⁴ Gumbel, *Questions of Life*, 200.

²³⁵ Ward, *Selling Worship, How What We Sing Has Changed the Church*, 148.

²³⁶ Steven, 'Worship in the Spirit', 274.

Evangelical writers that intimate encounter with God encourages them into mission, evangelism and social action and that experiencing God's love encourages people to share that love with others. But it is also clear that the focus on 'ministry time' and Intimate worship has had the effect of marginalizing the very social action they encourage. As a result, the legacy of Wimber, despite the work of his church in serving the poor, is the intensive nature of worship and 'ministry time' rather than the social action he also encouraged.

Church Planting

Church Planting is also a priority for charismatic evangelicalism which is symptomatic of the focus on the gathered worship service. The logic of this emphasis on church planting is that for people to encounter God, more churches are needed for them to encounter God in.

John Wimber loved church planting because he loved seeing people give their lives to Christ and become fully participating members of local churches. He knew that church planting was one of the most effective ways of seeing that happen.²³⁷

Wimber felt his vision for church planting was God-given²³⁸ and church planting became seen as the primary means for evangelism and church growth. Terry Virgo, the leader of the Newfrontiers network of churches and himself heavily influenced by John Wimber wrote 'The fact remains that we need to plant a great number of new churches if we are going to see the tide change in the nation'.²³⁹ Wimber advocated church planting and saw large numbers of Vineyard churches planted both across the US and internationally.²⁴⁰ According to Scotland '[Wimber's] conviction was that an intimate relationship or experience with God will ultimately lead to numerical church growth'.²⁴¹ Within the Church of England there was plenty of discussion about the place of church planting and Pytches laments the struggles St Andrew's Chorleywood faced in planting churches because of the parish system and celebrated the church planting of HTB.²⁴² In the 1990s this emphasis on church planting was seen in the books and reports being produced which sought to tackle some of the issues of church planting in the Church of England and encourage churches to engage in church planting including the Church of England report *Breaking New Ground*²⁴³, *Planting New Churches*²⁴⁴, *Radical Church Planting*²⁴⁵, and *Recovering the Ground*²⁴⁶. This trend

²³⁷ Steve Nicholson, 'Church Planter', in *John Wimber: His Influence and Legacy*, ed. David Pytches (Guildford, Surrey: Eagle, 1998), 117.

²³⁸ Nicholson, 120.

²³⁹ Terry Virgo, *Restoration in the Church*, 1st Paperback Edition edition (Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1985), 137.

²⁴⁰ Wimber, *John Wimber*, 182; Connie Dawson, 'John Wimber: A Biographical Sketch of His Life and Ministry in America' (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2012), 54, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1019026990/>.

²⁴¹ Nigel Scotland, 'Quo Vadis?', in *John Wimber: His Influence and Legacy*, ed. David Pytches (Guildford, Surrey: Eagle, 1998), 312.

²⁴² Pytches, *Living at the Edge*, 356–72.

²⁴³ Church of England, *Breaking New Ground - Church Planting in the Church of England*, 1st edition (London: Church House Publishing, 1994).

²⁴⁴ George Carey, *Planting New Churches*, ed. Bob Hopkins and Tim Anderson (Guildford: Eagle, 1992).

has continued and is still seen as an important element in renewing the church as demonstrated in the recent research focused on HTB church plants in the Diocese of London which contains the stated aim to see '100 new worshipping communities by the year 2020'.²⁴⁷

One of the key ideas around church planting was that 'new wineskins' were needed to hold the 'new wine' of the Charismatic Renewal. This new wine skin was in the form of new churches and was used for the justification of New Churches, Restorationism²⁴⁸ and for church planting within the Church of England.²⁴⁹ Scotland points to intimacy in worship generating 'an impulse to reach out to others with the gospel message'²⁵⁰ and how that impulse became focused on church planting. Church planting as the primary strategy for evangelism highlights the focus on the Sunday gathering as the place of encounter.

A Myopic View of Church?

Moynagh, writing from a *Fresh Expressions of Church* perspective is sceptical of church planting in the 1990s; 'many of these church plants suffered from having a dominant gene that saw church primarily in terms of Sunday worship, albeit done differently'.²⁵¹ As we have seen, this was the intention of church planting; a replication of a Charismatic Evangelical encounter with God primarily through the Sunday worship service. The focus on the Sunday service is seen in the Church Planting research carried out by the London Diocese. In St Paul's Shadwell the researcher reflected

There is perhaps a bit of a disconnect between Sunday services, with a very 'professional' feel and the church's midweek activities which serve a much wider group of local people. Translating midweek engagement into Sunday attendance has also proved difficult. The church has found mission to the area to be challenging and often seemingly not very fruitful, with limited movement of people from social engagement to church attendance. Some have indeed responded and joined the church, but most have not. We are ploughing ground that is hard; it may be that others will benefit.²⁵²

This quote displays some of the underlying assumptions of charismatic evangelicalism. Firstly there is a focus to make a 'professional' Sunday service. Secondly there is a very clear assumption that 'joining the church' means attending on Sunday. Thirdly there is an implication successful social action results in participation in Sunday worship. These assumptions demonstrate that the

²⁴⁵ Roger Ellis, *Radical Church Planting*.

²⁴⁶ Nigel Scotland, ed., *Recovering the Ground: Towards Radical Church Planting for the Church of England* (Chorleywood: Kingdom Power Trust, 1995).

²⁴⁷ Tim Thorlby, 'Love Sweat and Tears; Church Planting in East London', Research for the Local Church (The Centre for Theology and Community, 2016), Foreword.

²⁴⁸ Scotland, *Charismatics and the next Millennium*, 255.

²⁴⁹ Pytches, *New Wineskins*.

²⁵⁰ Scotland, *Charismatics and the next Millennium*, 271.

²⁵¹ Moynagh, *Church for Every Context*, x.

²⁵² Tim Thorlby, 'Love Sweat and Tears', 33.

Sunday service is seen as the location of belonging²⁵³, the place you need to be to be seen as a member of the church, and that activities beyond the Sunday service are somewhat marginalized and seen as less important. The report also notes that within two years of planting they had employed a full-time worship leader, their first employee after an administrator, further demonstrating the emphasis on worship.²⁵⁴ There is a myopic view of church which sees church as primarily a Sunday service with this intensive focus, done in a particular way and there is a struggle to see anything done outside of that Sunday service as really 'church'.

Summary of the Intensive Nature of Charismatic Lived Theology

The key features of this intensive charismatic lived theology then, are as follows;

- The primary place of encounter with God is the worship gathering. Although it is acknowledged that God can be experienced anywhere, there is an intensity of experience within the gathered worship service beyond that experienced elsewhere.
- The Sunday service is the primary place of transformation and the place from which people are called and commissioned by God into his work. As a result, the Sunday service is similarly the place of renewal, refreshing and re-commissioning.
- The Sunday service is the primary location of belonging. To be a member of the church you need to be present on a Sunday. As a result the practices associated with participating in Sunday worship become the modes of belonging.
- Mission and outreach is about bringing others into the same encounter with God which means that all mission and outreach becomes focused on the place people experience that encounter with God, namely the Sunday service.

This intensive nature of charismatic evangelicalism reveals a lived theology of how God acts in the world. When exploring 'ministry time' earlier in the chapter I suggested that 'discern what God is doing and bless it' was a key phrase in understanding the relationship between God's agency and human agency in charismatic evangelicalism. God acts, and Charismatic Evangelicals discern and 'bless' that by listening to what God is calling them to do. They see God as motivated primarily by love²⁵⁵, as unpredictable, wanting people to encounter him²⁵⁶ and as having a plan, not just for the whole world, but for each individual.²⁵⁷ The human act is one of response to what God is doing at that time in that place. It is spontaneous, fresh, and always understood in terms of 'relationship with God'. This relationship, like any relationship, has patterns to it, one of which is

²⁵³ See discussion in chapter 4, p155

²⁵⁴ Tim Thorlby, 'Love Sweat and Tears', 22–23.

²⁵⁵ Pilavachi and Hoeksma, *Worship, Evangelism, Justice*, 63; Wimber and Springer, *Power Evangelism*, 1992, 37; Lee, Poloma, and Post, *The Heart of Religion*, 23.

²⁵⁶ Redman, *The Unquenchable Worshipper*, 47.

²⁵⁷ Gumbel, *Questions of Life*, 94; Millar, *All I Want Is You*, 33.

the pattern of 'ministry time' which involved invitation, discernment, blessing what God is doing and action when prompted by God.

Critical Analysis of Charismatic Evangelicalism

This section, which has proposed a lived theology of charismatic evangelicalism, has intentionally drawn from leaders and participants in the movement, as well as academic voices, to develop a picture of lived practice which will provide an important voice in the analysis. There is, of course, a deeper critique which is important to engage with, and to which I now turn. This critique provides an additional voice which will enable a further exploration of the practices, beliefs, structures and understanding of SMCs. I will do this by focusing on the critiques of Wimber and contemporary charismatic evangelicalism in the UK. Using Percy's critique of power in Wimber's theology I critically assess the understanding of pneumatology, ecclesiology, and the miraculous in relation to social action.

Percy's critique of Wimber is based around an analysis of power. This language of power is key for Wimber and expressed more broadly in charismatic evangelicalism. Percy's critique revolves around how power is the primary lens through which Wimber and charismatic evangelicalism understand both its practice and theology. In this understanding, power is seen as flowing from God through particular agents, often church leaders, to their intended targets. However Percy's concern is that these agents become conflated with God's power.²⁵⁸

i. Pneumatology

Charismatic evangelicalism places a strong emphasis on the Holy Spirit and joining in the work of the Spirit. An immediate concern is the risk of self-deception. As Zahl points out, rejecting such an understanding for this reason and placing the Spirit's work solely in, say, preaching and sacraments is to ignore the scriptural accounts of the Spirit.²⁵⁹ Percy's concern is that Wimber sees the Holy Spirit as a force that stands apart from the world.²⁶⁰ This power stands against all other powers. Instead of the Spirit as the one who leads into all truth, there is a call to move beyond the ordinary and act in the supernatural. This is seen again and again in charismatic evangelicalism, where the ordinary and natural is seen as something holding people back or something to be overcome.²⁶¹ As Percy points out 'if ordinary life is to be shunned because the Spirit is only truly available on a different plane, then God's genuine engagement with the world

²⁵⁸ Percy, *Words, Wonders and Power*, 26–29.

²⁵⁹ Simeon Zahl, 'The Spirit and the Cross: Engaging a Key Critique of Charismatic Pneumatology', in *The Holy Spirit in the World Today*, ed. Jane Williams (London: Alpha International, 2011), 118.

²⁶⁰ Percy, *Words, Wonders and Power*, 133.

²⁶¹ Maranda Hassett, 'Charismatic Renewal', in *The Oxford Handbook of Anglican Studies*, ed. Mark Chapman, Martyn Percy, and Sathianathan Clarke, 2015, 308, <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199218561.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199218561-e-23>.

in Christ is reduced to a charade.²⁶² The Spirit's function is reduced to witness; 'it is a power that directs individuals to Jesus or the Father, and initiates them into the life of the church'²⁶³ but one that is detached from a concept of this power being the power of love. In this view Christians have little choice in how God's power operates through them, reducing humans to tools rather than creative agents in their own right.²⁶⁴ Percy believes space for God's freedom and love is lost, particularly in relation to creation.²⁶⁵ Similarly, Zahl calls for an appreciation of the freedom and creativity brought by the Spirit, giving particular personal examples of 'finding God in unexpected places in the culture around us' and 'inter-faith practice of scriptural reasoning'.²⁶⁶

There is similarly concern that this pneumatology has little place for weakness. Ideas of Christ's incarnation, self-emptying and willingness to suffer and God's identification with weakness become lost. Percy points out 'although he did perform acts that overcame various types of weakness, both in himself (e.g. Jesus' temptation, Matt 4.1-11) and others (e.g. Jesus healing others), his life was one of sharing and solidarity with a pathologically weak humanity.'²⁶⁷

Charismatic pneumatologies can also be seen to reflect the underlying concerns of the denominations they are part of. In this view charismatic evangelicalism has a problem seeing the Holy Spirit as having a salvific role without the accompanying preaching of the gospel.²⁶⁸ There is a need within charismatic evangelicalism to consider the Holy Spirit's work more inclusively and holistically. Ward describes faith as having both a 'given' and 'provisional' nature.²⁶⁹ It is 'given' in the sense that it is a gift, but provisional in that any theology of God can never fully capture the truth of God and therefore must be held as provisional. In this language charismatic evangelicalism has a strong emphasis on the 'given' nature of theology and faith, and on recognising God's agency in the world, but often fails to hold this in tension with the provisional nature of theology and faith, only recognising what it already believes to be true.²⁷⁰

ii. Ecclesiology

Wimber's ecclesiology is also seen by Percy as primarily about power. The church and its leaders are God's power brokers. 'The "Church" is a collection of people who are individually saved

²⁶² Percy, *Words, Wonders and Power*, 134.

²⁶³ Percy, 134.

²⁶⁴ Percy, 36.

²⁶⁵ Percy, 136.

²⁶⁶ Zahl, 'The Spirit and the Cross', 129.

²⁶⁷ Percy, *Words, Wonders and Power*, 131.

²⁶⁸ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, 'Pneumatologies in Systematic Theology', in *Studying Global Pentecostalism Theories and Methods*, ed. Allan Anderson et al. (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2010), 237.

²⁶⁹ Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, 44–48.

²⁷⁰ Percy describes this as the 'symbiotic alchemy of map making' and these maps of the world shape the way we see the world. Martyn Percy, 'Symbiotic Alchmy: Mapping the Futures of English Revivalism and Evangelicalism', in *The Wisdom of the Spirit: Gospel, Church, and Culture*, ed. Martyn Percy and Pete Ward (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).

individually sanctified and individually blessed'²⁷¹. It is positioned against the world in a dualistic way and fearful of the world, demonstrating clear sectarian tendencies. In this view the church is seen as an agent of the Kingdom of God and there is, as a result, an over-realized eschatology. Along the same lines the church, historically, is seen as having failed to demonstrate the power of God.²⁷² A particularly interesting point is made by Percy about the Wimberite obsession with a purity of power and the need to exorcise impurities from those seen as agents of God's power. This leaves little room for the weak to act as God's agents. 'They can be ministered to in the body, but are unlikely to feel equal to, or as valued as, those who can demonstrate God's power in their lives.'²⁷³ Percy, similarly, notes that in the Wimberite songs 'actual concern for social justice and for the needs of others outside the gathered congregation is rare.'²⁷⁴ There is a distinct lack of engagement with weakness and the place of suffering.²⁷⁵ As Percy asks, what place is there for communities that simply offer love and acceptance, or are called to be a 'suffering presence'? The result is that God's activity beyond the church is rarely discussed. 'All too often churches live as though they are central to salvation, making Christ peripheral... But focusing on the margins of belief, of membership, of experience and tradition, draws a church out of itself into creative dialogue with neighbours.'²⁷⁶ This is Percy's challenge to the Wimberite church, and one which will be taken up within this thesis.

A critique of church planting results in a similar view of the church. Paas is critical of the Church Growth Movement, which he sees as compressing the historical understanding of church planting to such an extent that 'evangelism is gathering and gathering is evangelism'²⁷⁷ leading to an instrumental approach to church and church planting. He continues "'Church" is completely swallowed by "evangelism"; its only function is to be as efficient as possible as a recruitment agency.'²⁷⁸ Exploring the Biblical and theological assumptions behind Church Growth Theory leads him to some difficult conclusions about the relationship between the world and church.²⁷⁹ Firstly, if mission is about numerical growth then the world must become the church; the world should be erased. Secondly, it seems to ignore the Biblical passages which suggest the church will be a minority presence in the world, something which is backed up by an exploration of European history. Thirdly, there is no theological place for the world. It simply becomes the 'arena for

²⁷¹ Percy, *Words, Wonders and Power*, 121.

²⁷² Percy, 126.

²⁷³ Percy, 114.

²⁷⁴ Percy, 81.

²⁷⁵ Roger Steer, *Church on Fire: The Story of Anglican Evangelicals* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1998), 299.

²⁷⁶ Percy, *Words, Wonders and Power*, 155.

²⁷⁷ Stefan Paas, *Church Planting in the Secular West* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2016), 39.

²⁷⁸ Paas, 40.

²⁷⁹ Paas, 115–20.

evangelism' without any sense of the world teaching the church. Finally, he points out that mission understood as church growth presents an impossible task. Where the church growing is the only measure of success, pragmatic arguments, rather than theological ones, rule. This leads to a focus on strategy and methods which, ironically, are a consequence of secularization rather than a remedy.²⁸⁰ Paas notes, 'Church planting sends the wrong message; it suggests that the church rather than the world is central in God's mission.'²⁸¹ The emphasis on church planting then draws people away from social justice, ecological responsibility and cultural renewal. Ethnographic studies of evangelicals note similar themes. Guest notes clear demarcation between a world in need of redemption and the community of faith.²⁸² Strhan identifies how evangelicals outwardly resist cultural trends in the world and yet demonstrates the ways they are hugely influenced by such trends. She describes these evangelicals as aware of this subjective fragmentation and as seeking coherence by understanding themselves as disciples.²⁸³

Both Percy and Paas notice similar patterns; a degrading of the place of the world, a move away from a theological understanding of the church towards the pragmatic and experiential, and a resulting reduction in concern for issues of social justice. In Paas' words, introverted, rather than socially engaged churches.²⁸⁴

iii. 'Signs and Wonders' and Justice

Charismatic evangelicalism, as I have already noted, has faced criticism of not being engaged in social action. One of the complicating factors is the focus on miracles and signs and wonders.²⁸⁵ As already discussed above, a tendency towards the supernatural can have the effect of excluding any understanding of seeing God at work in everyday life and as a result denying the place of suffering, instead seeing it as something to be abolished.²⁸⁶ Anderson describes how an emphasis on power and healing has been exploitative in many instances²⁸⁷ and Clifton points to a 'dark side' of healing and how the disabled become marginalised.²⁸⁸ The focus on 'signs and wonders' leads to a heightened dualism which neglects the 'natural' seeing sickness primarily through a lens of conflict between good and evil rather than as a consequence of the disorder of the natural

²⁸⁰ Paas, 120–21.

²⁸¹ Paas, 95.

²⁸² Guest, *Evangelical Identity and Contemporary Culture*, 3.

²⁸³ Anna Strhan, *Aliens and Strangers?: The Struggle for Coherence in the Everyday Lives of Evangelicals* (Oxford, 2015).

²⁸⁴ Paas, *Church Planting in the Secular West*, 96.

²⁸⁵ Cartledge, *Encountering the Spirit*, 105–6.

²⁸⁶ Hassett, 'Charismatic Renewal', 308.

²⁸⁷ Allan Heaton Anderson and Cambridge University Press, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 204.

²⁸⁸ Shane Clifton, 'The Dark Side of Prayer for Healing', *Pneuma* 36, no. 2 (1 January 2014): 204–25, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700747-03602003>.

realm.²⁸⁹ In this view suffering becomes something to be abolished rather than ‘part of our human journey’.²⁹⁰ Percy’s concern takes this further criticising contemporary healing ministries for not taking seriously the root cause of illness, poverty.²⁹¹ He identifies poverty as ‘one of our biggest threats to health, and one of our biggest killers.’²⁹² Going further, he identifies those with health, wealth and status as the primary focus of the ‘signs and wonders’ movement pointing out that Jesus’ own healings, of which these claim to be a rediscovery, were rarely directed towards that stratum of society.²⁹³ Instead, Jesus’ intention was to question society’s attitude to sickness and the onlooker’s ‘implicit or explicit role in the person’s misfortune.’²⁹⁴ This means that if the concern is for those who are sick, then the personal, social, societal and environmental factors need to be addressed together.

In summary, charismatic evangelicalism is critiqued is seen to have the following weakness and blind spots. It has a unidirectional pneumatology which sees the Spirit as primarily a force which acts on the world. It fails to value the ordinary or the weak and rarely recognises the way the Spirit speaks to the church from the world. It has an ecclesiology which diminishes the place of the world seeing the church as central and reducing the churches engagement with the world. Finally its focus on healing and miracles demonstrates a dualism which fails to take seriously issues of justice.

Summary and Research Question

There is a tension at the heart of charismatic evangelicalism that, despite an apparent emphasis on mission and social action, it is dominated by the emphasis on the gathered worship service which is seen as the primary location of encounter with God. As a result, social action regularly ends up on the periphery of church life. Given the Turn to Social Action within Evangelicalism and the growth of funding of and participation in social action it is vital that charismatic evangelicalism can get to grips with this problem and integrate social action into the life of the church more fully. Although attempts have been made to solve this problem by seeing it as a lack in theological and doctrinal understanding, the conviction of this thesis is that it is through exploring lived theology, the practices, understandings, beliefs and structures of groups who are seeking to overcome these problems. Small Missional Communities are one example of a group within charismatic evangelicalism which have identified these problems and sought to overcome them. They have

²⁸⁹ Nigel Wright, ‘The Theology and Methodology of “Signs and Wonders”’, in *Charismatic Renewal: The Search for a Theology*, ed. Thomas A. Smail, Andrew Walker, and Nigel Wright, Rev. and expanded ed.. (London: SPCK, 1995).

²⁹⁰ Hassett, ‘Charismatic Renewal’, 308.

²⁹¹ Martyn Percy, ‘Restoration, Retrieval, and Renewal: Recovering Heling Ministry in the Church - Some Critical Refelctions’, in *Theologies of Retrieval: An Exploration and Appraisal*, ed. Darren Sarisky (London ; New York, NY: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 335.

²⁹² Percy, 335.

²⁹³ Percy, 337.

²⁹⁴ Percy, 348.

formed in the imaginative space formed by the Emerging-Missional Movement as a reaction to these perceived shortcomings. This leads to the following research question and sub questions;

Given their Charismatic Evangelical roots how do Small Missional Communities sustain their social action?

This research question is broken down into three sub questions:

What are the practices, beliefs, structures and understanding of the SMCs of being Christian community and engaging in social action in relation to God and their Christian faith?

How do these practices, beliefs, structures and their understandings help them sustain social action given the struggles found in the account of charismatic evangelicalism?

How do SMCs challenge and extend the theological accounts of charismatic evangelicalism, the Emerging Missional Movement and the Evangelical Turn to Social Action?

I have described charismatic evangelicalism as having an intensive focus on the worship service and the practices of worship and 'ministry time'. The argument of this research is that the SMCs have extended and develop their charismatic practices and understandings and developed an extensive focus of encountering God in the world, one that is encouraged and sustained through the practices developed. These SMCs will be seen to bring insight and offer a significant challenge to charismatic evangelicalism the Evangelical Turn to Social Action and the Emerging Missional Movement particularly around sustaining social action.

Chapter 2: Methodology

In this chapter I develop a practical theology approach involving qualitative research. Drawing on the work of Graham and the embodied nature of theology²⁹⁵, Theological Action Research and the four voices of theology²⁹⁶, and Astley's Ordinary Theology²⁹⁷ I develop an approach which sees theology as embodied in the practices, beliefs, understandings and structures of the communities and describe this as a lived theology. Through this practical theology framework and using an extended case study approach involving participant observation, interviews and document study I seeks to describe the lived theology of the SMCs in this study. I then describe the analysis of these descriptions of lived theology which is carried out through a critical conversation with the accounts of charismatic evangelicalism, the Emerging Missional Movement and the Evangelical Turn to Social Action developed in chapter 1.

This chapter takes the following shape. The first section explores practical theology in relation to the research questions developing this understanding of lived theology. The second section explores the empirical and qualitative nature of the research relating it to the practical theology approach. The third section describes the qualitative methods used in the research. The fourth section gives an account of field work recounting the decisions made and the questions and problems faced in conducting the fieldwork and data analysis.

Practical Theology

This research is in the field of practical theology because, as laid out in the first sub question, it explores the practices, beliefs, structures and understandings of these SMCs from a theological perspective. It seeks to explore Christian faith as it is lived and embodied in the life of the community. Ballard and Pritchard describe four models of practical theology; Applied Theology, Critical Correlation, praxis model and a habitus model.²⁹⁸ Applied Theology is unidirectional from theory to practice making practice derivative. It also promotes theology as a professional endeavour rather than one for the whole church. Critical correlation sees renewed practice coming out of a dialogue between theory and a particular situation. The praxis model takes practice as its starting point, with theory developed through reflection on that practice. The habitus model understands truth as found in the practical wisdom of a community. According to Ballard and Pritchard these models are not 'disparate or mutually exclusive. Rather they should

²⁹⁵ Graham, *Transforming Practice*.

²⁹⁶ Helen Cameron et al., *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010).

²⁹⁷ Jeff Astley, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002., n.d.).

²⁹⁸ Paul Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society* (London: SPCK Publishing, 2006), 59–77.

be regarded as strands which are often woven together and affect each other'.²⁹⁹ Because this research begins with the practice and understanding of SMCs, an applied model is immediately ruled out. I will discuss approaches within the other three models in regards to what they offer in answering my research questions and whether they offer an appropriate framework.

Browning takes a critical correlation approach to practical theology. He sees religious communities as communities of memory with their own history, tradition and normative texts which inform their values and practices and as communities of practical wisdom which develop in an ever-changing context where they are seeking to remain faithful to their history, tradition and normative texts and be relevant to the world. He believes that the religious community moves forward through practical reason exercised by the community rather than simply individuals making their own choices. Browning, rejecting the view that theory leads to practice, suggests a pattern of practical theology which 'goes from present theory-laden practice to a retrieval of normative theory-laden practice to the creation of more critically held theory-laden practices'.³⁰⁰ Questions arise from both secular and religious practices, which are then used to reflect on tradition and normative texts and, in turn, develop theory-laden practices. This looks promising for exploring SMCs, seeing value in their current practices and identifying them as communities of practical wisdom. However, the first problem with Browning in relation to researching SMCs is his reliance on practical reason as the way of moving the community forward. Within the research questions there is an assumption that Small Missional Communities have developed and formed new practice and understanding which is of value to the church but within Browning's model new practice comes through the process of practical reasoning, not through the faithful living of the community.

This leads to the second problem, how Browning understands the process of practical theology. He draws on the hermeneutics of Gadamer³⁰¹ and the 'revised correlational approach' of David Tracy to set up a critical dialogue between Christian normative texts and tradition on one side and contemporary cultural experiences and practices on the other. The process begins with a 'thick description' of the situation, exploring the theory-laden practice and forming questions from them. This moves to historical theology where these questions are asked of the normative

²⁹⁹ Ballard and Pritchard, 59.

³⁰⁰ Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 7.

³⁰¹ Gadamer began by asking how to distinguish between 'cultural sciences' such as history, philosophy, psychology and sociology which study intentional human subjects, from the 'natural sciences' which study objects. He suggests that in the cultural sciences emptying yourself of assumptions and biases is both unhelpful and impossible. Instead he suggests that understanding is a dialogue between the researcher's prejudices and commitments (which he calls fore-understandings and fore-concepts) and the subject being studied. Browning summarises; 'Understanding is a moral conversation shaped throughout by practical concerns about application that emerge from our current situation.' (Browning, 39.) Gadamer talks about the 'fusion of horizons' where the horizon of meaning of the practical questions of the researcher, our fore-understandings, meets with the horizon of meaning given by the texts.

texts of the community. Systematic theology, through the fusion of horizons of the first two tasks, produces a fresh interpretation for this concrete situation and an apologetic move to defend this position. Finally, there is the strategic step, where fresh interpretation is used to determine the practices of the community such as worship, pastoral care and education. The problem with this account is that the normative task takes place in this critical correlation which occurs away from the community itself under the assumption that new understanding and practice is formed through this process of reasoning and then applied. This is not the drive of this research which is interested in how SMCs have developed and adapted their practices in the light of the issues they face, rather than focused on developing renewed practice itself. Graham, to whom I shall turn later, is critical of Browning's approach. She accuses Browning of giving moral reasoning privilege over all other Christian activities. She outlines two problems; firstly, the values in value laden practices are seen to be ethical precepts rather than an 'embodiment of theological disclosure'³⁰² and secondly, his account of practical wisdom is Christians thinking their way to being good. This account 'ignores the extent to which individuals, and believing/practising communities, are shaped by symbolic, embodied and non-rational action; dreams, worship, touch, stories, silence, space, movement and sacrament'.³⁰³

The second model suggested by Ballard and Pritchard is that of praxis. They describe it as coming out of a Marxist tradition and being the 'practical heart of liberation theology'.³⁰⁴ They also point to the 'pastoral cycle' as a model which takes practice seriously and sees theology 'as a resource at the disposal of the people of God in their quest for obedience'.³⁰⁵ The Pastoral Cycle has a similar pattern to Browning's four tasks; it is a cycle which begins with practice, then interpretation, then theological reflection and returns to develop renewed practice. Osmer describes the tasks as; the Descriptive-Empirical task, the Interpretive task, the Normative task and the Pragmatic Task.³⁰⁶ Again, a focus on practice fits well with the first sub-question, developing theological accounts of SMCs, however, the theological value is seen to emerge in the reflection and what is theologically normative is seen to develop out of that reflection. This theological reflection is again envisioned as taking place outside of the community rather than within the life of the community as the research questions suggest. This external reflection is not the intention of the pastoral cycle; Osmer seeks to embed the tasks in ministry calling them Priestly listening, Sagely wisdom, Prophetic Discernment and Servant Leadership respectively³⁰⁷

³⁰² Elaine Graham, 'Pastoral Theology: Therapy, Mission or Liberation?', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52, no. 04 (1999): 451.

³⁰³ Graham, 452.

³⁰⁴ Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society*, 71.

³⁰⁵ Ballard and Pritchard, 72.

³⁰⁶ Richard Robert Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008).

³⁰⁷ Osmer.

and Ballard and Pritchard attempt to locate the pastoral cycle in the theological reflection of the community, describing the stages as Experience, Exploration, Reflection, Action.³⁰⁸ Both see the pastoral cycle primarily as a tool to be used in the midst of ministry and secondarily as a tool for academic theology. This being the case it would make sense to see the pastoral cycle as an attempt to understand the processes within the SMCs rather than a model applied to the SMCs. However, I return to Graham's criticism of Browning; it doesn't do justice to the breadth and depth of the life of the community to think that it is only this type of theological reflection that shapes them, rather they are shaped by a multitude of practices. Despite the attempts to describe theology happening at all steps, the possibility of jumping between steps rather than completing a whole cycle and the importance of the cycle continuing or perhaps even being a spiral, the shape of theological reflection remains broadly within this hermeneutical model between practice on one hand and normative texts and traditions on the other. This is Anderson's problem with the pastoral cycle; 'practice only has access to truth through theory'.³⁰⁹

The Theological Action Research (TAR) model proposed by Cameron et al.³¹⁰ adapts the pastoral cycle and draws the community into the task of theological reflection. They describe how the theological reflection step in the pastoral cycle is often problematic; 'students can work attentively with experience and are keen to suggest renewed action, but the making of genuine and transformative connections with theology can often be rather weak and superficial'.³¹¹ TAR is a partnership between the researchers from outside the church/organisation and participants inside the church/organisation. It is a collaborative process carried out through conversations between these insider and outsider research teams. Epistemologically it rejects the privileging of the knowledge of the professional researchers and privileges instead the practical knowledge of the practitioners.³¹² In attempting to see the whole process as theological they introduce a tool which they call the 'four voices of theology'. These voices are the theologies present in the practices of the group (the operant), the theologies present in the articulation of beliefs by the group (the espoused), the scriptures, creeds and teachings which hold authority for the group (the normative), and academic theology (the formal). These are not four distinct voices and there is obvious overlap between them.

This idea of theological voices helps to understand how the beliefs, practices, understandings and structures of the SMCs can be understood as theological. The conversation that takes place is not what creates theology but brings these theologies into conversation. It

³⁰⁸ Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society*, 85–86.

³⁰⁹ Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 17.

³¹⁰ Cameron et al., *Talking about God in Practice*.

³¹¹ Cameron et al., 28.

³¹² Cameron et al., 36–39.

recognises the value of the academic theologian (the formal voice) but allows the voices of the community (the operant and espoused) to be prioritized. Their intention is to develop a conversation which begins to recognise the gaps and discrepancies between the voices. Many models of practical theology have an imagined conversational method but what is particularly striking about the TAR methodology is that an actual conversation is convened. In using both 'insiders' and 'outsiders' the research seeks to overcome the limitations of either and sees the conversation as key to this. The academic voice is most likely to be located in the outsider team and is seen to bring a particular academic articulation of faith. It both challenges and draws attention to other possibilities and offers particular modes of reflection on and articulation of espoused theology. Within the framework there is a normative voice, the theological authority named by the group, which might be the creeds, official church teaching, scripture, or 'orthopraxy'. In naming the normative voice, the normative task is not foreshortened. They state 'the forms of theology articulated by practices have a critical role in informing and forming both formal and, ultimately, normative theologies'.³¹³ The challenge then is not just from the formal and normative to the espoused and operant voices, but works the other way too where the espoused and operant question and challenge the formal and normative voices. Normative accounts are therefore seen to be developed in the midst of this conversation. The *Four Voices* approach attempts to overcome the problem of the pastoral cycle by identifying the four voices at all stages of the research and including them in the development of normative theology. This is a promising framework in developing a conversational approach to studying SMCs and language and structure to talk about the SMCs as theological but there remains a question of whether normative theology is simply one of the voices or whether it also becomes the goal of the conversation.

The third model Ballard and Pritchard suggest is the Habitus model, and here I will engage with the work of Elaine Graham. Graham uses feminist theology, gender studies and political theology to help shape a practical theology which takes seriously the challenges of postmodernity. She sums up her approach to practical theology;

In more postmodern versions of practical theology, practice itself is the primary medium of truth, but this is not simply to reduce the nature of God or God-talk to human action. Instead, it is to argue that by fixing their attention on the goodness of God, Christians shape their performances and 'practice what they preach' as words are enacted in faithful action. It is essentially a 'virtuous circle' from practice to theology to practice.³¹⁴

³¹³ Cameron et al., 56.

³¹⁴ Elaine Graham, 'The Virtuous Circle: Religion and the Practices of Happiness', in *The Practices of Happiness: Political Economy, Religion and Wellbeing*, ed. Elaine Graham, John. R. Atherton, and Ian Steedman, vol. 132 (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 231.

Being a postmodern account she challenges any account of knowledge, truth and value as unmediated revelation and instead locates them in practice;

Principles of truth and value are not to be conceived as transcendent eternal realities, but as provisional - yet binding - strategies of normative action and community within which shared commitments might be negotiated and put to work. Ethics and politics therefore become processes and practices, rather than applications of metaphysical ideals.³¹⁵

Drawing on Browning's ideas of practical wisdom she seeks to extend them. Practical wisdom, made up of the narratives and traditions of the community, is shaped by questions and challenges of faith, and also shapes those very practices. Practical wisdom is theological in nature and informs and is informed by faithful and transformative practice. 'This understanding of theology as practised, however, refuses such a division between theory and practice, and insists that God is both immanent and transcendent: apprehended in, but never reducible to, human experience'.³¹⁶ This account of practical theology gives a good framework for the first two sub-questions; the practices, beliefs, structures and understanding of the SMCs are part of their practical wisdom shaped through faithful practice and that this practical wisdom is what shapes them in seeking to sustain their social action. As suggested in the discussion of the pastoral cycle, the process of theological reflection is continually present in all aspects of the SMC as they seek to live faithfully.

Graham's call is to move away from a theology developed through abstracted reasoning and to see theology as embodied in human practices. Initially this seems to be an abandonment of Christian norms and doctrines, particularly given the priority of a feminist understanding of liberation and alterity in judging the norms embodied in practice. However, on closer inspection this is not an attempt to cut loose Christian practice from tradition and scripture altogether, but a suspicion that tradition and interpretation of scripture has come about in an androcentric society and needs to be revisited and reinterpreted. Tradition then is not the 'absolute application of fixed claims to truth'³¹⁷ but embodied in the practices of faith communities drawing on Bourdieu's idea of habitus.³¹⁸ She states 'It is therefore in the engagement between the horizons of past, present and future that a true apprehension of tradition emerges, not through the distillation of eternal principles independent of the living reality'.³¹⁹ All her examples describe how feminist Christian practices reinterpret scripture and tradition and challenge androcentric and patriarchal interpretations. Right living, orthopraxis, is of primary importance and allows communities to live out their truth claims with openness. This means authentic living is understood as faithfulness to feminist principles of liberation and openness to the other.

³¹⁵ Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 6.

³¹⁶ Graham, 'The Virtuous Circle', 231.

³¹⁷ Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 198–99.

³¹⁸ Graham, 102–3.

³¹⁹ Graham, 198.

The faith community therefore derives its epistemic authority from praxis; and theology, as the reflection and systemization of such practical wisdom is rendered as thinking (itself a form of practice) rather than thought (a form of abstraction and disengagement).³²⁰

For Graham practice is itself normative and truth, tradition and theological norms should be primarily understood as embodied in the life of communities. It is through seeking to live faithfully in the midst of the tensions and problems of life that new normative practices develop. This means that rather than developing normative theology through a dialogue between practice and theory, practice is itself normative and the practical theologian's job is to describe and systematise these normative practices. For Graham theology is the reflection and systemization of practical wisdom. This helpfully separates two processes which become blurred in the pastoral cycle and are significant for the study of SMCs. The first process is the SMC seeking to live faithfully to God in its context and in doing so develops a practical wisdom. The second process is that of the practical theologian who describes and systematizes this practical wisdom to develop a theological account. It is the practice, and not the account that is normative; by describing and systematizing this practical wisdom can be brought into the wider conversation within theology.

Despite Graham's insistence that the feminist principles of liberation and otherness are authentically derived, they look very much like external norms. This is a recurring problem; as much as theology can be negotiated from within, some element of external measure is always present and there is always need for judgement on what faithfulness looks like. Graham's argument is that these feminist norms are contextual and situated but there appears to be no reason why other external accounts could not be introduced under the same principle; that they are not fixed claims to truth but have developed in a context in response to the challenges of life. What this means is that there is space in Graham's practical theology for external accounts as long as they too are open to questioning and reinterpretation. These external accounts, be they theological, doctrinal, philosophical, or social scientific, are given space to question and be questioned in return. They do not have a final say, but all help to develop faithful practice.

Having discussed the theological nature of practice it is important also to discuss how God is understood within the research. My first sub question talks about SMCs' practices, beliefs, structures and understanding in relation to God. These references to God need to be understood within the practical theology framework. The Four Voices model named practice as the place of encounter with God.³²¹ Graham suggests that God is apprehended in human experience and that

³²⁰ Graham, 199.

³²¹ Cameron et al., *Talking about God in Practice*, 23.

it is possible to see 'Glimpses of Divine activity amidst human practice'.³²² Fowler, after discussing a number of different approaches to practical theology, raises the following concern;

There is no clear affirmation or examination of the priority and objectivity of divine initiative as the ground, the tendency, and the backdrop of situations of contemporary interpretation and response. This omission results in the subtle but dangerous tendency to abstract from actual contexts and issues of praxis, and from risky correlative existential-historical interpretations of the dialectic of divine and human action, and to focus instead on meta-theoretical issues of method.³²³

His concern is that 'divine initiative' is side-lined in practical theology along with a focus on the actual context and practice and that without this basis it avoids the hardest but perhaps most interesting questions. According to Fowler

The way forward in practical theology involves placing more radical trust in God's self-disclosure and promises found in our traditions of revelation; more radical investment in concrete, existential-social-historical action in anticipation of the in-breaking Commonwealth of Love; and a more radical engagement, through present action and prayer, to make us partners in God's work of creation, governance, and liberation/redemption.³²⁴

Anderson's Christopraxis is helpful in navigating these difficulties. Christopraxis is the ongoing action of Christ in the world. This means that theological action and practice is around interpreting Christopraxis and that Christian practice should be seen as an attempt to discern and participate in Christopraxis.³²⁵ Christian practices which are themselves theological not only point to the beliefs of the people engaged in them, but also give glimpses of Christ at work in creation. Discerning meaning and theology in the practices and discussions of those practices then gives theological insights in the work of Christ in the world. It is not theological because it articulates belief, but theological because it attempts to articulate something about God and his action in the world. For Anderson, ministry both precedes and produces theology; it is God's own ministry of revelation and reconciliation that determines our ministry and theology.

Theological activity must emerge out of ministry and for the sake of ministry if it is to be in accordance with the divine modality. The 'practice' of ministry, then, is not only the appropriate context for doing theological thinking; it is itself intrinsically a theological activity.³²⁶

³²² Elaine Graham, 'Practical Theology as Transforming Practice', in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, ed. James Woodward and Stephen Pattison (Oxford; Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 113.

³²³ James W. Fowler, 'Practical Theology and Theological Education: Some Models and Questions', *Theology Today* 42, no. 1 (1 April 1985): 56.

³²⁴ Fowler, 58.

³²⁵ Root also develops Christopraxis, as a way of attending to divine action. See Andrew Root, *Christopraxis: A Practical Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014).

³²⁶ Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 62.

All ministry is God's ministry. 'The church has no existence apart from being called into being through this ministry and equipped for it by the gift of the Holy Spirit'.³²⁷ He describes the fall as humans trying to establish truth which is accessible without the divine Word. Because of this 'the ministry of the church necessarily involves theological reflection and a correction of its own inevitable tendencies to create ministry for its own justification'.³²⁸

Christopraxis relates to Armstrong's insight into Ordinary Theology³²⁹. 'Ordinary believers are those who are most open to the influences of a changing world, because they live in it and reflect their faith in it and are therefore the best placed theologians to judge and respond to such changes'.³³⁰ His analogy of ordinary theologians as signal processors is one from engineering; just as radio waves once received need to be processed by a signal processor to be understood, so the work of the Holy Spirit is best discerned and interpreted by the ordinary theologian. 'Ordinary theologians are those best placed to notice when theology goes astray at a fundamental level, because they are the community of practice and belief where theology is accepted or rejected, tested and judged'.³³¹ This insight that practice is the place where theological reflection is best situated and the Holy Spirit is best discerned is key to the approach taken in this thesis.

Exploring Lived Theology

The approach to practical theology in this thesis, which I am calling lived theology, draws on the insights of Graham, the Four Voices and Christopraxis.³³² Lived theology takes as its foundation Graham's insight that practice is normative and that theology is embodied in the practice and understanding of lived faith, which Graham describes as practical wisdom. It also carries the conviction that God is present and active in the world and that faithful Christian living is an ongoing attempt to discern and participate in God's action. The job of the practical theologian is to describe and analyse this lived theology. The accounts of lived theology are a construction and should not be confused with the lived theology itself, nor should it be confused with a normative account of theology. It is not attempting to create an entity, but rather a snapshot of lived practice, understanding, belief and structure. This snapshot is not normative, but is offered back to the communities to inform their own discernment following the conviction that practice is both the appropriate context for theological discernment and is intrinsically theological. The practical

³²⁷ Anderson, 63.

³²⁸ Anderson, 73.

³²⁹ Astley, *Ordinary Theology*.

³³⁰ Michael Armstrong, 'Ordinary Theologians as Signal Processors of the Spirit', in *Exploring Ordinary Theology: Everyday Christian Believing and the Church*, ed. Jeff Astley and Leslie J Francis (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 67.

³³¹ Armstrong, 67.

³³² Ward uses Lived Theology to describe a particular approach to practical theology which recognises the need to talk about theology as it is lived in communities. See Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*. Marsh et al use Lived Theology to describe a broader project around theology and theological education focused on understanding God's presence in human experience. See Marsh, Slade, and Azaransky, *Lived Theology*.

theologian is not then attempting to carry out theological reflection on behalf of the community, or to facilitate such a discussion as in the Four Voices approach, but rather is attempting to provide a view into that community for further theological reflection through the life of the community.

In this account, SMCs are seen to be developing their practices in the light of attempting to discern what God is doing through their ministry. This is not done in isolation, as Graham discusses, these groups draw on and develop a practical wisdom which embodies the traditions, practices and texts of the Christian faith and their past experience. This practical wisdom informs and develops practices and at the same time is formed and shaped by the encounters of seeking to live faithfully – encounters with the divine, with others and the challenges and joys which are part of living. This approach to practical theology is an attempt to construct an account of this faithful Christian living with the purpose of providing insight and raw materials for further discernment within the communities themselves.

This approach fits within a wider discipline of critical ethnography. Through the kind of ethnographic work described here, and through engagement within a particular field, the accounts are critiqued in such a way as to suggest renewed theory and practice.³³³ These critiques take many forms, for example sociological, anthropological and theological, but in all cases challenge and critique the ethnographic accounts through those particular lenses. In this thesis those critical lenses are theological, drawing on the theological critique of charismatic evangelicalism developed in chapter 1 and through engagement with missiology sources. This draws on the type of critique envisaged by theological action research through the four voices of theology, where normative and formal accounts are drawn in both to critique and be critiqued by the operant and espoused. By developing a critique of charismatic evangelicalism in chapter 1 and then exploring this in chapter 4 in relation to the SMCs there is also exploration of where the weaknesses, blind spots and theological naivety of charismatic evangelicalism might continue to be present. In chapter 5 missiology sources bring further critique around the themes raised in chapters 1 and 4.

This thesis breaks this theological approach into three steps. The first is to describe the lived theology of the SMCs. The second is to bring in other theological accounts to analyse this lived theology and to draw out particular insights in relation to sustaining social action. The third

³³³ See for example: Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Pillars of Faith: American Congregations and Their Partners* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2005); Simon Coleman and Rosalind I. J Hackett, *The Anthropology of Global Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2015); Graeme Fancourt, *Brand New Church?: The Church and the Postmodern Condition*. (New York : SPCK, 2013); Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption : Theology for a Worldly Church: Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Meredith B McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Cary, UNITED KINGDOM: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2008); Scharen, *Public Worship and Public Work*; Strhan, *Aliens and Strangers?*

is to explore how the accounts of lived theology and the other theological accounts bring insights and challenges to each other which can be offered back to these groups for further reflection.

Developing Theological Descriptions of SMCs

Developing theological accounts of SMCs is primarily attempting to answer the first sub question; *What are the practices, beliefs, structures and understanding of the SMCs of being Christian community and engaging in social action in relation to God and their Christian faith?*

The role of the practical theologian at this stage is one of ordered description of the practices, beliefs, structures and understanding of the SMCs. The risk of this descriptive process is that the practical theologian focuses on their own interpretation of the situation and the voice of the community itself can be lost. The insight from Ordinary Theology about the importance of how people articulate their faith is helpful. Astley presents Ordinary Theology as 'an appropriate term for the content, pattern and processes of ordinary people's articulation of their religious understanding'.³³⁴ He is wary of interpreting people's beliefs purely through practice due to the variety of ways practices can be understood and encourages a focus on speech. However, he is also clear that this does not mean necessarily accepting their own interpretation of their beliefs.³³⁵

At times Graham's account seems to suggest that normative practice just appears in the midst of seeking to be faithful and practical wisdom is detached from any theological reflection in the community. This could have the effect of marginalising the voices of the community while attempting to describe the practical wisdom of the community. In both Ordinary Theology and the Four Voices³³⁶ approach priority is given to the communities' own articulation of their lived theology. It assumes, with good reason, that there is ongoing discernment and reflection around faithfulness within the communities. This does not mean that their articulation of what is happening perfectly aligns with what is actually happening, nor does it rule out the possibility of practices having developed within the group which they do subconsciously and have not reflected on but in light of the model laid out, prioritising my interpretation of the SMCs' practices over their own would be problematic. The models of Ordinary Theology and the Four Voices also help to show how these accounts are theological. They have developed as contextual and situated accounts of reflection and participation in God's action. They, therefore, in their words and action articulate a lived theology which is based in a theological commitment; seeking to be faithful to God.

Analysing Lived Theology

³³⁴ Astley, *Ordinary Theology*, 56.

³³⁵ Astley, 5–6 and 121.

³³⁶ See p54

The analysis of the theological descriptions of the SMCs revolves around the second and third sub-questions. Through this process of analysis key practices, beliefs, understandings and structures are drawn out of the descriptions of lived theology and discussed. Pattison suggests a model of theological reflection as a critical conversation between ‘the Christian Tradition, the students’ own faith presuppositions and a particular contemporary situation.’³³⁷ Through this conversation new insights emerge from which new understandings and practices develop. I will develop this model of critical conversation, drawing from the models already discussed, which will enable the accounts of the SMCs to be brought into conversation with the theological accounts in chapter 1 which have influenced and shaped them.

Earlier, I rejected a correlation approach where practice is brought into conversation with theology to produce new strategies and renewed practice. The pastoral cycle sees theological reflection as a particular part of the process and the Four Voices model convenes a conversation between insiders and outsiders to develop theological reflection. Lived theology sees the place of theological reflection as within the life of the community and includes conversation but also the practices of worship, service, hospitality, etc. of the community. For this reason, the analysis of lived theology is seen as separate from but complementary to the theological reflection of the community.

This analysis, however, is understood as a conversation between the descriptions of lived theology of the SMCs and other theological accounts; in this case the accounts developed in Chapter 1. Making a distinction between normative practice and theological accounts seeks to avoid foreclosure of knowledge. Graham suggests;

A communitarian and practice-based *phronēsis* could resist the foreclosure of introspection by regarding its truth-claims as forms of *situated knowledge*. Critical evaluation of such practical reasoning would deploy the critical dialogue of disclosure/foreclosure: in the spirit of situated knowledges and hermeneutics, the encounter with the ‘Other’ presupposes a larger reality beyond the present and immediate. It thus represents an ethical imperative towards communication, generosity and dialogue: all marks of good conversation. A recognition of the factors which engender difference also exposes the extent to which our own fixity of self-possession is actually contingent upon relationality and finitude.³³⁸

If this encounter with ‘other’ was considered to be other theological accounts then the type of conversation that Graham is suggesting is the framework proposed for this research.

The second sub-question is; *How do these practices, beliefs, structures and their understandings help them sustain social action given the struggles found in the account of charismatic evangelicalism?*

³³⁷ Stephen Pattison, ‘Some Straw for the Bricks: A Basic Introduction to Theological Reflection’, in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, ed. James Woodward and Stephen Pattison (Oxford ; Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 136.

³³⁸ Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 206.

The account of charismatic evangelicalism was developed through a study of descriptions and understanding of practice as articulated in the writings and books of key authors and leaders within charismatic evangelicalism as well as formal theological evaluations. In the language of the Four Voices model it draws insights from all four voices; the operant, espoused, normative and formal, to develop a lived theological account of charismatic evangelicalism. For this reason it is a theological account developed out of theological reflection from both inside and outside the movement. Following Graham's lead these theological accounts are seen as 'enacted, contextual and provisional'³³⁹ containing insights which can bring challenge and insight to the accounts of SMCs. By bringing the accounts of the SMCs and the account of charismatic evangelicalism together a conversation is developed around the way the SMCs both continue to engage in Charismatic practice and the ways which they extend it. The practices and understandings of the SMCs are illuminated, refining the theological analysis of the SMCs and drawing out the insights of their lived theology. In this way new practices, beliefs, structures and understandings are revealed and the question of how they sustain their social action can be tackled. It is also brought into conversation with some of the criticisms of charismatic evangelicalism, particularly exploring how the potential weaknesses and blind spots of charismatic evangelicalism have been carried forward into the SMCs.

It is important to emphasise that this account of lived theology is not normative and the practical theologian is not passing final judgement on the lived theology of these communities. For this reason the beliefs and understandings are described as belonging to these particular communities and individuals rather than as universal. This is not to see the understanding of faith and God as a construct of the community, in fact this is categorically not what I am suggesting, but rather it leaves any judgement of where God is glimpsed to the discernment of the communities in the midst of practice. Neither is this to say the conversation is not robust nor that lived theology should not be challenged, only that discernment of God and renewed practice should be primarily encouraged within the communities through practice.

The final chapter seeks to answer the third sub question; *How do SMCs challenge and extend the theological accounts of charismatic evangelicalism, the Emerging Missional Movement and the Evangelical Turn to Social Action?* This chapter extends this conversation further to draw in the accounts of the Evangelical Turn to Social Action and the account of the Emerging Missional Movement. Again, both draw on accounts of practice and understanding from those within the movements and of theological evaluations of the movements to develop a picture of the practice and practical wisdom they embody. Through a critical conversation these accounts are able to question and challenge each other. There is a tension within the conversational model, identified

³³⁹ Graham, 204.

earlier in the chapter, to both keep these conversations theological and at the same time keep them focused on practice; neither getting caught purely talking about new practice without reference to theology nor discussing theological frameworks with no reference to practice. Graham writes that 'Without the horizon of divine wisdom, such practice becomes self-referential or reducible to ethics'.³⁴⁰ The 'horizon of divine wisdom' that Graham talks about cannot be accessed as a particular doctrinal framework; rather all theological accounts are seen as contextual and reflect a particular practical wisdom. Access to divine wisdom comes both through practice and through the challenge of the 'other'. Through a conversation the problem of practice becoming self-referential is overcome as other accounts are brought in to challenge, sharpen and extend each other in developing faithful practice. The challenging and questioning from the other accounts pushes each of these accounts to explore further these questions within their own practices. This resists any attempt to solve problems with outside norms, but allows theological accounts to challenge and extend each other.

The aim of this third step is that the conversation reveals how practices and understandings are already developing in response to the questions raised from within the SMCs and within the other three accounts. Similarly, I will allow the theological account of SMCs to challenge and question the other three accounts, encouraging them to revisit their own practices in light of the questions raised. Graham states that 'Habitue is thus conceived as the residuum of past actions, a deposit of past knowledge and practice, but which is always available as the raw material for creative agency, or "regulated improvisations"'.³⁴¹ These descriptions of lived theology are a way to bring to light this practical wisdom and provide new and different perspectives. What is offered back to the SMCs is not a revised theological structure for them to adopt but an account of lived theology and a series of suggestions of practices and understanding from within the SMCs which appear promising for further creative reflection and improvisation. Through these accounts of lived theology, the practical wisdom which seems second nature to the SMCs can be articulated and named as something of value which can enable the SMCs to reflect on and develop their practice. This is the key difference from a correlation approach; rather than bringing in a framework from outside the context, here practices already present within the SMCs, which may already provide a way forward, are brought to consciousness and offered back to the SMC as the raw material from which to build. This is because the SMCs, through the practical wisdom which they embody, are best placed to understand and develop these contextual practices. Similarly challenges from the account of the SMCs to the other accounts does not take the form of models or structures to adopt but questions and practices which offer new means of seeing the world and new resources of improvisation and creativity. Ultimately the

³⁴⁰ Graham, 'The Virtuous Circle', 231.

³⁴¹ Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 102–3.

aim of this thesis is to describe and account for understanding and practice which has been transformative and to encourage the SMCs in their own context and with their own understanding to take these challenges and to draw on their practical wisdom in response.

In summary, the approach used is focused around developing and analysing accounts of lived theology. Starting with Graham's understanding of practice as normative and drawing in the accounts of the Four Voices and Ordinary Theology to articulate more clearly the voices of the SMCs, theological descriptions of the SMCs can be developed and these descriptions brought into a critical conversation with the accounts of charismatic evangelicalism, the Emerging Missional Movement and the Evangelical Turn to Social Action to bring insights from lived practice.

Qualitative Methodology

From the framework of practical theology outlined above, I have demonstrated a commitment to developing accounts of lived theology. These accounts will then be drawn into a conversation with other accounts of lived theology, drawn from Chapter 1, to further probe, question and develop them. As described in the practical theology framework, to develop these theological accounts of SMCs a qualitative approach is required. A qualitative approach was chosen over a quantitative approach due to the focus of the research questions; the research is inductive, seeking to develop a picture of the lived theology of SMCs, rather than deductive, testing a particular theory or hypothesis.

The relationship between theology and social sciences and the methods associated with them is not a simple one. Van der Ven describes two common approaches, an inter-disciplinary approach and an intra-disciplinary approach.³⁴² An inter-disciplinary approach works on a model of cooperation between theology and social sciences where practical theology is seen to belong to both disciplines. The problem with this model is the question of whether theology or social science is the judge of the practical theology assertions. An intra-disciplinary approach sees practical theology as a theological discipline and the move goes from theology to social sciences. Social science methods are used to answer theological questions. Here the problem is reversed, raising the question of whether theology should be given a privileged status. Swinton points out that social science methods are not necessarily interested in the same things as theology and come with a very different epistemology. His suggestion is that the methods are sanctified, that is brought in to serve a particular theological perspective, and that the relationship between theology and social sciences should be seen as hospitality; theology needs to welcome, understand, listen to and engage in conversation with the social sciences but it does not need to

³⁴² Johannes A. Van Der Ven and J. A. van der Ven, 'Practical Theology: From Applied to Empirical Theology', *Journal of Empirical Theology* 1, no. 1 (1 January 1988): 17–18.

pretend that it believes their view of the world is correct.³⁴³ This hospitality approach is adopted for this research where qualitative methods are welcomed, valued and engaged with in the service of theology.

Creswell describes five different approaches to qualitative research; Narrative Research, Phenomenology, Grounded Theory, Ethnography and Case Study. He describes them as similar in their process of research; all begin with a research problem from which research questions are developed, data is collected and analysed and a report is written. Similarly, they all draw on interviews, observations and documents to collect the data. For Creswell the fundamental difference between the approaches is in the objectives of the studies – what they are trying to accomplish. Narrative research is for exploring the life of an individual, phenomenology for understanding ‘the essence of the experience’, Grounded Theory for theory building from field data, Ethnography for describing and interpreting patterns of the culture of a group, and Case Study for developing in depth description and analysis of a case.³⁴⁴ As revealed in the research questions, this research is focused on the developing theological accounts of the SMCs and their engagement in social action and exploring how they sustain that engagement. The Case Study approach is then most appropriate to this situation; each SMC can be treated as a case which is studied in its own right. Theological accounts of each SMC can be developed before any cross-case analysis is carried out.

The Case Study Approach

Yin defines a case study as ‘an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident’.³⁴⁵ For Yin, case study inquiry is used to explore situations where there are many variables and large amounts of potential data which could be collected and is particularly appropriate when answering why and how questions. Simons defines the case study as;

An in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a ‘real life’ context. It is research-based, inclusive of different methods and is evidence-led. The primary purpose is to generate in-depth understanding of a specific topic (as in a thesis), programme, policy, institution or system to generate knowledge and/or inform policy development, professional practice and civil or community action.³⁴⁶

³⁴³ John Swinton, ‘Where Is Your Church?’, in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Peter Ward (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2012), 89–92.

³⁴⁴ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 2nd ed.. (London: SAGE, 2007), 76–78.

³⁴⁵ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, Rev. ed.. (Newbury Park ; London: Sage, 1989), 13.

³⁴⁶ Helen Simons, *Case Study Research in Practice* (Los Angeles ; London: SAGE, 2009), 23.

She emphasises that case study research is not defined by the method, but is about using multiple methods to carry out an in-depth study of a particular phenomenon in its context. Ragin further clarifies that the 'case-oriented approach places cases, not variables, centre stage'.³⁴⁷ The cases shouldn't be dissolved into the variables that make them up with each variable studied individually, rather, each case should be studied in its own right before wider comparisons are made.

Studying how SMCs sustain their social action means I am particularly interested in their engagement with the wider community. Context will inevitably overlap with the phenomenon. Using a multiple-case study approach each of the four SMCs will be considered as their own case. It will be a holistic study looking at each SMC as a whole, rather than breaking down the study of SMCs into smaller subsets. Using multiple methods allows triangulation of data, where the different data is used to support, shed light on and question the other data sources. When drawing wider conclusions, rather than seeking to generalize the data from all the cases, as you might in a questionnaire, the extended case study method will be used, where each case is in dialogue with current theory and used to refute and extend the current theory.³⁴⁸ Within the practical theology framework this refuting and extending is seen as a dialogue between the different theological accounts, firstly between the accounts of SMCs and charismatic evangelicalism and later introducing the accounts of the Emerging-Missional Movement and the Evangelical Turn to Social Action. Another advantage of the case study is its flexibility to incorporate new data and other sources and its openness to surprise. This in turn means that the research questions must, at all times, be the driving force behind the research to avoid getting side-tracked. It also gives plenty of opportunities for participants to engage in the research. In the words of Simons;

It signals a potential shift in the power base of who controls knowledge and recognises the importance of co-constructing received reality through the relationships and joint understandings we create in the field.³⁴⁹

The Extended Case Study

Burawoy's extended case study encourages a more dialogical approach which is in keeping with the critical conversation that I described in the practical theology framework. He describes his approach by comparing it with other approaches and discussing how they understand generalization in relation to the micro and the macro. Ethnomethodology denies that there is a macro or general explanation and is only interested in the particular. The macro is purely a

³⁴⁷ Charles C Ragin and Howard S Becker, eds., *What Is a Case? : Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 5.

³⁴⁸ Michael Burawoy, *The Extended Case Method: Four Countries, Four Decades, Four Great Transformations, and One Theoretical Tradition* (Berkeley, Calif; London: University of California Press, 2009).

³⁴⁹ Helen Simons, *Case Study Research*, 23.

construct to enable social interaction. The interpretative case study collapses the micro and macro in the other direction; the particular gives an example of the general, so that the micro can be seen in the macro. The principle of Ground Theory is that as you piece together the micro you can build up the macro. Extended Case Study on the other hand looks for the forces of the macro which shape the micro. Generalization occurs in dialogue with theory by refuting and extending it. Eisenhardt, describes how a grounded theory approach to case study research 'is begun as close as possible to the ideal of no theory under consideration and no hypotheses to test'.³⁵⁰ This is a completely different starting point from the extended case study. Burawoy explains;

In this version of ethnography we don't deliver our minds from preconceptions but clarify and problematize them; we don't accumulate data day after day only finally to code it and thereby infer theory at the end, as though no one else had thought of these matters before, but we continually engage theory with data, and theory with other theories.³⁵¹

The extended case study is easily adopted into the practical theology framework described. Each case produces a theological account of practical wisdom that can be put into dialogue with the other cases and other theological accounts. The theological accounts of each SMC disrupt and question charismatic evangelicalism and cause the account to be extended.

Criticisms of the Case Study Approach

There has been much criticism of the case study approach. However, a number of its greatest critics later became supporters of the approach (e.g. Campbell³⁵²). Flyvbjerg attempts to counter what he describes as 'five misunderstandings of the case study approach' in his paper addressing these criticisms of case study research. The five misunderstandings he lists are as follows;

(1) theoretical knowledge is more valuable than practical knowledge; (2) one cannot generalize from a single case, therefore, the single-case study cannot contribute to scientific development; (3) the case study is most useful for generating hypotheses, whereas other methods are more suitable for hypotheses testing and theory building; (4) the case study contains a bias toward verification; and (5) it is often difficult to summarize specific case studies.³⁵³

I will explore these points below in relation to the Extended Case Study method.

For Flyvbjerg, one of the key strengths of the case study is that it engages in human experience and provides context dependent knowledge. He asserts that expertise is not gained through just learning rules and procedures, but through experience of similar cases where an

³⁵⁰ Kathleen M. Eisenhardt, 'Building Theories from Case Study Research', *The Academy of Management Review* 14, no. 4 (1 October 1989): 536.

³⁵¹ Burawoy, *The Extended Case Method*, 15.

³⁵² D. T. Campbell, 'III. "Degrees of Freedom" and the Case Study', *Comparative Political Studies* 8, no. 2 (1975): 178–193.

³⁵³ Bent Flyvbjerg, 'Five Misunderstandings about Case-Study Research', *Qualitative Inquiry* 12, no. 2 (2006): 219.

intuition beyond that of following rules is gained and that all human knowledge is context dependent to a certain degree.³⁵⁴ The case study approach allows an engagement with the nuances of reality, not knowledge building from afar.³⁵⁵ He concludes 'Social science has not succeeded in producing general, context-independent theory and, thus, has in the final instance nothing else to offer than concrete, context-dependent knowledge'.³⁵⁶ Stake compares propositional knowledge and tacit knowledge. Propositional knowledge is spoken, through both good reason and gossip, tacit knowledge is 'all that is remembered somehow, minus that which is remembered in the form of words, symbols, or other rhetorical forms. It is that which permits us to recognize faces, to comprehend metaphors, and to "know ourselves"'.³⁵⁷ Where the case study may not be the best for studying propositional knowledge, it is ideal for studying tacit knowledge; the primary goal of the case study is not theoretical knowledge, but practical knowledge, or in the language adopted in this thesis, practical wisdom.

The next question is about generalization. If all knowledge is context dependent this immediately challenges the positivist understanding of generalization. Burawoy questions the place of the positivist approach in social science. He summarises positive science as one which seeks general rules and laws, one which looks to distance the observer from the case being studied so that they can't affect it, and which ultimately is seeking to produce a map of a fixed external world. He claims that positive science has four key principles; **Against reactivity** – the researcher 'must avoid affecting and thus distorting the worlds they study', **Reliability** – have careful criteria for choosing data, **Replicability** – following the same procedure the results could be reproduced by any researcher, and **Representativeness** – the specific must be representative of the whole.³⁵⁸ But as already discussed Burawoy is also critical of the interpretative model where the particular is seen as the key to understanding the general but in so doing removes the distinction between them. His reflexive method 'elevates dialogue as its defining principle and intersubjectivity between participant and observer as its premise'.³⁵⁹

Burawoy's principles for reflexive science, each countering one of the four principles of positive science, are; **Intervention** – that the presence of the researcher causes disruptions which give useful insights, **Process** – there are 'multiple knowledges' to be understood, (discursive and non-discursive, tacit and propositional) which are aggregated into a social process, **Structuration** – the situation cannot be frozen to allow it to be replicated, it is dynamic, 'simultaneously shaped

³⁵⁴ Flyvbjerg, 221.

³⁵⁵ Flyvbjerg, 223.

³⁵⁶ Flyvbjerg, 223.

³⁵⁷ Robert E. Stake, 'The Case Study Method in Social Inquiry', *Educational Researcher* 7, no. 2 (February 1978): 6.

³⁵⁸ Burawoy, *The Extended Case Method*, 31–32.

³⁵⁹ Burawoy, 39.

by and shaping an external field of forces³⁶⁰, and **Reconstruction** - rather than building theory from nothing, current theory is developed by looking for refutations. Burawoy summarises the approach;

Dialogue is the unifying principle of reflexive science, which is dialogical in each of its four dimensions. It calls for intervention of the observer in the life of the participant; it demands analysis of interaction within social situations; it uncovers processes in a relationship of mutual determination with external social forces; and it regards theory as emerging not only in dialogue between participant and observer but also among observers now viewed as participants in a scientific community.³⁶¹

Instead of seeking generalisation, the extended case method seeks refutations to current theory and then to extend the theory to take account of the specific cases. As Burawoy puts it 'We need first the courage of our convictions, then the courage to challenge our convictions, and finally the imagination to sustain our courage with theoretical reconstruction'.³⁶² The key to the extended case study is the dialogue between researcher, participants, context and current theory. This mirrors the conversations which have been set up in the practical theology framework, developing conversations which take current practice and place it in conversation with other theological accounts; theory is not seen as separate from practice but part of what has shaped the practical wisdom of the community.

The final criticism of the case study is that of the potential for bias and particularly as Flyvbjerg calls it 'a bias towards verification'. The susceptibility of research towards bias is a problem within all research methods, particularly in social sciences, and is countered through the rigorous use of the method employed. Flyvbjerg points out that most researchers' experience of the case study approach is it tends to disprove their theories more than it proves them.³⁶³ The extended case study method, rather than minimizing bias sees it as something to be taken into the field openly, allowing the case studies to challenge it. Reflexivity of the researcher is therefore vital to the integrity of the research.

Reflexivity

According to Swinton reflexivity is a 'process of critical self-reflection carried out by the researcher throughout the research process that enables her to monitor and respond to her contribution to the proceedings'.³⁶⁴ Describing the positivist approach as a 'myth of objectivity' Swinton presents two types of reflexivity, Personal Reflexivity and Epistemological Reflexivity. The first explores how the researcher's beliefs, experiences, interests and presence impact the research. The second reflects on how the design of the study might limit its findings. Swinton

³⁶⁰ Burawoy, 42.

³⁶¹ Burawoy, 43.

³⁶² Burawoy, 53.

³⁶³ Flyvbjerg, 'Five Misunderstandings about Case-Study Research', 235.

³⁶⁴ John Swinton, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM, 2006), 59.

describes research as co-creation; it is not simply describing what is happening but part of the creation of data. For this reason the research must reflect on their part in the creation of the data. Scharen suggests that without cultivating self-awareness during the research, the researcher risks using the participants to his own ends, 'violating those from whom we seek to learn'.³⁶⁵ He warns that without good self-reflection the research doesn't actually attend to what is going on and instead simply confirms assumptions and doesn't hold the researcher accountable to their place in the research.

One of the key issues in this research is the nature of 'insider' research. In the introduction I sought to locate myself both in the formulation of the research topic and in relation to SMCs. This is part of the ongoing reflexivity within the research. Hockey suggests the disadvantages of insider research are being 'too familiar' with the research context.³⁶⁶ Taken-for-granted assumptions can then blind the researcher to these things as interesting and important for research. The insider does not have the 'entry shock' of the outsider where new and strange patterns are instantly recognizable. The insider may be excluded from certain kinds of information by the participant because of their a priori interests and they miss out on being nurtured and socialized by the participants. One element that Hockey does not spell out, but is important, is the risk of the insider over-identifying with the communities and losing any critical voice. Despite these problems Hockey points out that there are advantages. Avoiding 'entry shock' may be seen as a positive, freeing the researcher from a potential obstacle to research. Prior knowledge also allows the researcher to fit into social patterns more easily. The insider may find research permission easier to obtain and Hockey reports that many find the insider status means the participant sees them as more trustworthy and may divulge more information. Finally, the insider is also at an advantage in understanding the culturally specific language of the setting. The advantages do not automatically cancel out the problems and Hockey states 'The main problem once access is gained by the insider researcher is, simply put, to make the familiar strange; to maintain enough distance so as to ensure that the analytical half of the insider/outsider coin operates effectively'.³⁶⁷ Warner reflects on the tension of being both an insider due to having been part of the phenomena being researched and being an outsider by coming in as a researcher;

³⁶⁵ Christian Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen, *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics* (London: Continuum, 2011), 20.

³⁶⁶ John Hockey, 'Research Methods: Researching Peers and Familiar Settings', *Research Papers in Education* 8, no. 2 (1 June 1993): 202–11.

³⁶⁷ Hockey, 208.

The reflexive process requires the insider to harness the benefits of privileged access and familiarity with subcultural language games, in tandem with critical reflection, the dialectic of observation and participation functioning in a mutually transformative iteration.³⁶⁸

Similarly Hellawell suggests that 'insider' and 'outsider' should not be considered as two separate states but as a continuum which is related to the participant-observer continuum I will explore below.³⁶⁹ I will reflect on my insider-outside status later in the chapter.

Qualitative Methods

The Case Study approach uses triangulation of a number of different elements to build a picture of the cases being studied. Dealing with each SMC as its own case the Case Study approach will be used to develop theological accounts of each SMC. The qualitative approaches I used were participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of written documents of the SMC such as blogs, websites, and vision documents.

Participant-Observation

The focus of this research is on the relationship between belief and practice in social engagement of the communities. This, of course, means asking the members of the communities about their beliefs and practices, but as I have already discussed, there may well be a difference between what people say and what they do; a difference between their espoused and operant theologies. Participant observation gives the best opportunity for these differences and discrepancies to be explored. Becker and Geer state;

By participant observation we mean that method in which the observer participates in the daily life of the people under study, either openly in the role of researcher or covertly in some disguised role, observing things that happen, listening to what is said, and questioning people, over some length of time.³⁷⁰

Bernard puts it more simply; 'It involves getting close to people and making them feel comfortable enough with your presence so that you can observe and record information about their lives'.³⁷¹ He gives five reasons for using participant observation; (1) you can collect all kinds of data that would not necessarily be available to you through another method; (2) it reduces the problem of reactivity, that is how people might change their behaviour based on researchers being present; (3) it helps to develop sensible questions for interviews or surveys; (4) it gives the researcher an intuitive understanding of what is going on; (5) many research problems can only

³⁶⁸ Warner, 'Fissured Resurgence', 40.

³⁶⁹ David Hellawell, 'Inside-Out: Analysis of the Insider-Outsider Concept as a Heuristic Device to Develop Reflexivity in Students Doing Qualitative Research', *Teaching in Higher Education* 11, no. 4 (1 October 2006): 488.

³⁷⁰ Howard S. Becker and Blanche Geer, 'Participant Observation and Interviewing: A Comparison', *Human Organization* 16, no. 3 (1957): 28.

³⁷¹ H. Russell Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, 4th ed.. (Lanham, Md; Oxford: AltaMira, 2006), 342.

be understood through participant observation.³⁷² Scott and Usher suggest a couple of other reasons for using participation in research. Most simply, it is a good way to gain access to the site being studied by offering something in return. Secondly, it allows direct experience of the actions under investigation and access to the meaning the participants give to their actions.³⁷³

Scharen sees participant-observation as vital for studying the church. Highlighting Healy's concern that ideal ecclesiologies can occlude the actual practices of the church, he calls for studies of the church which take account of 'actual bodies'. Drawing on Bourdieu's idea of habitus he describes the importance of learning 'from the body'.³⁷⁴ Through participant observation the researcher learns through their own body by trying to become part of the group, not just observation of others, and, he suggests, helps to avoid preconceived ecclesiologies obscuring the observation.

Another important consideration is how the observation will be carried out. Scott compares rigid systems of observations with more flexible ones³⁷⁵. A rigid system would have a pre-coded list of possible observation which are then recorded when they happen, perhaps even at regular intervals, whereas in a more flexible system the researcher judges what is important in the moment. This has the advantage of not prejudging what kind of data is going to be observed, allows the possibility to record any data and can be led by ongoing interpretation of the data recorded. The disadvantages are that due to the vast amount of data available to the participant-observer, it is possible that a great deal of data might be missed. In this research a more flexible approach was used and reflexivity and keeping the research questions central helped me to focus on the relevant data.

Semi-Structured Interview

Cohen describes the interview as 'a flexible tool for data collection, enabling multi-sensory channels to be used: verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard'.³⁷⁶ He describes four kinds of interviews; structured interviews where the content is decided in advance; unstructured interviews where the interviewer has freedom and flexibility to take the conversation where they like; non-directive interviews where the interviewee directs the conversation with the interviewer only asking points of clarification, and focused interviews where the interviewer plays a more

³⁷² Bernard, 354–56.

³⁷³ David Scott, *Researching Education: Data, Methods and Theory in Educational Enquiry*, 2nd ed.. (London: Continuum, 2011), 105–8.

³⁷⁴ Christian Scharen, 'Ecclesiology "From the Body"', in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Pete Ward (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2012), 66–68.

³⁷⁵ David Scott, *Researching Education*, 109–12.

³⁷⁶ Louis Cohen, *Research Methods in Education*, 5th ed.. (London ; New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2000), 349.

active role.³⁷⁷ Bryman describes a semi-structured interview which is somewhere in between a structured and unstructured interview. Here a list of questions guides the interview with flexibility for the interviewer to ask the questions in a different order and to ask additional questions to pursue interesting lines of discussion.³⁷⁸ In this research a semi-structured approach was chosen with particular questions in mind, drawn out of the participant observation and research question, but with the flexibility to explore interesting topics introduced by the participant and to allow the flow through those questions to feel natural and conversational.³⁷⁹

The analysis of interview data is not an exact science but a process of interpretation; 'less a completely accurate representation (as in the numerical, positivist tradition) but more of a reflexive, reactive interaction between the researcher and the decontextualized data.'³⁸⁰ Miles and Huberman give thirteen tactics for generating meaning from transcribed interview data.³⁸¹ This provides a useful collection of techniques to probe the data which can be used in the analysis of other data as well.

There are many things for the researcher to be aware of when interviewing. Within the interview the power relationship between the interviewer and interviewee are most obvious. Bernard talks about 'response effects' where there are measurable differences in interview data based on the environment, the interviewer and the interviewee.³⁸² He gives various examples including 'that middle-class interviewers got more politically conservative answers in general from lower-class respondents than did lower-class interviewers'.³⁸³ Then there is the 'deference effect' where people tell you what they think you want to know.³⁸⁴ This is hard to avoid but an awareness of the effect can allow the possibility for the interviewer to probe further to uncover the problem. Bernard also suggests that the way questions are asked can make a difference to the kinds of response. There is also the 'expectancy effect' where the expectancy of the interviewer can shape the response of the interviewee. This is different from the 'distortion effect' where the interviewer purely sees what they want to see and ignores what is counter to their expectations. These are all things which need to be dealt with through reflexivity.

Documentation

The documentation from communities came from various sources. I drew together articles and information on websites, blog articles written by community members, any manuals or vision documents, news and prayer letters/emails, promotional leaflets and any liturgies or services.

³⁷⁷ Cohen, 353.

³⁷⁸ Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 4 edition (Oxford; New York: OUP Oxford, 2012), 471.

³⁷⁹ See Appendix for sample question sheet

³⁸⁰ Cohen, *Research Methods in Education*, 368.

³⁸¹ Matthew B. Miles, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*, 2nd ed.. (Thousand Oaks, Calif; London: Sage, 1994).

³⁸² Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology*, 239.

³⁸³ Bernard, 239.

³⁸⁴ Bernard, 241.

Prior warns that studying documents is a complicated process. They are 'situated products' in a context where not just the text, but the medium and form is also significant. They are social products playing a social role and so production and consumption and content are all important.³⁸⁵ Bryman warns against the assumption that documents reveal something of the underlying social reality themselves and could also be considered 'as a distinct level of reality in their own right'.³⁸⁶ It is important not just to consider those writing the documents, but also the purpose in writing them and the intended or anticipated recipient. Yin states that in Case Study research the primary purpose of documents is to 'corroborate and augment evidence from other sources'.³⁸⁷ In the case of this research the documentation is one part of a triangulation process and therefore the interest in the documents is primarily about content, rather than the social use of such documents. Due to the nature of SMCs the documentation was limited; little information appeared to be recorded in formal documents. It is therefore important that the documentation is used primarily in this process of corroboration and triangulation and not as a starting point of analysis of the SMCs. Cohen et al provide a list of questions useful in the analysis of documentation to determine the context of the document, the writer of the document and the relationship between the researcher and the document.³⁸⁸ The analysis of the text of the documents was carried out as described below.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was carried out within the Case Study framework, and importantly within the Extended Case Study method of Burawoy. Within this framework I undertook a thematic analysis of the data through a process of coding into themes and subthemes before systematizing these themes to produce a theological account of each SMC. These accounts of lived theology could then be brought into conversation with the theological account of charismatic evangelicalism to further develop and refine them. In developing a thematic analysis Ryan and Bernard suggest looking for repetitions, indigenous categories (local expressions used in an unfamiliar way), metaphors and analogies, transitions, similarities and differences, linguistic connectors, missing data, and theory-related material.³⁸⁹ Bryman suggests one of the issues with a thematic analysis, is unlike other strategies of coding, it is not associated with a particular heritage of research or a particular series of techniques.³⁹⁰ Coding provides a way of beginning to systematize the data to

³⁸⁵ Lindsay Prior, *Using Documents in Social Research* (Los Angeles, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 2011), 26.

³⁸⁶ Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 554.

³⁸⁷ Yin, *Case Study Research*, 103.

³⁸⁸ Cohen, *Research Methods in Education*, 202.

³⁸⁹ Gery W. Ryan and H. Russell Bernard, 'Techniques to Identify Themes', *Field Methods* 15, no. 1 (1 February 2003): 85–109.

³⁹⁰ Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 578.

develop the theological accounts of each SMC. Coding has its problems which need to be kept in mind; principally that by coding the data it can become stripped of its context and fragmented.³⁹¹

Hahn describes four steps of coding and compares them to panning for gold; level one removes a large amount of the dirt that will not contain gold – this is rough coding, identifying the data that contains interesting material; level two begins to wash the lighter sand out leaving the heavier material including the gold – the level one codes are then coded themselves to further refine the data; level three is the patient swirling and observing where the gold is identified and removed – a refining of the codes finding convergence between them; finally, the level four is a theoretical step identifying where the gold has come from - related to theory building for grounded theory.³⁹² I used the first three levels of coding suggested by Hahn and followed his models for data analysis using Microsoft Word.

Fieldwork Account

Finding the SMCs and gaining Access

There were a number of criteria for identifying SMCs for the research. They needed to be gathering as a community on a regular basis to engage in some form of specific social action and to participate together in Christian practices of worship/prayer/teaching etc. I wasn't interested in aspirational groups, or groups who gathered together for worship but engaged in social action separately as volunteers in different projects. They needed to be relatively new groups, within the last ten to fifteen years to be part of or influenced by the recent trend towards community within the Emerging Missional Movement. At the same time they needed to be reasonably well-established to have developed practices, structures and beliefs and to have the longevity to be active during the duration of the research. Finally, on a very practical note they needed to be reasonably accessible to me from where I live in Reading.

To identify suitable groups I used personal contacts and put out a request through the Church Mission Society's Missional Communities Facebook page. Having gathered a list of ten SMCs which fitted the above criteria I had informal conversations with the leaders of the communities. For these SMCs the leaders are the gatekeepers of the community. A gatekeeper, in ethnography, is the initial contact for the group and the person who is able to give permission for the research and to introduce the researcher to other participants.³⁹³ Two of the communities I contacted did not have sufficient social action engagement on a regular basis and three communities proved difficult to contact and stay in touch with. Of the five that were appropriate,

³⁹¹ Bryman, 578.

³⁹² Christopher Hahn, *Doing Qualitative Research Using Your Computer: A Practical Guide* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008), 6–7.

³⁹³ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*, 125.

one was further away and so I settled on the four for my research.³⁹⁴ I sent out a letter to each gatekeeper to request permission. Lynwood SMC were the most communicative and enthusiastic. They formed differently from the other SMCs; they began with the social action and found that community formed around it and all the members continued to attend another church regularly. I was therefore hesitant to start with Lynwood, but given their enthusiasm and the fact that they were the most active over the summer months it made sense to begin with them. Because of the difference between them and other communities I always bore in mind that they might be quite different from other SMCs. The second SMC I visited was Airbury and the third was Hilchester. At this point it became clear that the fourth group I had selected had ceased to be an SMC and were not responding to my emails or phone calls. I therefore returned to the fifth group, which I had decided against due to distance. After a conversation with the gatekeepers I decided that I could plan 3 visits, one on a Sunday where everyone would be present, and 2 further visits both spread over two days to coincide with a variety of different activities and meetings which would allow me to gather the same number of hours of participant observation as in the other SMCs and overcome the problem of travel. Being the fourth community I was visiting I was also more aware of and tuned into the things I was looking for in the SMC, and having previous connections with the SMC I was more aware of their history and structure.

My Role as Researcher

As discussed earlier in the chapter, a key area of reflexivity that was required in this research was an awareness of my insider-outside status. As discussed in the introduction I have been involved in a couple of Small Missional Communities with connections to 24-7 Prayer. This knowledge and experience of these communities gives me 'insider status' to a certain extent. However, I have not been a member of any of the SMCs in this research. I had been friends with a few members of the Lynwood community for a number of years before beginning the research and had spent time with them on a number of occasions. Although I was known to a number of members of the community, to the vast majority I was a stranger. Knowledge of the working patterns and structures of the community was advantageous in being able to participate in the community, but much of the nurturing by participants suggested by Hockey still took place.³⁹⁵ The second SMC, Airbury, was a community I was unaware of before I began my research; in this sense I was an outsider with no prior relationships with the community. However, my insider status was noted by the community when they commented on how easily I fitted in and told me this was in contrast to other people who had visited them. The 'fitting in' helped them to trust me and include me in what they were doing. Hilchester was another community that I had no contact with before the research. Again, this meant in one sense I was an outsider and a number of

³⁹⁴ All communities and participants were given pseudonyms – see p83

³⁹⁵ Hockey, 'Research Methods', 203.

people in the group were suspicious of me; one girl in particular asked a number of questions about my involvement and experience of missional communities and asked that I did not take notes about the things she shared with the group. However, the overall pattern, language ethos of the group was familiar to me and again I was able to build trust quickly. Eastbark were a group I had visited and done some teaching for in the past. A number of the group were friends of mine and one member had previously been part of a missional community that I had also been part of. However, there had been many changes in the patterns and activities of the SMC since I had visited and to many I was a stranger.

Another key issue is around how the researcher represents those they are researching. This is recognising that the researcher is more than just another person within the research; they have made decisions about what and who to study in the planning, what to record and who to interview during the field work and the nature and focus of the analysis.³⁹⁶ I have given myself, as the practical theologian, a key role in describing the lived theology of the SMCs. As discussed above the description of lived theology must be seen as a construction and not confused with the actual practice itself. In attempting to be a faithful description, emphasis has been placed on careful and attentive listening, not just in the participant observation and interviews, but also informally through further interaction with individuals from the communities as themes have emerged during the analysis. As well as attempting to locate myself within the descriptions in chapter 4 plenty of space is also given to the voice of the community in the form of longer interview quotes. Further to this, in the analysis attention has been given to where the analysis challenges the self-understanding of the SMCs, particularly in regard to charismatic evangelicalism. There are also questions of how far the researcher should go in theorizing what is said by participants.³⁹⁷ This has been a key consideration in this research, and for this reason I have stopped short of developing a theology of SMCs, but have tried to observe and offer insights which are offered back to the SMCs.

Participant Observations

Using Patton's five continua³⁹⁸ I will summarize the shape of participant observation in this research. The first continuum is between full participant and onlooker. The nature of this research means that being a full participant was not achievable but I attempted to participate in

³⁹⁶ Stefanos Mantzoukas, 'Issues of Representation within Qualitative Inquiry', *Qualitative Health Research* 14, no. 7 (1 September 2004): 1000.

³⁹⁷ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*, 180.

³⁹⁸ Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, 2nd ed.. (Newbury Park, Calif. ; London: Sage, 1990., n.d.), 217.

all activities I was invited to, while avoiding taking a particular lead in any area. The second continuum describes how others understand the role of the researcher ranging from overt to covert. This research was overt where all participants were aware of my role and research. All participants whom I had regular contact with were asked to sign a consent form. In any situation where this was impractical the gatekeeper would introduce me or I would introduce myself. For this reason I could not expect to be seen in the same way as other members of the group. Of course, as discussed in the Extended Case Study discussion this can actually be helpful in data collection through the ideas of intervention. The third continuum is how others understand the purpose of the research being carried out between full explanation and deception of all involved. As far as possible I tried to explain fully what I was doing and was happy to answer any questions people had. Some still misunderstood the exact purpose of my research despite the information I gave them and the conversations I had with them. The fourth continuum is the duration of the research between single observation to long term observations and the fifth describes the focus of the research between a narrow focus of a single element to a broad focus giving a holistic view of the whole programme/community etc. I visited the groups regularly over a three month period, with the aim of participating in a variety of different activities and interacting with a wide group of participants. Although I was focused on how the groups sustained their social action I was aware that all elements of the SMC could feed into this and so took a holistic approach to the participant observation.

Taking field notes, I followed Bryman's advice of writing brief notes as quickly as possible, writing up full field notes by the end of the day, including any personal reflection and keeping a note of any analytic thoughts.³⁹⁹ He advises that although the researcher may begin by noting everything down, this is not sustainable and gradually they will develop a narrower focus on the emerging themes of their research, which is what I did.⁴⁰⁰ Taking notes during the participant observation was not always easy; pulling out a notebook felt rather intrusive. In many cases I found opportunities to take myself away for a few minutes to make initial notes or could type a few words into a mobile phone to jog my memory later. Exactly what to observe was also not straight-forward. Patton gives an indication of all the things that a researcher might observe; the physical environment, the social environment, planned activities and formal interactions, informal interactions and unplanned activities, the native language (in this case particular words and phrases which carry meaning for the group), nonverbal communication, unobtrusive indicators (for example where objects are more worn out from use), programmes and documents, and importantly observing what does not happen.⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁹ Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 447.

⁴⁰⁰ Bryman, 449.

⁴⁰¹ Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, chap. 6.

In each community the pattern of my visits and the duration of each visit was dependent on the activities in the group. Lynwood had a clear pattern to their week, meeting on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday between 10am and 3pm. I was invited to participate in all the activities within those days. I aimed to visit at least weekly for three months, made sure that I attended on all three days of the week during the research and attempted to engage in as many of the activities as possible. Due to the nature of their work, delivering furniture, I was often asked to go on the van to help with lifting and carrying. In total I spent 65 hours engaged in participant observation at Lynwood, the most time I spent at any of the communities partly due to them being together for 5 hours each time they met. Airbury's main activity was their 'drop in' on a Monday and Friday morning between 10am and 12 midday. Before the drop-in they would meet to pray but I was never invited to participate in that time. Again, I aimed to attend at least one activity each week. Because their social action revolves around the drop-in, much of the participant observation was joining in conversations at the drop-in. I spent 36 hours with Airbury. Hilchester's main meeting was on a Monday evening, beginning with a meal and developing into a time of sung worship with some form of reflection and conversation and time for prayer. Again, aiming to attend one activity per week I participated in all the different types of meetings from leadership meetings, prayer meetings, playing football, the Christmas party and the weekly gathering. I spent 30 hours with Hilchester. I approached the visits to Eastbark differently, as described earlier. Rather than visits to the community lasting a couple of hours, here I had the opportunity to spend a longer period of time. I attended their Sunday gathering and meal which happens once a month focused on those who have officially committed to the community. I attended community meals which are open to anyone to attend and seen as the primary focus of community life. I also attended prayer meetings, planning meetings for the afterschool café they run and spent time in the prayer room. At the afterschool café I was careful to follow ethical approval guidelines only helping before and after and only receiving information about event itself from the team, second hand. I spent 32 hours with Eastbark.

Semi Structured Interviews

The interviews took place towards the end of the participant observation. This meant that, firstly, appropriate participants could be chosen through the participant observation. It also meant that the data collected through participant observation helped to shape the questions being asked. Participants for the interviews were taken from those most active in the SMCs and chosen in conversation with the gatekeepers. Every interview was recorded and then transcribed with verbal, non-verbal and paralinguistic information recorded where possible. The interview itself is a form of co-construction between interviewer and interviewee and therefore reflexivity is required by the interviewer on their part in the analysis. A full summary of the interviews for each community is contained in the appendix.

In Lynwood eight people were interviewed. All the interviewees were keen to talk apart from William and Nig who seemed very uncomfortable and gave very short answers. Ben, in particular, commented that he had been nervous about the interview but had very much enjoyed it in the end. In Airbury all five interviewees were keen to participate. Logistically, it was easy to fit the interviews in after visits. Margaret and Will, in particular, seemed very happy to have had the opportunity to reflect on their involvement and to share their stories. Interview questions were improved from the ones I used in Lynwood and set more of a standard pattern for the remaining SMCs. Because everyone involved in the Hilchester was working it became increasingly difficult to find suitable times around observation visits. In the end I found a day when everyone was free and conducted all five interviews on the same day. In Eastbark I interviewed six people and again people were keen to engage. The interview with David was different from all of my other interviews. I asked my first question and he then continued to talk, with me asking a couple of questions of clarification as he went. Despite this, he covered the broad topics of my interview questions. Interviews took a similar pattern to Airbury and Hilchester following a similar selection of questions.

Document Study

The number of documents available varied between the four SMCs. Airbury had the most extensive collection, with Claire having written a regular Blog since the community began and the presence of a fairly extensive website. Eastbark had the least, with very little having been documented. The documents gathered for each community are summarized in the appendix.

Data Analysis

The Coding was carried out on each case study separately; a within-case analysis. Coding attempts to identify themes within each case to help to understand and systematize the complexity of the case. Only once this process is done can the second stage of analysis which identifies common themes between the cases begin; the cross-case analysis.⁴⁰² Level one coding categorized the data around key areas which began to emerge from the data collection and early coding. These were 'God's Agency', 'Christian Practices', 'Relationship to Church', 'Relating to Wider Society' and 'Community'. Having gathered these broad themes I sought to draw out specific themes through level two coding. Level three coding was undertaken to bring the themes back together drawing them into particular topics under the level 1 code headings. These level 3 codes then provided the subheadings for the Theological Accounts of each SMC. Ryan and Bernard describe a similar process where data was categorized and then coded; beginning with broad themes and gradually prioritizing and narrowing the focus.⁴⁰³ During the process of analysis and coding, themes from 'being yourself' were drawn into the other sections. This first stage of

⁴⁰² John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*, 75.

⁴⁰³ Ryan and Bernard, 'Techniques to Identify Themes', 95.

analysis developed the theological accounts of each SMC which were part of the process of faithful description of the practical wisdom of each community.

The second stage of analysis then drew these thick descriptions into conversation with each other and with the account of charismatic evangelicalism. Through a critical conversation between these different theological accounts following Burawoy's Extended Case Study method I developed an account of the lived theology of SMCs. The third stage of the analysis broadens the conversation further to discuss the practices and structures arising from the SMCs in response to tensions and problems faced and draws in the Emerging-Missional Movement and the Evangelical Turn to Social Action into the conversation.

Research Ethics

Finally, in this chapter I will turn to ethical considerations in this research. The reflexivity forms an important part of ethical research and certain considerations have already been discussed in the methodology. Here I will take the main sections of the Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association which are relevant to this research to discuss a number of other points.⁴⁰⁴

Relationships with research participants: Although it was hard to see any harm that may have been caused to participants in this research, it was still important to understand the relationships between researcher and participants and particularly to recognise disparities of power. These disparities of power were dealt with primarily through reflexivity during the data gathering and in the analysis of the research. As discussed in the Extended Case Study, the presence of the researcher is an intervention; this can mean interesting data is produced, but it also means there is a chance of causing disruption to the group, especially where many of these SMCs are small and relatively new. Again reflexivity formed an important part of being aware of this as did regular discussions with the gatekeepers.

All access to the communities was through discussion with the gatekeepers of the communities. At the first meeting with each SMC everyone was given an information sheet about the research and the opportunity to ask questions before being asked to sign a consent form.⁴⁰⁵ Participants could withdraw at any time, and any reference to them would have been removed from the participant-observation data, however no participant exercised this right. Others who came into contact with the group while the research was being conducted were made aware of my presence and research.

Covert research: None of the research carried out was covert and every effort was made to make sure everyone was aware of my presence and the purpose of my research.

⁴⁰⁴ 'The British Sociological Association', accessed 27 February 2014, <http://www.britsoc.co.uk/about/equality/statement-of-ethical-practice.aspx>.

⁴⁰⁵ These can be seen in Appendix 1

Anonymity, Privacy and Confidentiality: The groups have been given pseudonyms, as have other churches, charities or groups identified and the geographical data is generalized. For example Reading would have been described as a large town in the south of England. Participants have also been given pseudonyms to avoid identification. All data was stored in accordance with Kings College London and Durham University data protection policy including encryption of computer files and written documents being stored in a locked filing cabinet.

Obligations to sponsors and/or funders during the research process: This research is self-funded with The Bible Society paying my tuition fees for half of the duration of the research. They have requested a copy of the thesis, regular updates and a short presentation at their student researchers' conference but have had no further involvement in the shaping of the research. The hope is that this research will be of benefit to the SMCs who participated and to others as well. Through their involvement this research is able to contribute to academic discussion, giving the much-needed perspective of those actually involved in these communities. It provides further evidence of the theological thinking present in such communities and contributes to a wider discussion of the place of social action within the life of Christian communities. It also gave the opportunity for the SMCs to reflect on their own communities. A summary of the findings will be given to all the communities involved along with the opportunity to view the thesis if they wish.

Chapter 3: Descriptions of the Lived Theology of the Small Missional Communities

In this chapter, I will develop descriptions of the lived theology of the four SMCs focused around answering the first sub question;

What are the practices, beliefs, structures and understandings of the SMCs of being Christian community and engaging in social action in relation to God and their Christian faith?

These theological accounts are based on a lived theology approach where practice is seen as normative and to embody practical wisdom which can then be described theologically.⁴⁰⁶ Each account will begin with a brief history of each SMC and give a description of the community based on my participant observation. I will then give an account of the practices, beliefs, structures and understandings of each SMC. Through the process of data collection, transcription and early coding key themes began to emerge across the four SMCs. For example, each SMC discussed how they focused on relationships and building community and there were regular conversations about the relation to church and whether they were church. Through this process of analysis and coding, these key themes began to coalesce around the headings of Community, Relationship to Church, God's Agency, Christian Practices, and Relating to Wider Society. There were significant differences between the SMCs and these are accounted for within the subheadings used in the descriptions. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the SMCs and individuals. After introducing the SMCs the place name, e.g. Lynwood, will be used to identify the SMC through the rest of the thesis.

1. Lynwood Small Missional Community

Brief History

Lynwood SMC (from here on referred to as Lynwood) began out of a home group of the local evangelical Anglican Church. It was started by Alice after encouragement from her church home group leader. It is connected to Besom, a charity which encourages local projects revolving around enabling those who want to give to those in need, normally involving furniture and other household items. Besom operates out of Holy Trinity Brompton, a large Anglican church in London. Initially Alice was 'hung up on money'⁴⁰⁷ and how they were going to find a van but was told by the leader of Besom that, as a result, she wasn't ready. Alice recounts, 'He clearly knew it was God's plan and it would be God's timing and being hung up on those sorts of things was not the philosophy of Besom and it wasn't until I could lay those down that I would be ready'.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁶ See p61

⁴⁰⁷ Interview, Alice, Lynwood, Paragraph 3

⁴⁰⁸ Interview, Alice, Lynwood, Paragraph 3

The conversations continued and gradually more people in her home group became interested. Four of those original members of the home group remain part of the core team nine years later. Gradually through praying and making connections with the council and identifying different needs in the local area, things started to come together. 'Soap Powder Sunday' was a particularly key moment when they found out that a local women's refuge needed soap powder for the washing machines. They announced at church that they would be collecting soap powder the following Sunday for the hostel and ended up with a garage full of soap powder.⁴⁰⁹ They took this as a sign that people wanted to give and needed a means through which to do this. They started collecting items in their garages and sheds that they could give out to people in need. The provision of a van and a building and the money to pay the rent were seen as God's provision at the right time and they officially launched in March 2006.⁴¹⁰

Current Description

Lynwood is based out of an old scout hut at the far end of a car park. They meet on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays gathering at 10am and running until about 3pm. On a typical day there might be as many as fifteen people involved and during my three months visiting the community, I met 31 different people who were involved to some extent. Broadly I would split those involved into three groups. There are the core team and those who Tony describes as 'associates' who take responsibility for Lynwood and are the main leaders.⁴¹¹ There are those whom Lynwood would term as 'time-givers' but they often refer to themselves as volunteers who are involved for a variety of reasons and to a varying level of commitment, from those who turn up weekly to drive the van, to those who come when they can. They are generally middle class church-goers and many of them are retired. The third group is made up of people who might be classed as 'ex-clients' or 'more needy' for whom Lynwood gives them something to do and provides support.⁴¹² For some it provided a stepping stone back into employment.

My experience of a typical day at Lynwood would be as follows. Arriving at 10am sometimes the gate would be open and someone already inside and at other times I found myself arriving at the same time as whoever was opening up. The Hut is a reasonable size and every part of it is used. As you come through the front door there is an office, kitchen and toilet to the right and a large space to the left which most of the time is crammed full of furniture yet to be allocated and delivered.⁴¹³ Some of the furniture has name tags on and is waiting to be delivered to the appropriate recipients. Behind the furniture are a large number of shelves, stacked with food, clothes, bedding, towels, children's toys and small electrical items. Directly on the left is a

⁴⁰⁹ Interview, Alice, Lynwood, Paragraph 5

⁴¹⁰ Interview, Alice, Lynwood, Paragraphs 6-7

⁴¹¹ Interview, Tony, Lynwood, Paragraph 16

⁴¹² Interview, Tony, Lynwood, Paragraph 59

⁴¹³ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 5

large basket with items which have recently been donated which need organising. On the walls around the hut are various posters, bible verses and words such as 'love' and 'grace'.

People arrive and soon the kettle is on. Conversation begin normally around what has happened recently; good stories about people they have helped, difficult things that have happened along with the normal chit-chat of what people have been up to at the weekends etc.⁴¹⁴ Whoever is responsible for the days tasks, usually Alice but sometimes one of the other members of the core team, checks the days tasks and begins to allocate them. Most people have particular tasks which they enjoy doing; this might be sorting out clothes and food in the hut, driving the van and collecting and delivering the furniture, electrical testing, helping with the administration in the office or maintenance jobs around the site. One lady turns up to help prepare and tidy up after lunch.

These first twenty minutes or so can often be a little chaotic with people arriving, furniture being unloaded and loaded onto the van, items being gathered for delivery and people working out the day's itinerary. Someone normally boils the kettle and cups of tea and coffee are handed round. Alice usually has a clear idea what is happening, but when it's one of the others it can feel a little more disorganised with prayers such as 'Lord you've got us again, we're not sure what we're doing but please do your thing!'.⁴¹⁵ Generally there is a list of items to be delivered or collected prepared by those in the office the previous day. Once the items are on the van and it is decided who will be driving and delivering the furniture, everyone gathers and a short prayer is prayed for those going out on the van.⁴¹⁶ They pray for safety, for sensitivity towards what God is doing and for the people giving and receiving items. Often the person praying takes particular care to pray for each person on the list by name and if anything is known about them that is included in the prayer⁴¹⁷. This usually takes between a few seconds and a minute. Once the van is sent out everyone else gets on with their tasks for the morning. At this point someone is often in the kitchen preparing soup or bread for the lunch.⁴¹⁸ Others either retreat to the office or begin sorting out some of the recent donations.⁴¹⁹ When Tony is around he does electrical testing or glues furniture back together.⁴²⁰ Typically there will be a couple of people working in the office and up to five or six doing other tasks. Brian is often there. He is a retired lecturer who, after suffering from a heart attack, found the group when looking for somewhere to volunteer. He

⁴¹⁴ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraphs 67, 108-9, 142

⁴¹⁵ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 5

⁴¹⁶ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraphs 5, 36, 110, 128, 281, 292

⁴¹⁷ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 36

⁴¹⁸ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 18

⁴¹⁹ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 152

⁴²⁰ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraphs 53, 372

does the odd jobs around the hut, including painting, repairing and any other maintenance work that needs doing.⁴²¹

The tasks on the van usually consist of two or three collections or deliveries of items. When they arrive at the house, one of the team go to knock on the door making sure they know the name of the person they are visiting by double checking the day's list of jobs. They greet them by name and introduce themselves and the rest of the team. Depending on who is on the van depends on how much chatting and interaction there is with the givers and recipients. Rachel is always keen to engage in conversation and on both occasions when I was on the van with her she offered to pray for people. Bob is similarly keen to chat, although he doesn't tend to steer the conversation towards God and Christianity in the way Rachel does. Nick is much more task focused and although pleasant won't engage people in the same way. For a collection they need to decide whether they are going to take the item. This is something which everyone finds difficult, having to turn down things that are offered to them if they are not, what the group describes as, 'God's best'. This is a hot topic of discussion on the van and over lunch about how to turn things down, what to say and how to do it in a way that is not offensive.⁴²² On the whole Alice feels that people accept items of furniture too readily.

Deliveries are slightly different. They are normally to people who, for whatever reason, have very little. Many have recently been rehoused. During the time that I was visiting quite a few people had lost everything in the recent flooding that had occurred in the area and were in temporary accommodation. One or two were less thankful but on the whole people were delighted with what they received. The conversations with recipients were often around what else they needed. Sometimes members of the team would offer to drive back later with smaller items such as toasters or kettles.⁴²³ There was often a feeling of excitement after doing a delivery due to the reactions of those receiving. When asked, those delivering explained that these items had been donated by people from different churches or even that God had provided it for them because he loved them. These stories were readily shared with others and were of great encouragement to the whole community with comments like 'it makes it all worthwhile'.⁴²⁴

Sometime between 12.30 and 1 the van arrives back at the hut where lunch is being prepared. When the weather is nice enough they eat outside otherwise they eat inside squashed between the items of furniture. In fact on one occasion someone ended up with a tin of baked beans falling on his head from the shelves of stock behind but was fortunately unhurt.⁴²⁵ We all sit around one long table made up of two or three tables joined together. First someone says

⁴²¹ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 54

⁴²² Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraphs 145-8, 182, 202, 222, 247-8, 250, 301

⁴²³ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 323

⁴²⁴ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 384

⁴²⁵ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 21

grace before people tuck in to the spread which is before them. There is often soup, fresh bread, cheese, hams, quiche, pies and a whole multitude of other things which people have cooked specially, bought, or brought in as leftovers.⁴²⁶

It continues to strike me that the meal is the main focus of the day where everyone comes together. It is a lively time with most people participating.

Angela who comes every day to prepare and clean up the lunch is also good at remembering names and welcoming and greeting. During lunch someone turned up to drop some things off and rather than Alice jumping up to do it Angela dealt with it all. There were a few comments about how everyone turns up at lunch time. It's certainly popular. But as soon as someone turns up people immediately jump up to get people a chair and make some space at the table. Nancy who made the soup said she started making soup for 5 people as there weren't many people there but as more people turned up she kept having to bulk it out!⁴²⁷

There is plenty of humour, some affectionate teasing, and sharing both stories of what has been happening in the community and what has been happening in individuals' lives. The story of a number of the ladies taking their knickers to a Tom Jones concert was a particular moment of hilarity.⁴²⁸ The group have a bit of a reputation within the St Paul's Church as having good lunches. Far from playing down this reputation they very much enjoy it, both going along with the joke but also emphasizing the importance of eating together. When I asked Ben if I could interview him he told me the most important thing was the lunch and laughed.⁴²⁹ He went on to explain seriously that the lunch time is important because of the fellowship together. Lunch time is also the best time to see another important element in the life of Lynwood; their welcome and hospitality. People making space round the table and getting extra chairs, insisting people joined the lunch happened on numerous occasions while I was there. Another regular occurrence is celebrating birthdays. No one's birthday is missed and someone always seems to provide a cake and the opportunity to sing Happy Birthday.⁴³⁰ Lynwood is a fun place to be. There are laughs, jokes, good friendships and an openness and welcome which I found very attractive and drew me into the life of the community.

After lunch there a sudden change in pace as plates, food, tables and chairs all get cleared. A couple of ladies come in specifically to help with clearing up lunch and they disappear into the kitchen to clean and tidy.⁴³¹ The van is loaded with the afternoon deliveries and again those on the van are 'prayed out' by someone else. This 'praying out' of people is done every

⁴²⁶ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 22

⁴²⁷ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraphs 57-9

⁴²⁸ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 367

⁴²⁹ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 361

⁴³⁰ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraphs 96, 330

⁴³¹ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 96

time someone leaves the site, whether it's on the van, making a delivery in a car, taking things to the charity shop, heading to a meeting etc.⁴³²

The afternoon in the hut doesn't feel as busy with people leaving gradually over the afternoon, some to collect their children from school, or just to avoid the rush hour traffic. By about 3 o'clock most people have left and the van is back.

On a Monday 10-11am is the core team prayer meeting when the core team gather to pray about the work.⁴³³ This is also the time when decisions are made for the week and anything else is discussed, but the primary focus of the time is praying. This meeting is only for the core team who take responsibility both for the safe running of Lynwood and for regularly praying for it and all those involved. These prayer times usually begin with a time of sharing what has been going on particularly around some of the prayer requests and needs. They take it in turns to pray for different things. Although there is no particular pattern to the order of how things are prayed for, care is taken to make sure that everything is prayed for. The prayers are often in the form of requests for God to do things, whether that be to provide a particular item of furniture, heal someone from a particular illness, bring people with the particular skills they are lacking or more generally to be working in the lives of those involved in Lynwood. The prayer time often involves sharing pictures, words and Bible verses which have come to mind during the prayer time and are seen to be given by God. These are often taken as guidance of how to pray further or how to deal with the situations. These are explored later.

Community

(i) Family

Lynwood talk about themselves as 'family' and point to examples in the book of Acts. The relationships are seen as the core from which everything else comes. Sarah described Lynwood to me as 'the Lord's arms wide open [...] being in the arms of the Lord I would say.. In his family'.⁴³⁴ She likens it to the book of Acts and describes it as 'a place where everyone, you know we just, we want the best for everyone, what God's got for them'.⁴³⁵ She continues to make the connection between experiencing family and experiencing God's presence, saying that you just don't get the same sense of family in church.⁴³⁶ When I encouraged her to expand further she talked about her home group having that sense of family and also compared it to the sense of family they have when they go to the New Wine conference together.⁴³⁷

⁴³² Interview, Tony, Lynwood, Paragraph 65

⁴³³ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraphs 67, 192, 265, 332

⁴³⁴ Interview, Rachel, Lynwood, Paragraph 15

⁴³⁵ Interview, Rachel, Lynwood, Paragraph 17

⁴³⁶ Interview, Rachel, Lynwood, Paragraph 26

⁴³⁷ Interview, Rachel, Lynwood, Paragraphs 28-29

This family is most clearly expressed around the lunch table where the food is shared and people eat together. This allows stories of the day to be shared and people to know what is happening in the other parts of Lynwood. Sharing stories of what has happened gives an opportunity for everyone to get a bigger picture of what God is doing. They can see the miracles, the answers to prayer and all be encouraged together. It also allows people to share what is happening in their lives, the good and the difficult. These friendships went beyond the community and conversations at lunchtime often involved plan social activities. Tony points to the analogy of the church as a body in 1 Corinthians 12 and suggests eating together is where this practically happens.⁴³⁸ There is an impression that this sense of community just happened and that it almost came about by accident, but it is clear when talking to Alice that she was quite intentional about having lunch together and about building community.⁴³⁹

(ii) Being valued and loved

Lynwood has the tagline 'bless the giver' meaning their focus is on enabling individuals to give rather than meeting a particular need. 'It's about you, about your times, when you've got to give and what you'd like to do'.⁴⁴⁰ Rather than getting volunteers to fulfil a role the focus is on finding how people want to give. This gives a completely different focus, one which Alice hopes 'makes people feel valued' and 'loved as well as blessed'.⁴⁴¹ As Rachel expresses;

We want the best for everyone, what God's got for them and it's a bit like a greenhouse [...] People come in to help who are sometimes a bit broken, sometimes need a bit of confidence and it's a place where [...] they are fed and watered so they begin to grow and bloom and then quite often they are ready to move on into other things. ... and I feel that's what it's done for me, it's been a huge part of my Christian learning.⁴⁴²

Finding out how the individual wants to give is talked about in terms of them using their God-given gifts. Sarah describes how Lynwood 'uses a lot of skills that I have and it makes me feel also like I feel like it was God's intent to put me right here and to work on projects'.⁴⁴³ She goes on to say 'There's so many different aspects to a Lynwood. There's lots of ways you can help out so you're bound to find some way that fits your gifts'.⁴⁴⁴ Even if there are particular tasks that need doing, new people turning up will not be told what to do, but asked what their gifts are and what do they like doing. What is important is that the individual finds their place, enjoys participating and feels fulfilled.

Feeling fulfilled and having a sense of purpose is connected to being valued and loved.

This is often described in terms of feeling blessed. Sarah's experience of being a volunteer in

⁴³⁸ Interview, Tony, Lynwood, Paragraph 71

⁴³⁹ Interview, Alice, Lynwood, Paragraphs 8-13

⁴⁴⁰ Interview Alice, Lynwood, Paragraph 88

⁴⁴¹ Interview Alice, Lynwood, Paragraph 17

⁴⁴² Interview Rachel, Lynwood, Paragraph 17

⁴⁴³ Interview Sarah, Lynwood, Paragraph 18

⁴⁴⁴ Interview Sarah, Lynwood, Paragraph 56

other places was not very fulfilling and very different from her experience of Lynwood; 'it's the first place where I've given time where I've felt that the work is really worthwhile; I'm doing just what I want to do'.⁴⁴⁵ Others I talk to such as Ed, who is retired, tells me that it feels like something worthwhile to be involved in.⁴⁴⁶ Bob says he comes because he gets something out of it, mainly he enjoys driving the van. He tells me he wouldn't do it if he didn't enjoy it.⁴⁴⁷ Lynwood understand that people want this sense of fulfilment through the work and it is a focus of their work, not just a by-product.

Relationship to Church

I didn't meet anyone in Lynwood who told me it was church. Everyone involved was also involved in a local church. The church with the strongest relationship to Lynwood is the local Anglican Church, St Pauls, where a large number of those involved in Lynwood attend. There are strong links with other churches with time-givers coming from a local catholic church, a congregational church nearby, other Anglican churches in the area and a number of non-denominational charismatic churches. Lynwood see themselves as a bridge between churches and need and are focused on helping members of churches to give.⁴⁴⁸ The core team are, on the whole, positive about their relationship with St Paul's, talking about their commitment to pray for them, the positive relationship with the vicar and what Tony describes as the congregation's 'pride' at being associated with Lynwood.⁴⁴⁹ Rachel tells me that St Paul's have recently made Lynwood one of its mission partners and saying that it felt like proper recognition from the church.⁴⁵⁰ It is not all completely smooth and there is definitely a sense that they would like more individuals from St Paul's to get involved and there are some signs of tension around the spirituality of St Paul's.

Ben sees Lynwood as challenging the idea that church is about what is done on a Sunday. He describes being a Christian as 'seven day ministry'.⁴⁵¹ This is a recurring theme; 'Sunday Christians' are missing out. For example, Rachel prays that people 'wouldn't miss out by settling for church on Sunday' describing a picture of 'ivy growing up around people's legs while they sit in the pews and then a machete cutting the ivy down and releasing people to experience God'.⁴⁵²

God's Agency

(i) God's Work

In Lynwood they understand the work they are doing as God's work. This is most clearly seen in the prayers. At the core team prayer meeting Tony prays 'you own this work... As we go about

⁴⁴⁵ Interview Sarah, Lynwood, Paragraph 56

⁴⁴⁶ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 221

⁴⁴⁷ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 255

⁴⁴⁸ Interview, Alice, Lynwood, paragraph 19

⁴⁴⁹ Interview, Alice, Lynwood, Paragraphs 50, 52; Interview, Tony, Lynwood, Paragraphs 28-30; Interview, Ben, Lynwood, Paragraph 20

⁴⁵⁰ Interview, Rachel, Lynwood, Paragraph 48

⁴⁵¹ Interview, Ben, Lynwood, Paragraph 30

⁴⁵² Rachel's prayer at Core team prayers, Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 275

your business God, would we take your Spirit with us'.⁴⁵³ There is a constant emphasis in their prayer times that they would understand and follow God's plans and vision.⁴⁵⁴ Their expectation is that God's work is not some burdensome chore; it is exciting, fulfilling, life-giving and enjoyable. During one prayer time they used the metaphor of dancing with God and following his steps to describe the work; something enjoyable and fun rather than a list of tasks.⁴⁵⁵

One phrase that comes up a lot, both in prayer and conversation is 'God's timing'. They want to make sure that everything happens when God has planned it, not because of their own plans. They believe he knows and does what is best for the individual and the community. Sarah expresses how there isn't the same pressure as there is in other jobs because it is about God's timing and she's learnt about how to 'relax in God's work'.⁴⁵⁶ They get on with the task in hand but always trying to remember that it is 'God's timing' that decided what happens. This is how the community came about; it was only when Alice stopped worrying about money that things fell into place. They try not to push their own agenda but wait for things to come about in 'God's timing'. Rachel shares a story from her holiday about wanting to pray for a lady with a bad back, but rather than rush into it as she would have done before, she waited until the end of the holiday and when she did pray with the lady she opened up and shared all sort of personal things with her. Rachel was pleased she had waited for 'God's timing'.⁴⁵⁷ The emotional element is important; having peace and not worrying and the sense of being part of something that God is bringing about. One out-working of this is that they never ask for things or volunteers. If they have a need, they pray. They trust that God will provide the right people and the right items at the right time.

Just as following God's timing is important, so is doing things in 'God's strength' and not their own. A narrative which occurs regularly is; I tried to do it, it's was hard, I felt weighed down, suddenly I realised I was carrying a burden that was God's, I/we prayed, it felt lighter/freer etc. For example, this summary of a conversation with Rachel;

She realised she should be praying for someone more than she was on Friday, but that she thinks she picked it up as a burden and tried to do it in her own strength. She needed to let God take it over and do it in his strength because things shouldn't feel burdensome when they are for God.⁴⁵⁸

They describe how it takes practice to be God-oriented rather than task-oriented. Everyone is used to environment where it's about getting the job done but at Lynwood the expectation is that

⁴⁵³ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 81

⁴⁵⁴ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 419

⁴⁵⁵ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraphs 416-417

⁴⁵⁶ Interview, Sarah, Lynwood, Paragraph 34

⁴⁵⁷ Field Notes. Lynwood, Paragraphs 231-232,

⁴⁵⁸ Field Note, Lynwood, Paragraph 237

you are in tune with God and doing his will.⁴⁵⁹ Sarah tells me that in Lynwood when people ask how things are going they want to hear a story of what God is doing rather than measurable tasks that were completed.⁴⁶⁰ Doing things 'in your own strength' is not only seen as burdensome, but also as less effective. It is through relying on God that the work that's important gets done. This means there is a process of constant adjustment to God's will, through prayer, through discussion and encouragement with each other and through direct intervention by the Holy Spirit.

In many ways God is seen as the 'Good Boss'. He is in charge of the work, he knows when it needs to be done and will bring the right people to do it. He provides for their practical needs at the right time. He knows what people are capable of and helps them to balance the work with the other commitments and pressures of life. Sarah states 'If my family goes on holiday or I have to take some time off that's OK, God knows where I need to be'.⁴⁶¹

(ii) Experience God

Lynwood often talk about God as if he is part of the team. There is a feeling that miracles are just around the corner and an expectation that God is going to do something amazing today.

In Lynwood you can actually see, feel, and be part of the Lord God Almighty working – and that for me is spine-tingling, look [shows hair standing up on his arms and laughs] and to be part of that is actually quite mind- blowing. When you pray and something happens immediately, and it happens better than you'd imagined it's quite... yeah!⁴⁶²

Experience of God is central to the life of Lynwood. Rachel tells me she got involved in Lynwood soon after she became a Christian. She was reading about what God did in the Bible and seeing similar miracles when she was involved in Lynwood. It came as quite a shock to her that there were many in the church who had never seen the kind of miracles she had seen at Lynwood.⁴⁶³

Alice says that the reason she is still involved is 'The fact that we see God at work every day. I think he's so tangible here'.⁴⁶⁴ Similarly Ben says, 'You know, this is where we see God work'.⁴⁶⁵ Rachel in her interview describes how they 'see God at work, we see miracles every day we're here'.⁴⁶⁶ This is the narrative of Lynwood; being part of God's work and seeing Him at work.

According to Tony

It is so sad that all these Christian people that come to church on Sunday don't get a taste in their work environment how good God is. You see the Holy Spirit at work. Not just in the

⁴⁵⁹ Interview, Rachel, Lynwood, Paragraph 44,

⁴⁶⁰ Interview, Sarah, Lynwood, Paragraph 34

⁴⁶¹ Interview, Sarah, Lynwood, Paragraph 18

⁴⁶² Interview, Tony, Lynwood, Paragraph 4

⁴⁶³ Interview, Rachel, Lynwood, Paragraph 8

⁴⁶⁴ Interview, Alice, Lynwood, Paragraph 21

⁴⁶⁵ Interview, Ben, Lynwood, Paragraph 16

⁴⁶⁶ Interview, Rachel, Lynwood, Paragraph 52

day to day, but you actually see him work in people, you see him at work in prayer, you see him at work in the practical things of life. The mundane and the enormous.⁴⁶⁷

They see God at work in a variety of ways. They talk about seeing miracles. These normally revolve around God providing the right items at the right time. One story that is regularly told is how Alice accepted a massage table from someone. People questioned why she accepted it, but after being sat in the corner of the Hut for a while someone phoned up and said they needed a massage table for their child who had cystic fibrosis.⁴⁶⁸ Rachel told me another story of a lady who had been saving up for a green sofa but then had had the money stolen from her. They prayed for a green sofa on the Monday morning and by Tuesday they had three green sofas and by Thursday they had five and they ended up being able to offer the lady a choice of green sofas. She says 'it was like God was saying that if you pray... I will give it'.⁴⁶⁹

It is this experience of God which keeps them coming back. Tony says if he was encouraging someone to get involved he would say 'you want to see God at work? I'll show you God at work, if you have got the commitment and the eyes to see'.⁴⁷⁰ They tell me they wish others would get involved because of the blessings of experiencing God at work. Ben says 'I think it's sad that so many people, so many Christians don't have the privilege of seeing these sorts of miracles on a daily, weekly basis'.⁴⁷¹ He explains how in the last few months he's not been able to be so involved and he has really missed it. The narrative is that yes, of course God is present in Church on Sunday, but if you really want to see and experience God at work then come and join in at Lynwood during the week.

Christian Practices

(i) Prayer

According to Mary, Lynwood is centred on prayer.⁴⁷² Ben talks about it as 'prayer based'.⁴⁷³ For Lynwood, prayer is not just an important element, but the starting point of all they do. A testimony printed on their first newsletter captures the place of prayer in Lynwood.

If my summer at Lynwood taught me one thing, it was the absolute power of prayer. As part of the team, you end up praying 10 or 12 times a day...for the van as it goes out, for protection over fingers and toes, for opportunities to tell people what we do and why we do it, and overall, prayer for the things we need. Two days of seeing prayers being answered in such a visual & practical way was good for my faith, let alone a whole summer of it!⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁶⁷ Interview, Alice, Lynwood, Paragraph 23

⁴⁶⁸ Interview, Rachel, Lynwood, Paragraph 10

⁴⁶⁹ Interview, Rachel, Lynwood, paragraph 10

⁴⁷⁰ Interview, Tony, Lynwood, Paragraph 78

⁴⁷¹ Interview, Ben, Lynwood, Paragraph 18

⁴⁷² Interview, Mary, Lynwood, Paragraph 8

⁴⁷³ Interview, Ben, Lynwood, Paragraph 36

⁴⁷⁴ Testimony from News Letter 1, January 2008, Anonymous

Their core team meeting is principally a prayer meeting. In fact, they describe the core team's primary function as praying for the work of Lynwood. Tony explains, 'if you like the prayer and the business go together and we tried not to ever separate the two so that's the way it works. If you pray about it, it's going to get done'.⁴⁷⁵ Ben describes the work of Lynwood as 'prayer in action'.⁴⁷⁶ Prayer is the first thing they do; when they have requests for furniture or other items they pray; when they need more help or finances are a bit tight, they pray. They do not make appeals nor advertise. If they don't have the items, they pray and wait for God to provide them. Rachel, when explaining this to another time-giver describes how God taught her that lesson. The person needed bedding and she thought she could go and buy some, so she did, but when she got round there the person told her someone else had already given her some that morning. She said 'that was a real lesson to me that is was God's job to provide and my job to pray'.⁴⁷⁷ A physical sign of the importance of prayer to the group is that on the side of the Hut they have a purpose-built prayer room.

They really do pray for everyone who is leaving the site, whether on the van, walking to the charity shop, heading to a meeting or going to the tip. These are normally short prayers praying for safety, for sensitivity to what God is doing, for the task at hand and for the people they will be interacting with. Tony talks about it needing to remain a spiritual reality rather just a tradition explaining that it should not be just a mantra, but connect to what is actually going on.⁴⁷⁸

There is a lot of emphasis in prayer times on being aligned with God's plans, having the eyes and ears to sense what He is doing and experiencing his love and blessings. They see prayer as keeping them focused on God and in tune with what he is doing. Prayer keeps them focused on 'God's timing' and working 'in God's strength.' There are a lot of stories of how when things are becoming difficult it's often because they have not prioritized prayer. Sarah says 'I found that when we don't pray things don't seem to work the way... – it can be a little bit frustrating – when we do things fall into place.'⁴⁷⁹ Mary, similarly, describes how she prays before writing letters of thanks to people and is often amazed at what she has written.⁴⁸⁰

Prayer permeates every aspect of the SMC; praying when they've mislaid something, praying when the computers go down, praying when people are upset, whatever the need the first reaction at Lynwood is to pray. In the interviews people described how this habit of praying at Lynwood begins to permeate the rest of their lives as well.

⁴⁷⁵ Interview, Tony, Lynwood, Paragraph 18

⁴⁷⁶ Interview, Ben, Lynwood, Paragraph 39

⁴⁷⁷ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 402

⁴⁷⁸ Interview, Tony, Lynwood, Paragraph 66

⁴⁷⁹ Interview, Sarah, Lynwood, Paragraph 62

⁴⁸⁰ Interview, Mary, Lynwood, Paragraph 52

Praying for others is seen as a sign of caring and they regularly pray for each other's needs. The prayer room allows this prayer and support to happen without it getting in the way of the other business going on. At various points I experienced people stopping everything to pray for someone. Rachel was very moved when Brian offered to pray for her when she was heading off to the dentist as it was the first time he had done that.⁴⁸¹ If people have particular needs people will take time to pray with them. I asked Tony whether using everyone's names all the time is a conscious decision by the community. He told me that it was not but thought it was a result of regularly praying for everyone affecting 'your spiritual consciousness'.⁴⁸² What he seems to be implying is that the act of praying shapes how they see and interact inside and outside the community.

(ii) Nudges from God

One of the ways they feel God realigns them to his plan is through 'nudges'. This can be seen from my field notes during a core team prayer meeting;

Rachel prayed that we wouldn't be on auto pilot, that in everything we would follow Jesus' life. She prayed 'Lord nudge us if we do things in our own thinking' and asked that we would be like Paul [the Apostle] and be obedient to God's call, that we would be willing to divert if God calls us. She finished by praying we would be the hands and feet of Jesus.⁴⁸³

These nudges are understood as prompts from the Holy Spirit and come in different forms. I explored this in the interview with Alice in some depth from which the following excerpts are taken.

I can feel God. I can feel sometimes when we sit and we wait I just know his presence hovering – and sometimes that is a physical thing – so sometime hairs will all stand up on my arms – or sometime I want to get on my knees – sometime I just cry – but it's very very physical.....

It sounds a bit weird doesn't it? There's the slight trembling and when I get that I think I really have to pray for somebody and I need to know what it is and that's again asking 'what is it? Who is it?' And normally that happens when that person is there and you think 'OK, it's you. Let's go!' Sometimes as I'm walking round the hut, if I'm walking round and I'm praying about stuff that's in and where it's got to go I'll get a real sense [that] I've got to pray over a piece of furniture or something for God to reveal to me his plans for that and that can be very real – that can be like – I've got to stop here – 'where's this wardrobe going Lord?' And that's quite nice because I always do that on my own in the morning. You know when I come in and walk around – or at night – if there's loads of stuff I'll just pace and ask – and that will be like a 'Stop, this one' – I sounds like a raving lunatic sometimes [laughs]

⁴⁸¹ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 258

⁴⁸² Interview, Tony, Lynwood, Paragraph 45

⁴⁸³ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 356

How else do I feel his presence? Songs. Songs will come to my mind – and that’s probably thanksgiving- that’s a need to stop and praise.⁴⁸⁴

Rachel also describes these ‘nudges’ as a sense of needing to do something. She talks about how it took her a while to realise it was God nudging her but gradually she learnt.⁴⁸⁵ I notice that emotions are also a prompt to pray. A number of times Rachel is clearly upset by a particular situation and bursts into spontaneous prayer.⁴⁸⁶

They teach people how to experience the Holy Spirit and hear God speak within Lynwood. They take people to conferences organised by New Wine and Soul Survivor around experiencing the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸⁷ Alice talks about learning to hear God’s voice. She tells me ‘we went to a prophecy workshop one time and they said it’s like a butterfly, it just flits and if you can catch that thought that wafts in and wafts out it’s probably God’.⁴⁸⁸ She says it’s something she’s got better at with practice and that when she gets a thought she thinks might be God she tries it. She particularly notices thoughts that she wouldn’t expect to be thinking.

They like that Lynwood operates this way. Through prayer and being aware of these ‘nudges’ God is present in every decision that is made. Alice tells me that it’s not the official way decisions should be made but she thinks it is the way God would want it.

Relating to Wider Society

(i) Being a bridge

Besom described their projects as a bridge between those who want to give and the need that is there. Alice puts it very succinctly ‘I say I work for a Christian organisation that helps people give to people in need. And I say it’s time, things, skills or money, and we act as a bridge between the two’.⁴⁸⁹ The focus is on giving rather than need. As Sarah says

I guess the idea that the poor will always be with you – there’s always going to be people out there who need help, so if we focus on givers and help them to have an experience that makes them feel satisfied or happy then they are going to want to give again. And if someone gives time and doesn’t feel like they’ve impacted anything then really they won’t want to give time again.⁴⁹⁰

The bridge is a relational bridge. They are fully aware that it is through relational connections that they connect with both need and time-givers. Tony describes these relationships outside of the Christian family as ‘part of God’s way of showing that his people care’⁴⁹¹ and says they endeavour to build them.

⁴⁸⁴ Interview Alice, Lynwood, Paragraph 30

⁴⁸⁵ Interview, Rachel, Lynwood, Paragraph 13

⁴⁸⁶ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraphs 219 and 243-244

⁴⁸⁷ Interview Rachel, Lynwood, Paragraph 55

⁴⁸⁸ Interview, Alice, Lynwood, Paragraph 26

⁴⁸⁹ Interview, Alice, Lynwood, Paragraph 19

⁴⁹⁰ Interview, Sarah, Lynwood, Paragraph 54

⁴⁹¹ Interview, Tony, Lynwood, Paragraph 48

(ii) Sharing God's Blessing

A phrase that comes up a lot in Lynwood is the need to 'bless the giver' and they tell me they are focused on giving, rather than need.

It's all about making giving a pleasant experience and for every time-giver it's important for us to make their days nice. And I think in a lot of places people go to volunteer – it's not about blessing them- it's about getting the work done.⁴⁹²

Alice talks about the 'blessing going both ways'⁴⁹³ and how God wants to bless us, not just that we are a blessing. Ben talks a lot about blessing and being blessed in his interview;

God can't bless us if we're not willing to be participants, as Paul [the Apostle] says, and the blessings will flow, and I think it's when you see blessing flow, in terms of blessing flowing outwards, that is when we are blessed ourselves, that is when I feel blessed.⁴⁹⁴

Being blessed is made up of a number of elements at Lynwood. It means being loved and valued by the community. This is one of the key ways they both feel blessed and bless others.

Connected to this is the sense of doing something worthwhile and fulfilling. The other important element of being blessed is experiencing God. For many of the time-givers, this means seeing answers to prayers and 'miracles'. For the recipients it means feeling valued by receiving good quality items which they need and the hope is that they would experience it as God's provision to them. The connection between being blessed and blessing others is one that is encouraged. The expectation is that those involved will both feel blessed and be a blessing and that each leads to the other.

(iii) The recipients

The recipients/clients are those who receive from Lynwood. They are referred to Lynwood through an agency; people cannot just turn up and say you're in need. This is generally social workers with whom they have built relationships over time. Tony tells me that in the early days some of the social workers were a bit wary of them, a bit suspicious of their motives, but they have built good relationships and that their experience is that the social workers are very motivated.⁴⁹⁵ Although some people receive a few things as a one-off, they also have recipients who they are in regular contact with. For some of the time-givers their interaction with recipients is minimal and even those on the van rarely get to know the people they are visiting, but Alice, in particular has got to know many of them well; a number of people ask after her during deliveries and one person asked how her holiday had been.⁴⁹⁶

One lady we visited knew Ed quite well through some work he had done with another charity. She was in a wheelchair and having to rearrange her house as a result. On this occasion

⁴⁹² Interview, Alice, Lynwood, Paragraph 17

⁴⁹³ Interview, Alice, Lynwood, Paragraph 88

⁴⁹⁴ Interview, Ben, Lynwood, Paragraph 43

⁴⁹⁵ Interview, Tony, Lynwood, Paragraph 55

⁴⁹⁶ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 323

she wanted to give items away but they were not in good enough condition. However we spent time chatting with her and Ed helped her work out how to dispose of them.⁴⁹⁷ On another occasion we had the wrong address, but Ed knew the correct address as he had visited the lady before.⁴⁹⁸ One collection was from a man who had done some work at the Hut as part of a Princes Trust placement. They had given him a lot of furniture when he had moved into his house and now he wanted to give some things in return.⁴⁹⁹ After one delivery the lady gave us a list of things she still needed. Everyone seemed pleased to know exactly what she needed and a week or so later we delivered a bed, wardrobe, microwave and bookshelf to her.⁵⁰⁰ Bob often takes time to chat to recipients, particularly one man who had a bad back and another man whose background was in the Forces.⁵⁰¹ On one occasion we turn up to do a delivery to a man who had nothing in his flat. We'd only brought a few items but we measured up for curtains and asked him what else he needs. Nig was concerned for him, particularly that he had nothing to eat, and told him he would come the next day with some food and other essentials.⁵⁰²

On the whole recipients don't come to the Hut, but this is an account from my field notes after recipients had visited the Hut.

When we get back to the Hut we discover that the people we just delivered the fridge to have turned up (because William told them the opening hours) and have caused a fuss seeing what they would like. People seem quite uncomfortable about the whole thing. It sounds like it's difficult that people receiving the items have come inside the Hut. People feel uncomfortable about them wanting to come and choose things and then being fussy about what they can have. They seem to have wanted a child's bike but after people have run around to try and find what they are after they have told them it's not good enough for whatever reason. People seem quite flustered by the whole thing. Rachel talks about being uncomfortable when people receiving come into the Hut. Nick calls it havoc and seems to feel the morning has been quite disrupted.⁵⁰³

I got the impression the problem was that they turned up unannounced and treated it like a shop. It does suggest that some distance is kept between the recipients and the SMC, at least initially, because there are plenty of examples of former recipients becoming part of the work. The initial contact with recipients is quite professional, keeping things functional and providing for their need for furniture, but those who keep in contact and look to build relationships or want to get involved they are very keen to include. Apart from Rachel asking to pray for people if they share

⁴⁹⁷ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 301

⁴⁹⁸ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 181

⁴⁹⁹ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 182

⁵⁰⁰ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraphs 51,199

⁵⁰¹ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraphs 247, 284,

⁵⁰² Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 323

⁵⁰³ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 227

about health issues, rarely did the group initiate further contact or conversations about church or Christianity, rather they sought to take opportunities to share about their motives and invite people to participate where they arose.

(iv) Not doing evangelism but showing God's love

They tell me that they do not do evangelism, and yet they pray for opportunities to talk with people about God, pray for people and are pleased to be asked the question why they are doing it. What they mean is they do not preach at people; 'shoving it down people's noses'⁵⁰⁴ or having John 3.16 written across their foreheads as Tony describes it.⁵⁰⁵ Instead there is a deep concern for the individual. Prayer is seen as central to the process, as with everything at Lynwood, God is the one at work and so conversion begins with his work. When the opportunities to talk about God arise there is an excitement that it is a God-given opportunity. Tony tells me 'The lovely question to be asked is "why do you do this?" And to be able to start back and say because God loves you is wonderful and to let the conversation go on from there is fantastic and that's the thing that really gives you a buzz'.⁵⁰⁶ The motive is one of desire to care, to show God's love and to see God at work in other's lives. That is seen as key and as different from the kind of evangelism that secular organisations they work with are weary of.

The starting point for their social action is realising God's blessing and calling. The motive becomes to share the blessing of being loved and valued and the calling to be part of God's work with others. People are blessed when they receive and through the receiving of material things God's love and care are also shared – perhaps through the fact that the things are 'what they always wanted' or in good condition. There is in turn a blessing on those who are giving, of sharing in God's works, of seeing God at work, of using their gifts, of experiencing Christian community and a sense of fulfilment.

2. Airbury Small Missional Community

Brief History

Airbury SMC (from here on referred to as Airbury) came out of the work of four Christian women in the town, one of whom was Claire, who still leads the group. They had all been involved in working or volunteering with 'people that were in need or disadvantaged in some way'.⁵⁰⁷ At the same time there was a report from the National Skills Council and another report which highlighted significant needs in the town which is generally considered to be affluent and middle class. After finding the churches unresponsive to their concerns they sought to work with the

⁵⁰⁴ Interview, Tony, Lynwood, Paragraph 66

⁵⁰⁵ Interview, Tony, Lynwood, Paragraph 55

⁵⁰⁶ Interview, Tony, Lynwood, Paragraph 66

⁵⁰⁷ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 2

council and social services to start a Home Start scheme.⁵⁰⁸ It took them about a year to get it off the ground, initially raising 150,000 pounds.⁵⁰⁹ At the same time the four women met every Friday morning to pray for the town. They felt disconnected from the churches and that the churches weren't willing to acknowledge the need in the town. At this point Claire got a job working one day a week with the council supporting families giving her experience of how to support people in practical ways and making her more aware of the needs around them.⁵¹⁰ With this experience she began working with the families beyond the remit of her job doing advocacy work, helping run a play scheme and generally building relationships with those she was coming into contact with.⁵¹¹ They decided to begin a drop-in to support the women they were meeting. This wasn't easy, there was no church support and Claire felt forced out of the church she was attending. She and her husband ended up selling their house to fund the drop-in and after much searching they found a property on the High Street to rent. They registered as a charity; one lady, who is no longer part of the group, ran the drop-in and Claire worked behind the scenes with the administration. Claire explains;

The whole thing converged because all the women we met at the Homestart and all the women we met at the play scheme, women that we knew around town and at the school gates just basically then all came up here, and so suddenly there was quite a vibrant group of people.⁵¹²

They invited ladies to come and drink tea and share their lives. They offered to pray with those who attended and put on social activities and talks on practical things like identity, self-esteem and stress management.⁵¹³ This was the first phase of the drop-in, but when volunteers started heading off to do other things Claire found herself working alone. They closed at the end of 2010 for three months and during that time they hired Will as their first paid worker.⁵¹⁴

Hiring a man to lead the drop-in immediately changed the focus with a number of the women stopping coming because it no longer felt a safe environment for them.⁵¹⁵ Instead six homeless men started attending. It met their practical needs; using the loo, charging their phones, having something to eat and drink but also they appreciated getting to know Will.

According to Claire they didn't set out to be church at the drop-in, although they did want to have a 'prayer room ethos'.⁵¹⁶ In her blog there is a change of focus over this time. There is a

⁵⁰⁸ Home Start UK is an umbrella charity for individual groups across the UK who provide one-to-one support for parents with young children.

⁵⁰⁹ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 3

⁵¹⁰ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 7

⁵¹¹ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 8

⁵¹² Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 13

⁵¹³ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 15

⁵¹⁴ Claire's Blog, Airbury, 21/12/2010

⁵¹⁵ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 17

⁵¹⁶ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 23

move away from the more charismatic elements with the conversation becoming more focused around the marginalised. There is a move from miracles and charismatic experiences to focus more on weakness and brokenness and creating what they described as 'safe space' to journey with others. Another significant event was Claire beginning ordination training in September 2012 which came with increasing connections to Fresh Expressions and the Anglican Church. They became a Bishop's Mission Order at the end of 2013.⁵¹⁷

Current Description

Their premises above a shop on the High Street is the main hub for the work they do and the location of the drop-in and the communion service. They told me that a number of times they have wondered if they should be located on one of the housing estates on the edge of town but have always felt it was right to remain in the centre and having spent some time researching found that most people from the estates come into the centre on most days.⁵¹⁸ The premises itself is made up of two rooms. There is a small room with a couple of chairs, a space to make tea and coffee and a coat rack. Through a door on the left is a much bigger room which has a large window straight ahead looking out onto the Market Square. The room feels like a large lounge with a number of sofas and arm chairs, a fire place, pictures on the walls, a cross straight in front of the fire place and a large black board on the left hand side with the words 'We Love [our town]' and a list of people they are currently praying for.⁵¹⁹

The drop-in on a Monday and Friday morning is the mainstay of the community. They run from 10am to midday and are open for anyone to call in for a chat, a cup of tea, a listening ear, a bowl of porridge or to be prayed for. Turning up to my first drop-in I arrived a little early. I had been communicating with Claire about visiting, but she was running late and had texted Will to let him know I would be coming. He welcomed me in and made me a cup of tea and asked me what I was up to. He was immediately very open with me sharing about his past and his struggles with mental health issues.⁵²⁰ During this conversation someone turned up to give a donation to the group from the Street Pastors team who use the room for free on a Saturday Night.⁵²¹ Claire soon arrived and explained that she had been further delayed by meeting a homeless man she had not seen before and buying him a pasty.⁵²²

Claire introduced me to Nigel and Sally as they arrived and asked me to tell them a bit about why I was there. The lines seemed to blur between volunteers and those attending and I

⁵¹⁷ A Bishops Mission Order is means for a Bishop to formally recognise a mission initiative leading to Christian Community. See 'What Is a Bishop's Mission Order (BMO)? | Fresh Expressions', accessed 23 November 2017, <http://community.sharetheguide.org/ask/bmo>.

⁵¹⁸ Interview Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 46

⁵¹⁹ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 219

⁵²⁰ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraphs 10-14

⁵²¹ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 16. Street Pastors is a nationwide scheme where Christian volunteers support the Police and others to keep people safe in city centres at night.

⁵²² Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 18

found it difficult to work out how everyone was connected. It was obvious that there were good friendships between all of them.⁵²³ Conversations continued in the room and I began chatting with Claire who told me about the community. I got a sense that she is somewhat suspicious of Charismatic Christianity.⁵²⁴ This conversation was interrupted by Sally asking for prayer. 'Claire goes over and places a hand on her shoulder and prays for her in her work and family life that she would be filled with the Holy Spirit.'⁵²⁵

Once a month on a Friday after the drop-in they have a communion service followed by a shared lunch. I timed my first visit to coincide with this communion service. Just before midday people start to appear for the service; Margaret, who is Will's wife, and has baked the bread for the communion service,⁵²⁶ Michelle, who is one of the trustees and the first person to become a Christian through the community, Liz, who is also a trustee, a number of other people with connections to the community and a couple of visitors. They are all friendly and welcome me. Liz, who is American and very extrovert, welcomes me with enthusiasm telling me that the community is a 'loving place' where everyone really cares for each other.⁵²⁷

The communion service was put together by Claire in line with Anglican liturgy, using what they have to from the Anglican service but bringing in their own prayers and focus. The service is led by a local vicar and about 16 people are present, some sat on the sofas and others sat on chairs that have been put out in a circle round the room. This is the first communion service where they are going to sing because a number of the ladies who attend have been requesting it for a while.

The communion service is Anglican, printed liturgy with little space for any input - not even prayer apart from what is written down. 3 members read the readings which are written on cards and in pink envelopes as if they are invitations. Claire gives an address and then the Vicar leads the communion. During Claire's talks the ladies seem to chuckle at some of the imagery she uses, particularly penitence being like opening drawers and cupboards of our lives. The liturgy is shaped round the idea of coming home and us being a home for Christ. For this reason the confession is after the reading and Eucharist.⁵²⁸

Before the communion the Peace is shared. 'The Peace is an occasion where everyone goes round and shares a 'sign of peace' with everyone else, which usually involved a handshake, a hug or a kiss but also includes some introductions too'⁵²⁹ The group have received special

⁵²³ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 18

⁵²⁴ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 29

⁵²⁵ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 28

⁵²⁶ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 37

⁵²⁷ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 33

⁵²⁸ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 47

⁵²⁹ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 240

permission from the Bishop to have communion as an open table where anyone can receive bread and wine. The service leads straight into lunch with lots of chatting and laughter.⁵³⁰

Every drop-in is different and each has its own feel and dynamic and that is the point; the room is open for anyone and who comes in will determine the shape of the day. On the days when they do not have the communion service Claire, Will and whoever else is keen tend to go round to the local Anglican Church for their midday communion service.⁵³¹

They eat together once a month on a Sunday evening in people's homes. Everyone brings a dish and they share a meal together. At the meal I attended there were ten people present although Claire tells me that there are normally more people and they have to use a camping table so that everyone can fit.⁵³² The table was laid nicely with a red runner down the middle and red mats, serviettes and candles. They said a short grace before the meal started. Conversations around the table were light-hearted and fun. I was sat next to Laura who told me how she had got involved with the community. There was no particular agenda other than to have a meal together and Claire explained to me that the main aim is to model how to be family together.⁵³³ On this occasion, however, Claire did ask people to give their thoughts on the conference they had been to the previous week.⁵³⁴

They have a Bible study twice a month on a Sunday evening which, when I went, was only attended by Claire, Michelle, Will and Margaret. The structure of the evening was to study a passage of the Bible together and then to pray together. This has proved to be a controversial venture and brought some tension within the group. Will and Margaret feel that it is due to outside pressure to have Sunday meetings to look more like church.⁵³⁵ Michelle likes the group because, as a new Christian, she feels that everyone else knows the Bible a lot better than her and this is the main opportunity to learn about the Bible.⁵³⁶

Beyond this Margaret runs workshops in cooking and gardening. She and Will live in a cottage on a farm and have been given a plot for an allotment and use of the kitchen facilities to run the workshops by the farmer. The farm is on the edge of the estate where Airbury is gradually becoming more and more focused. The gatherings happen roughly fortnightly with a small group of people both from the drop-in and from the local estate. The gardening is in its early stages and when the group gather it is mainly preparing the ground to plant. The cooking has been established for longer with a group of 4 or 5 regularly attending.

Community

⁵³⁰ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraphs 43-52

⁵³¹ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 293

⁵³² Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 176

⁵³³ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 193

⁵³⁴ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 185

⁵³⁵ Interview, Will, Airbury, Paragraph 84

⁵³⁶ Interview, Michelle, Airbury, Paragraph 40

(i) Being Valued

Liz describes Airbury as 'a community whereby you're just loving these people and getting alongside them so they know how loved and valued they are'.⁵³⁷ In particular she talks about sharing Jesus' love, 'a love of another kind',⁵³⁸ and then being able to share about God 'who knows us, who loves us and wants the best for us'.⁵³⁹ Claire describes it similarly in her blog;

After beginning the basics of teaching people to love and value themselves, in the light of God's love for them, then they can begin to explore their response to Him and so begin to consider love for God. Then comes love for others, and the trust building required for that. It's all a long journey, but they're worth it!⁵⁴⁰

One of the ways they value people is by including people in the life of the community; eating together, celebrating birthdays, having photos of things they have done together on the walls. In particular, they made sure that they celebrated the homeless men's birthdays and made a big deal of them.⁵⁴¹ Claire reflects that these things 'massively reinforced personhood and the development of identity and self, in a way that was new from their previous experience of identity'.⁵⁴²

Will mentions a number of times in his interview that he hopes people feel accepted when they come to the drop-in and other gatherings. He also describes how they celebrated the homeless men's birthdays and tells me 'you could see that they hadn't had that; that was a big deal'.⁵⁴³ Through valuing, welcoming and accepting the people who come to the drop-in or connect with the community in some way they create a space for individual transformation. Nigel is the clearest example of an individual being transformed. When he first came to the drop in he could not really interact with anyone. Claire recalls;

He didn't look up and his head was basically completely bowed when he first came in and he only ever looked down at the ground. He never made eye contact with anybody ever, and he never initiated conversation, ever [...] He's quite severely mentally ill and you know you just think three or four years on he's just like a completely changed guy [...] it was like his real self had to get called forth somehow by God. So I just think I really believe in the power of community, in the power of people, and how God works through people to help people.⁵⁴⁴

This isn't to say he is completely fine, he still struggles in large groups, he sat awkwardly staring at the ground during the sharing of the Peace in the communion service, but they have seen huge

⁵³⁷ Interview, Liz, Airbury, Paragraph 14

⁵³⁸ Interview, Liz, Airbury, Paragraph 7

⁵³⁹ Interview, Liz Airbury, Paragraph 49

⁵⁴⁰ Claire's Blog, Airbury, 31-05-12

⁵⁴¹ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 24

⁵⁴² Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 24

⁵⁴³ Interview, Will, Airbury, Paragraph 13

⁵⁴⁴ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 42

changes in him from being valued in community. In his own testimony given at a workshop Airbury led at a conference he stated;

Before I came to Airbury I just stayed in every day. I had really bad panic attacks and was drinking a lot.... Since I started coming I became a Christian and got baptised. Now I help people out wherever I can.... I feel better in myself and my self-confidence has increased.

⁵⁴⁵

The focus of the social action within Airbury is on helping people to value themselves. This includes all the struggles that come with it. This is not a conversion to forget about all that is going on in life, but a journey through that pain with others and God to find a new sense of self in the context of being loved in a community and experiencing the love of God through that community. Focusing on identity and allowing God to reshape people's warped understanding of themselves allows the changes to happen, both on the inside, but also on the outside in relationships, debt, finding a job and participating in community. They really do celebrate these things and find value in them. This is the goal, described by Liz as 'one life at a time'⁵⁴⁶, to help people live stable lives. There is a sense that the story of people finding stability, such as the homeless men finding community, or Nigel being able to start to live a normal life, are of similar importance to their baptism.

(ii) The metaphors of Desert and Journey

The idea of going through a desert experience came up at various points throughout my time with the community but was discussed most fully in a Sunday evening Bible study. The study was looking at the first few chapters of Hosea. Margaret was particularly drawn to Hosea 2.14 where it says 'Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her'.⁵⁴⁷ She likened it to how she was drawn into the desert and described the desert as a metaphor for testing.⁵⁴⁸ She also remarked that there is no short cut; you have to pass through the desert. Michelle, who was leading the discussion, commented on the fact that it is often when people are at their lowest that God meets with them. Will and Claire both shared their own personal desert experiences. Will shared how he got to a point where he had to leave the church he was part of which led to him spending 'a couple of years in the desert'.⁵⁴⁹ He described it as horrible but was thankful he had that experience and said that in the end he was desperate for God; the experience of the desert is what drove him to God. Claire shared about leaving the Baptist church to start the community and how difficult it was not having a supporting church.

⁵⁴⁵ Nigel's testimony in Handout from Inhabit Conference

⁵⁴⁶ Interview, Liz, Airbury, Paragraph 43

⁵⁴⁷ Hosea 2.14 (NIV)

⁵⁴⁸ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 76

⁵⁴⁹ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 90

She tells us that 'it threw us on to God'.⁵⁵⁰ Margaret agrees saying that through the desert you come to the place of being thankful.⁵⁵¹

The desert experience is associated with having to do things alone. This is generally an experience of not being part of the church which for some, like Will, was a decision they made, and for others, like Claire, they felt forced out. As Will describes;

It's a very lonely journey but that loneliness kind of puts the bedrock of your relationship with God down because you.. then you're driven to find how real the God is you think you worship. It's brilliant; very painful, full of tears, full of heart ache and brilliant.⁵⁵²

Will has discerned a pattern in scripture where people are drawn into the desert which he describes as 'a valid part of the journey for lots of children of God'.⁵⁵³ He particularly points to Paul after his conversion. Later in the interview he again reflects on scripture and how 'God seems to delight in people going to him with some real complaining, some full-on complaints; Moses, Job. God isn't rocked by this stuff'.⁵⁵⁴ Will describes this part of his desert experience where he would literally go out into a deserted place and curse and shout at God. He described it as his therapy. He would also take an old hymn book and reflect on a hymn. He says, 'On my way back after the ranting and the raving it would be – OK, you're also God'.⁵⁵⁵

This common experience of the desert is important in the life of the community. They are aware that many of those who are part of the community are going through a similar experience. Their experience of the desert is of travelling through something hard but in it being thrown onto God, being dependent on Him and realising that it is in those lowest points that God often meets you, helps them to walk with others through their own experiences. Will describes the slow process of 3 steps forward 2, or even 4 back, but how in those steps back people become more aware of their wounds and in becoming aware of their wounds they meet Christ in the wound. He said 'those moments are better than gold'.⁵⁵⁶ Margaret also has a phrase 'finding treasure in dark places' taken from Isaiah.⁵⁵⁷

Along with the desert experience comes this idea of journey. Often the journey they are referring to is the one through the desert experience. Margaret describes Airbury as 'a place where people get [...] journeyed with, so it's never a straight line, it's always up and down, going down in the dips with people and sometimes just sitting with people without words'.⁵⁵⁸ Michelle

⁵⁵⁰ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 91

⁵⁵¹ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 92

⁵⁵² Interview, Will Airbury, Paragraph 48

⁵⁵³ Interview, Will Airbury, Paragraph 48

⁵⁵⁴ Interview, Will Airbury, Paragraph 53

⁵⁵⁵ Interview, Will Airbury, Paragraph 53

⁵⁵⁶ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 232

⁵⁵⁷ Interview, Margaret, Airbury, Paragraph 18

⁵⁵⁸ Interview, Margaret Airbury, Paragraph 17

describes her coming to faith as a 'long journey' rather than a 'euphoric moment'.⁵⁵⁹ Claire describes how they supported the homeless men in their journeys to having their own flats.⁵⁶⁰ Margaret said she learnt not to argue with people who were angry and negative about prayer; 'you have to just bless them in your mind silently and let them go and pray that they journey onwards'.⁵⁶¹

Airbury's emphasis is travelling alongside people on their own journeys. It is not just about a journey of faith but also a journey towards finding themselves. For Airbury it is important not to give answers like 'oh it will be all right' but to travel the ups and downs of the journey with people. This portrays the empathy, the patience and the long-term nature of their work; travelling with people, not trying to fix their problems but to help them to continue their journey. They understand that everyone has to walk their own journey and you can't short cut it for them. It is a personal journey which shapes the individual and their relationship to God, but as journeys interact they affect each other. By journeying with others, those in Airbury sense that their own journeys are shaped.⁵⁶²

The metaphors of journey and desert allow space for the messiness of life. They are proud of the messy and chaotic nature of the community, of the drop-ins, of the communion service and of the way everything operates. This chaos is seen as authentic and true to real life; people can be honest and not hide their feelings.

(iii) Family and Building Relationships

At one of the communion services I spoke to Dorothy and her two friends. Dorothy got to know Claire through the school because Claire had helped her granddaughter when she was being bullied. She brought along the other two ladies. I asked her why she came and after a short pause replied 'well, because it's family. That's it really, it's like family'.⁵⁶³ Claire said exactly the same, recounting how they were invited to Dorothy's 50th Wedding Anniversary;

All the rest of the crowd of her family and friends they all knew who we were because she talks about us all the time. And I just find that incredible you know that you're welcomed in and we had a dance and a sing-song, you know and ate food and it's just like.. wow – that for me is– I feel like that's a new family for me as much as it is for them to belong here and so it's a mutual sort of exchange of relationship really.⁵⁶⁴

Claire also expressed the relationship with the homeless men as family;

They would meet us out on the street, if they had been given food they would invite us to eat with them and we just, I don't know, just developed some very sort of deep

⁵⁵⁹ Interview, Michelle Airbury, Paragraph 37

⁵⁶⁰ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 20

⁵⁶¹ Interview, Margaret, Airbury, Paragraph 31

⁵⁶² Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 24

⁵⁶³ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 241

⁵⁶⁴ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 42

connections with them. And sort of became family really for them because they'd mostly burnt their bridges with family or not got safe family.⁵⁶⁵

Claire describes the Sunday evening meals as 'modelling how to be family together'.⁵⁶⁶ Airbury's goal is to build deep relationships with people and to journey with them through the ups and downs of life. Michelle described the support they give each other as the most important thing about Airbury.⁵⁶⁷ This is what they mean by family.

(vi) Being Small

Most of the group that I interviewed commented how important it was that the group was small. Margaret told me 'I hope it would continue to be a quite small community. That feels important because that gives you the chance to be in relationship with people at a deep level.'⁵⁶⁸ When I asked Michelle what would be lost if it did grow bigger she replied 'Intimate conversations really. If you turn up here and there's only three or four people you feel you can talk more openly'.⁵⁶⁹

There is also a sense that physically they couldn't support many more people. Will tells me

I hope it does not get too successful in terms of numerical growth [...] We're starting projects which is great [...] but I don't see the drop-in [...] expanding, I don't see how it can. If you had four times the size of this room with four times the number of people I don't think it would work.⁵⁷⁰

Claire commented 'it's small in order to be accessible and it's slow in order to be accessible and so it's mainly about welcome and hospitality on behalf of God'.⁵⁷¹ She describes it as 'the shape God seems to have given it'⁵⁷² and says that it may always be small. She tells me that being small 'enables the people who are the furthest away to be able to feel at home'⁵⁷³ but also acknowledges that being small brings challenges too.

Michelle tells me that being small enables them to focus on mission. 'We look out a lot. I think when with a small church you can do that; maybe with a big church you can sometimes, sometimes you get lost in the melee of a big church. It is nice to be in a small church'.⁵⁷⁴

Relationship to Church

(i) Relationship with other churches

The relationship with other churches in the town is mixed. Will and Claire both left the local Baptist church because of struggles with the leadership.⁵⁷⁵ Will left before getting involved in the

⁵⁶⁵ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 20

⁵⁶⁶ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 193

⁵⁶⁷ Interview, Michelle, Airbury, Paragraph 25

⁵⁶⁸ Interview, Margaret, Airbury, Paragraph 91

⁵⁶⁹ Interview, Michelle, Airbury, Paragraph 66

⁵⁷⁰ Interview, Will, Airbury, Paragraph 77-80

⁵⁷¹ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 38

⁵⁷² Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 53

⁵⁷³ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 53

⁵⁷⁴ Interview, Michelle, Airbury, Paragraph 27

⁵⁷⁵ Interview, Will, Airbury, Paragraph 44

community, whereas Claire left as a direct result of starting Airbury. The leadership of the church would not support her starting the community which turned out to be because the elders of the church did not agree with women in leadership.⁵⁷⁶ Claire ended up in a large Charismatic Anglican church in a neighbouring town which supported her work and was a key reason for the community connecting with the Anglican Church and Claire training for ordination.⁵⁷⁷ The relationship between Airbury and the local Baptist church has been difficult. They were invited to be part of 'Churches Together', a local ecumenical partnership of churches, only for the Baptist minister to cause a fuss and stop them joining.⁵⁷⁸ They had a good relationship with the Anglican Church in the middle of town but I was told that has been a bit frostier after they became a Bishop's Mission Order, which gives them a little more autonomy from the local church.⁵⁷⁹ This tension however was resolved during my time there by Claire putting herself under the authority of both the Anglican Church in the centre of town and one in the local estate.

There is a perceived external pressure to conform to people's expectation of church and Will, in particular, tells me passionately that he doesn't like their Sunday Bible study because he feels that the main motive is to look more like a church.⁵⁸⁰ Liz, who is a trustee and very involved but attends another church in the village where she lives, is more positive about the relationships with the churches. She tells me that the Baptist church is very positive about the work of Airbury and how the current pastor speaks highly of Claire. She does say she can't imagine any other church doing what Airbury do, but she feels relationships are improving.⁵⁸¹

The members of Airbury tell me that you cannot be yourself in church, that you have to put on an act and cannot share your problems.⁵⁸² There is a suspicion that churches, in general, cater for a certain type of person and some people aren't welcome. They contrast this with Airbury where everyone is welcome and included.

Claire sees part of the role of Airbury as encouraging churches to engage with the need around them. She told me about one way they were doing that through the church activity day they organised where churches helped out with practical jobs in the local community.⁵⁸³ Despite some of the negative experiences and views they have about church they are keen to build relationships with the local churches.

(ii) Being Church

⁵⁷⁶ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 11

⁵⁷⁷ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 23

⁵⁷⁸ Interview, Will, Airbury, Paragraph 44

⁵⁷⁹ Interview, Will, Airbury, Paragraph 44

⁵⁸⁰ Interview, Will, Airbury, Paragraph 84

⁵⁸¹ Interview, Liz, Airbury, Paragraph 79

⁵⁸² Interview, Michelle, Airbury, Paragraph 66 and Margaret Airbury, Paragraph 25-27

⁵⁸³ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 39

During my time visiting there were a number of conversations around whether Airbury is a church. It is clear to me that everyone involved sees it as church but that it can be a divisive thing to express in the town. This was one of the first conversations I had with Will when I arrived at Airbury. He and his prayer partner from the Baptist church disagreed on whether Airbury was a church. Will told me that for him church must be about justice and if the church isn't engaged in justice he questioned whether it was church.⁵⁸⁴

Claire told me that it was not their intention to be a church, 'In the beginning in the drop-in I don't think that we were aware that we were being church [...] I don't think we set out to set up a church I think we set out to set up a drop-in'.⁵⁸⁵ She told me how they were shaped by the engagement with the people who came to the drop-in; 'We began to realise that you need to let the people who are coming direct their own need for spirituality'.⁵⁸⁶ They wanted to be part of a community and through being community they sensed God at work transforming lives. This led them to the idea of Small Missional Community rather than a traditional church because they 'wanted to stay as a group that would outreach and get involved in the life of the town and not stay behind closed doors here doing sort of secret things that no one knows about'.⁵⁸⁷

In one sense they describe themselves as distinct from Church, distancing themselves from the negative things about churches they have been part of. Instead they are a missional community; they reach out to those beyond the community and have the freedom to engage in social justice issues to which they feel called. However in another sense they are church. From within they are convinced they are church because they are Christian community and they are gathering 'those who are furthest away'.⁵⁸⁸

God's Agency

In Airbury, God is seen more in the background. They very much believe that God is active and present, only that his work is not seen so regularly – rather it is glimpsed. There is a stronger emphasis that God works through people and an emphasis on God working in the midst of human weakness and frailty.

(i) God in the Background

God being in the background of people's lives is a phrase used by Michelle. She describes how one person at the drop-in regularly talks about God being in her life whereas other don't and 'you hope that God is there in the background of their life watching over them and looking out for them'.⁵⁸⁹ This idea of God being in the background describes Airbury's understanding quite well.

⁵⁸⁴ Interview, Will, Airbury, Paragraph 10

⁵⁸⁵ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 23

⁵⁸⁶ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 24

⁵⁸⁷ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 24

⁵⁸⁸ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 53

⁵⁸⁹ Interview, Michelle, Airbury, Paragraph 47

There isn't much discussion about what God is doing which is shown in the interviews where the conversation tends to revolve around the practices of the group rather than how God is at work. This reluctance appears to be both due to humility and a cautionary stance towards Charismatic Christianity. Digging a little deeper there is an expectation that God is at work and they get glimpses of that at different times.

The members of the community talk about 'having a sense' or a feeling. Liz talked about how, having prayed and talked about it she got involved in the community because it 'felt that it was the right time'.⁵⁹⁰ Claire talked about 'having a sense' that they needed to be out on the estates and that that would be important to the community at some point.⁵⁹¹ The implication is that this sense or feeling is from God. When Margaret and Will were looking for a house Margaret describes how they 'knew they needed to move near to [town]' but she wasn't that keen. She says she prayed 'all right, I'll do what you want me to do but please don't send me into the town'. When they looked at the farm cottage she says that 'we couldn't forget it because it felt so right'.⁵⁹² Claire describes how 'we felt like we'd really heard God speak about hiring [Will] in a very direct way'.⁵⁹³ He'd come to talk to Claire about volunteering but while they were chatting she had this 'nagging voice' in the back of her head saying 'pay him pay him'. She went away and prayed about it and over the next few days she 'had this very very strong sense that I must not take him on as a volunteer' but at an employee.⁵⁹⁴ The way they describe these experiences implies that they feel they heard from God, but it is not as confidently stated as Lynwood.

Another way they express God as present in the background through 'glimpsing God'. Will talks about glimpsing God and glimpsing the Kingdom. He describes how he 'began to see the Kingdom of Heaven everywhere except in church. I found it the most difficult place to identify what God was doing was in the church building itself really'.⁵⁹⁵ What he focused on were the relational interactions; people exchanging friendly banter and homeless men sharing sausages they'd been given. He continues 'I love the signs and wonders – they're great- but it's in the ordinary everyday stuff that I've found so much of what the Kingdom is about'.⁵⁹⁶

On her Blog Claire describes a powerful experience of God when she is kissed on the lips by a homeless man:

I was kissed on the mouth today by a homeless man. All beery and whiskery. Oddly it wasn't at all inappropriate or a crossing of any boundaries. Instead it was a spontaneous,

⁵⁹⁰ Interview, Liz, Airbury, Paragraph 4

⁵⁹¹ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraphs 45-46

⁵⁹² Interview, Margaret, Airbury, paragraph 89

⁵⁹³ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 17

⁵⁹⁴ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 19

⁵⁹⁵ Interview, Will, Airbury, Paragraph 4

⁵⁹⁶ Interview, Will, Airbury, Paragraph 7

genuine act of human connection, a response and reaction to another human being, after a brief and very humorous conversation accompanying a sausage roll and a cup of tea on the step outside the church in town. After a brief moment while walking away (when the voice of my inner fundamentalist suggested I'd probably contracted hepatitis and should go straight to the hospital), I began to cry. I felt as if something profound and life changing had happened. I felt as if I'd been kissed by Christ.⁵⁹⁷

In Airbury God is glimpsed in the ordinary more than he is seen in the miraculous. There are exceptions to these stories, where God interacts very directly and powerfully in people's lives, but these stories don't tend to form the narrative of the group. In Michelle's testimony of how she became a Christian she describes being 'stalked by God' where through a series of answers to prayer and other incidents she gave her life to God and felt the Holy Spirit powerfully.⁵⁹⁸ Claire talks about dreams, about hearing God's voice but the stories they tend to tell are about journeying with people and the gradual transformation through being part of the community.

(ii) God already at work

The work that they are developing on an estate on the edge of town is a particular example of them sensing that God was already at work. In response to people asking for prayer at the play scheme they ran, Claire told me how she was amazed at their openness and thought 'wow, God is already doing something here'.⁵⁹⁹ She told me that the local church on the estate were excited to see 'what God was doing' and Will also reflected on how nice it was that the diocese recognised 'the unique way they were doing mission and that God was doing something in [the estate]'.⁶⁰⁰

Will and Margaret were able to rent a house on the edge of the estate which met their needs at a price they could afford, with the facilities to do the workshops with groups. It came about through a time of prayer walking when Margaret went to explore the farm shop at the end of a driveway and came across the cottages. She put her name down to say she was interested in the cottages and one became free very soon after. They had been searching for somewhere to live for months and months before this came about. Margaret described how it 'it's like God opened a door'.⁶⁰¹ Similarly Claire describes how the farmer gave them an allotment plot and use of the old farm shop kitchen and how 'God opened that up'.⁶⁰²

They particularly understand God as working through people. Claire described this in the interview:

I think that's been the revelation for me in the way that you can pray all you like for God to directly do something, but in the most part God will have given that over to somebody to do it and for me that's how God acts in the world is through people, and yes obviously he

⁵⁹⁷ Claire's Blog, Airbury, 06-09-11

⁵⁹⁸ Interview, Michelle, Airbury, Paragraph 37

⁵⁹⁹ Conversation with Claire from Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 25

⁶⁰⁰ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 279

⁶⁰¹ Interview, Margaret, Airbury, Paragraph 89

⁶⁰² Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 47

acts directly himself as well by the Holy Spirit but I think the Holy Spirit moves people to act in support of other people and I just feel like that has been a bit of a revelation for me that that's what we're about here on this earth – we're to make change and to bring in the Kingdom and even among ourselves by the Holy Spirit being able to work through us. So that... Teresa of Avila you know 'he has no hands and feet but yours' and I just really believe that.⁶⁰³

Liz describes it as 'showing Jesus' love... this love of another kind'.⁶⁰⁴ They see God at work primarily through relationships. God is gently shaping and transforming lives of the people in the community and beyond. God at work is tied to community. 'And so we just felt like God was almost doing redemption in the being together, He was remodelling people's view of themselves as they saw themselves reflected in the way we responded to them.'⁶⁰⁵ There is a mutual shaping which comes through an interaction where God is present.

(iii) Uses weakness

There is a strong focus on God using weakness and meeting them in their weakness. Will describes humanity as 'so broken and yet so filled with hope'.⁶⁰⁶ He describes it as a paradox and points to two incidents that morning before the interview of seeing Christ in broken people. One was Sally and her ability to face all the difficulties in her life, and the other was Laura who had had a banner made for Dorothy for her golden wedding anniversary.

The prayer times before the drop-in Will describes as 'a time of honesty'⁶⁰⁷ where they can share their struggles. He says 'so we will cover this stuff in prayer, it's really good. It's just being transparent again... it's like an invitation for God to come in and help and take out the mess, and He does, and you still limp, it's just that it's a blessed limp'.⁶⁰⁸

They are honest about how difficult this can be, but equally how rewarding. It is all seen and understood through their experience of desert and journey. What is particularly striking is that it is not in spite of their brokenness or by replacing their brokenness but in the middle of their brokenness that they sense God meets them. The image of clay pots from 2 Corinthians 4 helps them understand this. God's light shines out of cracked pots; He is able to bring something beautiful and brilliant out of broken and weak people.⁶⁰⁹

The reflection on weakness is a defining feature of the community. They can't give answers that make everything OK. Life is tough. Their testimony is that God met them in the tough times of life and carried out a healing in the midst of it, not despite it.

Christian Practices

⁶⁰³ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 43

⁶⁰⁴ Interview, Liz, Airbury, Paragraph 49

⁶⁰⁵ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 24

⁶⁰⁶ Interview, Will, Airbury, Paragraph 35

⁶⁰⁷ Interview, Will, Airbury, Paragraph 32

⁶⁰⁸ Interview, Will, Airbury, Paragraph 32

⁶⁰⁹ Claire's Blog, Airbury, 03-10-12, and Interview Liz, Airbury, Paragraph 49

(i) Prayer

Airbury began with four ladies meeting to pray once a week and when they first opened the drop-in they called it 'The Prayer Room' having been heavily influenced by 24-7 Prayer and their Boiler Rooms.⁶¹⁰ Prayer has always been a key part to the drop-in and prayer openly with the people who came.⁶¹¹ I witnessed people being prayed for at the drop-in a number of times. When Sally interrupted my conversation with Claire to ask her for prayer, Claire immediately went over, placed a hand on her shoulder and prayed for her in her work and family life and that she would be filled with the Holy Spirit.⁶¹² Claire tells me how they used to pray for Michelle before she became a Christian.⁶¹³ At first she refused prayer, then she allowed them to pray and gradually she softened as some of her needs became more acute, and through witnessing a number of answers to prayer in Claire's words 'the dots started to join up'.⁶¹⁴ Margaret tells me that people ask for prayer or sometimes when it feels right she offers to pray for them.⁶¹⁵

These opportunities come up outside the drop-in too. Claire and Liz both tell me how they had opportunities to pray for people during the play scheme. Claire had people coming up to her saying things like 'Claire I had a nightmare last night, will you pray for me' or 'my friend went to a medium last night and now she thinks she has an evil curse over her will you pray for her?'.⁶¹⁶ Similarly Liz describes how she offered to pray for someone who was crying because someone had turned up who she had fallen out with.⁶¹⁷

Prayer was important to the group. Liz told me how they often text each other prayer requests.⁶¹⁸ They never invited me to join the prayer time before the drop-in but I asked about it a number of times and about other times they pray together. On one particular occasion when I asked them what they had prayed about that morning Michelle and Will told me they had been sharing stories from a difficult week and lamenting together about the bad news and the difficult lives in the community.⁶¹⁹ Margaret told me how she and Will pray together on a Sunday because at the moment it is hard to find time to pray with the others, partly because Claire is so busy with her studies.

We've learned that mission and justice is worship. So we would consider action, an underpinning spirituality as much as we would prayer, because that has to always be the marrying up of prayer and action and we were all in churches that just prayed and did sod

⁶¹⁰ Conversation with Claire from Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 29

⁶¹¹ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraphs 13-15

⁶¹² Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 28

⁶¹³ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 32

⁶¹⁴ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 32

⁶¹⁵ Interview, Margaret, Airbury, Paragraph 71

⁶¹⁶ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 25.

⁶¹⁷ Interview Liz, Airbury, Paragraph 38

⁶¹⁸ Interview Liz, Airbury, Paragraph 37

⁶¹⁹ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 220

all about that and expected God to be the answer to their prayers when God was expecting them to be the answer to those prayers.⁶²⁰

There is an activist tendency within the group which runs alongside a desire for a contemplative prayer life. This contemplative strand has run through the group from the beginning with contemplative prayer being offered weekly when the drop-in first started.⁶²¹ Prayer times can be conversations with each other as much as prayer to God and there is a sense that there is a balance to be found between praying and getting out and doing. Will tells me how he struggled at times when people just offloaded at the drop-in, in what he described as 'a splat of words'.⁶²² Claire had encouraged him to 'take it as their prayer; their lament'.⁶²³

(ii) Charismatic

From Claire's blog it is clear that there was a strong Charismatic Evangelical influence early on. In one post Claire was excited about an 'outpouring of the Holy Spirit' in Dudley.⁶²⁴ She emphasized praying for healing⁶²⁵ and invited people to training events on prophetic gifts and 'Healing on the Streets'.⁶²⁶ In 2009 Claire was writing things on the blog like 'we expect to hear and see God at work over the course of the weekend'.⁶²⁷ Similarly in 2010 she describes 'Treasure Hunting' where people get words from God and then go out to find the people in those words saying that it 'sounds as crazy as anything I've ever heard and I'm desperate to give it a go in Airbury as soon as possible!'.⁶²⁸ Gradually over 2010 and 2011 the emphasis of the Blog began to change with less about charismatic spirituality and more about contemplative spirituality.

Despite this there are still signs of a strong Charismatic influence on the life of Airbury. Claire talked about having a direct word from God to train for the ministry⁶²⁹ and hearing God's voice telling her to employ Will⁶³⁰. She told me about dreams she has had which have shaped the direction of the community.⁶³¹ Margaret told me about prophetic words which had come out of their recent away-day which she felt were important for the group.⁶³² She used to be involved in a Healing on the Streets team in a nearby town and speaks fondly of those times and how that

⁶²⁰ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 30

⁶²¹ Claire's Blog, Airbury, 17-09-08

⁶²² Interview, Will, Airbury, Paragraph 40

⁶²³ Interview, Will, Airbury, Paragraph 40

⁶²⁴ Claire's Blog, Airbury, 23-07-08

⁶²⁵ Claire's Blog, Airbury, 23-08-08

⁶²⁶ Claire's Blog, Airbury, 23-01-09

⁶²⁷ Claire's Blog, Airbury, 22-06-09

⁶²⁸ Claire's Blog, Airbury, 20-05-10

⁶²⁹ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 155

⁶³⁰ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 19

⁶³¹ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 12

⁶³² Interview, Margaret, Airbury, Paragraph 83

has shaped how she prays in the community. She prays short prayers with authority and sometimes she gets a particular insight, a feeling which guides her praying.⁶³³

The move away from charismatic evangelicalism was, on the whole, a conscious one.⁶³⁴ For Will his scepticism came because he saw that Charismatic prayer lacked an understanding of mental health issues.⁶³⁵ He tells me that he left the charismatic church because he felt uncomfortable but there are things he misses.⁶³⁶ I had a number of conversations with Claire where she reacted against charismatic evangelicalism; she was uncomfortable about the Healing on the Streets Teams because of their 'inability to comprehend unanswered prayer' and the fact that they had 'no theology of suffering'.⁶³⁷ Both Will and Claire tell me they have had conversations with each other about it and I sense there has been some disagreement. This has in part come about because of Will and Margaret's recent visit to friends in another town who were previously part of the Healing on the Streets Team. Will, in particular, felt challenged to pray for healing;

I want to see some people healed. It troubles me that we don't see people healed very much anymore, but I want it throughout the town... I know you've got to accept that not everybody is healed. I accept that... But yeah, I want to see that healing ministry restored. Because it is meant to be. The command is to heal the sick – not just pray for the poor buggers.⁶³⁸

He told me about a lady they met when they visited their friends' church who had been born with a deformed foot which had meant she had to use a wheelchair but through an 'incremental journey' she was gradually being healed and no longer used a wheelchair.⁶³⁹ Something about it being a journey seemed to appeal to Will. He told me 'I felt that our testimony was a wee bit weak, a wee bit powerless and I haven't seen anybody healed from anything and I needed some fresh testimony to get me going again. Well I saw some [there]'.⁶⁴⁰

Although the narrative of the group had shifted, over time, away from Charismatic Christianity, many of the practices still remain. Aside from the communion service, extempore prayer seems to be the norm. Pictures, hearing God,⁶⁴¹ prophetic words⁶⁴² and even dreams⁶⁴³ seem to have a significant place in the spirituality of the group and their practice of praying for

⁶³³ Interview, Margaret, Airbury, Paragraphs 11-13

⁶³⁴ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 191; Interview Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 24

⁶³⁵ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 14

⁶³⁶ Filed Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 198

⁶³⁷ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 191

⁶³⁸ Interview, Will, Airbury, Paragraph 66

⁶³⁹ Interview, Will, Airbury, Paragraph 60

⁶⁴⁰ Interview, Will, Airbury, Paragraph 60

⁶⁴¹ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 12 and 19; Field Notes, Paragraph 155

⁶⁴² Interview, Margaret, Airbury, Paragraph 83

⁶⁴³ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 45

the individual by laying on hands⁶⁴⁴ and inviting the Holy Spirit⁶⁴⁵ to come seems very connected to the 'ministry time' of charismatic evangelicalism.

(iii) Communion

Claire tells me;

The Eucharist for me is just all in terms of my spirituality now, massively, I would just take communion every day if I could; well I probably take communion three or four times a week at the moment. And I'm very happy with the liturgy and I really find God in it which I would have been appalled by in my charismatic days really.⁶⁴⁶

This emphasis on communion is seen in the group. Everyone told me that the monthly communion service was very special for them.⁶⁴⁷ The inclusiveness of the communion service was key. They practiced 'open table' so that anyone can take communion.⁶⁴⁸ Claire told me 'we have some atheists journey with us for quite long times who've taken communion'.⁶⁴⁹ She explained that she felt it was important to have no barriers because grace is offered when we don't deserve it.⁶⁵⁰ Michelle talked about the importance to her of holding the cup and being included⁶⁵¹ and Will liked that it was a 'ragtag collection of people that turn up', adding 'I think God is accessible here in those communion services'.⁶⁵²

Relating to Wider Society

(i) Being Relational

Airbury began because they both saw the need around them and felt angry at the injustice of it. Claire explains; 'We were actually quite mad about it. We were like "this is just really not acceptable, this is not fair." You know, why should people here be having a worse time?'.⁶⁵³ This frustration and anger was focused on building relationships with those who are 'furthest away'. Claire explains 'We always have that scripture "you preach peace to those who were far off and to those who were near" and to us the priority is those who are far off'.⁶⁵⁴

It is this relentless emphasis on relationships which defines their engagement with wider society. It all flows from wanting to show Jesus' love. 'I hope always that we'll be able to carry on being a witness to the love of Jesus for people and be able to share the gospel in practical and

⁶⁴⁴ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 258; Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 13; Interview, Michelle, Airbury, Paragraph 50

⁶⁴⁵ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 22

⁶⁴⁶ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 27

⁶⁴⁷ Interview, Liz, Airbury, Paragraph 42; Interview, Will, Airbury, Paragraph 73; Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 265; Conversation with Laura from Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 323.

⁶⁴⁸ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 37

⁶⁴⁹ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 37

⁶⁵⁰ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 37

⁶⁵¹ Interview, Michelle, Airbury, Paragraph 70

⁶⁵² Interview, Will, Airbury, Paragraph 73

⁶⁵³ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 2

⁶⁵⁴ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 36

teaching ways. Seeing people come to faith and be changed'.⁶⁵⁵ Michelle compares their work on the estate with a church in another town, doing something similar, who had struggled which she felt was because they had not focused on building relationships. Through building relationships with people on the estate they did not feel like outsiders.⁶⁵⁶

(ii) In the Gaps

One way I have come to understand the work of the community is 'working in the gaps'. Initially this was working with the local council and other churches to start a Homestart project for the town. After that it was to create a foodbank. This was filling gaps in the provision in the town. But more significantly was the way she, and then the community began to fill the gaps in some of the social care. She was volunteering with the council helping to run a parent support group and off the back of that began to build relationships beyond the group.

The social worker had sort of said "well it's OK for you to pick up some of this work outside of here if you want to do it. Just let me know." And so I started to get asked to go along to educational welfare tribunals where their children had been truanting and they were going to be fined. And you know, to sort of advocate for them, to speak up for them, to write letters for them, so they'd tell me what it was they wanted to say and we'd put it in a letter. And I think really there was a just a turning point from there that just was – wow we can actually do something to impact this.⁶⁵⁷

Claire went beyond the volunteering of providing a support group once a week and built relationships which opened up opportunities to help in practical ways. It showed her how practical the needs were and that there were easy ways that people could make a big difference.

An entry from Claire's blog shows how they are able to fill this relational gap this time with the NHS:

So, an interesting connection has arisen for us at the Upper Room whereby we are having people referred to us from a part of the NHS which supposedly supports people once they're discharged from hospital or having mental health crises.⁶⁵⁸

The budget cuts and rising needs that were once met by benefits and other services is a recurring theme both on the blog and in conversations in the community. I attended the AGM of the group when Claire talked about all the people they had helped, that there was more need due to the changes in the benefit system and that they were 'still ticked off at the way the government is treating people'.⁶⁵⁹

They are also challenging the gaps between rich and poor. There are plans to build 2000 new homes on the estate where they are working and Airbury are trying to make good contacts to

⁶⁵⁵ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 52

⁶⁵⁶ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 280

⁶⁵⁷ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraphs 8 and 9

⁶⁵⁸ Claire's Blog, Airbury, 24-04-12

⁶⁵⁹ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 244

influence the plans. Claire describes it as ‘Standing in the Gap’ and ‘sowing seeds of difference’⁶⁶⁰ and how they have a prophetic role in ‘changing the landscape of the church conversation in the town’⁶⁶¹ by finding opportunities to draw the other churches into meeting the needs in their town.

3. Hilchester Small Missional Community

Brief History

Hilchester SMC (from here on referred to as Hilchester) began through many conversations between Andrew, Becky and another person, Jim, who is no longer connected to the community. Andrew, who leads the group and has seemingly been the driving force behind it, had just finished a gap year with Youth for Christ and had been on a mission trip to Ecuador. He told me he had really loved the expression of church as a small group with a common focus on mission and being church through daily devotions.⁶⁶² Becky similarly had been inspired by her time with Mercy Ships where she had enjoyed ‘some really powerful routines’ of praying together, working together and the integration of life together and life with God. She had felt supported, disciplined and encouraged in a way she had not felt in the church where she grew up.⁶⁶³ The community started because of Jim’s vision to start an art gallery in the centre of town. Andrew explains ‘he’d done an art degree [...] and he was really interested in [...] people on the margins and the way art can bring people together and help people express themselves’.⁶⁶⁴ Jim invited Andrew to set up a community which would support and grow up around the art gallery. Becky describes it as a prayer group and tells me how she was really keen to get a community house where they could ‘live together and pray together and try and impact together’.⁶⁶⁵ Andrew describes the setup of the community house where five of them lived together;

We had a little rule of life and we had a little chapel – like a prayer room – in the house and we used to have morning devotions and have people round for meals and parties and have people to stay who didn’t have anywhere to go and just try and encourage each other in our walk with the Lord and to really live it.⁶⁶⁶

The Gallery ran from October 2008 to July 2009⁶⁶⁷ and through it they interacted with the homeless and with various drug addicts, including a friend of the group who sadly died of an overdose during that year. When the gallery closed the community ‘looked for a new area of

⁶⁶⁰ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 147

⁶⁶¹ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 52

⁶⁶² Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 4

⁶⁶³ Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 2

⁶⁶⁴ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 4

⁶⁶⁵ Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 3

⁶⁶⁶ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 5

⁶⁶⁷ Vision and Values Booklet p5

mission⁶⁶⁸ and focused on an estate on the edge of town where most of the town's social housing is found and which has a negative stigma attached to it. Five of them moved into a house that was owned by the Anglican Church on the estate. They tried to stay connected with the people they had met through the gallery and had a gathering on a Monday night. Initially there were 15 of them on a Monday night which gradually grew until they split into two groups. They met for social activities, went on weekends away together and engaged in 'missional activities' such as gardening for people on the estate, getting to know their neighbours and hosting barbeques and parties.⁶⁶⁹ They began playing football every Tuesday night with anyone who wanted to join in which in Andrew and Charlie's eyes was what initiated the youth work they do on the estate. Amanda sees the youth work as having begun with the small group of girls she had meeting in her house.⁶⁷⁰ She connected with Hilchester soon after they moved onto the estate when she was looking for more support with the work she was doing. The youth work grew with a Friday night youth club, which was popular but did not allow the group the kind of interactions with the young people they were looking for nor the impact they were hoping for.⁶⁷¹ Charlie began to dream about how they could do things differently and inspired by a project they visited in Bradford they launched a charity in 2014.

When I visited, Charlie had just got married and had stopped attending the Monday night meeting. Andrew told me that a number of people had moved away and they had recently been told by the Anglican Church that they would no longer have the house. Andrew had had a difficult time personally and there had been conversations earlier in the year about whether they could carry on. The response from the community was that it 'must carry on'.⁶⁷² Becky describes it as a stage of 'hunkering down'⁶⁷³ where they sought to support each other and listen to God but she was hopeful that they would be able to 'move out' and to grow soon.⁶⁷⁴ Charlie being less connected with the community has meant that the charity and therefore the youth work is less connected with the community, although towards the end of my time it was announced that Charlie and his wife would have to move away due to his wife's job.

Current Description

During the time I was visiting I noticed there were two separate groups forming. One was the community which focused around a Monday night meeting where they brought meals to share and worshiped and studied the Bible together which was principally led by Andrew. The other was the youth charity which was responsible for the youth work and was principally led by

⁶⁶⁸ Vision and Values Booklet p6

⁶⁶⁹ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraphs 6 and 7

⁶⁷⁰ Interview, Amanda, Hilchester, Paragraph 6

⁶⁷¹ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 128

⁶⁷² Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 48

⁶⁷³ Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 48

⁶⁷⁴ Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 52

Charlie. Although Andrew told me it was around 15 people who were part of the community I probably met twice that number of people revealing a core group with a larger periphery.⁶⁷⁵ Of the group only Andrew and Amanda were really involved in both the community and charity and while I was visiting Amanda was taking a sabbatical from the youth work as she reflected on what God was calling her to next.⁶⁷⁶ The charity and the youth work was prayed for and talked about in the community gatherings but very few seemed to be involved in a practical way.⁶⁷⁷

The house community is made up of Philip, Barry, another man who I never met and Amanda and her teenage son.⁶⁷⁸ Although the intention of the community house was that they ate and prayed together it appears that since Charlie moved out a few months before I visited this has been something they had largely failed to continue.⁶⁷⁹ The house, though, functions as a hub for much of what goes on providing a place for them to gather on Mondays (although occasionally they use Andrew's house which is also on the estate) and for other meetings.

A typical Monday evening gathering begins around 6.30pm with people arriving with food which they have prepared or bought which is then heated and cooked. People appear gradually over the next hour with the meal beginning during that time. This is a time of informal conversation and catching up with each other. At the first Monday gathering I attended there were about ten people at the dinner and there were comments about how few people there seemed to be.⁶⁸⁰

Dinner is a bring-and-share. They have made fish pie, and paella, pizza, garlic bread, salad. Rob says grace and everyone starts eating. There is plenty of banter round the table, talking about friends, about what has been going on and filling everyone in on things that have happened in people's lives - people they should be praying for - and everyone decides it would be good to write a card to someone and arrange to go and visit someone else in Birmingham.⁶⁸¹

On another occasion the conversation around the table is more heated, debating the role of the Royal Family and the nature of justice and mission.⁶⁸²

After the dinner they gather in the lounge.⁶⁸³ Tim and Chris are often present. They come from a charismatic church in a neighbouring town with a particular focus on worship, prophecy and knowing 'the father heart of God'.⁶⁸⁴ They have been connected to the community for a number of years, originally through a curate from a local church who was part of the community

⁶⁷⁵ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 7

⁶⁷⁶ Interview, Amanda, Hilchester, Paragraphs 20, 116

⁶⁷⁷ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 28,

⁶⁷⁸ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 5

⁶⁷⁹ Interview, Amanda, Hilchester, Paragraph 12

⁶⁸⁰ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 11

⁶⁸¹ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 16

⁶⁸² Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 185

⁶⁸³ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 18

⁶⁸⁴ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 39

for a time. Andrew tells me that Tim and Chris have brought a 'deep appreciation of worship' and that before, the community had 'always been a bit more activist and get out and do things, but actually before you do that people need to know they're loved and everything can flow from that'.⁶⁸⁵ Once a month Tim and Chris lead the evening with an extended time of worship and prayer and teaching on spiritual gifts. When I was there they were learning about prophecy and prophesying over each other.

We begin with the song "Blessed be your Name". Everyone is quickly engaged, singing along. Two or three with their hands in the air, others with their eyes closed and everyone in the room seems engaged in the worship, even those who've decided to stay seated are singing along, eyes closed with their hands open in front of them. This flowed straight into the song "We stand and lift up our hands". At various points phrases get sung a few times over including "more of you Lord" and "be present here". During this time Charlie places a cushion on the ground and kneels.⁶⁸⁶

Chris then said that it was an open heaven and that we should declare things because "what we loose on earth will be loosed in heaven". He said he would begin and encouraged Andrew and Charlie to join in. He began declaring that God reigns over the city, over the hospitals, streets, neighbours, over cancer, over heart attacks "you are not of this earth Lord". There were many other things too, but he was saying it so quickly this is what I took a note of. Andrew began listing off names of places, streets and buildings where they work. Then he began to list of the names of people that they work with, particularly lots of the young people. Chris is shouting, "come on Andrew" as an encouragement to keep declaring things about God. He continues, "Reign in their lives."⁶⁸⁷

Of all the groups I visited this was the only group which had regular and extended times of charismatic worship.

On the occasions when Tim and Chris were not leading they had a longer teaching time. At the first meeting in January Andrew encouraged the group to reflect back on the previous year for them as individuals, encouraging them to focus on 'answered and unanswered prayer, on what they have learnt about God and how they have changed'.⁶⁸⁸ They spent about ten minutes reflecting on this on their own before sharing with the rest of the group. The following week they reflected on their hopes for the coming year.⁶⁸⁹

The youth charity has various different weekly activities. Tuesday night football continues as it has for the last few years with Charlie, Andrew and whoever else is around turning up at the compound to play football with whoever is there. The evening I attended there were in the region of 20 people, including some teenage girls who watched from the side.⁶⁹⁰ On Thursday

⁶⁸⁵ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 39

⁶⁸⁶ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 20

⁶⁸⁷ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 24-25

⁶⁸⁸ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 195

⁶⁸⁹ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 223

⁶⁹⁰ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 363

nights they run a Bible study with young people who are Christians or interested in the Christian faith. Friday nights is 'Café Boost' which is primarily run by the young people for their friends.⁶⁹¹ Before the football on a Tuesday they have a prayer meeting at the community house where they pray for things to do with the charity.⁶⁹² There is the Bike Hub which is a social enterprise project run in collaboration with another local charity to teach young people to repair old bikes that can be sold.⁶⁹³ There is a monthly leaders' meeting on a Wednesday night which either begins with a meal or includes dessert and is seen by Charlie as the main time that the leaders and volunteers can encourage and support each other.⁶⁹⁴ Beyond this Charlie has developed mentoring relationships with some of the more challenging young people, mainly through relationships with the local secondary school.⁶⁹⁵

Becky tells me the three most important things about the community are 'the connection with each other, letting God guide us and trying to bring God into the community'.⁶⁹⁶ This seems a good summary to keep in mind while exploring some of the themes arising in the community.

Being Community

(i) Love One another

The big focus of being community is caring for one another and loving each other. Becky tells me that they felt it was really important and highlighted the verses in John 13 'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another'.⁶⁹⁷ Becky tells me 'we did definitely, actively and consciously prioritised that [...] eating together was important and trying to create a loving community [...] that we could invite people into.'⁶⁹⁸ Later in the interview she talked about 'a love that is authentic'⁶⁹⁹, not loving people so that they become Christians but befriending them and loving them unconditionally. Philip also emphasises the importance of building good relationships that 'spill out', building relationships in the house, but also with neighbours and those around.⁷⁰⁰

This love for each other plays out in support and encouragement. Andrew said that in the community house they try to 'encourage each other in our walk with the Lord and to really live

⁶⁹¹ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 134

⁶⁹² Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 327-8

⁶⁹³ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 257

⁶⁹⁴ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 230-215

⁶⁹⁵ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 255

⁶⁹⁶ Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 39

⁶⁹⁷ Bible, NRSV; John 13.34-35

⁶⁹⁸ Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 9

⁶⁹⁹ Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 29

⁷⁰⁰ Interview, Philip, Hilchester, Paragraph 14

it'.⁷⁰¹ Becky makes a similar point; 'we eat together and pray and learn about God together but also try and support each other in our lives day-to-day'.⁷⁰² Amanda, amid some of her struggles in the community tells me, 'The good bits were the support, [...] people having time outside Sunday so it's not just on a Sunday it's on a Monday'.⁷⁰³

They describe Hilchester as family. Andrew talks about 'trying to create a family atmosphere where people really know each other, know what they're going through – they can respond to people's needs'.⁷⁰⁴ Ed told me that Hilchester had been like a second family to him, particularly as he is from Ireland and his parents live in Edinburgh.⁷⁰⁵

(ii) Being Small

Being small was important for Andrew; it meant that they could be family and support each other.⁷⁰⁶ He said 'I always really appreciated the smallness and I think sometimes when we grew to forty-something it was hard for everyone to really know each other'.⁷⁰⁷ He told me he thought it was important to have constancy and depth rather than breadth.⁷⁰⁸ He talked about the importance of depth of relationships and the opportunities to teach and disciple that come about through small groups and how it is really attractive to him. He likened it to the church in Acts 2.

Being small also means that it is fragile. Andrew describes how the group felt quite fragile as people got married and for various reasons left the group because they 'feel like they need to go off and do their own thing and sort of create their own identity'.⁷⁰⁹ Becky also talks about the fluctuations with people leaving when they get married and how you need a big group to be able to take those fluctuations.⁷¹⁰

(iii) Identity and Value in God

In Hilchester, one of the main emphasises of exploring charismatic spirituality has been the focus on identity, as Andrew describes; 'the identity stuff in Christ, who he is and how he feels about us'.⁷¹¹ This arose regularly in the Monday meetings. One night they decided to pray and prophesy over each other one by one. I was asked not to record anything about specific people but a lot of the 'words' they shared with each other were things like 'I see you sat on a swing with Jesus and you are talking about everything' and 'God just wants to give you a big hug and tell you

⁷⁰¹ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 5

⁷⁰² Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 25

⁷⁰³ Interview, Amanda, Hilchester, Paragraph 17

⁷⁰⁴ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 16

⁷⁰⁵ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 71

⁷⁰⁶ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 16

⁷⁰⁷ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 27

⁷⁰⁸ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 27

⁷⁰⁹ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 23

⁷¹⁰ Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 9

⁷¹¹ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 39

he loves you'.⁷¹² For one girl they prayed positive things over her, things they valued in her and saw in her, to counter the negative thoughts she has about herself.⁷¹³ In another meeting where they were sharing about what they had learnt about God in the last year Philip said he realised he was trying to find value and stability in things other than God.⁷¹⁴

Hilchester believe everything begins with knowing who you are, finding your identity in Christ and knowing you are loved. Their desire is that everyone knows this as a foundation from which everything else can flow.⁷¹⁵ This is not just what they want for each other but one of the main things they seek to bring when they reach out to the young people. Charlie tells me about how they want to counter some of the hopelessness and negative ideas people have;

Just trying to say that there is a different story to tell, that you have got skills, you have got talents; God is for you and wants the best for you. And wanting to give young people the opportunities to build up their skills and show their talents and see that small changes in people's lives.⁷¹⁶

The vision statement of the charity is 'to see young people come alive as they change the world around them'.⁷¹⁷ Their hope is that young people would rise up into the fullness of who they were made to be and live fulfilled lives.⁷¹⁸ In a conversation with Charlie, he told me "Jesus wants people to be fulfilled" and he believes the best way that that can happen is through them knowing Jesus, but even if they don't they can give them the skills and help them to live fulfilled lives.⁷¹⁹ These are regular points of prayer on the Prayer Email too; 'For blessing and favour on [a particular young person]. That he would make good choices. His confidence and self-worth would increase and good people would be placed around him'.⁷²⁰

Within the SMC itself, Andrew wanted to have a 'community where they can really flourish and really express themselves in worship and art and really grow a faith that is connected with mission but also is really personal and not dependent on anyone else'.⁷²¹

Relationship to Church

(i) Being Church

Hilchester consciously began as an expression of church. Andrew was inspired by Fresh Expressions, Missional Church and New Monasticism and the idea of having an expression of

⁷¹² Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 106

⁷¹³ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 106

⁷¹⁴ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 202

⁷¹⁵ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 39

⁷¹⁶ Interview, Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 46

⁷¹⁷ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 132

⁷¹⁸ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 6

⁷¹⁹ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 132

⁷²⁰ Prayer Emails, Hilchester, Paragraph 149

⁷²¹ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 31

church as a small group with a common mission.⁷²² Becky talks about their frustrations with the local church they all attended;

We kind of just felt it was a Sunday thing and then everyone got on with their lives, and obviously we all loved God and wanted to live for him but there wasn't really anything in that Sunday that enabled us to do that better the rest of the week.⁷²³

She was particularly inspired by the idea of community living and the book *The Irresistible Revolution*.⁷²⁴ She tells me that communities like Hilchester are appearing around the country because people are tired of church, find it irrelevant and are wanting more.⁷²⁵ They have been able to shape their expression of church around mutual support and learning.⁷²⁶ Philip tells me

Sometimes institutional church can become too formal, too about the service, and the coffee afterwards is seen as a little added thing and I think I liked this because it felt like something I'd do normally with my friends; come and have a meal, but a bit more directed. And I thought I quite liked that expression of church – that almost deliberate blurring and mixing things in and saying this is a social thing where we're supposed to live lives with each other, we are supposed to get to know each other and do normal things but also there's something more to it as well. That's the main thing that really appealed to me.⁷²⁷

Relationships are made central to the community, shown through the focus on the meal, rather than coffee at the end of the service.

Many who attend, although not everyone, would see it as their church. For Andrew, Becky, Philip and others it is very much their expression of church.⁷²⁸ Amanda talks about not going to church for a year or so and realising that Hilchester could be her church.⁷²⁹ Philip tells me 'I would describe it as church but more centred around a smaller group of people so that it's easier to get to know other people and to live in their lives'.⁷³⁰

Although Becky talked about Hilchester as her church, she also told me 'I would really love to think we could be like a stepping stone for church' for some of the young people.⁷³¹ She says it's hard to step straight into church when you come from having nothing to do with God. 'it's a stepping stone where you can learn more of God and God can speak to you – but it's more of a normal experience having dinner and sitting in someone's living room'.⁷³² A number of people who have become Christians through the work of Hilchester have ended up attending a

⁷²² Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 4

⁷²³ Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 2

⁷²⁴ Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution*.

⁷²⁵ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 15

⁷²⁶ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraphs 5 and 16

⁷²⁷ Interview, Philip, Hilchester, Paragraph 4

⁷²⁸ Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 25

⁷²⁹ Interview, Amanda, Hilchester, Paragraph 12

⁷³⁰ Interview, Philip, Hilchester, Paragraph 25

⁷³¹ Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 21

⁷³² Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 21

local church rather than being part of the SMC.⁷³³ In some cases this was because the group felt a bit young for them.

(ii) Relating to other churches

It is interesting to plot their relationship with other churches and the points of tension between them. As discussed Hilchester was started because they felt the church they went to on Sunday had very little to do with the rest of their lives. That church did, however, encourage them and 'blessed them' in starting up the gallery.⁷³⁴ When they moved onto the estate into the local Anglican Church's house the church hoped they would get involved. However, the expectation was that they would get involved in Sunday services, which was exactly what the group felt they were trying to get away from. Philip comments;

When you're part of a church group like [Hilchester] where you're saying we want it to be more about living with other people, we want it to be less resource intensive as a Sunday morning thing but we do want to work with the other churches around us [...] but then they're like 'Great we'd love you to get involved. Come and lead our kids' ministry on a Sunday. Come and do the sound desk on a Sunday'. There's a bit of clash there, just in the way they want you to serve and how you bless them is to do all the things on Sunday that you're trying to not do – so I think from the beginning that's a little bit difficult.⁷³⁵

This tension has continued and is perhaps one of the reasons that the church have asked the group to move out of the house and have invited another community to start a prayer community in the house.

Philip contrasts the relationship with the Anglican Church and the relationship they have with the church from the neighbouring town;

I think one of the things that has been wonderful about them is that they've said 'we just want to bless you, we just want to see Christ formed in you'. It's been their whole thing and they haven't at any point really ever said 'and you can become part of our church', it has been a 'we think we can see Jesus working here so we want to be part of that'.⁷³⁶

This was seen in stark contrast with the Anglican Church which seemed to see them as a resource for their work. He tells me that they thought about becoming a Fresh Expression of Church within the Anglican Church but realised that if it did it would come under the leadership of the local Anglican Church which they felt unhappy with.⁷³⁷

God's Agency

(i) God's love, Strength and Power

On my first visit to the community, after a time of Charismatic worship Andrew talked to me and was concerned I might have felt uncomfortable with the Charismatic elements of the meeting. He

⁷³³ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 14

⁷³⁴ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 5

⁷³⁵ Interview, Philip, Hilchester, Paragraph 36

⁷³⁶ Interview, Philip, Hilchester, Paragraph 35

⁷³⁷ Interview, Philip, Hilchester, Paragraph 35

told me that when they began they had focused on being missional and relevant and although a few people had become Christians it didn't seem very powerful. When they were encouraged down the Charismatic route they felt it was more powerful and they were more hopeful that this would change the estate for the better.⁷³⁸ He described to me how they 'majored on how much God loves people and his heart for people – the father's heart'.⁷³⁹

This has become much of the focus of their Monday night meetings; knowing God's love and their identity in Christ. Philip told me how important it had been for him to experience God as father through the charismatic practices. According to Becky, the regular visits of Chris and Tim has 'brought a massive injection of spiritual understanding and power and more of a prophetic and... miraculous side of everything'.⁷⁴⁰ This sense of God's power has been an important addition to the missional approach they began with.

Andrew and Charlie both tell me about the importance of doing things in God's strength rather than their own. Charlie tells me how when he began focusing more on the youth work he 'felt challenged by God to stop doing, doing, doing and just get to know him'.⁷⁴¹ Andrew tells me 'I guess a lot of what I've seen is trying to do stuff out of my own strength and not really bear fruit, whereas God can really bear fruit if you let him'.⁷⁴² Rob shared something similar in a Monday meeting where he had felt God saying to him to live more simply and not get caught up in doing and asking what's next.⁷⁴³ In the same meeting Amanda shared quite openly how it had been a difficult end to the year. She says she felt God telling her to trust him and not lean on her own strength. She comments that she's an activist and God needed to physically stop her.⁷⁴⁴

For those who have been around the community a long time it appears that much of what they have learnt is that the activism works best when it comes from an experience of being loved by God and comes with the power and strength of God rather than their own. Using their own effort to make church accessible did not really work and they have learnt to focus on worshipping God and let him do the work.

(ii) God's Plan

At the end of one Monday night meeting Andrew prayed, 'We can't see the big picture but everything you do has deep meaning and fits in your plan'.⁷⁴⁵ For Hilchester God is at work, has a plan and sees the big picture. This means that they need to trust him and to follow his lead.

Charlie writes in one of his prayer emails;

⁷³⁸ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 57

⁷³⁹ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 39

⁷⁴⁰ Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 46

⁷⁴¹ Interview, Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 24

⁷⁴² Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 41

⁷⁴³ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 200

⁷⁴⁴ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 213

⁷⁴⁵ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 226

This week God has been really challenging me about obedience. Will you trust me and obey? Will you believe me at my word? Will you believe more in my ability to work through you, than in your own ability? My cry is yes, but I know it requires letting go of my own agenda, my pride and just being faithful. It's hard.⁷⁴⁶

Hilchester regularly challenge each other to stop doing things in their own strength, to give up their plans and to trust in God's plans. Becky talks about the importance of 'seeking God's will for where we go with it. Allowing God to work and lead it and guide it'.⁷⁴⁷

Charlie's story of his involvement with the community and starting the charity is very focused on how God led him and guided him. He was about to leave the town but Andrew invited him to move into the community house. He kept making plans to go and visit other places but he didn't have the motivation, which surprised him because he is normally quite a motivated person.⁷⁴⁸ He moved into the house and as he got to know local people he 'started to feel impacted by it'.⁷⁴⁹ He describes how rather than a vague notion of need he began to see practical ways he could help; the abstract became real and personal.⁷⁵⁰ He says it 'must have been God'⁷⁵¹ who drew him into the work on the estate and put it on his heart.⁷⁵² He gradually felt drawn into doing more and asked his employer if he could work four days a week and later three. He spent a lot of time praying and reading his Bible after the challenge from God to get to know him. He says 'every time I was praying about doing youth stuff there was, I would almost say, a fire in my heart to do it [...] it was something I couldn't not do'.⁷⁵³

(iii) Bringing God into the community

Hilchester have developed various ways to understand their work in relation to God's plans. Becky talks about 'wanting to bring God and impact the rest of the community'⁷⁵⁴ and how they are 'trying to bring God into the community'.⁷⁵⁵ Charlie talks about being a good example to the young people on the estate and finishes every prayer email with the line 'Overall please pray that we would represent Jesus well in all that we do this week. That people would be drawn to Him'.⁷⁵⁶ At the youth work prayer meeting Charlie opened with these prayers recorded in my field notes;

He thanked God, he invited God to be present and asked him to inspire our prayers and that we'd hear his voice. He said that this wasn't some ambition of theirs but that they believe this is God's plan. That they come in agreement and come as God's hands and feet.

⁷⁴⁶ Prayer Emails, Hilchester, Paragraph 517

⁷⁴⁷ Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 39

⁷⁴⁸ Interview, Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 18

⁷⁴⁹ Interview, Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 20

⁷⁵⁰ Interview, Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 20

⁷⁵¹ Interview, Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 20

⁷⁵² Interview, Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 20; Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 136

⁷⁵³ Interview, Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 24

⁷⁵⁴ Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 39

⁷⁵⁵ Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 39

⁷⁵⁶ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 122; Prayer Emails, Hilchester, Paragraph 30

He thanked God for his faithfulness to them. 'You are our Lord and King. We declare that you are shifting the atmosphere and your freedom is coming.' 'We can do nothing without you', 'Forgive us when we do things in our own strength'.⁷⁵⁷

They believe that God has a plan and is at work in the community and that it is through them that God enacts some of this plan. They are God's hands and feet and yet they can do nothing without him and shouldn't be doing it in their own strength. On another occasion Charlie described it as being 'good stewards' and prays that God would 'equip and inspire' them.⁷⁵⁸

(iv) Creating Space for God

After reflecting on the year ahead, one of Charlie's new goals was to make sure there was space in his week to respond to opportunities and needs that appear. He expects God will bring these opportunities and highlights how he and his wife had the space to take in a young person into their house for a few weeks.⁷⁵⁹ He later refers to this as 'creating the space for God to move'.⁷⁶⁰ In a similar vein Andrew talks about trying to 'bless and then see what God does with that'.⁷⁶¹ Charlie also spoke of 'seeing God represented well in this community, so that people whatever their perspective can be like "well I've seen that God is good – I may not believe in him but I see he's good"'.⁷⁶²

Becky tells me about a lady she met who is a spiritualist who she invited along to the Monday night meeting saying that she 'will probably be another person who for a long time there is a connection and a care and we will see what God does with it'.⁷⁶³ Hilchester seem comfortable with this approach; they engage in the local community and are drawn into things by God, they build friendships with those they interact with knowing that God is at work in those friendships and that he will speak at the right time. By being there they are creating space for God to move.

(v) God brings Change

Charlie tells me;

the aim for [the youth work] is to hopefully be a catalyst to see change come to this community. And not just superficial, but deep rooted long term change and I think that's only going to come through God it's not going to come through a great community centre.⁷⁶⁴

For Hilchester change comes through God's work which is a key motivation for them.⁷⁶⁵ They see this change as God's Kingdom coming in their community. Charlie describes how in dreaming

⁷⁵⁷ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 330

⁷⁵⁸ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 314

⁷⁵⁹ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 248

⁷⁶⁰ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 281

⁷⁶¹ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 9

⁷⁶² Interview, Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 46

⁷⁶³ Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 27

⁷⁶⁴ Interview, Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 46

⁷⁶⁵ Interview, Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 43

about where the youth work would go their conversations were around the question ‘what do we think the Kingdom of God coming in this community looks like and how can we make steps towards that? We were looking at how we could facilitate it’.⁷⁶⁶ Change comes through the work of God but it is facilitated through them being present on the estate and God working through them.

The change that God is bringing comes in various forms. There are the changed individuals’ lives; the young person who is happy and content at school,⁷⁶⁷ the friendships restored,⁷⁶⁸ through answered prayers for healing, and people becoming Christians. Change comes through restored hope in the community where people begin to feel that they can have dreams and they can come true.⁷⁶⁹ And change comes through a changing atmosphere on the estate; this is something Charlie regularly asks for prayer for in the prayer email⁷⁷⁰ and mentions an answer to prayer that ‘one of the young people mentioned that what they like about football is the atmosphere, something we have been praying for!’.⁷⁷¹

Christian Practices

(i) Prayer

Prayer has been important for Hilchester from the beginning. The gallery was launched with a week of 24-7 Prayer⁷⁷² and Becky and Robin both told me that one of their motivations was having experienced the importance of a regular pattern of prayer with others on the short-term overseas missions teams that they had participated in.⁷⁷³ As a result they tried to pray regularly together in the community house.⁷⁷⁴ He told me that there wasn’t much structure to the prayer time; they might read a psalm together, once a week they would have a time of worship and generally they would pray for each other and the community around them.⁷⁷⁵ According to Becky the routine in the community house worked well and she and a friend continued to pray together when they moved into a different house; ‘It’s amazing – really, really good, powerful– just to pray together regularly’.⁷⁷⁶ Andrew thinks that ‘praying for each other has been massive over the years’.⁷⁷⁷

⁷⁶⁶ Interview, Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 24

⁷⁶⁷ Prayer Emails, Hilchester, Paragraph 56

⁷⁶⁸ Prayer Emails, Hilchester, Paragraph 265

⁷⁶⁹ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 272

⁷⁷⁰ Prayer Emails, Hilchester, Paragraphs 82, 194, 224, 280, 283, 570

⁷⁷¹ Prayer Emails, Hilchester, Paragraph 145

⁷⁷² Interview Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 5

⁷⁷³ Interview Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 4; Interview Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 2

⁷⁷⁴ Interview, Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 8

⁷⁷⁵ Interview, Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 10

⁷⁷⁶ Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 54

⁷⁷⁷ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 16

Amanda tells me that in the last few months of the community house this focus on prayer has petered out⁷⁷⁸ but Becky hopes that with Philip moving into her house they might be able to continue regular prayer.⁷⁷⁹

(ii) Sung Worship

As already mentioned Hilchester avoided sung worship in the early stages because they saw it as at-odds with the missional and relevant approach they were seeking; as Andrew relays 'I didn't want to be the cheesy Christians, because obviously there aren't many environments where people sing communally'.⁷⁸⁰ But through the connections which came about with the church in the neighbouring town they have found a power and a value in it which they were missing. Andrew tells me that with the growing emphasis on charismatic worship and spiritual gifts, 'a lot of people were really attracted to that and came to learn, you know there was a feeling of the presence of God and I don't know; there was lots of miracles'.⁷⁸¹ The emphasis is on how much God loves everyone, which they call 'the father's heart' and how they are all sons and daughters of God. I asked Andrew, Philip and Becky about the connection with the church and the worship times and they all told me how important they had been to them bringing a deeper appreciation and understanding of spiritual gifts and seeking God.⁷⁸² Philip calls it 'the experiential – I don't like saying spiritual side but it is that'⁷⁸³ and appreciates how there are many different ways to experience God in Hilchester.

It appears that a number of people started coming to the meetings because of this focus on charismatic worship and God's presence. Although for many the focus on worship was something refreshing that brought new life to the work they were doing, it appears that some come just for the worship time with little intention of engaging in the community.

Andrew explains that everything they do should flow from the place of knowing how God feels about them.⁷⁸⁴ He tells me there needs to be a tension between 'inputting' and 'outputting' and it's important to do both. Andrew's prayer in one of the meetings demonstrates his sense of that tension, 'Lord we do a lot for ourselves here in Hilchester but it's when we look out that we really enter into your blessing'.⁷⁸⁵

Charismatic spirituality has been a great encouragement to the group and resourced them in a new way to do what they want to do on the estate, but at the same time it has been a

⁷⁷⁸ Interview, Amanda, Hilchester, Paragraph 12

⁷⁷⁹ Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 54

⁷⁸⁰ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 41

⁷⁸¹ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 37

⁷⁸² Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 46,

⁷⁸³ Interview, Philip, Hilchester, Paragraph 56

⁷⁸⁴ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 39

⁷⁸⁵ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 110

distraction away from the work they are doing and has meant that there are people involved in the group who don't have a passion for what is happening on the estate.

(iii) Miracles

One of the other things that the focus on charismatic worship has brought is a focus on praying for miracles and healing. 'There was lots of miracles, we've always had lots of answers to prayer during [our gathering] – including healing – often not in a miraculous there and then way but in a sort of slower way'.⁷⁸⁶ They tell me about some of the answers to prayers they have had; praying for a friend's hand which had a bad cut on it and a week later finding it had healed really well,⁷⁸⁷ praying for a lady with a bad back and her saying it had got better straight away,⁷⁸⁸ praying for one of the boys they mentor to get a place at school which seemed very unlikely, but he was accepted,⁷⁸⁹ and seeing relationships restored particularly between one girl and her mum who had always had a difficult relationship.⁷⁹⁰

The focus on prayer and praying for miracles is an important element of how they reach out. Andrew tells me about the importance of both the practical support but also praying for people if they are sick.⁷⁹¹ They feel they have grown in confidence to offer prayer and believing that they might be healed.⁷⁹² Andrew tells me that the charismatic emphasis has 'increased the confidence to pray for people and really ask the Holy Spirit to bless people and heal people on the streets'.⁷⁹³ He sees it as a way of expressing love for people.⁷⁹⁴

Relating to Wider Society

(i) Tension between being community and social action

They have felt a tension in Hilchester between building community and engaging in social action, particularly in understanding how the charity fits with the community. Some like Charlie and Andrew are heavily focused on the estate, on reaching out, whereas Becky and others see the importance of building community, of caring for and loving each other in order to create a safe environment for others to be welcomed into.⁷⁹⁵ Andrew refers to the concept in the book *Punk Monk*⁷⁹⁶ which uses the analogy of breathing in and breathing out. Activities focused inwards, for example worship, prayer, teaching and eating together are seen as 'breathing in' and breathing

⁷⁸⁶ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 37

⁷⁸⁷ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 33

⁷⁸⁸ Interview, Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 14

⁷⁸⁹ Prayer Emails, Hilchester, Paragraph 14

⁷⁹⁰ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 244

⁷⁹¹ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 33

⁷⁹² Interview, Philip, Hilchester, Paragraph 54

⁷⁹³ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 41

⁷⁹⁴ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 34

⁷⁹⁵ Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 29

⁷⁹⁶ Freeman and Greig, *Punk Monk*.

out is the outreach; the mission and social action.⁷⁹⁷ He tells me that he has been taught the value of worship and building community but that it is important to have the tension. Becky also reflected on the tension between the two, particularly how Charlie was frustrated with the 'inward looking stuff'.⁷⁹⁸ She highlighted two things which made it difficult to do everything; having enough resources and people trying to be involved in the community alongside their full time jobs. She also pointed towards the fact that the more recent charismatic focus of the group had meant that the Monday meeting wasn't as accessible as it had been to people 'who don't know anything about God'.⁷⁹⁹

For Charlie the tension was difficult and he stopped going to the Monday meetings to focus on the charity.⁸⁰⁰ Andrew told me that church leaders had advised him that they should just focus on the estate and let the others go but he didn't want to 'dictate things'.⁸⁰¹ He felt the best way was to pray and listen, not to fight the flow too much and to be comfortable with the tension; 'not wanting to have a neat box'.⁸⁰² One of the things the group has found difficult is hanging on to people. People don't necessarily have the vision for the estate and the outreach in the way Andrew and Charlie do, but nevertheless their presence means that there are sufficient people for the group to be viable.

(ii) Starting from Friendship

As already mentioned the basis of their work on the estate are loving relationships. In Andrew's words 'we're not trying to do big altar calls or preaches but really try and bless and then see what God does with that. Share the Gospel but kind of become friends and start really from friends'.⁸⁰³ Becky tells me that 'I think, from what I can see the neighbours have become really good friends and come to rely on the people in the house in a good way and see the church [...] in a more practical, alive, personable way'.⁸⁰⁴

In many ways the football that they play with the young people every Tuesday embodies what they are attempting to do; through low key consistent activities they build relationships. Charlie tells me how they were inspired by a friend who did something similar somewhere else. They used to turn up and even if there were no young people they would still enjoy playing football together.⁸⁰⁵ Gradually over time people began to realise they would be there and it grew 'organically'⁸⁰⁶, they never advertised it, they just turned up and invited anyone else to join in.

⁷⁹⁷ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 18

⁷⁹⁸ Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 9

⁷⁹⁹ Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 52

⁸⁰⁰ Interview, Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 29

⁸⁰¹ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 23

⁸⁰² Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 48

⁸⁰³ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 9

⁸⁰⁴ Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 17

⁸⁰⁵ Interview, Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 14

⁸⁰⁶ Interview, Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 16

Philip tells me that they are ‘able to model living life through football’⁸⁰⁷ by which he means ‘being competitive and having fun, but also being encouraging to other people rather than bemoaning them not passing the ball – you know very simple things – and just being a consistent presence in people’s lives’.⁸⁰⁸

In all their interactions practical support is seen as a key element. Andrew explains

The most important [way of showing love] is that committed, loving, practical support and that includes giving them lifts to the shops or going with them to hospital or sorting out their gardens and trying to help them find a job but also praying if their sick.⁸⁰⁹

This practical action, whether it be taking people to the shops, cooking crumbles for neighbours from the apples from their garden, helping with their gardens or other DIY tasks they are all seen as ways to bless people and build relationships.

(iii) Reaching out as Community

At the beginning of the interview with Andrew while he was talking about the aims of the gallery he said ‘So it would be a way [...] of the church to get out and meet people but not just as individuals but as a community and hopefully people would be drawn into the Trinity and their communal dance’.⁸¹⁰ It was said with a chuckle at the end due to the theological language he was using, but I was particularly interested in his focus of the church getting out as a community, not just individuals. Their social action and interactions with wider society tend to be through members of the community engaging together. The focus of the community house allowed hospitality to be central. Andrew describes how once they started the shared house they had ‘people round for meals and parties and people to stay who didn’t have anywhere to go’.⁸¹¹ They all talk about having neighbours round for dinner and doing big parties.⁸¹² They used to do a big Christmas party and a big summer party.

(iv) Changing the Atmosphere

One of the things a number of people told me about was the negative stigma attached to the estate in the city. They talk about their hope of ‘telling a different story’ and of ‘changing the atmosphere’ on the estate. Charlie tells me;

It’s like –someone said to me that ‘salvation is the centre of God’s plan but not the circumference’ and that our role is to improve environments – not like the only thing is to see someone saved. We want to see the whole environment improved. And yeah, just like hope where there isn’t hope – different stories to tell about life – but as a community.⁸¹³

⁸⁰⁷ Interview, Philip, Hilchester, Paragraph 16

⁸⁰⁸ Interview, Philip, Hilchester, Paragraph 18

⁸⁰⁹ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 33

⁸¹⁰ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 4

⁸¹¹ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 5

⁸¹² Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 17; Interview Philip, Hilchester, Paragraph 20; Interview Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 7

⁸¹³ Interview Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 27

He tells me his hope for the charity is that it would be a catalyst for change by telling a different story from the one people hear growing up. That God is for them and wants the best for them and how that will bring small changes in people's lives which will breed more change.⁸¹⁴ Having testimonies is therefore an important part of it. People telling the stories of what God has done.⁸¹⁵

(v) Charity, School and Local Council

In many ways the charity was a way they could legitimately do the youth work they wanted to do when it became clear the affiliation with the local church was not working. The aim of the charity is not to put on activities for young people but to help young people be part of running them.⁸¹⁶ Isaiah 61 has been important to them in setting up the charity. Charlie explains 'Isaiah 61 [talks about] the most broken people will restore cities and community and I guess our belief is that change is going to come from within this community'.⁸¹⁷ One example of this is, when a number of teenage girls said they were disappointed that their school was not engaged in much charity work, they encouraged them to stop complaining and set something up themselves, which led the girls to organise and run a Christmas party fundraiser.⁸¹⁸ Charlie talks about the need to make sure the work is of high quality when you're a charity and to look after volunteers and acknowledges the challenges of being both a charity and a community.⁸¹⁹ What becoming a charity has done is to open up opportunities to work with the school and local council in a new way.

They connected with council youth workers early on when they started coming along to the football on a Tuesday night and handed out hot chocolate and supported the work they were doing. The council also funded them to take the young people on trips.⁸²⁰ But gradually as people left the council and with changes in funding the council workers disappeared. As cuts started to affect what the council could deliver they invited Charlie and the charity to do more and more. Initially the contact with the school came through a council worker being made redundant and asking Charlie to continue the mentoring he had been doing for a young person which involved going into school to support him. This meant that Charlie gradually got to know the school and got asked to help out in other ways. He tells me 'I got asked to a presentation at a multi-agency meeting and told everyone about what we're doing and from that other people have asked if we can support people. Which has been amazing really – like seeing people value what we've

⁸¹⁴ Interview Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 46

⁸¹⁵ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 347; Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraphs 349 and 351

⁸¹⁶ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 134

⁸¹⁷ Interview, Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 35

⁸¹⁸ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 135

⁸¹⁹ Interview, Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 37

⁸²⁰ Interview, Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 16

done'.⁸²¹ Their consistent presence and continuing work with the young people has resulted in more opportunities.

Charlie and his wife have been involved with a number of young people and families in various ways through the school and social services. In particular, one boy ended up living with them for a few weeks while they worked with social services to find him a permanent place to live. They helped another boy successfully return to school after 5 months of absence. They provided one-to-one support, helped him to get involved in sports activities and took him to church. His teachers asked 'what have you done to him? He is like a different child. He can't stop smiling'.⁸²² They also run a bike hub which one boy was able to get involved with and count it towards school attendance. These are various examples where they have been able to bring a relational consistency and help to smooth some of the gaps between the school and social services.

4. Eastbark Small Missional Community

Brief History

Eastbark SMC (from here on referred to as Eastbark) came out of a local Charismatic Evangelical Free Church, Eastbark Community Church (ECC). Most of the original families involved in Eastbark SMC were active members of ECC and all part of the same small group. According to Jenny they felt as though they weren't progressing, the things they had hoped for when they were young hadn't happened yet and they want to 'dig deep in the things of God'.⁸²³ Their small group ate together and prayed weekly. Jenny points to a particular time when they prayed every night for six weeks for a girl with spinal deformities in Albania as something which formed them as a group and gave them a sense of what might be next.⁸²⁴ They had some experience of 24-7 Prayer locally and participating in weeks of prayer and some of them were actively involved in the movement.⁸²⁵ In 2005 Jenny and Darren bought a new house which Nick suggested they turned into a house of prayer. After a while considering it they agreed and it opened in April 2006.

So what we did then we just made the beds, made the house presentable, painted a few flowery walls and put some prayer things up – cd player really – a few plates and table and chairs. And we just started and it was very much a hands-off for Darren and I at that time – and we didn't – we tried not to make any plans – the idea was that people who wanted to would come and pray for one hour a week and we would just see what God did, so we did that until about the Christmas.⁸²⁶

⁸²¹ Interview, Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 41

⁸²² Charity Newsletter Spring 2015

⁸²³ Interview, Jenny, Eastbark, Paragraph 2

⁸²⁴ Interview, Jenny, Eastbark, Paragraph 2

⁸²⁵ Interview, Jenny, Eastbark, Paragraph 6; Interview David, Eastbark, Paragraph 15-22

⁸²⁶ Interview, Jenny, Eastbark, Paragraph 6

They began eating together once a week and felt they were starting to get some momentum. In the February of 2007 they had a breakfast for everyone and discussed what was next. There was plenty of enthusiasm and they decided to continue for another three years and to be intentional about having meals together and having prayer weeks. Jenny and Darren suggested that they lead the group, particularly taking responsibility for coordinating meals and allocating roles. Alongside this they still attended the Sunday services at ECC.⁸²⁷ The desire to be active in the local community is not something new to Eastbark; in the 1990s many Albanian and Kosovan refugees arrived in the area and some of them had had refugees to live with them.⁸²⁸ At the same time as starting Eastbark, many people were also involved in starting running a youth café one evening a week out of a double decker bus and are still involved today.⁸²⁹

A deeper connection with 24-7 Prayer was formed when they began hosting their training course. They adopted the Boiler Room model taking on the six values of Prayer, Mission, Justice, Creativity, Hospitality and Learning. These values shape the community and everyone whom I interviewed used them to talk about what was important to Eastbark and how they ran.

After 3 or 4 years they decided to start a second community. Taking a particular group of people within the community who prayed together and socialised regularly they challenged them to plant a new community. They didn't have a house, but encouraged them to gather in a different venue (which was Jenny and Darren's house initially) and to form their own distinctive shape. After almost a year they found their own house and formed a distinct, though connected, community.⁸³⁰ The two communities continued to meet altogether once a month in what they called 'core team' where those committed to Eastbark would gather to eat and worship together.⁸³¹

Although individuals from Eastbark are involved in a variety of social action throughout the town, their work in schools is their main focus and is the only activity which is only run by people from the community. Jenny and Darren's children attended the secondary school as did many of the other young people in the community. They had a 'real heart' to pray for the school.⁸³² Darren was a governor there and gradually opportunities opened up. The first thing they did was *Prayer Spaces in Schools*, a 24-7 Prayer initiative which ties in with the national curriculum. Sometime after that there was a change in head teacher so Darren and Kate went to meet her

⁸²⁷ Interview, Jenny, Eastbark, Paragraph 14

⁸²⁸ Interview, David, Eastbark, Paragraph 10

⁸²⁹ Interview, Jenny, Eastbark, Paragraph 16-18

⁸³⁰ Interview, Jenny, Eastbark, Paragraphs 21-3

⁸³¹ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 29

⁸³² Interview, Kate, Eastbark, Paragraph 6

and asked 'what can we do to serve you?'.⁸³³ She gave them a list of things. Jenny continues the story

So we came back with a thought, in fact we called an emergency community meeting one Saturday morning. I think we've only done it once. And said we've just been given all these opportunities in school what do we do? And we'd been praying now for our town, you know our hearts were very much turned to this place, these roads, these people, so to get that was really something. So we came across this idea of a café in a box someone else had done. And literally turn up with a box and make a café – so we're like, we can do that.

Hospitality is our thing. We can just make ourselves available.⁸³⁴

A story they particularly like telling is how when they were being shown the canteen space where they could run the café, the head teacher asked them where they were going to put their prayer space. This wasn't something they'd even thought of but it's been a regular feature of the café since the beginning.

Current Practice

Both houses have two meals a week with everyone expected to participate in one of them to keep it small and intimate. I'm told by most people that these meals are main gathering points of the week. There can be anywhere between 4 and 25 people at a house meal.⁸³⁵ Recently they have changed the timing of some of the meals to allow young families to attend more easily. The main focus of their meals is eating together and building community but there is often some sort of prayer focus at the end of the meal.⁸³⁶ At one meal I attended there was a short time of prayer for people from Eastbark who were ill or in hospital that week.⁸³⁷ At another meal, after they've eaten they took time to listen to a worship song before praying for various needs in the local community.⁸³⁸ Anyone is welcome to attend the weekly meals. Kate tells me 'our weekly gathering is a meal- it's not church on a Sunday 'cos we want to share life – we want to make that accessible to non-Christians and Christian's kids and old people'.⁸³⁹ Jenny tells me how Kate was able to invite a single mum who asked them what other support they offer in the school.⁸⁴⁰ House meal provides the relational hub around which everything else can operate.

There are two communities which form the Eastbark SMC; House A and House B. House A is the original house, led by Lee and Lisa. House B is the house that was planted and is led by

⁸³³ Interview, Jenny, Eastbark, Paragraph 25

⁸³⁴ Interview, Jenny, Eastbark, Paragraph 25

⁸³⁵ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 47

⁸³⁶ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 29

⁸³⁷ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 50

⁸³⁸ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 58

⁸³⁹ Interview, Kate, Eastbark, Paragraph 14

⁸⁴⁰ Interview, Jenny, Eastbark, Paragraph 29

Ben, Kate and Pete.⁸⁴¹ People are either part of House A or House B apart from Darren and Jenny who oversee both houses and participate in both communities. Both houses have a prayer room, dining room and kitchen downstairs forming the community space and bedrooms to host guests who visit.⁸⁴² These houses form the hub of the communities. No one lives in them and so there is a sense that they all host together. The two communities gather together for 'Core Team' once a month. Until recently this happened at House A but it became overcrowded so they now hire a room at the school which allows them more space.⁸⁴³ The Core Team is the closest thing they have to a traditional church service. They have a speaker, they worship together and share stories of what's going on in the life of the community and beyond. After the meeting they eat together. They are clear that Core Team is only for those who've made a commitment to Eastbark. When I attended they were sharing about *learning* which is one of their six values. Everyone sat in one of four small circles and four of the leadership team rotated around the four circles sharing about different aspects of learning that were going on in the community.⁸⁴⁴ Later in the meeting, Kate shared about her recent trip to South Sudan and all that she had experienced mainly around stories of healing and answered prayer.⁸⁴⁵ A short time of worship was led by Pete before a visiting speaker shared stories of what is going on around the world in 24-7 Prayer.⁸⁴⁶

Prayer is central to who they are and they have a rhythm of prayer throughout the year. There is a weekly rhythm, where everyone is encouraged to sign up for a regular weekly slot in the prayer room.⁸⁴⁷ Every month they have a particular prayer focus; 'whether that be a prayer week, whether that be a 24-1 [24 hours for one day], in September and October we do 5 weeks of 5 nights of prayer. So that's one hour for five nights for five weeks. We all join together as community and have a bit of a focus.'⁸⁴⁸ Three times a year they have a week of prayer where there is always someone from the community praying in the prayer room and there is a particular theme or focus. When I attended, the theme was 'Breakout' and all of the prayer stations and creative prayer activities were about God 'breaking out' in their lives, their community and their town. I was told stories by both Jenny and Kate of things that had been prayed that for week which seemed 'locked up' (i.e. which they could not see how they would change) but they had seen answers to prayer.⁸⁴⁹

The Café is the centre of their work in the school, which includes 'chaplaincy' by which they mean one-to-one meetings with pupils who need extra support, working with those

⁸⁴¹ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 29

⁸⁴² Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 47,

⁸⁴³ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 151

⁸⁴⁴ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 11

⁸⁴⁵ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 18-23

⁸⁴⁶ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 25-27

⁸⁴⁷ Interview, Lee, Eastbark, Paragraph 32

⁸⁴⁸ Interview, Ben, Eastbark, Paragraph 56

⁸⁴⁹ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 66, 74

excluded from school and, more recently, supporting parents of pupils from the school. Their vision for the café isn't to encourage young people to join Eastbark, although some have, but to create 'church community' within the school. They have developed 'café team' made up of pupils who want to be more connected to what goes on; they help out at the café and meet on a Friday lunch time to eat together and to discuss what they call 'café values', fun, family and hospitality.⁸⁵⁰ Although the café, itself, lasts one hour it takes a whole day for the team. This is in part because they want prayer and hospitality to be at the heart of the café. They gather to pray at 9am for 1 hour, before heading off to buy whatever is needed for the day and plan any activities that will happen during the café. They cook lunch and all those going into school eat together, modelling the hospitality they are extending in the café.⁸⁵¹ They have another hour of prayer and then an hour of set up before the kids come into the café at 3pm after school. About 150 young people visit the café.⁸⁵² Initially there is a huge queue for toast which is given out for free.⁸⁵³ Some people only come for toast, but many sit at the tables and chat and play games, some join in with the creative activity which is biscuit decorating the week I'm visiting, and then there are some more active team games later on.⁸⁵⁴ After the café the young people who are part of the café team stay around and there is a time to pray together for any particular needs.⁸⁵⁵

Being Community

(i) Relationships

Again, like the other SMCs, Eastbark see relationships as vital in all that they do. Jenny told me that the community was built on friendship. Many in Eastbark were friends long before they decided to start an SMC. Ben similarly points to the vital nature of building strong relationships in the group;

I think the relationship is essential. I think one of the things that we've really tried to encourage and harness is just this relationship for each other but it being really building strong relationships, but also those relationships being loose enough to include others – not to be exclusive –not to be a little cliquey group of people that doesn't invite others. And I think that can sometimes be a hard thing to get balance of, because you want to build these really strong individual relationships but also maintain this welcome thing – so I think that's really important – and it needs to be –kind of – have a family feel – so I think we need to look at each other and act as family to each other really – that's really important as well – and then that allows... but again all of that kind of starts and comes from the prayer room – so I guess that's the pivotal bit – it's prayer.⁸⁵⁶

⁸⁵⁰ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 221

⁸⁵¹ Interview, Kate, Eastbark, Paragraph 6

⁸⁵² Interview, Kate, Eastbark, Paragraph 6

⁸⁵³ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 223

⁸⁵⁴ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 227

⁸⁵⁵ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 221-231

⁸⁵⁶ Interview, Ben, Eastbark, Paragraph 15

Here Ben points out the possible tension of building strong relationships and yet remaining open and welcoming to others. He uses the word family to describe those relationships, as do others. It is also interesting to see Ben's assertion that the relationships start in the prayer room. For Ben it is important that they pray together and demonstrates the centrality of prayer in the SMC. Lee also describes the community in terms of relationship;

There is more [to] being a Christian other than going to church and carrying on with the things we carry on doing – it's relationship really – it's that relational context that I enjoy. Involved with people and seeing people grow and be encouraged and be blessed. But also blessing to others. Yeah, so working it out practically – that's how I see it really.⁸⁵⁷

The relational aspect isn't just seen within the community but as Lee said they are worked out practically in the wider community.

It's like you can really start to have these relationships with this individual from this school and her mum and there's a group of you all really investing in that and then you start to really see the impact of that – because they're experiencing family as I am.⁸⁵⁸

Relationships are vital and the house meal is a key place where those relationships can be formed and developed.⁸⁵⁹ Eastbark work hard on building and maintaining strong relationships. One way they encourage it is through 'study buddies' or 'study partners'. Every few months names are pulled out of a hat and people are paired up and encouraged to meet up a few times and spend time together.⁸⁶⁰ They have developed structures and patterns to help put relationships at the centre of the community.

(ii) Being Small but Hoping for Growth

Being small is seen as having great value.

With a large group of people – if you're meeting with 300 people every week it's very easy to kind of slip into the background and go from week to week and nobody really knows even who you are – when you've got a small community – and that's kind of why we planted into two is to keep that number relatively small to allow people to step into things because they can't hide from responsibility – so we need people to cook house meal and if there's only 11 people in community, everybody has to do it because the same person can't do it all of the time. And worship and teaching we try and get everybody involved in that.⁸⁶¹

But the hope of the group, as Jenny puts it is 'to see [local] people join us. Like average ordinary [local] people come to faith and know God'.⁸⁶² They want to grow because they want to see new people becoming Christians. The problem with growing, is of course, that it's hard to maintain the things they value about it being small; 'I'd want to see us grow, obviously that would bring

⁸⁵⁷ Interview, Lee, Eastbark, Paragraph 6

⁸⁵⁸ Interview, Ben, Eastbark, Paragraph 17

⁸⁵⁹ Interview, Lee, Eastbark, Paragraph 20

⁸⁶⁰ Interview, Pete, Eastbark, Paragraph 50

⁸⁶¹ Interview, Ben, Eastbark, Paragraph 17

⁸⁶² Interview, Jenny, Eastbark, Paragraph 79

challenges. What does it look like to have 3 houses, or 4 houses or 5 houses, or maybe we don't even have houses?'.⁸⁶³ But the fact that they have already grown to two community houses means they don't seem so daunted by the need to develop new communities. As Kate explains, 'And that's why we've done two house meals [...] for house B it was almost 30 on one night, so actually to have two makes us small again to grow again'.⁸⁶⁴ David draws it back to relationships; 'I think it's not about numbers, it is about relationship and it is about making a difference in our community. So maybe another house to be planted, but only so that more of the community can be touched'.⁸⁶⁵

Being small of course brings its own challenges. Darren tells me that even with 50 or so people the community still feels fragile. There are big changes in moving into one house for a while when house A is refurbished and he is worried how the community will respond.⁸⁶⁶ David highlights another challenge of being small; 'There's no hiding place if I can put it that way. In a bigger church you can sometimes turn up and do a little bit'.⁸⁶⁷ He told me that when he and his family were considering joining Eastbark they had a trial to see if they liked it and were actually committed, particularly to the six values. Ben describes the level of commitment required as a good thing, and that although it can be uncomfortable it is 'iron sharpening iron'.⁸⁶⁸

Relationship to Church

(i) Being Church

As with the other groups, there is an interesting relationship with church. They see themselves as church, but at the same time have no desire to be a church. They want to do church (verb) not be a church (noun).⁸⁶⁹ Ben describes Eastbark as his 'expression of church' and explains 'how we do church is through meals and sharing time with each other and prayer being a major pivotal part of all of that'.⁸⁷⁰ Lee described Eastbark as 'community based church'.⁸⁷¹ Kate tells me why she stayed at Eastbark; 'I just built relationships and really connected in the prayer room with God but also with how they did church here'.⁸⁷² She tells me how she would describe it to someone else.

I'm a part of a church but it's church like you don't know it, our church looks like a meal [...] it is a group of people that really know how to love each other well, that have a faith that completely transforms the way that they live their lives and that they see miracles all the time [...] It's church but every day of the week."⁸⁷³

⁸⁶³ Interview, Pete, Eastbark, Paragraph 64

⁸⁶⁴ Interview, Kate, Eastbark, Paragraph 52

⁸⁶⁵ Interview, David, Eastbark, Paragraph 62

⁸⁶⁶ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 48

⁸⁶⁷ Interview, David, Eastbark, Paragraph 29

⁸⁶⁸ Interview, Ben, Eastbark, Paragraph 17

⁸⁶⁹ Ward, *Liquid Church*, 3.

⁸⁷⁰ Interview, Ben, Eastbark, Paragraph 11

⁸⁷¹ Interview, Lee, Eastbark, Paragraph 2

⁸⁷² Interview, Kate, Eastbark, Paragraph 2

⁸⁷³ Interview, Kate, Eastbark, Paragraph 26

At their core team meeting Jenny tells me;

We're more about the Monday to Saturday. We don't want to be a church. We actively discourage Christians from getting involved. If you're not a Christian or not going to church, yes please come as much as you would like and get involved, but if you are a Christian we'd rather you didn't.⁸⁷⁴

The last comment is perhaps worth exploring a little further. There is a suspicion of people changing churches. They don't want to encourage Christians to come and join but they want to be open and welcoming to everyone else. 'If you're not a believer we want to focus on you and love on you and bring you to God'.⁸⁷⁵ But if they are a Christian 'we really make people jump through hoops if they want to join us'.⁸⁷⁶

Ben explains that what drew him and his wife to the community was that it was local and focused on their community. They attended a church in London for a while where there was good worship and teaching but 'in-between those times you weren't able to live a life that was – a life of worship if you like'.⁸⁷⁷ David and his wife agreed but highlighted both how they missed Sunday worship and how there was a very high level of commitment with the community.⁸⁷⁸ In the conversation with Jenny about not being church on a Sunday she goes on to tell me they have fought hard to keep true to the original vision and not get drawn into being a church and that they are passionate that this remains a community looking outwards.⁸⁷⁹

In one sense Eastbark are church; the relationships, the support, the prayer, the focus on the community. But in another sense they are not church; they have actively moved away from the Sunday focus and made a distinction between themselves and the churches they were part of.

(ii) Relationship to Other Churches

The church they came out of, ECC, has gone through a lot of difficulties in the last ten years. It decided to adopt a model of Missional Communities after Eastbark had already formed, which allowed Eastbark to still connect with the church as the focus was taken off Sunday meetings and placed on creating these missional communities. This model focuses on developing communities within the church itself which have a particular missional focus. One of the other successful groups from the church has been based around Messy Church encouraging families to engage together. This has not been the easiest transition. David and his family joined Eastbark when the Missional Communities initiative was launched and tells me how it was a struggle for him;

At that point I was still involved in the music team, worship team, and then the church had a Sunday morning meeting which was [...] in one building and then a main meeting once a

⁸⁷⁴ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 37

⁸⁷⁵ Interview, Jenny, Eastbark, Paragraph 62

⁸⁷⁶ Interview, Jenny, Eastbark, Paragraph 60

⁸⁷⁷ Interview, Ben, Eastbark, Paragraph 7

⁸⁷⁸ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 99

⁸⁷⁹ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 37

month. And that was to sort of wean people off - if I can put it that way – Sunday morning worship. I still used to go to that, and still quite like that if I'm quite honest. I found the transition from that to the current model quite difficult.⁸⁸⁰

He tells me how quite a few people left the church because of the change in focus away from Sundays.

A number of the community, mainly those who formed Eastbark out of ECC originally, still attend Sunday services, but seem to be more distant from the church. It hasn't been an easy relationship to navigate, but they have sought to communicate well and support each other and Jenny and Darren still meet up regularly with the leader of ECC and are on good terms. One particular point of tension has been how individuals give money; ECC think it should be given to them to be distributed, but many who are part of Eastbark feel no connection to ECC and therefore give money directly to Eastbark.⁸⁸¹

God's Agency

This is Jenny's description of how things happen in Eastbark.

So you meet and pray, you meet and talk to God and you meet to eat together. And then out of that God will do something that will cement you together but also send you out. It has to happen otherwise you're not doing it properly. Yeah it does happen.⁸⁸²

Through praying and eating together God worked through them and sent them out into the community.

(i) God has shaped the community

They feel that the community is the shape it is because of how God has shaped them. Jenny tells me that, at the beginning, they tried not to direct the community but encourage people to pray in the prayer room and 'just see what God did'.⁸⁸³ They spent time praying together and then regularly eating together and dreaming about what it might be. 'So then we started to have meals together, we started to pray, and then we started to have these celebrations of what we felt God was doing and encouraging one another really. And we kept it at that for a year'.⁸⁸⁴ Pete believes God has called them as a community to the rhythms of prayer that they have.⁸⁸⁵ He tells me that the leadership team, which he is a part of, has the job of holding together what they feel God has called them to and the practical organisation and decisions.⁸⁸⁶ For Eastbark there is a deep connection between their times of prayer and their sense of calling into social action. 'If we keep the prayer focus and if we keep our heart right in that sense then I hope God will keep

⁸⁸⁰ Interview, David, Eastbark, Paragraph 24

⁸⁸¹ Interview, David, Eastbark, Paragraph 23

⁸⁸² Interview, Jenny, Eastbark, Paragraph 59

⁸⁸³ Interview, Jenny, Eastbark, Paragraph 6

⁸⁸⁴ Interview, Jenny, Eastbark, Paragraph 9

⁸⁸⁵ Interview, Pete, Eastbark, Paragraph 64

⁸⁸⁶ Interview, Pete, Eastbark, Paragraph 48

moving us along you know.⁸⁸⁷ Jenny tells me that they sense God is still at work among them and that what they are doing is benefiting others. 'So I think that's what keeps you going – God is still for us. And while that's the case you've got to stick with it'.⁸⁸⁸

(ii) Sensing God's calling and what God is doing

They describe to me various ways that they sense what God is calling them to and what God is doing amongst them. Jenny gave me an example; when she and Darren had bought the house but hadn't managed to sell their old one, they both independently had the thought that they shouldn't rent it out. She recalls saying 'I just don't think we should rent it out – how can you say that to Darren?'.⁸⁸⁹ But when asked by Nick, both felt that having it as a house of prayer was the right thing to do.

They describe how, on another occasion, prophetic words were given to them by visiting speakers. One described seeing five or six communities in the town, another encouraged them to bring their plans forward in time. Jenny tells me 'I just felt God say "this second house should be now. Like you're saying in the future but you've got to bring it forward." I just felt God inspired us at that time to say "do it and it's this group, do it with this group."' ⁸⁹⁰ They expect to hear from God. For example every year on New Year's Day they go round to the houses in the community and pray 'and people ask God for words – particular words for the family for the year – and they're written down'.⁸⁹¹ In the prayer times that I was part of people shared various words and pictures they felt were from God during the times of prayer and worship.

David described how he senses God 'steering' him during his prayers by focusing his attention to a particular prayer or prayer request on the wall and he just concentrates on praying for that person.⁸⁹² In their prayers they use phrases such as 'ride the wave with you God'⁸⁹³, 'Keep us committed - don't want to be holding back where you are opening doors'⁸⁹⁴, 'your timing is perfect'⁸⁹⁵ and 'pray our hearts are in tune with yours'.⁸⁹⁶ Seeking God, hearing from Him, being in tune with Him and following what He is doing are key themes of their prayers and the narrative of the group.

Through basing what they do in the prayer room they continually ask God about what they are doing. This means that there has been no big plan and they've figured it out as they went along. Jenny remarks 'I think that's always interesting when you look back isn't it? Because

⁸⁸⁷ Interview, Jenny, Eastbark, Paragraph 62

⁸⁸⁸ Interview, Jenny, Eastbark, Paragraph 76

⁸⁸⁹ Interview, Jenny, Eastbark, Paragraph 2

⁸⁹⁰ Interview, Jenny, Eastbark, Paragraph 21

⁸⁹¹ Interview, David, Eastbark, Paragraph 42

⁸⁹² Interview, David, Eastbark, Paragraph 32

⁸⁹³ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 119

⁸⁹⁴ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 143

⁸⁹⁵ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 120

⁸⁹⁶ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 120

it makes perfect sense and I could put it in a nice story line for you but at the time it didn't feel like we were going anywhere'.⁸⁹⁷ She tells me they did not know where they were heading. Ben comments similarly 'When we started we had no idea what we're doing... and we kind of fumbled our way through it and we're still kind of just exploring and fumbling through different challenges really'.⁸⁹⁸

I don't get the sense that this is a problem for the group and there is a general excitement that there are always new things to explore and new things to be part of. 'It's worth it. It makes it all worth it. Yeah it's hard work but wow – how amazing to be part of something that keeps on growing and every year looks different and every year there's a new story'.⁸⁹⁹ Ben describes it as 'we've come with a corporate kind of focus to put God first in all of those things – still working on what that really looks like in every area – but that's part of the journey of this'.⁹⁰⁰

Lee describes how being involved in Eastbark is 'challenging and exciting at the same time'⁹⁰¹ and Pete tells me how excited he is by the opportunities opening up to them.⁹⁰² There is an expectation in the group and excitement about what God is doing. They are on an exciting journey and although there are challenges it is the excitement of what is happening and the potential that keeps them going.

(iii) Experiencing his presence and blessing

They put a strong emphasis on experiencing God's blessing and his presence. These extracts from my field notes recount a couple of testimonies shared by members of the school team in their prayer time after the worship time in the school show the importance they place on experiencing God.

Tim gave a little testimony. He had been struggling from a bad back over the last few days. After the worship time suddenly his back feels much better. He said that during the worship time he had been quite teary which is often a sign to him of God's presence.⁹⁰³

Kate mentions how another boy who was there told her that during [the worship time] he was praying and he couldn't open his eye and he sensed God's presence.⁹⁰⁴

In a couple of the prayer times Kate, in particular, prays, for God to 'show us the joy of your presence'⁹⁰⁵ and 'you are a kind God, you do amazing things but you also bless us with your

⁸⁹⁷ Interview, Jenny, Eastbark, Paragraph 2

⁸⁹⁸ Interview, Ben, Eastbark, Paragraph 17

⁸⁹⁹ Interview, Kate, Eastbark, Paragraph 38

⁹⁰⁰ Interview, Ben, Eastbark, Paragraph 13

⁹⁰¹ Interview, Lee, Eastbark, Paragraph 18

⁹⁰² Interview, Pete, Eastbark, Paragraph 64

⁹⁰³ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 69

⁹⁰⁴ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 87

⁹⁰⁵ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 112

presence'.⁹⁰⁶ These prayers captured something of the joint desires, both to see amazing things and that they and others would experience God's presence.

Christian Practices

As mentioned above, Eastbark adopted the six practices set out by 24-7 Prayer Boiler Rooms; Prayer, Mission, Justice, Hospitality, Creativity and Learning. They make sure that these practices are present in their community life and use them as a means to focus the activities of the community.⁹⁰⁷ Of the six, prayer and hospitality appear to be the ones which they most emphasize and come most naturally to them.

(i) Prayer

Because of their strong connections to the 24-7 Prayer movement prayer has been important from the beginning. They have a dedicated prayer room in both houses, a regular rhythm of prayer and an expectation that core team members will spend at least an hour in the prayer room a week. Ben highlights that prayer is key to who they are; 'I think having a prayer room and a commitment to praying individually and corporately as a group, I think is really important – that's something that we would say is a major foundational building block'.⁹⁰⁸ And they have achieved a sustainable rhythm of prayer as Jenny relays; 'we've really managed to put a stake in the ground for prayer and we've done well in that and I think there's always more, and we're never satisfied, but the prayer stuff is good'.⁹⁰⁹

Ben also told me that it is important that the prayer room is central; 'So I think main thing is having it as a prayer room, I guess, and having that focus on wanting God to be the centre of it – so everything that we do is born out of a desire to almost draw closer to God really'.⁹¹⁰ Lee tells me 'you can pray in your house, in your room, anywhere – but it's important that we have a place where people feel like they can just come and pray – it's that active participation really – so we see that as a very important part of community life'.⁹¹¹ The prayer room is a creative space with art work, interactive prayer stations and prayer written across the walls and on post-it notes. There is a sense among the group that, because it's a place set aside for prayer, because there is regularly prayer going on and because you are surrounded by other people's prayer, it is a special place to pray. As Kate says

To have this house- to have a permanent prayer room where its got layer upon layer of prayers – where you can see people's names. Like last week saw 'I want to see my job situation change', [then] 'I've got the interview' and you could track it on the prayer wall. I

⁹⁰⁶ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 118

⁹⁰⁷ Interview, Jenny, Eastbark, Paragraph 20

⁹⁰⁸ Interview, Ben, Eastbark, Paragraph 15

⁹⁰⁹ Interview, Jenny, Eastbark, Paragraph 15

⁹¹⁰ Interview, Ben, Eastbark, Paragraph 13

⁹¹¹ Interview, Lee, Eastbark, Paragraph 34

didn't speak to them I just tracked it on the prayer wall and I got to pray through that process with them."⁹¹²

There is a focus on praying for miracles, healing and breakthrough within the community. During one of my visits there were a number of people in hospital for minor operations and the two prayer times at the end of community meals were mainly focused on praying for them. Darren particularly prayed that they would see more of God's power through healing, not just the doctors but God's hand 'that people might turn up and find they don't even need the operation anymore'.⁹¹³

Ben describes a lot of what they do as an overflow from the prayer room. He tells me how 'it's born from a place of seeking God' which pushes them out into the community and how being in the prayer room shapes the individual's life and therefore affects everything. Similarly, the things that happen in the social action that they are involved in 'come back to the prayer room and then direct our prayers'.⁹¹⁴ He describes it as a 'two way thing where our prayers directly impact what is happening in school and bar and bus and just life but then, equally, that then comes back and directs our prayers and so on..⁹¹⁵ The prayer room is the place of connection with God, meeting with Him and hearing from Him, and the place that they are sent from. Similarly those things that happen in life become the things they pray about. When making decisions in the community, for example the decision about how to get involved in the school, prayer plays a key role.⁹¹⁶

(ii) Hospitality

Hospitality is primarily shown through the act of eating together every week. This is not the only expression of hospitality, but it does seem to be the one from which all others flow. The principle is that acting hospitably towards each other is the means by which they can act hospitably to those beyond the community. This includes welcoming people to house meals, inviting people to join in with many of the activities and having people to stay in both the houses and in their own homes.

Pete emphasises eating together; 'I think eating together is really, really important just to have our main expression of community as a meal, I think that says something about who we are'.⁹¹⁷

He then expresses something I think is key in the life of the community; 'we're not a community that kind of puts on stuff - it almost sounds selfish - we do it for ourselves - we don't do this for other people'.⁹¹⁸ What I think he's trying to express, and I saw acted out throughout the

⁹¹² Interview, Kate, Eastbark, Paragraph 36

⁹¹³ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 52

⁹¹⁴ Interview, Ben, Eastbark, Paragraph 58

⁹¹⁵ Interview, Ben, Eastbark, Paragraph 58

⁹¹⁶ Interview, Ben, Eastbark, Paragraph 60

⁹¹⁷ Interview, Pete, Eastbark, Paragraph 42

⁹¹⁸ Interview, Pete, Eastbark, Paragraph 42

community, is that they are not creating events and projects to invite people to, they are creating community which they welcome people to be part of. The central event of the community, the meal, is not just something that everyone is welcome to, but also something that is easily accessible. Everyone is welcomed into the very core of the community life. The meal is central because of the way it helps them to build relationships and grow as a community as Pete explains;

You have to create that space for people to share their life with one another and again to pray with one another – you know the stuff that I hear about what someone else is going through over a house meal, that stuff I can pray for, that stuff I can, you know, catch up with them next week and say ‘how are things going, how’s this going?’ So I think yeah, prayer and eating together, or hospitality, that’s really important.⁹¹⁹

This also shows how hospitality and prayer are not two separate strands, they interconnect. House meals are a way into the community, they ‘bridge the gap’ between the community and those outside as Ben recounts ‘that neighbour got involved and became a Christian through starting off with the house meals, so being able to share that life with people has been fantastic as well’.⁹²⁰

Despite the relational nature of all that they do, everything is carefully structured and organised. They have rotas for cooking house meals, they have people in charge of hospitality in each house, and they have a rota to cook for the oldest member of the community, Fran, who is 89.

Relating to Wider Society

I have already demonstrated that the foundation to Eastbark’s engagement in wider society is through extending the relationships they have out into the community. This is done in a number of ways.

(i) Engaged as Community

The schools work gives Eastbark a focus to their social engagement. ‘So other people are doing other things, but as Eastbark what’s bubbled out of what we do together is the schools works. And that has become a heavy focus for us’.⁹²¹ Many in the community are involved in actually going to the school as part of the café team, through mentoring or helping young people who are excluded and through helping with the God story teaching that they did one year. Even those who don’t get to go in regularly feel part of the work. Ben who isn’t able to be involved in the school’s work because he is working full time talks about how he feels part of what’s going on in school.⁹²² This is not seen as social action that some people in the community are involved in, but

⁹¹⁹ Interview, Pete, Eastbark, Paragraph 44

⁹²⁰ Interview, Ben, Eastbark, Paragraph 50

⁹²¹ Interview, Jenny, Eastbark, Paragraph 29

⁹²² Interview, John, Eastbark, Paragraph 62

rather as the way that the community as a whole engage in social action. This is their mission together.

(ii) Building community as Mission

Jenny describes how they approached the schools work differently;

For school we had a mind change – I think the prayer spaces in school did that for me. That we were not trying to recruit school kids to come to our church. We didn't want three or four of them to come and join us – we wanted to take church there.⁹²³

This is all part of extending the relationships and building community. Eating together before they go into the school is seen as vital as Jenny explains 'we model the hospitality before we take the hospitality'.⁹²⁴ Although some people from the school join the houses their goal is that the café would itself be Christian community. The first time they ever ran the café one of the young people asked how they could join. They were surprised, but told her she could join and that they would bring a badge for her next week. This grew into their student team who help to run the café.

David compares their focus on relationship with inviting an evangelist and handing out leaflets;

What we see now is just real relationships. For no ulterior motive, because we want to serve people, that's the first principle. And then people come along and they join and they join and 'goodness me, that person prayed tonight – did they? – I didn't know they were a Christian.' Those sort of conversations happen – so it's lovely – fantastic.⁹²⁵

Eastbark are focused on building community in whatever they are doing.

(iii) Prayer Spaces

One interesting dynamic is how prayer is part of every aspect of their social action, not just that it came out of praying for it together or that they pray for what they are doing but prayer is a very obvious presence in all they do. Their initial way in to the school was by running 'Prayer Spaces in Schools', an initiative started by 24-7 Prayer creating prayer rooms in schools and tying that in with Religious Education in the National Curriculum. They now have a prayer space at every café they run in school which can be used as a quiet space for the young people but will also include a creative prayer activity. The prayer space gives people the opportunity to pray in a creative way which is somewhat independent of the team running the café. After the café they ran while I was visiting one of the team said that the prayer space was used with lots of people using it to thank God for friends and family. She said that there were a lot of good conversations too and so it must have felt like a 'safe space'.⁹²⁶

⁹²³ Interview, Jenny, Eastbark, Paragraph 30

⁹²⁴ Interview, Jenny, Eastbark, Paragraph 30

⁹²⁵ Interview, David, Eastbark, Paragraph 25

⁹²⁶ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 245

It's not just in the café that prayer takes an active role in the schools work. They were careful at first and when asked by the head teacher whether they were going to pray with the young people they said that they would chat to young people but pray for them later. The head teacher then told them that she wanted them to teach the young people how to pray.⁹²⁷ Eastbark's expectation is that as they provide opportunities for people to pray and engage in Christian practices that they will encounter God through them.

Beyond the school's work prayer often plays a prominent part in their social action. While having discussions with the person who was buying a house for them to rent to begin the second community Darren told them 'if we were getting together now and having this sort of discussion we'd pray before we finished'. So they said 'yeah all right then, carry on'.⁹²⁸ So they prayed about the plans with him even though he wasn't a Christian. David tells me how people at his work know he is a Christian and know about their prayer room. He says 'People come to me and ask me to pray about things at work'.⁹²⁹ He asks their permission to put their names on the prayer wall in the prayer room and the community pray for them.

Summary

Through each description of lived theology key themes were drawn out under the headings that emerged through the coding of the data; Community, Relationship to Church, Christian Practices, God's Agency, and Relating to Wider Society. These themes helped focus the descriptions and will in turn focus the analysis, around particular points in common between the SMCs. Under each of these headings the subheadings drew out the unique practices, understandings, beliefs and structures of each SMC.

I now turn to the analysis, drawing out key insights from these descriptions of lived theology around the question of how the SMCs sustain their social action. These descriptions demonstrate a complex relationship with charismatic evangelicalism; on the one hand these SMCs have developed as a reaction to the intensive focus of charismatic evangelicalism, but significantly all four SMCs have drawn on practices and beliefs from charismatic evangelicalism to do that. For this reason, chapter 4 develops an analysis through a conversation with the account of charismatic evangelicalism developed in chapter 1.

⁹²⁷ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 60

⁹²⁸ Interview, Jenny, Eastbark, Paragraph 23

⁹²⁹ Interview, David, Eastbark, Paragraph 48

Chapter 4: The Extensive Charismatic Nature of the Lived Theology of Small Missional Communities

This Chapter takes the themes developed in the previous chapter and develops an analysis of SMCs in conversation with charismatic evangelicalism. This analysis is directed by the second sub question;

How do these the practices, beliefs, structures and their understandings help them sustain social action given the struggles found in the account of charismatic evangelicalism?

Having developed descriptions of the lived theology of SMCs these are now brought into a critical conversation with each other and the account of charismatic evangelicalism to analyse the lived theology of SMCs. I will identifying the ways in which SMCs both continue to embrace the understandings and practices of charismatic evangelicalism and the ways that they extend and change them. I will demonstrate that SMCs have developed an extensive focus in contrast to the intensive focus of charismatic evangelicalism⁹³⁰. This represents a significant development in charismatic evangelicalism which has allowed the Charismatic Evangelical emphasis on experience to remain central while enabling the SMCs to sustain their social action by focusing on God's action in the world.

This chapter is not an attempt to articulate a theology for SMCs, but rather to explore the lived theology of these SMCs in greater depth. Of course, this account is a construction; an attempt to understand the practices, beliefs, understandings and structures of the SMCs theologically. The statements about God within the chapter attempt to reflect the SMCs understanding of how God is at work, but judgement is reserved with the conviction that God is at work in the world and may be glimpsed through the words and actions of the SMCs.⁹³¹

The chapter is split into four sections. The first section describes how SMCs have moved the Location of Belonging, the place you need to be to be considered a member of the SMC, from the worship service to the relational gathering. I will show how this has enabled them to sustain their social action by making their social action part of community life rather than a project run by the community. The second section explores the change in understanding of where and how God acts. Mirroring the move in the Location of Belonging, the SMCs have developed new ways to understand how God is at work in the world, particularly in relation to their social action, and how they can collaborate with God in that work. Describing God at work in the world opens the possibility of God being experienced in the midst of social action. The third section explores how the SMCs experience God in social action. This section brings together the first two by connecting

⁹³⁰ See the description of the intensive nature of charismatic evangelicalism p44.

⁹³¹ See discussion on p63

them through the idea of ‘experiencing God’ and exploring how they experience God in their social action. I analyse how they both draw on their Charismatic practices and develop new practices and vocabulary to help them learn to see and experience God at work in their social action. The fourth section engages with the critique of charismatic evangelicalism exploring how, despite the positive ways that charismatic evangelical lived theology has been extended by the SMCs, some of the weaknesses and blind spots have been carried forward too. The chapter concludes with a short summary of how the extensive charismatic nature of their lived theology helps them sustain social action.

Moving the Location of Belonging

This section explores where you need to be present to be considered part of the church or community. I have named this the ‘Location of Belonging’. In charismatic evangelicalism this was the Sunday worship service; this was where you needed to be to be considered a member.⁹³² What Chapter 3 revealed was that SMCs had a strong desire for church and their Christian lives to be more about what goes on in the rest of the week, outside the Sunday service.⁹³³ They had actively moved this Location of Belonging to relational gatherings such as a meal. As Kate in Eastbark expressed; ‘Our church looks like a meal’.⁹³⁴ This is not just introducing a meal into the pattern of the church life but making the meal the central activity.

The Location of Belonging in charismatic evangelicalism and SMCs

In charismatic evangelicalism the focus of the life of the church was around the worship service and all activities needed to connect to the worship service. One of the measures of the effectiveness of social action was whether it brought people into the Sunday service. The primary focus of the Sunday worship service was on ‘time of worship’ and ‘ministry time’ and that the focus of these practices was experiencing God.⁹³⁵ The worship service is described as the place where people experience God, are ‘filled with the Holy Spirit’ and then ‘sent out’ into the world.⁹³⁶ However, the result is that the worship services dominates charismatic evangelicalism which is demonstrated by the fact that Pilavachi can describe the gathered worship service as ‘the main event’.⁹³⁷

Through the theological accounts of the SMCs I demonstrated that they were challenging this understanding of church. All four SMCs actively questioned the dominant place of the Sunday service and the focus on ‘time of worship’ and ‘ministry time’. Instead there was a strong desire in the SMCs for church to connect to the rest of their lives. Eastbark told me how they

⁹³² See p44

⁹³³ See pp91, 109, 126 and 144

⁹³⁴ Interview, Kate, Eastbark, Paragraph 26

⁹³⁵ See p34

⁹³⁶ See p39

⁹³⁷ Pilavachi and Borlase, *Life Beneath the Surface*, 34.

were about 'the Monday to Saturday'⁹³⁸ and were 'church but every day of the week'.⁹³⁹ Hilchester told me their motivation for starting the community was that church on Sunday didn't connect to the rest of their lives⁹⁴⁰ and they didn't want to use their efforts to resource a Sunday service.⁹⁴¹ Margaret in Airbury told me she felt a call 'to be part of the church outside the building' describing how she could not just sit in the pews any longer.⁹⁴² The perspective from Lynwood was that church on Sunday was not enough; being 'filled up' and sent was not working for them, they wanted to experience God all through the week. All the SMCs displayed this sense that church should connect with everything else that they did.

This desire that Christian faith connects with everything else in life is regularly articulated in charismatic evangelicalism through phrases such as 'worship as a lifestyle'⁹⁴³ and social action being 'near and dear to the heart of God'.⁹⁴⁴ Wimber's primary focus was to equip God's people for ministry and evangelism but, on the whole, the practices were adopted into the Sunday service, and did not result in people engaging in evangelism and ministry outside of the church. The SMCs identified this tension between the espoused and operant theology within charismatic evangelicalism; it may be the espoused theology of the worship service that intimate worship leads to action in the world, but the experience of the members of the SMCs was that the operant theology was a focus on intimacy in worship, which for many had little impact on the rest of their lives.⁹⁴⁵ For many this was one of the key motivations for starting the SMC, faith actually connecting with the rest of life.

Further to the frustration that the Sunday service was disconnected from the rest of life and did not effectively equip them to engage, the SMCs noted that at times it actually inhibited their ability to engage. Hilchester found that the demands of the Sunday service in the local church had the effect of drawing them away from engaging with people on the estate.⁹⁴⁶ Despite the rise in engagement in social action and justice within charismatic evangelicalism it remained something of a side-show, happening on the periphery of the life of the church⁹⁴⁷. The SMCs reaction against this stance was clear; being an SMC for Airbury meant remaining involved in the life of the town⁹⁴⁸ and for Hilchester meant impacting the local community.⁹⁴⁹ It was not just that social action was something important, but that it was vital to their life as a community. They

⁹³⁸ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 37

⁹³⁹ Interview, Kate, Eastbark, Paragraph 36

⁹⁴⁰ Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 2

⁹⁴¹ Interview, Philip, Hilchester, Paragraph 4

⁹⁴² Interview, Margaret, Airbury, Paragraph 5

⁹⁴³ Pilavachi and Hoeksma, *Worship, Evangelism, Justice*, 47.

⁹⁴⁴ Pytches, *Living at the Edge*, 285.

⁹⁴⁵ For discussion on operant and espoused theologies see p54

⁹⁴⁶ Interview, Philip, Hilchester, Paragraph 36

⁹⁴⁷ See p41

⁹⁴⁸ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 24

⁹⁴⁹ Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 39

were not just seeking to engage in social action, but for it to be an integral part of their life together.

The result is that SMCs have taken the emphasis off the Sunday worship service and instead focus on the relational gatherings such as the meal. They have done this by structuring the life of the community in such a way as to make the meal, and other relational gatherings, central to the life of the community; by doing so they have made these relational gatherings the Location of Belonging. The emphasis on relationships, already present within charismatic evangelicalism,⁹⁵⁰ has become a primary focus of SMCs through this structural change of the Location of Belonging. The relationships between people in the community have become the means of belonging rather than participating in 'time of worship' and 'ministry time'. Philip compared 'institutional church', where building relationships felt tagged on the end, with the Hilchester community meal where there were blurred lines between socializing and the meeting.⁹⁵¹ Similarly in Lynwood, Sarah described the work as being secondary to the relationships they built and how they had a reputation for their lunches where everyone eats together.⁹⁵² In the SMCs the Location of Belonging moves from the Sunday service to the community meal and the mode of belonging moves from the practices of the Sunday service, namely worship and 'ministry time', to those of relationship and hospitality. This is a significant change that needs emphasizing; to belong to the group you now need to be present at a meal rather than a worship service and the belonging is mediated through relationships with others as opposed to joining in the communal worship practices. This means that anyone can have a sense of belonging in the SMC without having to engage in those communal worship practices or even believing in God.

There are a number of things that 'moving the Location of Belonging' is not, which I want to highlight. Firstly, it is not moving the worship service to a different setting; holding the worship service in a pub, café or rugby club still means the Location of Belonging is the worship service, and the practices of belonging are intimate worship and prayer ministry. For the SMCs belonging comes through the relationships not through worship practices. For example, the people attending the drop-in at Airbury were considered as much part of the community as those attending the communion service, and perhaps more so. Secondly, this is not creating an inward looking club focused on itself, but a 'missional community' wanting to reach out to those around them. Moving the Location of Belonging has come about because of the strong desire to reach out to the community. It has not happened in isolation but alongside the other changes I will

⁹⁵⁰ See p38

⁹⁵¹ Interview, Philip, Hilchester Paragraph 4

⁹⁵² Interview, Sarah, Lynwood, Paragraph 18

discuss in this chapter which together help them to be more focused on their local community.⁹⁵³ Thirdly, the SMCs are not questioning the importance of worship but are questioning the dominance that this somewhat narrow definition of worship has had over the life of charismatic evangelicalism. In fact one of the challenges that Airbury needed to address was how to find a place for sung worship within the community. Fourthly, the Location of Belonging is not just where most people are. I have had countless conversations with people interested in my research who have wondered how they can get all the people currently coming to their midweek activity, which draw far more people than their Sunday service, to start coming to 'church'. What the SMCs did was change the Location of Belonging and realised that these people already were the church community.⁹⁵⁴

How moving the Location of Belonging Sustains Social Action

SMCs have moved the Location of Belonging from the worship service to the relational gathering but the important question to answer at this point is what difference it makes to the SMCs and specifically how does it help them sustain their social action? I have identified three key ways that this change comes about.

i. Social Action on an Equal Footing

Because the Sunday gathering is no longer the Location of Belonging the 'time of worship' and 'ministry time' do not receive special status purely by being the principle activities in the Sunday gathering. The Location of Belonging is the meal and therefore the activities that are associated with belonging become those of hospitality and welcome. The foundation of belonging isn't a practice of worship, but hospitable relationships. By locating the place of belonging in the meal and other relational gatherings, all other practices and activities are understood from this relational foundation. Practices are not favoured purely by virtue of them being the practices which occur in the Location of Belonging meaning that social action, for example, is placed on more of an equal footing with the 'time of worship'; they are both engaged in from the Location of Belonging of relational community. Claire in Airbury described this change in perspective when she stated that they have 'learned that mission and justice is worship' and that they 'consider action an underpinning spirituality as much as [...] prayer'.⁹⁵⁵ This is not necessarily a theological

⁹⁵³ The risk of drifting towards an inward-looking club is always present and will be addressed in chapter 5

⁹⁵⁴ Another question which might arise is whether this is similar to the journey of belong-believe-behave suggested by the Emerging Missional Movement. In reality, and as can be seen in the SMC, belonging, believing and behaving all overlap. I developed concept of the Location of Belonging because of the dominance of the worship service within an Intensive charismatic evangelicalism. The belong-believe-behave still pictures this journey towards the centre and doesn't necessarily challenge the idea that everything must move towards the worship service. Changing the Location of Belonging moves the focus of belonging to relationships and allows a more complex interplay of belonging, believing and behaving.

⁹⁵⁵ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 30

statement about the value of social action over ‘time of worship’, but rather pointing out that its value is not decided by how it relates to ‘time of worship’.

ii. Blurring the lines between Community and Social Action

Blurring the lines between community and social action is a direct result of moving the Location of Belonging. The SMCs have become focused around relational gatherings, primarily meals but also the drop-in in Airbury and the school café in Eastbark, and therefore relationships and hospitality. One way that individuals in the SMCs described their experience of these deep relationships was through the word ‘family’; be it Dorothy in Airbury telling me why she came to the communion services,⁹⁵⁶ Ed in Hilchester living far from his parents,⁹⁵⁷ Rachel talking about the close relationships in Lynwood⁹⁵⁸ or Ben in Eastbark describing the experience of the house meals.⁹⁵⁹ Using ‘family’ to describe church community is common in Christianity; but here in the SMCs it is used to particularly emphasize the depth and importance of the relationships that they experience. This is what they want to share as they reach out to the wider community, these deep friendships and this sense of community. The key point is that because the relational gathering is the Location of Belonging people can easily be invited to participate and feel part of the community straight away. As a result, the distinction between the community and the social action becomes blurred and the ability to define something purely as the community or social action is lost. Social action is not seen as a project engaged in outside the community but part of the life of the SMC. The simple fact is that because the Location of Belonging is in the meal, it is now easier to belong. Anyone can participate in the central act of the SMC, the meal. It is natural to invite people whom they interact with to the meal times meaning these people can immediately feel a sense of belonging.

A particularly clear example of blurring the lines between social action and the relational gathering was the drop-in in Airbury. On my first visit I spent time trying to distinguish between people attending the drop-in and those who were part of the community but I soon realized that this wasn’t a distinction that they made. Similarly it wasn’t until half way through my time visiting the community and looking for social action that I realized that the drop-in was the focus of the social action that they engaged in; it was the slow building of supportive relationships which were the foundation of their social action. This happened because these relational gatherings really were the Location of Belonging. There was no sense that newcomers were not part of the community until they attend a Sunday gathering for example. Social action is not one step removed from the life of the SMC; because it takes place in the Location of Belonging it is woven in to the life of the SMC. These meals are not purely social; they might include times of prayer,

⁹⁵⁶ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 241

⁹⁵⁷ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 71

⁹⁵⁸ Interview, Rachel, Lynwood, Paragraph 26

⁹⁵⁹ Interview, Ben, Eastbark, Paragraph 15

discussions, follow the communion service in the case of Airbury, or lead into a time of worship and prayer in Hilchester. The SMCs are not removing religious practices to make it more accessible, these practices are still present, but participating in these practices is not a prerequisite to belonging to the community.

iii. From Project Approach to Community Approach

Therefore, social action is not a project that happens outside the SMC, nor are particular activities put on for people outside the SMC, instead people are invited to participate in the life of the community. Social action is a relational activity. I was told the 'relationships go out like ripples'⁹⁶⁰ and how their good relationships with each other 'spill out'⁹⁶¹ into the local community as they build relationships with those with whom they come into contact. They want them to experience 'family'. Social Action is not seen as a project but as part of the life of the community. In fact the term 'social action' is not one that the SMCs used very much, this is my term which I have brought to the research. The SMCs do not make these clear distinctions. Because the meal is the Location of Belonging, those who engage initially through the social action are naturally part of the life of the SMC. Social action is understood as the extension of the life of the community rather than a project engaged in by the community.

Charismatic evangelicalism has fostered an individualized approach. 'Ministry time' focuses on the individual and their relationships with God. Worship encourages the individual to find intimacy with God. There is encouragement to find your own individual calling and God's plan for your life.⁹⁶² In contrast, these SMCs understand social action as a community pursuit. As Andrew in Hilchester told me, they wanted the community to 'be a way [for] the church to get out and meet people but not just as individuals but as a community.'⁹⁶³ This doesn't mean that individuality is lost, in fact it is celebrated with people encouraged to find their own individual calling and to use their gifts and skills in line with God's calling. The emphasis is placed on people feeling valued and loved and understanding their calling. Lynwood and Airbury described this individuality as 'being yourself'. They were structured in such a way as to allow people to be themselves in the midst of community life. The individuals were encouraged to find their passions and interests and to exercise their skills and gifts within the life of the community. Airbury use the ideas of 'desert experience' and 'journey' to allow people to understand and articulate their individuality. Lynwood used the phrase 'bless the giver' placing the emphasis on those engaged in the social action and their fulfilment. Hilchester used the idea of 'finding your identity in Christ' and experiencing the 'father heart of God', again finding fulfilment and individuality but being drawn into the life of the community. The expectation was that everyone in the community

⁹⁶⁰ Interview, Tony, Lynwood, Paragraph 42

⁹⁶¹ Interview, Philip, Hilchester, Paragraph 14

⁹⁶² Gumbel, *Questions of Life*, 94.

⁹⁶³ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 4

would participate in the social action they engaged in but through using their own skills and developing their own passions. In Eastbark they saw the work in the school as something they did as a community and even those who did not physically go into the school felt part of the work through meeting young people at the meals, praying for the work and hearing the stories.

The SMCs have managed to maintain a focus on the individual and at the same time developed a sense of community engaging in mission together. Individuality isn't lost as gifts and skills and personal experience of God are still prioritized, but this individuality is brought into the service of the community by creating a sense of common mission and purpose, and with that a sense of adventure and excitement. There is a shift away from 'God has a plan for your life' towards drawing individuals into God's plan for the SMC and the local community.

A Change in Understanding of Where and How God Acts

While the emphasis in charismatic evangelicalism was experiencing God in the worship gathering, the SMCs expected to experience God acting in the world. This move mirrors the shift in the Location of Belonging, taking the focus off the worship service and extending it into the world. Charismatic evangelicalism regularly used the phrase 'discern what God is doing and bless it' to understand the relationship between God's action and human action⁹⁶⁴. The SMCs do use this phrase but have developed new ways to understand how and where God acts in the world. I have categorised these as; seeing God in the interruptions, 'Creating space for God' and collaboration with God. I will explore each of these in turn, but first will turn to a discussion of how the SMCs' understanding of God's action compares to and extends the understanding and practices of charismatic evangelicalism.

Discussion of God's Action in charismatic evangelicalism and SMCs

Charismatic evangelicalism identifies God as motivated by love and sharing God's love was motivation for Christians to engage with those beyond the church⁹⁶⁵. The SMCs also had a strong emphasis on God's love and of God reaching out and revealing his love to others.⁹⁶⁶ Individuals experienced God's blessing and wanted to share it. Blessing was particularly understood as feeling fulfilled and having a purpose. Being blessed did not necessarily mean things being easy but it did mean a sense of fulfilment in doing God's work.

Charismatic evangelicalism also emphasizes that God has a plan which he is working out and is talked about broadly in terms of 'The Kingdom', meaning the Kingdom of God.⁹⁶⁷ It is towards this Kingdom that everything is oriented. Within this big picture God is working out his plans in specific situations and it is important that people seek God's plans and follow them.

⁹⁶⁴ See p37

⁹⁶⁵ Buckingham and Davies, 'Megachurches and Social Engagement in London - Policy Options and Opportunities', 3.

⁹⁶⁶ See discussion on pp100, 124 and 128

⁹⁶⁷ See discussion pp39-40

God's plan also features strongly in the lives of the SMCs.⁹⁶⁸ They do not engage in social action due to a general sense of Christian calling to love and serve but due to a specific calling from God to be part of a specific task which is part of God's plan and what he is doing. They are very clear that God is carrying out his plan and shaping them to be who he wants them to be. All that they do comes out of a sense of being called by God as individuals and as a community and in all they do God has a plan which they are seeking to follow. They have a particular calling to these people in this place and understand the work they are doing as God's work. They describe how it is God who shapes them and who guides their work. He has a plan, a big picture, and he leads them according to his will. They are learning to trust his timing, to do the work in his strength and most importantly to remember that it is his work, not theirs.

The dominant way to understand the relationship between God's action and human action in charismatic evangelicalism is through the phrase 'see what God is doing and bless it'. This phrase is also evident in the SMCs; Eastbark began praying and waited to 'see what God did'⁹⁶⁹ and allowed that to shape them as a community and their sense of calling. Similarly Hilchester constantly prayed for God to reveal his plan for them.⁹⁷⁰ Becky said they were 'seeking God's will for where we go with it. Allowing God to work and lead it and guide it'.⁹⁷¹ Both Lynwood and Airbury began from a group of people praying. Through seeking God, trusting in his plan and finding out where they fitted they were able to discern the shape of the work they were called to. It appears then that this understanding of 'discern and bless' was helpful for the SMCs, particularly when they started. What becomes clear, however, is that it is not enough for sustained engagement in social action.

'Ministry time' begins with an invitation for God to work and there is an expectation that he will.⁹⁷² The person praying looks for particular signs that God is at work and prays and listens for what God wants them to do. Despite the belief that God always acts differently and surprisingly there is still this discernible pattern to 'ministry time' and the understanding of how God acts in the service. This pattern works well in the contained environment of the church service. Social action tends to happen in more complex environments which are less predictable; discerning God at work in the world and blessing it does not necessarily have the same patterns and boundaries as 'ministry time'. Neither the pattern nor the particular ways of discerning God at work easily transfer into to a social action context.

Using a 'ministry time' model for engaging in social action raises a number of problems. Firstly, it gives a fairly passive role to the person praying; they bless what God is already doing,

⁹⁶⁸ See pp92, 129

⁹⁶⁹ Interview, Jenny, Eastbark, Paragraph 6

⁹⁷⁰ See p129

⁹⁷¹ Interview Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 39

⁹⁷² See p34

seek to hear from Him. God acts first, the person continues to pray that God would act, but may or may not be required to act themselves. In this understanding only God initiates ministry and the individual may or may not be required to participate. Secondly, they are discouraged from building a relationship with the person being prayed for due to the risk of 'creating dependency' on anyone other than God and encouraged to trust that God is at work in the person. The third problem is that if 'discerning God and blessing his work' is carried out in the strictest sense one is limited to an ad hoc approach to social action. If it is required to discern what God is doing before acting, action is going to be more sporadic and more spontaneous due to the difficulty of discerning God; in contrast what these SMCs seem to be advocating is long-term, sustained engagement. The question then is how the SMCs have developed their understanding of how God acts to enable this long term participation?

The SMCs Understanding of God's action in the world

The SMCs can be seen to be developing a lived theology of how God acts in the world and how God's action relates to human action. Through their words, actions and practices they reveal an understanding of collaborative action with God. This section seeks to give an account of this lived theology of God's action in the world which has developed and been tried 'at the coal face'. These ideas have coalesced around three particular phrases; 'God interrupting Routines and Patterns', 'Creating Space for God' and 'the Overlap of God's Actions and Human Actions'. I will explore each in turn demonstrating how they lead to a collaborative understanding of the relationship between divine and human agency.

i. God interrupting Routines and Patterns

As I already discussed, when the SMCs began 'discern and bless' was a helpful understanding of God's action and how they should act. Through the initial periods of prayer and discerning the SMCs began to develop ideas of what they felt God was calling them to be and do. Through this they began to develop patterns and routines of work. Prayer remained an important element of what they did but they did not seek to understand what God was doing on a day-to-day basis before they began working, as you might expect from a strict following of the pattern of 'ministry time'. The patterns and routines of ministry they had begun to establish shaped the day's activities. The work is not purely discerning what God is doing and blessing it; rather it involved discerning God and what God was calling them to and then developing patterns and routines of work.

Lynwood had a routine of sending out the van to collect and deliver furniture and other items, while others sorted the items in the hut, answered phones, cooked lunch and did other tasks. They knew roughly what they were doing before they turned up that day. They were not looking to God before deciding every action, but they were seeking to remain attentive to what God was doing within that routine. Rather than purely 'seeing what God was doing and blessing

it' they undertook a regular pattern of work and expected God to be active, to keep them aligned to his plans and to interrupt them when they stray from his plans. Lynwood described God nudging them⁹⁷³ through natural and supernatural means. This desire to keep 'aligned' and 'in-tune' with God by continually seeking to listen and be attentive and for God to 'lead' and 'guide' was seen in all four SMCs. Although Lynwood's routine was the clearest, all four developed some sort of routine through which they expected God to guide them. These are not, therefore, social action projects with a Christian ethos, but ministries in which they believe God actively guides and leads.

I will explore in more detail the way the SMCs have developed practices to help them remain aligned with God's will in the next section. Here, I will draw attention to a few of the key phrases and ideas which help them. One phrase regularly used in Lynwood and Hilchester was working in 'God's strength' and coupled to it was 'God's timing'. These phrases helped them to focus back on what God was doing and to remind each other that it was not ultimately about their plans or actions or their responsibility to keep the ministry going. Doing things in God's strength meant trusting God, not only that he was at work, but also that he would guide them in the work. God's timing was a reminder to be patient, particularly when things did not work out as they had planned or hoped.

For all four SMCs the pattern of their work created a foundation from which they sought to discern God. Rather than an understanding of following God into what he was already doing they had a sense of acting with God. They developed the routines according to how they felt God was leading them and how they experienced God acting with them in the work. For Lynwood, in particular, it was almost as if God was another member of the team. They constantly put the emphasis back on God, and prayed that he would keep them aligned to His plans. Although there was a general sense that they were engaged in God's plans, the specifics were not seen beforehand, rather they continually discerned and responded to God as they acted. This meant that if they did not hear God, if they did not discern anything, they continued in the routine they had, but when things occurred, interruptions happened or things did not go to plan their reaction was to return to prayer and to see what God was saying to them. The participation therefore is one of acting with God in the present, following the patterns of ministry but aware that God is always at work.

The SMCs are developing the Charismatic Evangelical notion of 'see what God is doing and bless it' without abandoning it. They have managed to keep Charismatic Evangelical beliefs and practices at the forefront of their social action by developing their understanding of God's agency beyond this maxim. Firstly they have discerned patterns of working, routines, which they can

⁹⁷³ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 356

engage in within their day-to-day life. They then try to discern God within these patterns. They understand these routines to be God-given and in accordance with God's plan. They act without necessarily having a specific understanding of what God is doing within each situation. However, they train themselves to remain attentive to what God is doing and position themselves to respond accordingly. This overcomes the limits of 'discern and bless', namely avoiding an ad hoc approach, but still keeps attentiveness and discernment of God central to the work that they are doing.

Although this is not the narrative of 'ministry time', it does bear similarities to the practice. 'Ministry time' has a set pattern and routine which everyone follows and through which God is discerned and expected to act. They expect God to act differently each time, but it is generally within this pattern of invite, wait, listen and discern, bless and act where led. Just as with 'ministry time', where there are suggestions of the things to look out for in discerning God, gradually over time the members of the community learn signs within social action and God's work in the world. They understand their routines as formed in response to a particular calling from God, shaped by God in the present and form a pattern in which God can be discerned, just as in 'ministry time', but which also provide a regular shape to the ministry which they can continually engage in. The problem of discerning God only leading to ad hoc engagement is somewhat overcome through developing routines and discerning the interruptions which allows a more sustained engagement.

ii. Creating Space for God – the importance of human action

As well as discerning God's action there is an understanding of active engagement by the community. In Hilchester, phrases like 'Bring God into the community'⁹⁷⁴ and 'Create space for God'⁹⁷⁵ bring a change of emphasis in the relationship between God's acts and human acts. Whereas before the focus was on the individuals following God's plans and being attentive to him, now there is an expectation that as they work God joins with them. Andrew, at one point in his interview, turned the Charismatic Evangelical phrase around; describing the slow nature of their work and the need to keep going he said they were trying to 'bless and then see what God does with that'.⁹⁷⁶ Here the human action comes first, opening an invitation for God to act. The emphasis is on creating space where people can experience God.

This happens in a number of ways. One was through the act of blessing. The SMC takes the initiative to bless others. This blessing is sharing God's blessing that they have received. By stepping out and seeking to be a blessing to people, as Andrew commented, they can see what

⁹⁷⁴ Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 39

⁹⁷⁵ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 281

⁹⁷⁶ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 10

God does with that, or as Ben in Lynwood put it, they 'do something which God can bless'.⁹⁷⁷ Although I did see people pray for blessing for others, the primary understanding of blessing was practical help and spending time with people. Through this practical blessing they hope that people will experience God. There are regular prayers to invite God to be present and to reveal himself to people before their activities and gatherings, be it the football in Hilchester, the café in the school in Eastbark or the delivery of furniture in Lynwood.

A more explicit way that they create space for God is through including prayer in their social action. Prayer has an active role in the social action of all four SMCs. They look for opportunities to pray for people and I was told stories and experienced first-hand people praying for others in the drop-in in Airbury, while delivering furniture in Lynwood, after playing football in Hilchester, and during the café in the school in Eastbark. They pray with people that God would act in particular situations in their lives and that they would experience God. Eastbark actually go further; the prayer room is the place where they experience God most powerfully, therefore they take that with them into their social action setting up a 'prayer space' in the school café.

By 'creating space' for God it is the Christian who takes the lead. By stepping out and blessing they create space for God to act and for God to be experienced. Here then the understanding is of God 'blessing' the human work, or perhaps God who blesses specific areas at specific times. This is not to say that it is only initiated by human acts, and again, all their work is understood in the context of God's plan and God's calling, but in stepping out and blessing others they can see more clearly what God is blessing and begin to focus on that.

Again, this could be seen as a development of the 'ministry time' patterns, extending the 'ministry time' invitation for God to be present into the invitation to be present in their social action. 'Ministry time' is all about creating an environment where God can be experienced in individuals' lives. What they are suggesting is that their actions in the community create similar spaces. Just like in 'ministry time', during the prayer before the activities the SMCs invite God to be present in what they are doing, to reveal himself and to provide opportunities which they can take to develop deeper relationships and to talk about their faith. Here the invitation to God is not to be present in a particular worship service, but to be present and active in their social action in the world.

iii. God's Action and Human Action begin to Overlap: Towards collaboration with God

From the discussions in the first two sections it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between what the SMCs consider to be God's acts or human acts. Hilchester talked about allowing God to 'work through you'.⁹⁷⁸ Similarly doing things in 'God's strength' was about letting go of your own plans and not trusting in your own ability but in God's. They described how God

⁹⁷⁷ Interview, Ben, Lynwood, Paragraph 43

⁹⁷⁸ Prayer Emails, Hilchester, Paragraph 517

worked through them to achieve things they would not have imagined. In creating space for God there was a sense of God working through their actions and in building relationships with others and a hope that those people would experience God's love through those relationships. God worked through human actions and others could experience God through those actions. In 'ministry time' there was a concern that human action could get in the way of God's action, but for these SMCs God can be experienced through human acts. This is more than God inviting humans to participate; it is a joining together of human action and God's action through ministry. There is no sense that this is an equal or mutual action, the SMCs emphasize the need to trust, pray and to do things in God's strength and according to his will. But the joining together of human action and God's action is more complicated than the phrase 'discern and bless' allows.

Airbury had actively distanced themselves from Charismatic practices⁹⁷⁹ and focused on building long term relationships with those whom they came to know through the drop-in and other activities, particularly people with mental health issues, the homeless and people who were struggling and lonely. For them, supporting people over a long time through difficult circumstances felt at odds with charismatic evangelicalism that expected immediate healing and miracles. Claire gave an insight into how they viewed this when she said 'we were all in churches that just prayed and did sod all about that and expected God to be the answer to their prayers when God was expecting them to be the answer to those prayers'.⁹⁸⁰ There was a clear sense in Airbury that God was already at work in the community, but Claire expresses that prayer is not an act which relinquishes human responsibility but one which commits them to the work.

Acts that seem to be human acts are understood as God acting, prayers are calls not just for God to act but for humans to join in; God blesses through the SMCs blessing others. The SMCs attempt to express this by referring to prayer attributed to Teresa of Avila 'Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours' which they often referred to as 'being God's hands and feet'⁹⁸¹. I heard this expressed in all four SMCs and it carried the sense of this mystery; that through their actions God acts. This was not a sense that God can only act through people, nor an idea that good Christian action is equivalent to God's act. What they were trying to express was this idea that God's action and human action overlap; that God works through human actions, and through human action people can find God at work. The ability to distinguish between God's acts and human acts begins to break down in the middle of the act of ministry. This is not to confuse human acts with God's acts, rather it is to begin to grasp something of the mystery of collaboration with God. Claire in Lynwood described this sense of acting with God on her blog;

⁹⁷⁹ See p117

⁹⁸⁰ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 30

⁹⁸¹ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 330; Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 356

We are lately seeing that our work together is about working like archaeologists, dusting off the dirt that is covering the inner beauty of someone and helping it to be revealed. Everyone has something beautiful inside, and for some it's been covered over deeply for a long time, so the work is painstaking, but is actually the work of the Holy Spirit, so all we do is see the leads and follow them, as we can.⁹⁸²

Here we see that the work of the community and the work of the Holy Spirit very much overlapped; human work was not just joining in with God's work, or following his lead but in a mysterious way was actually God's work. However in trying to explain it she returned to the language of 'discern and bless' talking about the Holy Spirit leading and them following when really she was describing something far more profound. Through their acts of love and kindness to others they found that with God they were seeing people flourish. This was not just an act of God which they were following, but an act of collaboration where their actions became blurred. As I expressed at the beginning of this chapter this lived theology of God's action is one which is developing through the life of the community; they are still developing the language to give words to express what is happening and often fall back on phrases and ideas which they have used before. I am suggesting the word *collaboration* to begin to shape the language around these acts of ministry.

Through the acts of justice and mercy, of loving and supporting, people begin to see reconciliation and wholeness, which, as Claire describes, is in fact God's work; but it is work which happens through the slow and patient building of relationships and providing support. It is, of course, God's work, but this in no way makes it less of a human work. There is a collaboration of Human and Divine action which lead these people towards God's wholeness and reconciliation. This collaborative understanding again points to the extensive nature of the lived theology of these SMCs. I am suggesting the term 'collaboration' as a way of exploring this practice emerging from the SMCs for a number of reasons. It is clearly more than just following; the SMCs have been shown to initiate as well as follow. It is not mutual engagement; there is no sense within the SMCs that human acts are on the same level as God's acts, a point which they continually emphasized. The SMCs do not believe it is synergy; this is not just the fact that humans working together can be seen as God's work because together they amount to more than a sum of their parts.

Understanding God's Action in the World and Sustaining Social Action

By engaging in social action and trying to follow God's plans and God's will, the SMCs have developed practices and vocabulary which help them to understand how God is at work in the world and how they collaborate with God in that work. Practices and vocabulary of 'ministry time' provided a starting point from which the SMCs have learnt how to describe God at work in

⁹⁸² Blog 25-07-12

the world. The SMC's understanding of how God acts is a significant development in charismatic evangelicalism, but not an abandonment of it. SMCs have developed their practices and vocabulary to help them understand how God is at work in their social action in a way which both makes sense within their charismatic understanding and practices, and importantly helps them to engage in social action in a sustainable way. This new vocabulary which is appearing demonstrates the growing emphasis in understanding God's action in the world. Through the language of discern and bless, pattern and interruption, creating space for God and relational collaboration, SMCs have begun to develop a rich vocabulary to express their discernment of God's action. By describing different ways in which God is at work in the world beyond the 'ministry time' model they begin to shape social action as somewhere where God can be encountered and they can join the exciting adventure of collaboration with God. These first two moves, moving the location of belonging away from the Sunday service and understanding God's action in the world are vital in understanding the extensive nature of their lived theology and have been significant in sustaining social action. The final section, though, is the key connecting these two moves to the emphasis on experiencing God which members of the SMCs have brought from their Charismatic Evangelical background.

The Extensive Charismatic Nature of the Lived Theology of SMCs and Experiencing God in Social Action

This section draws the previous two sections together through a renewed understanding of experiencing God. Chapter 3 demonstrated that the SMCs continued to draw on Charismatic Evangelical practices and understandings including a focus on experience of God, particularly through emotions and feelings, an expectation of God working in people lives today, a sense that there is always another adventure round the corner and excited anticipation of what God is going to do next. To sustain their social action and keep it at the centre of the community the SMCs have learnt to experience God in their social action in a manner similar to the way charismatic evangelicalism has learnt to experience God in the worship service.

Discussion of Experience of God in charismatic evangelicalism and SMCs

In charismatic evangelicalism intimate encounter with God is the goal of worship and experiencing God is primarily located in the worship gathering and in 'ministry time'.⁹⁸³ These experiences of God through worship and 'ministry time' were not alien to the SMCs, and I observed and heard about such encounters, but they regularly described other ways in which they experienced God. Two that were particularly common were experiencing God through family and experiencing God through being part of his work.

⁹⁸³ See p34

Experiencing God through family connects experience of God with the new location of belonging; the meal table. Through being part of these meal times, people described how they experienced family. Of course, there is a particular definition of family being used; family describes the experience of close, caring and loving relationships, of mutual support and of shared experiences. It also suggests a level of diversity; they share their lives with people they would not perhaps have immediately described as friends. It is a somewhat idealized view of family, but they recognise that this is not necessarily how every family is. By welcoming people to eat with them they are inviting people to experience this family which may well be in complete contrast to what they've experienced before.

For the SMCs this experience of family is connected to their experience of God. They understood their acts of valuing and welcoming people to be an expression of how God values them and welcomes them. For example, in Airbury they talked about redemption through the relationships in the community. This community was not just a demonstration of God's love or a sign of God's love, or even a result of God's love, but the love of the community could actually be experienced as God's love. In Lynwood, Rachel compared the depth of relationship in the community with what they experienced at the New Wine conference every summer. She saw a connection between experiencing family and experiencing God's presence.⁹⁸⁴ When I asked her how they experienced God she began by talking about the sense of family in the community. For her, the love and care in the SMC, which they described as family, was an experience of the love of God for them.

The SMCs also found that they could experience God directly through their social action. Eastbark shared stories of how they experienced God and how others experience God and showed that experience of God is a regular feature of their prayers.⁹⁸⁵ Through their social action they wanted to experience God and wanted others to experience God. I reported how in Lynwood Tony told me 'you can actually see, feel, and be part of the Lord God Almighty working'.⁹⁸⁶ We can see in these and other examples how the language of encounter, familiar from the 'time of worship' and 'ministry time', is being used in a context of social action. Experiencing God in these ways moves beyond the charismatic evangelicalism where experience and blessing push you into service. In these SMCs they experienced God when engaged in social action. Social action was not just what they did after they had experienced God, but was also a place where God could be experienced.⁹⁸⁷

⁹⁸⁴ Interview, Rachel, Lynwood, Paragraph 28-35

⁹⁸⁵ See p148

⁹⁸⁶ Interview, Tony, Lynwood, Paragraph 3

⁹⁸⁷ Ruddick also points to a Charismatic Evangelical understanding of experiencing God as important in sustaining 'Missional Pastoral Care' within the Eden community but didn't explore the practices behind that development. See Ruddick, 'Missional Pastoral Care', 118–30.

The experience of God in social action helps to make sense of the collaborative nature of God's action and human action. In charismatic evangelicalism the worship service focuses on experiencing intimacy with God through the worship. Everything is set up to help the individual experience God through the sense of being loved and accepted by God. The expectation is that from this experience of God one is then propelled into action in the world, returning to the worship for that sense of intimacy and experience.⁹⁸⁸ There is little emphasis on an encounter with God within social action. This is in contrast with these SMCs where they felt God was most encountered through their engagement in social action. Just as God can be experienced intimately in worship, so these SMCs find that they can continue to experience God as he acts in the world through social action. The important question, having identified where God is experienced, is to ask how do they learn to identify God, and how do they experience God?

Learning to See God at Work

To engage in God's work in the ways described above the SMCs have had to develop ways to discern God. To explore this I will begin with what Alice in Lynwood told me. She described how the busyness and the pressures of secular work meant that people did not recognize God. 'It's beaten out of you'.⁹⁸⁹

Part of me thinks it would be good to be [in a] secular [workplace] for a little bit so you could bring some of that hope, some of that... just a taste of it for other people to see, I don't think they'd believe you anyway unless you're working alongside other Christians – but maybe that would be an encouragement for other Christians that don't see God at work or don't recognise God at work- they probably see him all the time they just don't recognise it as God.⁹⁹⁰

The last sentence is the key to understanding this process of discernment; learning to recognise God at work. Just as Evangelical Christians in Luhrmann's research described how God is always speaking and they just needed to learn to hear him⁹⁹¹, here Alice makes the same assertion about God acting in the world; God is always at work, you just have to learn to recognise him. Tony from Lynwood similarly told me;

You want to see God at work? I'll show you God at work – if you have got the commitment and the eyes to see – because you can see everything at Lynwood and see nothing – but you need spiritual eyes to see it.⁹⁹²

The question then is how the SMCs develop these 'spiritual eyes' and learn to see God at work? I have identified a number of ways in which they learn to 'see God at work':

⁹⁸⁸ See p39

⁹⁸⁹ Interview, Alice, Lynwood, Paragraph 23

⁹⁹⁰ Interview, Alice, Lynwood, Paragraph 23

⁹⁹¹ Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back*, 46.

⁹⁹² Interview, Tony, Lynwood, Paragraph 78

Firstly, they have ways to constantly remind themselves of the reality that God is at work. In society, at large, there is no expectation that God is at work, nor that people would see and experience God at work. What I found in these four SMCs was confidence that God is at work; that he has a specific plan in their local community and that he is carrying it out. They had shaped the environment to be one where God was expected to act. One of the key ways in which they did this was through prayer. Prayer was important in all four SMCs and was the way that they remained 'aligned', 'in tune' and attentive to what they discerned God was doing. All four talked about having prayer rooms and space dedicated to prayer and Eastbark and Lynwood had permanent prayer rooms. For Eastbark having a permanent prayer room was a statement about their commitment to prayer and despite emphasising that you can of course pray anywhere they described something special about praying in the prayer room. Prayer and the physical signs of prayer around the SMCs were a continual reminder that it was God's work not their own. All the SMCs had 'rhythms' or patterns of prayer which helped them to remember that God was at work. Another way they shaped this environment was by encouraging each other to act in 'God's strength' and trust 'God's timing'. By encouraging each other to look to God when things were difficult they reminded each other that God was at work. For Hilchester this was the reason for returning to a more charismatic worship style; to remember God and allow God to do the work. Through prayer and reminding each other they continually viewed the world as somewhere where God is present and active and they set their expectations to see God at work and so shaped an environment where they expected God to act. The place of excitement and sense of adventure also played a key part. They were excited to discover where they would next find God already at work. This sense of excitement also seemed to help them to view the world as somewhere where God would act.

Having shaped an environment where they expected God to act the next task was to identify and describe God at work. The previous section showed the development of vocabulary allowing them to describe God at work in the world. Tied to this they used a vocabulary straight out of charismatic evangelicalism; answers to prayer and 'miracles.' They described miracles in the form of healing, provision and through seeing lives transformed by God. Through being in an environment where they expected God to act they found it easy to identify those things as coming from God. Ben told me, 'We've been blessed with a hut... The council think it was a gift from them but we know otherwise'.⁹⁹³ By shaping their understanding of the world as a place where God is continually acting it made complete sense to see the hut as a provision primarily from God. They created an environment where it is natural to recognise God's provision amongst competing explanations, something they pointed out would be alien within most work

⁹⁹³ Interview, Ben, Lynwood, Paragraph 16

environments. Coincidence, generosity and 'perfect timing' are all interpreted through this expectation that God is at work. Answers to particular prayers were celebrated,⁹⁹⁴ as was God providing before they even pray about it.⁹⁹⁵ In the previous section I discussed how they developed routines and then expected God to interrupt these routines. These interruptions could easily be written off as luck or coincidence, but for these SMCs they were interruptions from God to realign them with his plans. It might be tempting to label all this as delusion, but they are aware of the competing explanations and are aware that to many people this would sound crazy.⁹⁹⁶

It was noticeable that Airbury developed a different vocabulary from the rest of the SMCs, perhaps due to the slower nature of their work and their more deliberate move away from charismatic evangelicalism. They talked about glimpses of the Kingdom and of Christ at work, finding God in the backwards steps, and the concepts of desert and journey. Even when talking about healing Will was attracted to the idea of a gradual process. Despite this more cautious approach there was a desire, an attempt and a developing vocabulary to describe God's work in the world. God's work was not observed from a distance, but experienced by those in Airbury.

Another key way to discern God was through feelings, emotions and sensations. Alice in Lynwood described physical sensations.⁹⁹⁷ Rachel in Lynwood saw emotions as triggers to pray⁹⁹⁸ and also recounted a story of teaching someone that the tingling they felt in their cheek when praying was an encouragement from God.⁹⁹⁹ Tim in Eastbark described how 'feeling teary' was a sign to him of God's presence.¹⁰⁰⁰ Charlie in Hilchester even identified God working through his feeling of being demotivated about moving to another town.¹⁰⁰¹ They understand these emotions as giving them some insight into what God is doing. Luhrmann described how Christians in Vineyard Churches saw God as causing their emotions.¹⁰⁰² In the SMCs sometimes the emotions are seen as caused by God, but it can also be that emotions and other senses are used to discern God at work. The shaping of the environment and the excited anticipation of God at work allowed them to interpret not just what they see and hear, but also what they feel.

The ways of discerning God and the vocabulary used to describe his work in the world is passed on through sharing stories.¹⁰⁰³ This happens around the meal table, through

⁹⁹⁴ E.g. Kate meeting a boy from the school who she hasn't seen for two weeks after praying, field notes Eastbark Paragraph 74

⁹⁹⁵ Interview, Rachel, Lynwood, Paragraph 10

⁹⁹⁶ Interview, Alice, Lynwood, Paragraph 30

⁹⁹⁷ Interview, Alice, Lynwood, Paragraph 30

⁹⁹⁸ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 219

⁹⁹⁹ Interview, Rachel, Lynwood, Paragraph 40

¹⁰⁰⁰ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 69

¹⁰⁰¹ Interview, Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 18

¹⁰⁰² Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back*, 180.

¹⁰⁰³ Interview Kate, Eastbark, Paragraph 40

conversations, through prayer times, in the prayer room and through other means; sharing the stories helps others to learn to see God at work.¹⁰⁰⁴ They share the stories of answers to prayer and ‘miracles’ but they also use the stories of where they got it wrong to teach people.

Responding to someone saying that they would go and buy some sheets, because the stock was low in Lynwood, Rachel told two stories of how God taught her to pray, rather than to solve the problem herself.¹⁰⁰⁵ This pattern of creating the environment where they expect God to be acting, developing the vocabulary to describe God at work and sharing those experiences through stories, together help them to learn to ‘see God at work’. The next step is to discuss how this helps people to experience God in Social Action.

Experiencing God in Social Action

Having developed a theology to understand God’s work in the world and having developed practices to ‘see God at work’ in the world, the next step is learning to experience God in social action. In the previous section the relationship between God’s action and Human action was explored through the ideas of interruptions, creating space for God, and collaborating with God. Interruptions to the day’s routines were experienced as interruptions from God. These interruptions came in a variety of ways. Some came through some of the phenomena associated with ‘ministry time’ and charismatic evangelicalism; words and pictures, a sense of needing to do something, a physical sensation, or through a conversation with God. Others came through things happening in everyday life; physical interruptions of people turning up unexpectedly or by phone calls, surprise encounters or things not going to the original plan. The attentiveness encouraged by charismatic evangelicalism during ‘ministry time’ and worship is now adopted by the SMCs to experience God in the midst of social action. Through their ‘spiritual eyes’ these can all be means of experiencing God at work. The sensations and interruptions bring an excitement and expectation of what God is going to do. Rachel, in Lynwood, described the sensation of God asking her to stop at her friend’s house on the way and she found that her friend’s husband had left her and that the timing of her visit was perfect to support her friend.¹⁰⁰⁶ God is experienced in the process; things heard, sensed or felt turn out to be the right thing to do giving an excited sense that God is at work at that moment. Similarly seeing answers to prayer, such as Kate meeting the boy she had not seen for a while at the school gate was experienced as God’s provision.¹⁰⁰⁷ The experience is not just in the outcome, but also in the excitement of being part of the process. This is the key to experiencing God in social action; the exciting part is not just seeing the answers to prayer, the lives transformed and the other outcomes, but also the sense of being part of what God is doing at that moment in those situations. The collaborative act of being

¹⁰⁰⁴ Interview, Ben, Lynwood, Paragraph 52: Interview Tony, Lynwood, Paragraph 71

¹⁰⁰⁵ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 402-203

¹⁰⁰⁶ Interview, Rachel, Lynwood, Paragraph 13

¹⁰⁰⁷ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 83

part of God's ongoing action in the world allows them to experience not just God but also God's action in the world.

This is not just a case of identifying good things as from God, nor a case of ignoring struggles and difficulties. God is seen to be at work in all of it. As well as stories of answers to prayer, there were plenty of stories of them realising they had missed seeing where God had been at work, and of having doubts about whether God was at work. The struggles and difficulties were reminders to focus back on God, to pray and to continue to follow his plans. In Lynwood difficulties drove them back to reflect on God and working in his strength.¹⁰⁰⁸ Airbury had the most developed way to deal with struggles and difficulties using the metaphors of 'desert' and 'journey'.¹⁰⁰⁹ Everyone was understood to be on their own spiritual journey, and most of the people that they were coming into contact with were seen to be going through some sort of 'desert experience', which was tough and painful. But, according to Will, the most amazing part was finding God in the desert. He described this in his own life, as did others in the Airbury, but he also identified it in others talking about how they find Christ in the wound.¹⁰¹⁰ This might be through people engaging in generous acts despite their struggles, people being honest and open about the things they are going through or through people opening up to God. Those moments of experience of God in the midst of struggles were for Will, 'better than gold'.¹⁰¹¹ Collaborating with God means that the SMCs experience the process of God at work, not just the outcomes. They are part of the ongoing redemptive work of God in the world. For Will it is in the brokenness and the 'two steps backwards' that he suddenly gets a glimpse of Christ at work.¹⁰¹² Through this collaborative understanding experience is naturally woven into the social action. By being attentive to God's work they find themselves collaborating in the work of God which brings the sense of excitement and adventure they sought.

The experience of God was not something they wanted to keep to themselves. Chapter 3 demonstrated that the SMCs sought to find ways to share their experience of God with others. Just as experiencing God was important, so was helping others to experience God. The SMCs tell me how they encourage hospitality and welcome anyone to nearly all of their gatherings. In most of these gatherings prayer has a prominent role, whether it is the house meals in Eastbark, the communion service and the meal in Airbury, lunch time at Lynwood or the Monday night meeting in Hilchester. I am describing this as the SMCs *creating spaces of suspended disbelief*. Luhmann describes how Evangelical faith demands a 'willing suspension of disbelief'¹⁰¹³ to allow people to

¹⁰⁰⁸ See p92

¹⁰⁰⁹ See p106

¹⁰¹⁰ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 232

¹⁰¹¹ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 232

¹⁰¹² Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 232

¹⁰¹³ Luhmann, *When God Talks Back*, 301.

experience God as real. In these gatherings the SMCs do not begin with belief and I found very little evidence of them trying to convince people to believe in God through explaining Christianity or what they believe. They do not appear to be trying to create structures that make Christian belief plausible, they are trying to create environments where they expect people to experience God, despite what they might believe. Through blessing people, building relationships and showing them that they are valued and loved they do not aim to convince people to believe in God; they try to create an environment where people suspend their disbelief and are able to experience God. They have found that belief follows experience of God. Charlie, in Hilchester described how they wanted to see ‘God represented well in this community – so that people whatever their perspective can be like, “well I’ve seen that God is good, I may not believe in him but I see He’s good”’.¹⁰¹⁴ This paradoxical statement demonstrates this suspended disbelief. They are creating spaces where people can interact with Christians, build relationships with Christians, have conversations about God with Christians but most importantly experience God themselves. The experience of God can by-pass cognitive assent; God can be experienced before people believe in him. By blessing people and making them feel valued they hope that they will experience God’s love for themselves. This can lead to further conversations and other opportunities to experience God. They, particularly, look for opportunities to pray for people, whether this is praying for them in difficult or uncertain situations or for prayers for physical healing. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, looking for and taking these opportunities to pray with people happens regularly in all four SMCs. Many of the ideas of ‘ministry time’ are employed; inviting God to bless the person, placing their hands on the person they are praying for, listening for words or verses of encouragement to share with the person and an expectation that God will act. They do not, however, expect particular manifestations of the Spirit, rather they keep the prayer short and focused with the expectation that God will be at work in the person over the coming weeks. Being prayed for is seen as a way of caring for each other, but also an opportunity to experience God first hand.

Eastbark went one step further and created a ‘prayer space’ in the café for the young people. They actively encourage them to engage in creative prayer tasks and to spend time listening to God. They have a prayer time at the end of the school café, with the team of pupils who helped, involving some sort of creative prayer task. In all the SMCs these times of prayer happened with Christians and non-Christians and many learnt to experience God before they had really considered belief in God.

Similarly in Airbury’s communion service they create an environment where everyone feels welcomed and able to participate, but what they are particularly excited about is the fact

¹⁰¹⁴ Interview, Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 46

people who don't believe in God participate, particularly an atheist who took communion.¹⁰¹⁵ This journey can be seen in Michelle's life. She came to the group for support during a difficult time and put up with the Christian bit, considering herself an atheist/agnostic depending on who you talk to. Gradually she opened up to people praying for her as things got more difficult and began to see answers to those prayers, specifically God providing a bed for her father and money for them to go on holiday. She described how she was 'stalked by God' eventually becoming a Christian at a conference she went to.¹⁰¹⁶ All the groups have found ways to create these environments of suspended disbelief which allow people to experience God.

In creating spaces of suspended disbelief there is little effort from the SMCs to convince people that God exists, only to suspend their disbelief to allow them to experience God. Through prayer but also through blessing, loving and building relationships with people they create these spaces of suspended disbelief where people who don't acknowledge God or even believe in him have opportunities to experience Him.

The Weaknesses and Blind Spots of SMCs

I have demonstrated that the SMCs in this study have made changes in theology and practice by extending their charismatic lived theology to experience God in the world. At the same time it is important to note the places where some of the weaknesses of charismatic evangelicalism continue uncritically in the practices of these SMCs. I will explore this by engaging with my critique of charismatic evangelicalism, developed in chapter one. These were; having a unidirectional pneumatology which fails to recognise the way the Spirit speaks to the church from the world, embracing an ecclesiology which diminishes the place of the world seeing the church as central, and focusing on healing and miracles while failing to take seriously issues of justice.

Firstly, the pneumatological critique was rooted in the charismatic evangelical understanding of the Spirit as primarily empowering Christians and the church to act in the world. The underlying assumption is that the Spirit flows into the church and out to the world. Within the SMCs this was regularly discussed in the terms of the language of 'blessing'. Blessing flows through the members of the SMCs to those with whom they come into contact. Although their emphasis has been discerning the Spirit in the midst of social action, the work of the Spirit is still often seen as beginning with the member of the SMC. In the same way, although they talk about encountering God in the midst of social action, this is often through the experience of feeling blessed by blessing others. Lynwood described the blessing as 'flowing both ways'¹⁰¹⁷ but this primarily meant blessing others and in return being blessed by God. The expectation is primarily on being part of the action of God in the world, through ideas of encounter and collaboration,

¹⁰¹⁵ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 37

¹⁰¹⁶ Interview, Michelle, Airbury, Paragraph 37

¹⁰¹⁷ Interview, Alice, Lynwood, Paragraph 88

rather than an expectation of encountering the Spirit through the 'other' in the world. Although 'being God's hands and feet' had proved a strong metaphor for developing the practices already explored in this chapter, this critique highlights its limitations. It primarily sees Christians as acting for God and revealing God to the world as opposed to encountering God in the world. However, the language that was seen to be developing around collaboration suggested that the problem of Christians being simply tools¹⁰¹⁸, rather than creative agents was being challenged. There was a creativity around the engagement with the world which expected to meet and act with God, rather than purely to be used by God. The focus was not on being conduits of power, but instead on relationships, generosity and presence.

Similarly, there were few suggestions that there was something new to be learnt from the encounter with God in the world. The God that they encountered was the God they expected to encounter. Although the way the SMCs saw the world was as an arena for God's work, the 'maps'¹⁰¹⁹ which helped them to navigate the world risked overemphasizing their givenness and denying their provisionality.¹⁰²⁰ These maps both helped them to identify God at work in the world, but blinded them to other ways God might be at work. This risked them being over confident that God's action in the world was aligned with their own work. Rachel's assertion that the lady's cheek twitching was an indication of God at work, both demonstrates this confidence in God's agency in the world but also the charismatic evangelical blind spot of assuming to know how and where God acts.¹⁰²¹ A greater emphasis on the provisional nature of faith would encourage an openness to encountering God in other ways which in turn might challenge the SMCs faith and theology. This has the potential to allow charismatic evangelicalism to be extended further. There were some exceptions to this in the work in Airbury. Claire's experience of the kiss from the homeless man as Christ¹⁰²², seeing glimpses of the kingdom of God in the homeless men sharing their sausages with each other¹⁰²³ and the description of finding 'Christ in the wound'¹⁰²⁴ all demonstrated a theological perspective which expected God to work in unanticipated ways in the world. Another way that Airbury extended charismatic evangelicalism further was in their recognition of suffering. Charismatic evangelicalism tends to see suffering, trials and weakness as something to be overcome, but Airbury began to develop a language and theology of suffering as the place of encounter with Christ, and recognising their own on-going suffering, the experience of the desert, as a vital part of their solidarity with others in the community. The other SMCs didn't seem to demonstrate this same awareness and there was

¹⁰¹⁸ Percy, *Words, Wonders and Power*, 36.

¹⁰¹⁹ Percy, 'Symbiotic Alchemy'.

¹⁰²⁰ Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, 44–48.

¹⁰²¹ Interview, Rachel, Lynwood, Paragraph 40

¹⁰²² Claire's Blog, Airbury, 06-09-11

¹⁰²³ Interview, Will, Airbury, Paragraph 7

¹⁰²⁴ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 232

little articulation of what has been learnt about God from the world. This is perhaps surprising given the 'missional' focus that God is already present and active in the world.¹⁰²⁵

Within the critique of ecclesiology there was a concern about the diminished place of the world in charismatic evangelicalism, which is seen as an 'arena for evangelism' with an unacknowledged assumption that the world needs to be transformed into the church. At the same time it harbours a sectarian attitude where the church becomes separate from the world. I have already explored how the change in location of belonging has a significant impact on the place of social action in the life of the community, but it is also a shift in this ecclesiological distinction between church and world. In the development of a 'community approach' to social action some of these issues are at least challenged, if not fully overcome. The relational language of the community and the blurring of the lines between community and social action show the potential for the type of creative dialogue with neighbour envisioned by Percy.¹⁰²⁶ This appears to be a tempering of the conversionist approach associated with evangelicalism¹⁰²⁷ rather than an abandoning of it. There is a complexity of relationship between evangelism and social action but on the whole there remains a desire that people would develop the 'relationship with Jesus' which is at the heart of evangelical faith. Lynwood are an interesting example of this, where the word evangelism is dropped, and models of overt evangelism are rejected and yet prayers for people to know God and experience him remain. These SMCs then, retain the conversionist commitment but cannot be simply identified as understanding the world as the arena of evangelism, nor as seeing social action simply as a means of evangelism. However, the challenge remains to see the world as a place of encounter with God in new and strange ways, and not simply a place where people can encounter the God already known to the SMCs. Paas' challenge to the church regarding church planting is important for these SMCs; that it risks seeing the church, and not the world, as central to God's mission.

The language of power which Percy described as dominating Wimber's ecclesiology was not seen to do so in the SMCs. However it did appear, particularly when discussing the return to charismatic practices at Hilchester and Will's desire to pray for healing in Airbury. I have already offered one interpretation of this as a desire to rediscover an understanding of God's agency and developing an expectation of encountering God as active in the world. However, it also has elements of returning to the Wimberite understanding of overcoming weakness and powerlessness. The challenge put to charismatic evangelicalism about the place of weakness, suffering and solidarity is worth placing before the SMCs.

¹⁰²⁵ It is worth noting, however, that this could potentially be a methodological issue about the types of questions asked, although, apart from the examples given, these kinds of accounts weren't seen in the stories told.

¹⁰²⁶ Percy, *Words, Wonders and Power*, 155.

¹⁰²⁷ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*.

Finally the critique of charismatic evangelicalism asked whether the commitment to healing and the miraculous, was truly rooted in a concern for those who are sick. The concern of the SMCs can be seen to be primarily pastoral and personal. However, there was evidence of a wider concern for issues of justice and poverty and some engagement with systemic issues, particularly in the Airbury and Hilchester.

From this critique a number of key themes have developed which will be explored in the next chapter through a wider conversation. Firstly, the challenge of encountering God in the world through the stranger and other not just in the experience of blessing and participation. Related to this is the uni-directional nature of mission and the potential problem of the church being the focus of mission. The understanding and place of suffering and weakness will be developed further, as will the challenge to understand engagement with the world as being about justice.

Summary: How SMCs sustain social action

The question which has driven this research is how Small Missional Communities sustain their social action. Chapter 1 discussed how social action ends up on the periphery of the life of the worshipping community in charismatic evangelicalism. What I have suggested in this chapter, through looking specifically at SMCs, is that the solution has come not through some grand theological schema or through purely bringing ideas and practices from another context, but through adapting and developing their familiar practices and drawing on others, but always with a focus on those practices expressed in everyday life. These SMCs have moved their focus from the intensive nature of the charismatic worship service to the extensive focus of God at work in the world. They have done this through developing practices and theology which, crucially, are in continuity with their Charismatic Evangelical background. By seeking to adapt and develop in such a way that the goal of experiencing God can be realised in contexts beyond the worship service has helped SMCs sustain their social action and keep it central to the life of the community. I have described in this chapter how their lived theology has an extensive charismatic nature. It is charismatic because it has maintained an emphasis on experiencing and encountering God through feelings and emotions. It is extensive because it has shifted their focus more broadly than the immediate worshipping community expecting to experience God out in the world as much as in a gathered worship service.

I have described three important elements of the SMCs' lived theology; moving the Location of Belonging from the worship gathering to the meal and relational gatherings, developing a deeper understanding of how God acts in the world, and learning to see and experience God at work in the social action and community life beyond worship and 'ministry

time'. In all three the emphasis has moved from the intensive nature of experiencing God in the worship service to the extensive nature of experiencing God at work in the world. As a result, they have changed the status of social action from a project engaged in outside the community to a community pursuit, where they can collaborate with and experience God in the world. At the same time, I have demonstrated that some of the weaknesses and blind spots of charismatic evangelicalism have been carried forward into the life of the SMCs, particularly in its missiological and ecclesiological understanding of the place of the world and the 'other'. These will be explored in more detail in the next chapter.

I have shown that social action has been sustained by these SMCs, in the medium-term at least, through developing a lived theology which takes seriously the beliefs, practices and understandings of the members. By understanding social action as a place where God can be encountered rather than something you do after you've encountered God, it has become central to the life of the community and something which also feeds and sustains the members, not just drawing on their energy and resources.

Chapter 5: Tensions in Small Missional Communities

This chapter broadens the conversation begun in the previous chapter to include the Emerging Missional Movement and the Evangelical Turn to Social Action. It is focused on the third sub question;

How do SMCs challenge and extend the theological accounts of charismatic evangelicalism, the Emerging Missional Movement and the Evangelical Turn to Social Action?

Following the practical theology framework developed in chapter 2 the critical conversation now turns to seeing how the different accounts of lived theology challenge and extend each other. The aim is not to develop a definitive theology of SMCs but to offer challenges and points of reflection, to be explored in the midst of practice, the primary location of discernment. The conversation is focused around two tensions present in the SMCs; the place of charismatic understanding and practice within the SMCs and the fragility and vulnerability of the SMCs. These tensions reflect themes also present in the Emerging Missional Movement and the Evangelical Turn to Social Action. Here I will explore the lived theology of SMCs described in the previous chapter, in light of these tensions, and explore the ways SMCs have lived with and sought to overcome them. The goal is not to solve these problems by bringing solutions from outside but to explore the tentative and innovative ways that the SMCs have understood and lived with these tensions and to bring them into the conversation in a constructive way.

The first half of the chapter will focus on the SMC's relationship with charismatic evangelicalism. Charismatic Evangelical practices and understandings continue to be key to the life of these SMCs, as was asserted in the previous chapter. This section explores the tensions between the operant and espoused theologies of Charismatic Evangelical practice, from the four voices model, in the SMCs.¹⁰²⁸ The emphasis on discerning and experiencing God also brings interesting insights and challenges to the doctrine of the *Missio Dei* and challenges to the Emerging Missional Movement to pay more attention to lived practice. This develops into a broader conversation of both critique of and being critiqued by the *Missio Dei* exploring the weaknesses and blind spots revealed in chapter 4. The second half of the chapter will focus on the fragility of the SMCs. They are small and vulnerable and the question of sustainability and longevity is always hanging over them. I explore Orton's trajectories of social action initiatives in relation to the SMCs and draw on the practices of SMCs around developing *Missional Space*, being *Relational Glue* and *Discerning God in the Interruptions* to highlight how they have developed structures which allow them to continue to sustain their social action and to be Christian

¹⁰²⁸ For discussion of the four voices see p54. Also see Cameron et al., *Talking about God in Practice*.

community. I conclude the section by addressing the question of the importance of social action and the place of weakness and fragility in the SMCs.

Tensions in the Relationship with charismatic evangelicalism

The SMCs in this research all had different relationships with charismatic evangelicalism. Lynwood were happy to identify themselves as Charismatic Evangelical, whereas Airbury felt they had moved away from charismatic evangelicalism. Eastbark were suspicious of the focus on the Sunday worship meeting but happily engaged in charismatic practices and Hilchester had reintroduced a more Charismatic Evangelical worship evening. As seen in the previous chapter, all four had included and developed charismatic practices within their community life. For Eastbark and Lynwood the inclusion of Charismatic practices was relatively unproblematic, but for Airbury and Hilchester there were more visible tensions.

Airbury saw themselves as having 'gone through the charismatic thing and out the other side'¹⁰²⁹ and Claire, Will and Margaret had all left the local Baptist Church because of their struggles with charismatic evangelicalism.¹⁰³⁰ However there was also evidence of charismatic practices and understanding within Airbury; spontaneous praying for one-another¹⁰³¹, guidance through a direct audible word from God¹⁰³², dreams that shaped the direction of the SMC,¹⁰³³ and celebrations of encountering God in surprising and exciting ways. This demonstrates a disconnect between the espoused theology of the SMC which emphasized a post-charismatic theology and the importance of practices such as Eucharist and mindfulness, and the operant theology where their practice contained many elements from charismatic evangelicalism.¹⁰³⁴ They have moved away from a charismatic evangelicalism in the shape of a Sunday gathering, but Charismatic Evangelical expressions, emphasises and practices continued to be present in the life of the SMC. Will's suggestion that their testimony felt a bit 'weak' and 'powerless' and that 'the command is to heal the sick – not just pray for the poor buggers'¹⁰³⁵ were recognitions of this separation and a desire to reconnect the two. Hilchester also noticed a similar tension and having initially moved away from Charismatic expression of Christianity to embrace a 'missional model' they returned to

¹⁰²⁹ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 27

¹⁰³⁰ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 15

¹⁰³¹ Field Notes, Airbury Paragraph 258; Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 13; Interview, Michelle, Airbury, Paragraph 50

¹⁰³² Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 12 and 19; Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 155

¹⁰³³ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 45

¹⁰³⁴ The terms espoused theology and operant theology come from the Four Voices of Theology within Theological Action Research. See discussion p54

¹⁰³⁵ Interview, Will, Airbury, Paragraph 66

many charismatic practices because they felt more powerful and more likely to make a difference on the estate where they were living.¹⁰³⁶

The Problem of Not Recognising the Operant Charismatic Practices

In their reactions against charismatic evangelicalism Airbury and Hilchester both sought to distance themselves from Charismatic Evangelical practices but, as both Andrew in Hilchester and Will in Airbury expressed, in doing so there was a sense that they had cut themselves off from the thing that felt 'powerful'. Excitement and the spontaneous nature of their relationship with God was part of their experience within charismatic evangelicalism, and where these things were not given space in the life of the community there was a sense that something was missing. The operant theology contains these charismatic goals of encounter and experience which are met in extensive ways, however in Airbury and Hilchester in particular the espoused theology did not always reflect these charismatic elements. This can be seen in the Emerging-Missional Movement more broadly and can give rise to a number of problems. They can fail to recognise their motivation for what they do, can cut themselves off from practices and resources that would help them and they may fail to pass on to others joining the group something which is fundamental to the way they operate. I will deal with each of these points in turn.

i. Not recognising what motivates them

Many of the individuals in these SMCs continued to be motivated, at least in part, by charismatic goals of experience. Experiencing God through these charismatic practices, for them, was part of feeling like a Christian. The SMCs found ways to experience God in their social action but this desire for experience was not always recognised and articulated. Hilchester's desire to return to something that felt more powerful is an example of this; they began to introduce charismatic style worship into their Monday meetings and found they rediscovered this sense of experience and encounter. For the likes of Andrew and Charlie this was directly related to the social action they were involved in but for others the connection was not so clear. Over time a split began to take place between those who wanted the Monday night worship evening and those who wanted to be involved in social action on the estate. Many of the group did not learn to experience God in the social action and the worship gathering instead drew attention away from the social action. In their desire to experience God they experienced a drift back to the familiarity of Charismatic Evangelical practice. Where this charismatic emphasis is operant but not espoused it appears that this drift is more likely to occur without people noticing. What was highlighted in the previous chapter was the way many had begun to articulate this experience of God without having to return to a focus on charismatic worship.

ii. Accessing Charismatic Practices and Resources

¹⁰³⁶ Field Notes, Hilchester, Paragraph 57

Not recognising their practices as charismatic and actively trying to distance themselves from charismatic evangelicalism meant that Airbury inadvertently cut themselves off from resources that might have been helpful to them. Claire's negative reaction to the Healing on the Streets team's understanding of suffering meant that she distanced herself from them rather than noticing the many similarities in what they did and seeking to learn from each other.¹⁰³⁷ The Emerging Missional Movement is well known for its ability to bring in practices from different traditions and to incorporate them into their own¹⁰³⁸; the criticism is that these practices often become detached from the traditions in which they were formed. SMCs have drawn and developed practices from within the Charismatic Evangelical tradition. By reconnecting the operant theology to the espoused theology they open up space for further conversations and for further practices and resources to be critically embraced. The language developing in the SMCs around experiencing God in social action enables them to discuss, share and encourage this experience of encounter without feeling trapped by the Charismatic Evangelical practices which they have found less helpful.

iii. Passing on the faith through word and practice

There is a risk that if the operant charismatic theology in individuals' lives is not recognised and both given outlets and resourced within the community then new people joining the group are not able to fully participate and the motivation to reach out to others is never fully passed on. In Airbury they talked about the importance of choice and emphasized that those joining the community were able to choose their own spirituality. They discussed how those coming liked the traditional church elements because that was what they were familiar with. They saw the simple communion service once a month as a setting that enabled those attending to choose what worked for them.¹⁰³⁹ However, the practices present in the communal settings tended to be the practices that Claire, Will and Margaret had embraced such as the centrality of the Eucharist and mindfulness. I observed that extempore prayer, discussion around the Bible, testimonies of God speaking and individual encounter with God all formed part of the shape of the community but were not embraced as part of the communion service and not as actively passed on. A particularly pertinent case is Michelle, who had been part of the group for a few years. When she had first come she was not a Christian but gradually became willing to receive prayer from the group and had experienced a number of 'miracles' and 'answers to prayer' during that time. She eventually became a Christian through what she described as a series of encounters with God.¹⁰⁴⁰ She enjoyed charismatic worship songs but felt discouraged from using them in the gatherings. I was present at a very awkward meeting where she tried to get everyone to sing some of these

¹⁰³⁷ Field Notes Airbury, Paragraph 191

¹⁰³⁸ Gay, *Remixing the Church*.

¹⁰³⁹ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraphs 24-25

¹⁰⁴⁰ Interview, Michelle, Airbury, Paragraphs 5-6

songs.¹⁰⁴¹ Similarly, she was frustrated that she didn't know the Bible very well, whereas everyone else had a great deal of Bible knowledge, but she didn't feel there was any way for her to develop this knowledge and understanding.¹⁰⁴² These were things which were part of the Charismatic Evangelical background of the group but not adequately passed on to those joining the group. Rather than being able to 'choose a spirituality that is right for them' the result is that they can feel closed off from beliefs and practices which they feel are part of the group but which they feel actively discouraged from pursuing in a community setting.

Again, what is noticeable is that in the SMCs there are understandings and practices developing which enable the ideas of encounter and experience to be passed on, without having to conform to charismatic evangelicalism which the SMCs have sought to move away from. The SMCs both have this tension between operant and espoused, but have also begun developing the language to talk about these things and the practices to bring them together.

Charismatic Lived Theology, Being Missional and the *Missio Dei*

The charismatic understandings and practices present in these SMCs are not purely habits from their Charismatic Evangelical past. These Charismatic Evangelical practices have been helpful to the SMCs as they engage with the wider community. The doctrine of the *Missio Dei* is one which had particular traction within the Emerging Missional Movement, particularly when exploring what it might mean to be a 'missional church'.¹⁰⁴³ Rowan Williams describes the *Missio Dei* as 'finding out where the Holy Spirit is at work and joining in'.¹⁰⁴⁴ This phrase has immediate resonances with the phrases from 'ministry time' in charismatic evangelicalism.¹⁰⁴⁵ The idea of discerning and working with God fits easily into a Charismatic worldview and it is no surprise that Charismatic Evangelical practices would be helpful in translating the doctrine of the *Missio Dei* into practice.

Flett and Van Gelder both identified the problem of the separation between the worship life of the church and mission or social engagement.¹⁰⁴⁶ They suggested that the problem arose due to a poor understanding of the doctrine of the *Missio Dei* and that the solution is a clearer, revised and more Trinitarian formulation. The SMCs have drawn on the ideas of the *Missio Dei* but it was through developing new practices which drew Charismatic Evangelical practices into their social action that they began to overcome this separation of worship and mission. This, in turn, questions Flett and Van Gelder's understanding of how doctrine relates to everyday life. For

¹⁰⁴¹ Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 68

¹⁰⁴² Interview, Michelle, Airbury, Paragraph 40

¹⁰⁴³ See p27 for discussion of *Missio Dei* and Missional

¹⁰⁴⁴ This quote is widely attributed to Rowan Williams but rarely referenced. Kim quotes it from the fresh expressions website in 2006 (Kirsteen Kim, *Joining In With the Spirit: Connecting Local Church and World Mission*, Reissue edition (London: SCM Press, 2012), 1.)

¹⁰⁴⁵ See p37

¹⁰⁴⁶ See p28

Flett and Van Gelder one of the main problems is the elasticity of the term *Missio Dei*, which means *Missio Dei* can describe almost anything.¹⁰⁴⁷ They seek to overcome this ambiguity through clearer doctrine. However, ambiguity in doctrine affords flexibility in practice.¹⁰⁴⁸ The *Missio Dei* has caught the imagination of the Emerging Missional Movement and allowed creativity in understanding mission, which suggests that the elasticity of the term might actually be part of its success. Having set this idea of ‘joining in with the Holy Spirit’ the SMCs have begun to develop ways to actually do this. They have managed to integrate social action into the life of the community through revised charismatic practice and altered structure. They have developed the language and practices to understand God at work in the world, which has enabled them to understand how both to discern and act, and crucially, to do this as a community as well as individuals.

Through engaging with these problems in the midst of their social action they have adjusted their practices accordingly. There has been a shift from mission seen as the result of worship to mission as the sharing of community. The way in which the SMCs reacted to the dominance of the worship service by developing ways to view social action and worship as part of the life of the community was a reordering of these priorities, but it came about through developing practices in response to what they felt was missing in charismatic evangelicalism. Flett’s worry was that in the doctrine of the *Missio Dei* mission becomes a second step for the church and that worship therefore comes before mission.¹⁰⁴⁹ This is what was articulated in charismatic evangelicalism, that from worship they are sent into the world¹⁰⁵⁰ whereas for these SMCs mission is connected to sharing community and hospitality, putting it on an equal footing with worship. The SMCs in one sense have taken a similar direction to Flett, but the advantage is that they have developed structures and practices at the same time which allow them to ‘live it out.’ The problem of the separation of mission from the church is beginning to be overcome through a lived theology developed in the midst of practice, rather than a doctrinal construction.

What the elasticity in the terms missional and *Missio Dei* has allowed is this imaginative engagement in practice which is seeking a continual discernment of God at work in the world. Both Flett and Van Gelder’s anxiety is misplaced. Through this continual discernment, practices and understanding have begun to develop which bring insight and potential solutions. To attempt, as Van Gelder in particular has done, to somewhat detach the terms from the practices they have begun to develop is to try to harvest fruit before it is ready. The evidence from the

¹⁰⁴⁷ Flett, *The Witness of God*, 9–10; Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 1.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Kathryn Tanner, ‘Theological Reflection and Christian Practices’, in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C Bass (Grand Rapids, Mich; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2002), 230–31.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Flett, *The Witness of God*, 207.

¹⁰⁵⁰ See p39

SMCs is that fruitful practices have begun to develop and should be encouraged to continue to develop, in overcoming the problem of the separation between mission and worship.

This is one reason why more attention needs to be given to practice in the Emerging Missional Movement. Lived theology both shapes and is shaped by the life of the SMCs, and it is through a negotiation with the problems in the real world that new practices and understandings have begun to emerge which are theological in nature. The Emerging Missional Movement needs to take these practices seriously. That the SMCs developed ways of discerning and acting with God in line with the *Missio Dei* should be of interest both to doctrinal theology and to the Emerging Missional Movement.

Challenges to and from the *Missio Dei*

SMCs, by extending and developing their charismatic practices, present some challenges to the *Missio Dei*. At the same time some of the issues raised at the end of chapter 4 suggest weaknesses in the approaches of the SMCs which can be further explored through engagement with the *Missio Dei*. As described in the methodology, the SMCs' lived theology is dynamic and should be understood as continually evolving. Here a number of theological voices are introduced to sharpen the analysis of the SMCs. This critique is intended to bring challenges and insights to the SMCs and provide further raw materials and tools to develop their practices and understandings.

*i. Challenges to the *Missio Dei**

What the SMCs in this research have identified is that discernment is key to mission and social action. On the surface there is nothing new to this assertion. Dunn remarks that 'discernment is the first act of mission'¹⁰⁵¹ and Cray expresses 'the task of discerning the activity and leading of the Spirit is the central theological and practical task of a missionary church.'¹⁰⁵² However, as Kim expresses, discernment is 'a complex process'¹⁰⁵³. She points to the place of confession of Christ and of 'Christ-likeness' as indications of the Spirit's presence. This might be the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5.22-3), where the gifts of the spirit are exercised (1 Cor. 12-14) or where people are liberated, healed and reconciled.¹⁰⁵⁴ Cray makes a similar turn developing a list of 'charism, character, content, characteristics, community and cultivating leadership.'¹⁰⁵⁵ What is not discussed are particular practices of discernment. While there may be some questions about the theological depth of discernment of the SMCs, which will be discussed later, what needs to be recognised is that they have developed authentic practices of discernment. The practices

¹⁰⁵¹ James D. G Dunn, *The Christ and the Spirit. Vol. 2. Vol. 2.* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 72.

¹⁰⁵² Graham Cray, 'Discernment: The Key to Sharing in the Mission of God', in *The Holy Spirit in the World Today*, ed. Jane Williams (London: Alpha International, 2011), 97.

¹⁰⁵³ Kirsteen Kim, *Joining in with the Spirit: Connecting World Church and Local Mission*, Reissue edition (London: SCM Press, 2012), 36.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Kim, 36.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Cray, 'Discernment', 110.

described in chapter 4 provide concrete means of discerning God, in the midst of mission, which are aligned to their charismatic spirituality. The challenge from the SMCs to the *Missio Dei* is to develop practices of discernment. They also challenge the suggestion that discernment is the *first* act of mission. This was the starting point for all the SMCs, discernment before acting, but beyond that they have developed discernment as a continual practice. The great strength of the way the SMCs have developed their practices of discernment is their continual nature while at the same time not being hindered by having to have discerned God before acting. By developing these practices of interruption and creating space, discernment is woven into the work of the community. Discernment has become more like a continual attentiveness in mission, than its own particular act.

One issue that Van Gelder and Zschiele raise is the problem of the church in the West operating with a secular social imaginary. 'This is a social imaginary largely devoid of imagination for the Triune God's disruptive, graceful, provocative power and agency.'¹⁰⁵⁶ Instead it puts an emphasis on human agency where mission is predictable and manageable. They call for 'a retrieval of a biblical imagination for the spirit's presence and power in our midst.'¹⁰⁵⁷ On one level this is what I observed in the SMCs, who shaped the environment in such a way that they expected to see God act. As a community they began to operate with a different social imaginary focused on the Spirit's work. Although one can challenge the way in which the SMCs seeks to discern God, to which I will shortly turn, it is worth emphasizing both the way the SMCs have reshaped the social imaginary, through their expectations, language and stories, and the importance this has had in sustaining their social engagement.

The SMCs challenge the *Missio Dei* by suggesting that developing practices of discernment is vital for engaging mission. Discernment is not simply the first act, but a continual one. Although practices such as withdrawing to pray and learn have a key place within all the SMCs, practices of discernment are not primarily understood as discrete and separate but as continual, taking place in the midst of social action and mission. The SMCs demonstrate the need for these practices need to be authentic to the particular community, in this case their charismatic evangelical lived theology.

ii. Challenges from the Missio Dei to the SMCs' Missiology

One of the weaknesses recognised in the lived theology of the SMCs was the nature of the encounter with God in the world. Within the doctrine of the *Missio Dei*, this encounter of the Holy Spirit in the world has been key. So much so that it was possible for a particular understanding of the *Missio Dei* to develop which marginalised the church and saw the world as

¹⁰⁵⁶ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 119.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Van Gelder and Zscheile, 120.

setting the agenda for the church.¹⁰⁵⁸ Through engaging with the discussion about the world, the 'other', and the encounter with the Spirit in the world in the literature of *Missio Dei* I will explore the criticism of a charismatic lived theology further in this section.

Van Gelder and Zscheile mapped the missional conversation and suggested that there are four main branches which they call (1) Discovering Missional, (2) Utilizing Missional, (3) Engaging Missional and (4) Extending Missional.¹⁰⁵⁹ The SMCs can be seen as moving from the 'discovering missional' branch which uses missional language to describe traditional ideas of obedience and sending¹⁰⁶⁰ to the 'utilizing missional' branch which emphasizes 'the mission of the sending Triune God and the church being called to participate in this mission'¹⁰⁶¹. Van Gelder and Zscheile raise a number of challenges to this 'utilizing' branch. They warn against understanding God's reign as an extension of the church's ministry. 'This understanding ultimately folds the reign of God back into the life and ministry of the church rather than viewing it as extending beyond the church, calling the church into a fuller participation in what God is doing.'¹⁰⁶² They also warn against reverting to a Christological rather than Trinitarian basis for mission pointing out that it encourages a view that, (1) the individual Christian is the focus of God's redemptive work, (2) emphasizes emulation of Jesus rather than being 'in Christ', (3) diminishes the role of the Spirit in the world.¹⁰⁶³ Finally they are cautious about seeing the church as a contrast community and concerned that this limits the ability to discern and participate with God in the world. These challenges echo those raised in the previous chapter through engaging with the critique of charismatic evangelicalism, namely that there is a risk that the encounter with God does not take seriously enough the action of God in the world and reverts to seeing the church as the focus of God's mission.

Whereas Van Gelder and Zscheile's position is that a better Trinitarian understanding of God will enable mission as expressed in the *Missio Dei*, this thesis proposes that practices have already developed within the SMCs which embody much of a *Missio Dei* approach, and that the doctrine of the Trinity provides language and theological understanding which enables deeper reflection on and development of practice. The aim of this section is not to decide how these practices should develop but to offer critique, language and suggestions through the conversation with *Missio Dei*, to encourage the continued creative and innovative engagement of the SMCs.

As noted in the previous chapter, narratives of encountering Christ in the 'other' and the world were surprisingly few given its centrality in the *Missio Dei*. Kim suggests 'the unbounded

¹⁰⁵⁸ Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2004), 290.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 10.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Van Gelder and Zscheile, 71.

¹⁰⁶¹ Van Gelder and Zscheile, 76.

¹⁰⁶² Van Gelder and Zscheile, 77.

¹⁰⁶³ Van Gelder and Zscheile, 84.

nature and unpredictability of the Spirit's presence and activity (John 3.8) cuts across human expectations and confounds our sense of geography.¹⁰⁶⁴ With the exception of a number of stories from Airbury, this confounding of expectations was not the experience of these SMCs. *Missio Dei* is rooted in a Trinitarian understanding of mission where 'there has never been a moment when God has not been present to and in creation... through the presence of the Holy Spirit.'¹⁰⁶⁵ The *Missio Dei* challenges the SMCs to encounter God in the world in this confounding way. Rather than seeing the world as simply in need of the salvation which the church offers, all creation is seen as holy and containing the 'mysterious presence of the Spirit'¹⁰⁶⁶. For Bevans and Schroeder this means that dialogue is a key part of Christian mission. 'Mission should be done in vulnerability, in humility, with a sense of being open to being evangelized by those whom we are evangelizing.'¹⁰⁶⁷ This sense of God being encountered in the world in such a way to challenge and change theology is somewhat missing in these SMCs. Van Gelder and Zscheile see this as a common problem stating 'There is often little imagination for how the church can learn from the world.'¹⁰⁶⁸

There were accounts in both Lynwood and Hilchester of the awkwardness of the encounter with other. Lynwood found it very difficult when 'clients' arrived at the hut,¹⁰⁶⁹ and Becky in Hilchester recounted the awkwardness felt by the group as the women they met, who interested in new age spirituality, started praying for them in one of their meetings.¹⁰⁷⁰ A *Missio Dei* approach would not just seek to take these encounters seriously as a challenge to practice, and something to respond to, but also as having the potential to reveal something new about God who is present in the world through the Spirit. Bevans and Schroeder offer the images of treasure hunter, guest, stranger and entering someone else's garden as alternative images for mission.¹⁰⁷¹ This places the emphasis on discerning the treasure already present in a culture and what it reveals about God, and having an awareness of their status and the need to learn from others. Van Gelder and Zscheile suggest that moving from a 'sending' understanding of mission to one of relationality and reciprocity is what is needed. They draw this from the nature of the Trinity explaining how 'a participatory understanding opens up a highly reciprocal view of the God-world-church relationship, in which the church shares in the Triune God's one vulnerable engagement with the world.'¹⁰⁷² Here the disruption of the engagement with the world is seen in

¹⁰⁶⁴ Kim, *Joining in with the Spirit*, 1.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books (USA), 2011), 11.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 302.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 22.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 109.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 227

¹⁰⁷⁰ Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 27

¹⁰⁷¹ Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 67–68.

¹⁰⁷² Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 111.

this reciprocal relationship. The word *attending*, used by Bevans and Schroeder, might be helpful here. As well as *discerning* God at work in the world, there is an act of *attending* to God's work in the world, which is vital to mission understood through the *Missio Dei*. The stories of awkward encounters for Hilchester and Lynwood should be seen as opportunities for this type of discernment rather than something to be avoided. They reveal the boundaries of their engagement with the world and an important place for further reflection.

I will develop this language of attending through engagement with Wells' work.¹⁰⁷³ Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10.30-37) is often seen as a call to compassion and blessing those less fortunate than yourself. Wells however challenges this reading, 'To say the healthy and wealthy should not be so preoccupied with their own well-being but should have a bit of care for the stricken and the victim is not an astonishing new teaching. Jesus' stories are telling us more than that.'¹⁰⁷⁴ Instead he points out how the listeners are encouraged to identify with the man beaten and bleeding at the side of the road. While they would be happy to receive what they need from the Levite or Priest, it is the Samaritan, who is despised, rejected and condemned, who meets their need and brings salvation. The challenge then is 'are we prepared to receive the healing and forgiveness and eternal life that comes through the person we couldn't believe had anything to give us.'¹⁰⁷⁵ He continues 'Go, and continue to see the face of Jesus in the despised and rejected of the world. You are not their benefactor. You are not the answer to their prayer. They are the answer to yours.'¹⁰⁷⁶ Wells' entire thesis is that rather than *working for*, *working with*, or *being for*, it is *being with* which is the 'most faithful form of Christian witness and mission'¹⁰⁷⁷ which seeks genuine encounter of equal engagement. Again Wells is calling Christians to attend to Christ in the 'other'. In seeking to develop this engagement with 'other' the SMC's practice of discerning God's interruption has potential here. Noticing a similar problem in the Church of England, where mission activity was seen as a one way 'flow' from church to world, Barrett suggests practices which would be more receptive to the voices of others, and thereby 'interrupting the flow.'¹⁰⁷⁸ Whereas Barrett turns to public theology and liberation theology, I have demonstrated that the SMCs are already developing these practices of discernment which are developing and growing and have the potential to integrate attentiveness and reciprocity. By seeking to recognise how God might be interrupting their work through the

¹⁰⁷³ Samuel Wells, *A Nazareth Manifesto*, 1 edition (Chichester, West Sussex ; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015).

¹⁰⁷⁴ Wells, 93.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Wells, 95.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Wells, 96.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Wells, 23.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Al Barrett, 'Interrupting the Church's Flow: Hearing "Other" Voices on an Outer Urban Estate', *Practical Theology* 11, no. 1 (1 January 2018): 79–92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2017.1416221>.

encounter with other, these practices could be extended further, allowing a deeper, reciprocal relationship with the world.

This may raise fears of a secularized approach to *Missio Dei* where the church is marginalized. Van Gelder and Zscheile suggest that 'the church must enter into a deep reciprocal engagement with the world, while retaining a posture of critical discernment'¹⁰⁷⁹ and that 'salvation is in, of and for the world, not out of the world.'¹⁰⁸⁰ The ensuing challenge to the SMCs is to both be more open to discerning God at work in the world, beyond the work of the community, and at the same time to develop a more critical discernment, perhaps along the lines discussed by Kim and others.¹⁰⁸¹ It also returns to the challenge of a Trinitarian understanding of God's work in the world, where Christ's work is not just a historical activity but a present and future one.¹⁰⁸²

iii. Challenges from the Missio Dei to the SMC's Ecclesiology

I have used the language of intensive and extensive to compare the engagement of charismatic evangelicalism and the SMCs. It is helpful to discuss Hardy's concepts of *intensity* and *extensity* to engage with the ecclesiological questions. Intensity expresses the way God becomes known through the Church, scripture and belief. Extensity is the spread-out-ness of God's work in the world through individual and society; God involving the world in God's truth and life.¹⁰⁸³ While I have described the ways that SMCs have become more extensive in their understanding of encounter with God, I have also shown that there are ways to extend this further through an attentive and reciprocal relationship with the world. Percy doubts whether such groups are truly extensive in nature, describing them instead as 'dispersed intensity'¹⁰⁸⁴ explaining that most local people will not be aware of these groups, nor do they have the institutional structures to enable such engagement. Whether this rules out an engagement with the extensity of God is not immediately clear. The SMCs in this study are not unknown or without the institutional links required. Working relationships have been developed with local authorities, churches, charities and other networks.¹⁰⁸⁵ Addressing Percy's broader question about the place of extensity the SMCs have made moves away from the centrality of the church in mission. In Hilchester, Charlie's call to see 'God's plan' as broader than the salvation of individuals and including changing environments displays the extensive thinking.¹⁰⁸⁶ Seeing people value themselves and be able to

¹⁰⁷⁹ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 113.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Van Gelder and Zscheile, 113.

¹⁰⁸¹ Kim, *Joining in with the Spirit*, 36; Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology. Supplement Series ; 20 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

¹⁰⁸² Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 111.

¹⁰⁸³ Hardy, *Finding the Church*, 140.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Percy, 'Old Tricks for New Dogs? A Critique of Fresh Expressions', 32.

¹⁰⁸⁵ See discussion of *relational glue* and *missional space* later in the chapter.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Interview, Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 27

participate in society through finding employment and other social interactions is seen as a valuable outcome. This is in tension with Charlie's desire to see 'God represented well'¹⁰⁸⁷ by the SMC, which continues to identify God primarily with the community itself. There is both a desire to engage with the extensity of God in the world but at the same time there is an assumed understanding of the way God works, through those who 'represent' him. The ecclesiology associated with *Missio Dei* encourages the SMCs to continue to explore their desires to engage with the extensity of God, while helping to raise awareness of the ways in which charismatic evangelical assumptions might be causing barriers to this awareness. Bevans suggests, 'It is not so much that the church has a mission. Rather the mission has a church.'¹⁰⁸⁸ The church is a 'communion-in-mission.'¹⁰⁸⁹ This resonates with the SMCs' community approach to social action which demonstrates a dynamic understanding of church and mission, discerning God at work in the world and attending to the holiness of creation.

One of the challenges to both charismatic evangelicalism and the SMCs has been around the need for the focus on healing to engage with wider issues of suffering and social justice. The Anglican Church's Five Marks of Mission¹⁰⁹⁰ include (3) to respond to human need by loving service and (4) to seek to transform unjust structures of society to challenge violence of every kind to pursue peace and reconciliation. Do the practices of SMCs remain in the understanding of 'loving service', or include 'transforming unjust structures'? A helpful framework for such an analysis is given by Bevans and Schroeder: (1) The church acts as a voice for the poor and marginalized, (2) the church works to help those who suffer injustice find their own voice, (3) the church lives a life of solidarity with victims through a simple lifestyle and siding with the poor and oppressed and (4) the church should be a just church.¹⁰⁹¹ Practices of the SMCs fit into all four of these categories, however it would be true to say that the language of justice was not the primary one used by the SMCs. The model of relational glue develops many of these themes, ensuring that people do not fall through the gaps, and helping them to write letters and access the resources they are entitled to. However, there was little sign of political engagement through organised protest in them. Some discussion of the structural causes of poverty did occur, but the typical nature of engagement was through individual support rather than any structural approach. This is an underdeveloped theme within the SMCs. Bielo, however, suggests that a concern with structural, not just individual, engagement is on the rise within evangelicalism, and the evidence

¹⁰⁸⁷ Interview, Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 46

¹⁰⁸⁸ Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 57.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 298.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Anglican Consultative Council, ed., *Bonds of Affection: Proceedings of ACC-6 ; Badagry, Nigeria 1984*. (London: Anglican Consultative Council, 1985); Anglican Consultative Council and Meeting, eds., *Mission in a Broken World: Report of ACC-8 : Wales 1990*. (London: Church House Pub., 1990).

¹⁰⁹¹ Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 67–68.

from these SMCs is that deeper engagement with those who are marginalised has moved these communities towards themes of social justice.¹⁰⁹²

This whole discussion highlights a pressing need for SMCs to engage more deeply with the conviction that God is at work in the world. This requires an attentiveness to culture, to other, the stranger and beginning to develop practices of attentiveness. It also requires the dialogical openness described by Bevans and Schroeder, which is open to being evangelized through engagement with the world, and the reciprocal engagement in the world suggested by Van Gelder and Zscheile.

The Tension of Fragility

Fragility and vulnerability was another theme that arose during the time I spent with the SMCs. They were stretched and under-resourced in many ways but particularly talked about not having enough people to do the work they had set about doing nor the finances to support it. The SMCs were small and were reliant on a few key people. This made them vulnerable in the face of unexpected events in the lives of their members or struggles in relationships between members. Even Eastbark, which was the biggest of the SMCs, told me that they felt the community was fragile and could collapse with the proposed changes that were coming up for them.¹⁰⁹³

A key reason for this fragility was the size of the SMCs. They were all led by a few key individuals who were driven and gave a lot of time and energy to seeing the SMCs develop and grow. But as the SMCs have found, a few people moving away, changing jobs or getting married has a big impact on the community.¹⁰⁹⁴ In Chapter 4 I discussed how being small meant that it was easy for the SMCs to build relationships and include people. The downside of being small is that it is harder to absorb unexpected changes; there is no capacity to take on other people's tasks to make sure that things can continue. Liz recounted Claire's frustration about the group saying that they would have to stop if Claire was 'wiped out by a bus'.¹⁰⁹⁵ In the SMCs the work load is demanding and tends to fall on the shoulders of a few. Will in Airbury told me how difficult it was for a few of them to support so many people with difficult mental health issues.¹⁰⁹⁶

The sense of being stretched is multiplied by the sense of the need around them. The SMCs are excited by the opportunities that are offered to them and keen to get involved, often seeing them as God 'opening doors'¹⁰⁹⁷. Hilchester found opportunities appearing in the school to be involved in mentoring some of the difficult young people, particularly due to cuts in staff and

¹⁰⁹² James Bielo, "FORMED" Emerging Evangelicals Navigate Two Transformations'.

¹⁰⁹³ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 48

¹⁰⁹⁴ Interview, Andrew, Hilchester, Paragraph 27; Interview, Becky, Hilchester, Paragraph 9;

¹⁰⁹⁵ Interview, Liz, Airbury, Paragraph 77

¹⁰⁹⁶ Interview, Will, Airbury Paragraph 80

¹⁰⁹⁷ Field Notes, Eastbark, Paragraph 143

resources in local government.¹⁰⁹⁸ As with most social action, there is always more that can be done, and once people began to see they were reliable and professional they were keen to get them more and more involved. The same has happened in Eastbark with their school's work. With these growing opportunities comes increasing demands on time and increasing pressure of professionalisation. The limited number of resources in the face of such demand gives a sense of fragility and vulnerability and is one of the reasons that some began to get pushed towards becoming a charity.

Orton's Trajectories within SMCs

Orton¹⁰⁹⁹ suggested there were two trajectories that social action projects emerging from church generally followed, the first was that they are reabsorbed back into the community becoming inward looking again, the second was that they lost touch with the community from which they formed becoming independent charities.¹¹⁰⁰ These trends are noticeable in the SMCs in this study.

Hilchester had evidence of a line being drawn between the community and the social action as the youth work was formalised into a charity. This was mainly due to Charlie's frustration that the focus was on meeting together, like a small group, and not impacting the estate. They had discussed this tension openly and recognised right from the start of the SMC that some people were more focused on building community and others were more focused on social action. However, these tensions had grown particularly with the charismatic worship being reintroduced which Charlie felt made the group more inward looking¹¹⁰¹ and Becky felt became less accessible to non-Christians.¹¹⁰² Many of the new people coming into the group didn't have the vision for the youth work or the estate and others had grown tired of it. Charlie had felt called to start the charity, partly because he felt frustrated that the SMC were not fully committed to the vision of reaching out to the community and the charity gave him a vehicle to enable him to do that more effectively. By the time I had finished my participant-observations, I noticed that they had started to look to other churches for 'volunteers' and only Andrew, Amanda and Stewart seemed to be strongly connected to both the charity and to the SMC. It seemed that some people in Hilchester were being drawn away from the community to focus on the charity, whereas others were less engaged with the social action and becoming more inward focused.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Interview, Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 41

¹⁰⁹⁹ See discussion on p16

¹¹⁰⁰ Orton, 'Faith, Dialogue and Difference in English Christian Community Work: Learning "Good Practice"?', 201.

¹¹⁰¹ Interview, Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 29

¹¹⁰² Interview, Becky, Hilchester Paragraph 52

Airbury had started a number of charities that they felt were needed including a food bank and a project supporting young families,¹¹⁰³ but then handed on the responsibility to others and continued to focus on the drop-in and other activities. During the time I was visiting, only Will was employed by the charity and only for a few hours a week but as I was finishing my time there they had just received some funding to employ someone else and were looking at how to develop their work in the estate on the edge of town. Part of the reason for employing people was the difficulty of finding people who would commit time to the work voluntarily. Although this could push them further down the charity trajectory this was accompanied by Claire finishing her training to become a vicar which she felt would mean there would be further flexibility on developing Christian community within the social action.¹¹⁰⁴

Eastbark were also finding that the social action was taking more time and resources and they were in the process of formalizing their work and applying for funding to continue it. However the school's work had become a focus of what the community did together whereas many other social action activities they did separately. It remains to be seen whether this increase in work, formalizing roles and applying for money will send them down the route of charity and detach the work from the community, but they were determined to keep the emphasis on building community at the heart of all they did. Lynwood were a possible exception, in part because the community aspect had developed after the focus on social action. They had not sought to 'be church', in the way the other SMCs had, and continued to expect their participants to attend a church, even if they would feel most 'at home' in Lynwood. They were aware of the pressures of being a charity and had a clear vision to stay focused on giving not on need. They were very keen to tell me how they differed from other charities – they didn't twist people's arms to help out, they gave them opportunities to give.

Resisting the Trajectories of Church or Charity

Orton suggests that these trajectories are not inevitable but as we have seen there is a fragility to these SMCs, due mainly to their size and relational structures. As a result the move either back towards more familiar models of church, or towards becoming a charity promises some sense of stability. Rather than looking outside for models of stability to resolve tensions in this section I identify some of the resources and practices already present in the SMCs which might help them to resist either trajectory.

i. Relational Glue

The SMCs have focused on relationships and these become the means of both belonging and including others. This relational focus has also shaped the way that the SMCs engaged in their

¹¹⁰³ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 3; Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 23

¹¹⁰⁴ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 52

social action. Lynwood described how they were a bridge allowing people to give¹¹⁰⁵ and focused on building relationships to show that God cares.¹¹⁰⁶ Airbury identified gaps in social care which usually focused around the need for community, supporting people in simple tasks and helping them access the support they need.¹¹⁰⁷ Charlie, in Hilchester, discussed their work with young people struggling in school and how they were able to support and mentor them.¹¹⁰⁸ Eastbark similarly, had had great success in providing relational support to young people in the school that they were connected with. All the SMCs identified that not only was there insufficient support for people, but often they struggled to access what was available for various reasons. What they were able to be was the 'relational glue' which helped provide a foundation from which people could access the support. Airbury were able to help people to read their post and write letters, take people to hospital appointments and support them in their interactions with the council. Claire told me how the drop-in developed out of relationships they were building by supporting people when she was volunteering with the local council.¹¹⁰⁹ She had helped run a support group for families and continued that through the drop in when it finished.¹¹¹⁰ Eastbark, similarly, were able to build relationships not just with the young people but with their families as well.¹¹¹¹ Eastbark and Hilchester were able to provide opportunities for the young people who were excluded from school, but more importantly, they cared for them, made sure they turned up to their appointments and provided relational support due to the supportive community around them, in a way that a local government or school worker couldn't. They provide the *relational glue* which helped to bring these different services together so that they could be accessed. By building relationships with people they did not replace the services they needed but gave them a supportive community which helped them to keep appointment, helped them read and respond to letters, encouraged them, supported them and made them feel valued.

Other organisations and local government run community projects can often be short term, disappearing when the money runs out but these SMCs have continued to be present. For all four SMCs their consistency and effectiveness in supporting individuals had been noticed. Eastbark, Hilchester and Airbury had all been approached by schools and/or local government to extend the work they were currently doing. They were seen as being in a good position to take on some of the work which was no longer being done by the local government and others. The SMCs were excited that their work was recognised by local government and that they were being offered further opportunities. In doing this they are encouraged to formalize their work and

¹¹⁰⁵ Interview, Alice, Lynwood, Paragraph 19

¹¹⁰⁶ Interview, Tony, Lynwood, Paragraph 48

¹¹⁰⁷ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 8 and 9

¹¹⁰⁸ Interview, Charlie, Hilchester, Paragraph 41

¹¹⁰⁹ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 8 and 9

¹¹¹⁰ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 3

¹¹¹¹ Interview, Ben, Eastbark, Paragraph 17

develop the projects further. The problem is, as Orton argues, this can have the effect of drawing them away from what they were doing well. Moving the Location of Belonging allowed these groups to blur the lines between social action and community and have a community approach to social action¹¹¹² rather than a project approach; the push towards charity can begin to redraw these distinctions.

Airbury, initially, managed to work around this problem. They saw the need for specific support for young mothers so they drew people together to form a charity supporting young families. They saw the need for a food bank so they drew together a number of people and churches to carry it out from across the town.¹¹¹³ They were involved in initiating these projects and were probably vital to seeing them get off the ground but they made sure the SMC remained separate from the endeavour and remained focused on the relationships with people.

Lynwood had a different way of remaining focused. They talked about being a bridge between those who want to give and those in need and described how they were focused on giving rather than need.¹¹¹⁴ There was need all around them and they could become focused on particular needs and get drawn into all sorts of things, but by focusing on what they had to give it was both sustainable and focused. They supported individuals through building relationships but did not get drawn into other activities. The Kitchen was a project that had launched out of the Lynwood SMC which was focused around a café and providing community for lonely people. It operated separately from Lynwood although it served many of the same people.¹¹¹⁵ They had also been involved in helping Christians Against Poverty (CAP) to begin locally but had remained separate from it.¹¹¹⁶

A great strength of the SMCs is their ability to provide the relational glue which joins up a number of different services and provides a relational foundation from where these things can be accessed. What Airbury did so effectively was to provide that relational support through the drop-in and life of the community and at the same time helping to set up the support that is needed to sustain it without turning the drop-in into that support.

ii. Missional Space

By blurring of the boundaries between community and social action the SMCs were not simply forming social action projects but were creating space for relationships to form. One way this space was created was through the emphasis of the SMCs on hospitality. Lynwood's drop-in, Eastbark's after-school café, Hilchester's football and bike hub, are all creating these spaces where the interactions can take place. Orton talks about hybrid spaces where there is an

¹¹¹² See p158

¹¹¹³ Interview, Claire, Airbury, Paragraph 3; Field Notes, Airbury, Paragraph 23

¹¹¹⁴ Interview, Alice, Lynwood, Paragraph 19

¹¹¹⁵ Interview, Alice, Lynwood, Paragraph 48

¹¹¹⁶ Field Notes, Lynwood, Paragraph 74

encounter between people who are different and the importance of building these relationships.¹¹¹⁷ What the SMCs added was the idea of experiencing God. I described how the SMCs created ‘spaces of suspended disbelief’ where people were encouraged to experience God before they were encouraged to believe in God¹¹¹⁸. I am describing this blurred space between community and social action which encourages relationships and openness to experiencing God as ‘missional space’.

Missional Space begins to provide the language to describe something that is neither charity nor church, but can be an entity in its own right where these encounters take place. The move to charity is often a move to legitimacy to those outside the church who are then able to understand the group and what they are about. The move back to church congregation is one of gravitational pull back to what is known and comfortable for the church-goers – the thing that feels like church.¹¹¹⁹ The Missional Space created by these SMCs develops a legitimate form of social action and community that is neither just a social action project nor simply church but a blurring of the two. These missional spaces are flexible. Although they might have a particular focus to their social action, the SMCs are able to respond and welcome whoever turns up. Airbury for example had a focus on mothers they had met at the school gate, but when homeless people started turning up to the drop-in they found ways to support them. They didn’t become a homeless project but through building relationships gave these men a safe place to come to, met some of their needs and helped them to find the specific support they needed.

This missional space also provided opportunities to encounter God. This might be through offering to pray with someone directly, as happened regularly in the drop-in in Airbury; it might be through the prayer space set up by Eastbark in their café; through the friendship and conversations during activities, such as football at Hilchester; or at Lynwood through the experience of receiving the items they needed and offering prayer. There is no requirement of belief or engagement with Christian faith and spirituality, but it is present and the focus is placed on the individual experiencing and encountering God.

Missional Space then gives a name to something in-between Church and charity. It’s about relationship and encounter; about support and stability, about friendship and community. Lee, Poloma and Post suggested that there was something interesting about the work of Shane Claibourne and the Simple Way community in how they brought together both mystical prayer and social action. They suggested it was to do with drawing on monasticism and its spiritual

¹¹¹⁷ Orton, ‘Faith, Dialogue and Difference in English Christian Community Work: Learning “Good Practice”?’ , 204.

¹¹¹⁸ See p175

¹¹¹⁹ Ward describes the affective Gravitational Pull of the church, see Pete Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology* (Leiden ; Boston: BRILL, 2017), 19.

practices.¹¹²⁰ I am suggesting that, in the case of these SMCs, this is only partly true. They have developed an operant theology and new structures which enable them to sustain engagement in social action while maintaining a focus on encountering God. The distinction between the two is diminished providing an integrated approach which meets need and encourages a deeper connection both in relationships with each other and the possibility of suspending disbelief and experiencing God.

iii. Discerning God in the Interruptions

Another problem which can cause this tension is that formalizing the work to make it sustainable and safe can end up detracting from what made it interesting to people in the first place, namely the exciting and spontaneous nature at the heart of charismatic evangelicalism. Chapter 4 described how the SMCs developed patterns of working but were attentive to the interruptions which they identified as from God.¹¹²¹ Through developing patterns of work they brought stability to the work, but through the idea of God interrupting, nudging and prompting these patterns of ministry remained exciting and spontaneous. This is particularly relevant in exploring how SMCs avoid Orton's trajectories described. By seeing their routine as God-given, but then developing the ability and sensitivity to discern God and respond to God within it, the SMCs were able to develop a more structured and sustained approach to social action while allowing it to be part of the continued charismatic adventure focused on experiencing God. What SMCs offer to a charismatic evangelicalism is both the suggestion and the means of developing routines which retain this excitement of spontaneity and encounter.

For the Emerging Missional Movement this connects with what was discussed earlier in the chapter. There is a need to recognise and appreciate these points of discernment as charismatic. Many of their members are still driven by this goal of encounter and the excitement associate with that. By recognising the charismatic practices and understanding which remain present and using the language to describe the experience of God in the world developing within these SMCs, this goal of encounter can be realised within the more structured approach needed for sustained social action.

An Invitation to Fragility

There has been an unspoken assumption running through this whole thesis which needs to be brought into the open. This assumption is that engagement in social action is vital to the life of the church, and that without it all aspects of the life of the church are impoverished. That assumption is a deep challenge to the idea that social action is a stepping stone to evangelism or that social action is a response to a call to share God's blessing further. Without engagement in social action, without relationships with those whom Jesus calls 'the least of these' (Matthew

¹¹²⁰ Lee, Poloma, and Post, *The Heart of Religion*, 115–17.

¹¹²¹ See p173

25:31-46), without the engagement with the stranger, the 'other' and 'the poor', then churches and communities miss out on an important means to understand God and themselves. If social action always ends up on the periphery of church life then the church is cutting itself off from a key locus of revelation of God, and the arena of the work of the Spirit. For this reason, the practices developed by SMCs to sustain social action and maintain it at the centre of community are of particular importance. SMCs, as I have shown, provide a challenge to an ecclesiology which sees the world as peripheral to the church and simply as an 'arena for evangelism' where charismatic worship time is the 'main event'. At the same time I have highlighted the need for this engagement with the world and the 'other' to be further transformed in the ways envisioned in the *Missio Dei*, through an attentive, open, dialogical and reciprocal relationship with the world and the 'other'.

In responding to this challenge to include reciprocal engagement with the 'other', fragility should be seen as a key practice. Recognising and embracing powerlessness and weakness was largely missing from charismatic evangelicalism. However, it should be no surprise that in seeking to open themselves up to God's engagement in the world the SMCs have experienced weakness and fragility. The challenge of the *Missio Dei* is to see fragility, not just through the lens described by the SMCs, of faith and trust in God, but also through the lens of identification *with* the weak and marginalised. A fragile Christian community will struggle to develop an ecclesiology of power. I suggest that part of the challenge to the SMCs to engage with weakness and powerlessness is not to see their fragility as something to be overcome but to recognise it as not only inevitable in such a venture, but in itself, as a space of attentiveness and identification for such engagement.

Hardy states 'What has to happen is the finding of a new intensity in God – a God who genuinely surprises, and whose purposes do also, in the breadth of the excitements of the world today. This will be a God who is not less but much more than what we have come to expect from Christian faith.'¹¹²² Although Hardy's vision is perhaps greater than that achieved by the SMCs, there are strong resonances with the way in which SMCs have sought to engage in the world. The practices which they offer around relational glue, missional space and interruption are all ways that seek to connect the church community with the wider engagement of God in the world. An identification with weakness also allows further opening up to the breadth of God's surprises.

Summary

The lived theology of the SMCs has implications for both the Emerging Missional Movement and how Charismatic Evangelicals engage in social action. It challenges the Emerging Missional Movement to take lived theology and practice and in particular charismatic lived theology and practice, more seriously in understanding how these communities interact with one another, God

¹¹²² Hardy, *Finding the Church*, 234.

and wider society. It provides a starting point for a more open conversation about the place of Charismatic practices within the Emerging-Missional Movement while trying to avoid a prescriptive understanding of charismatic lived theology as understood in its intensive expression. This research shows the value in Charismatic Evangelical practice for these SMCs and suggests ways that can be further explored for the Emerging-Missional engagement in social action.

The broader conversation with the *Missio Dei* both reveals some of the unique insights of the SMCs around the place of discernment in mission and the importance of developing practices of continual discernment. It reveals missiological insights which provide vocabulary, theological reflection and potential practices which might help these SMCs to deepen their social engagement. In line with the methodology, no attempt has been made to provide theology or practice to be adopted, but tools, resources, and suggestions to aid the SMCs' continuing development.

I then explored the sense of vulnerability and fragility within the SMCs and suggested that there is a pressure to become more recognisably church, or to become a social action charity. I highlighted three practices developed by the SMCs; 'relational glue', providing 'missional space' and being attentive to interruptions in their routines. I suggested that these three practices could help SMCs develop their own identity and could help them to avoid the trajectories towards simply charity or inward looking church. These practices and structures gave them ways to maintain their relational focus within a structured approach to social action. Finally, I asserted that the importance of keeping social action central to the life of the church or community is theological; that the Trinity is at work in the world and without social engagement an important locus of revelation is lost. In this view fragility might, actually, be a gift to the community and an important part of it engaging with weakness.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

The key question through this thesis has been; ‘Given their Charismatic Evangelical roots, how do Small Missional Communities sustain their social action?’ This question was based on the observation that charismatic evangelicalism has had a strong focus on the gathered worship service, meaning mission and social action have often been pushed to the periphery of the life of the church, and that there are Small Missional Communities who are successfully engaging in social action who could bring insights to this problem. What this thesis has shown is that Small Missional Communities have begun to bring social action into the centre of the life of the community and that far from abandoning their charismatic practices and understanding these have been key to this development. I have argued that the principle shift is a theological one, the move from an intensive to an extensive understanding of where God is at work. This shift has developed in an imaginative space created by the Emerging Missional Movement which has enabled these SMCs to develop creative ways to engage in social action as a community. At the same time they have kept their Charismatic Evangelical focus on experiencing God central and as a result have developed practices which enable this shift of emphasis and help them to experience God in the midst of their social action.

Having identified a key issue around church and mission, namely social action ending up on the periphery of the life of the church, SMCs have sought to find ways to do things differently. This lived theology has developed understanding, structures and practices which embody a significant shift in theological emphasis. There is a shift in understanding of what it means to be part of the Christian community; a shift from meeting to relationship. This was particularly demonstrated in what I called ‘moving the Location of Belonging’ where ‘belonging’ was most identified around the meal table and other relational activities. This also brought a shift in the practice of mission by blurring the boundaries between community and social action and moving from a ‘project approach’ to social action to a ‘community approach’ to social action. Mission as social action is no longer seen as something purely done beyond the community but as within the community and as part of the community. The ‘church’ then has become understood as a community engaged in mission together rather than a particular gathering of people. This change in emphasis is part of the Emerging Missional Movement’s conversation, what the SMCs have brought are concrete practices which root these theological changes in the life of the community.

The key to sustaining social action for these SMCs has been extending and developing their Charismatic Evangelical practices to help them to experience God at work in the world in the midst of social action. The problem was not that there was no understanding of God at work in the world, or that it was not seen as important, but rather that it was at odds with the dominant practices of charismatic evangelicalism around ‘time of worship’ and ‘ministry time’. In

developing the practices which I have described as extensive in nature, seeking God in the world, the SMCs have found key ways to connect this conviction with the charismatic emphasis on experiencing God. I identified these practices as God interrupting routines, creating space for God and collaborating with God. Collaborating with God, in particular, brought the ideas, not just of seeing and experiencing God at work, but participating in God's redemptive work in the world. By developing 'the eyes to see it' they encourage each other to see the world as a place where God is present and active and have developed vocabulary and practices which they see as enabling participation in that work.

Drawing on Charismatic Evangelical practices and understanding was not always a fully conscious choice by the SMCs. This raised another important insight, that the history of those who are part of the SMC cannot be detached from the SMC itself. Charismatic Evangelical practices remained important to the individuals and as a result continued to be present in the group. Some were rejected, particularly the focus on worship and 'ministry time', although many of the practices associated with them were visible in the lives of the community. The problem though was that often new members to the community were not given the means to participate in these practices and understanding because although they were present in the community, they were not always recognised or valued by the community. This is a reminder that the Christian faith is one that is embodied as much as thought about, and that habits and practices built overtime become second nature. It also demonstrates the importance of recognising these practices and seeing them as something of value to be passed on to others in the community.

Exploring the tensions within SMCs brought further implications for missiology. I challenged the assumption that elasticity in the terms missional and *Missio Dei* was a problem, suggesting that this elasticity instead provided the space for this lived theology to develop in the midst of practice. To attempt to remove this elasticity has the effect of either removing this creative space or prematurely stopping a process of discernment, which is continuing in the life of the community, before it has had time to bear fruit. For this reason, there is an emphasis in the thesis on returning to practice to encourage a continual process of discernment by the SMCs. It is the conviction of the research that these are developing in the midst of lived faith, that this is the best context for such discernment and that practices continue to mature and develop bringing fresh theological insight. The temptation to 'finish the job' purely through a doctrinal discussion needs to be avoided; SMCs have proved to be fruitful ground for developing these new, deeply theological practices and must be encouraged and enabled to continue to see that fruit develop.

The thesis also highlighted a number of ways the weakness and blind spots of charismatic evangelicalism, particularly around its pneumatology and ecclesiology, continued to be present in the SMCs. These were particularly around the uni-directional flow of mission and a failure to attend to and learn from the surprising nature of the Spirit at work in the world. These were

brought into further conversation with the *Missio Dei* encouraging the SMCs to develop practices of attentiveness, reciprocity and dialogue alongside their practices of discernment.

The practices of the SMCs also provide ways to disrupt the trajectories that Orton describes. Relational Glue, Missional Space, suspended disbelief and God interrupting routines all provided ways of continuing to blur the lines between community and social action. The idea of God interrupting routines seemed to be a particularly helpful understanding and practice for the SMCs. Charismatic evangelicalism has often focused on the spontaneous and the fresh, and routines have seemed to be greatly at odds with this approach. However, here the spontaneous and fresh is enabled to survive in the midst of routine through the idea of interruption. Similarly missional space and relational glue offered ways in which the SMCs had begun to operate beyond the understanding of simply congregation or charity.

Suggestions and Practices for Further Reflection and Improvisation

The role of the practical theologian, as outlined in Chapter 2, is one of ordering and describing the lived theology of communities. In line with the methodology, these implications have been discussed in relation to the SMCs themselves, charismatic evangelicalism, the Emerging Missional Church and the Evangelical Turn to Social Action. Here I gather these challenges and suggestions and offer them back for further reflection.

i. Small Missional Communities

SMCs were found to be rich with practices, beliefs, understandings and structures which helped to bring social action in to the centre of the life of the communities. I found that this had developed not through a rejection of charismatic evangelicalism but through taking the practices and understanding of charismatic evangelicalism and extending and developing them to experience God in the midst of social action. What is offered to these SMCs, first of all, is the descriptions of these practices within the thesis, bringing to consciousness things which may have seemed second nature before.

A number of tensions and struggles were identified within some of the SMCs. One was the gap between the espoused and operant theologies around the understanding of the place of charismatic evangelicalism. Therefore the first suggestion is to be more conscious of charismatic practices present within the SMC. Secondly the SMCs have already developed language to help them articulate their experience of God in social action and I would encourage them to draw this language more fully into the life of the community, seeing it as a way to articulate understanding and belief to those joining the community. The practices identified and named as 'discerning God in the interruptions', 'relational glue', 'spaces of suspended disbelief' and 'missional space' may also offer ways to further explore the tensions with charismatic evangelicalism. What is clear in the SMCs is that it is possible to continue to embrace charismatic practices, without having to

continue to embrace the whole package of charismatic evangelicalism as described in chapter 1, which they have found problematic.

I also highlighted that some of the weakness and blind spots of charismatic evangelicalism were also present in the SMCs. I encouraged the SMCs to see the world and other as having potential to reveal God to them and teach them about God as well as needing to receive God. I suggested that the practices already developed could be further extended to include ideas of attentiveness, reciprocity and dialogue, and that uncomfortable encounters with others beyond the community should be welcomed as opportunities to learn and reflect.

ii. Charismatic Evangelicalism

Charismatic evangelicalism is encouraged to take notice of the significant development of SMCs and particularly those within this study who are seen to be extending and developing Charismatic Evangelical practice. The exploration of the way in which SMCs have moved from an intensive to extensive focus offers Charismatic Evangelical churches insights and practices to reflect on in seeking to engage in social action and offers encouragement that social action does not have to slip to the periphery of the church. The ideas of routine and interruption provides a significant way that charismatic evangelicalism can continue to be exciting and spontaneous at the same time as developing sustainable social engagement. The SMCs also present a challenge to charismatic evangelicalism on the place of worship and the Sunday service in the life of the church. The SMCs do not offer an easy solution to the problem but demonstrate that in the midst of practice new understandings and practices can develop which can help to overcome this tension. SMCs offer a challenge and encouragement to reflect on the place of the worship service within charismatic evangelicalism and to seek to encounter God in the world.

iii. The Emerging Missional Movement

The Emerging Missional Movement is encouraged to take note of the operant and espoused theologies and particularly the way charismatic evangelicalism continues to influence communities. The insight that Charismatic Evangelical understandings and practices played an important role in the SMCs in this research provides an encouragement to reflect again on the influences at work in other communities, groups and organisations. The recognition and acceptance of charismatic practices present in the community does not mean that they are forced into a particular shape against their will, but that they can identify the motivations and practices as charismatic and allow them to be present in their work. Again the language and practice developing within the SMCs around experiencing and encountering God in the world provides some tools and raw materials for undertaking such discernment.

The Emerging Missional Movement was also encouraged to pay closer attention to actual practice. There are many innovative and interesting ventures which individuals and groups have engaged in and, therefore, they will have inevitably found understandings, practices and

structures which enable them to be faithful in their context in the same way as these SMCs. Reflecting on actual practices can challenge the operant and espoused theologies and through doing so develop new insights, resources and means of engaging.

iv. The Evangelical Turn to Social Action

Finally the Evangelical Turn to Social Action is encouraged to take seriously these tensions and the trajectories described by Orton. Through their structure and practices, SMCs offer an alternative to Orton's trajectories, one which draws social action and Christian community together blurring the boundaries between the two. Again, further attention to and reflection on actual practice can provide new insights in overcoming the tension. This research also highlights the importance of lived theology in sustaining social action. Seeking to draw more intentionally on the lived theology of the individuals and communities to tackle questions and tensions arising, rather than purely turning to doctrinal accounts or pre-existing models can also bring new insights as demonstrated in the conversation around the *Missio Dei*.

In summary SMCs represent an exciting new development with charismatic evangelicalism who have sought to overcome some of the short-comings they identified in charismatic evangelicalism without jettisoning the practices, beliefs and understandings which they have found helpful and continue to draw on. The account of the lived theology of these SMCs presented here demands that these communities should not be ignored or written off, but embraced as bringing new insights and challenges which can enable sustained engagement in social action in a way that maintains the Charismatic Evangelical emphasis on experience of God.

Appendix 1 – Consent forms

This appendix contains sample consent forms for interviews and participant observation which were filled out by all regular participants and all interviewees. Occasional visitors were made aware of my presence and research but not required to complete a form.

Note that forms contain Kings College London logos due to the fact that nearly all data collection was carried out while I was a student at Kings College London before transferring my PhD studies to Durham University.

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

REP(EM)/13/14-19



YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET

A Study of the Social Engagement of Small Missional Communities

I would like to invite you to participate in this postgraduate research project. You should only participate if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

The aim of this research is to investigate the way in which Small Missional Communities engage in social action and how the community and the members of the community understand social action in relation to the other activities of the group, such as meeting, worship, prayer, eating together etc.

This research is independent of any groups or charities and is done in partnership with the Small Missional Communities who have agreed to participate in the research.

I hope to spend time observing and participating in some of the meetings and activities of The Upper Room over the coming year. I will aim to visit around 6 times during that time. You will not be expected to do anything different from what you normally do. I will participate in the group and join in with whatever you are doing. I will make notes to help me to write about the practices of the group but I will make sure that all data is written up in such a way that no individual can be identified.

I would like to follow up my observations with interviews and a focus group. I may approach you personally at a later date to ask about the possibility of your participating in an interview or focus group and I will provide additional information and consent sheet.

My hope is that through this research that The Upper Room will be able to contribute to academic discussion giving the much need perspective of those actual involved in these communities. It will provide further evidence of the theological thinking present in such communities and contribute to a wider discussion on the place of social action within the life of Christian communities. I would be happy to give you a final copy of the report and hope that it might help to further reflect on the activities of the community.

It is up to you to decide whether to take part or not. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw from the study at any time and without giving a reason. You may also withdraw any data/information you have already provided up until it is transcribed for use in the final report. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form.

If you have any questions or require more information about this study, please contact me, James Butler, by email j.e.d.butler@durham.ac.uk or at St Johns College, 3 South Bailey

Durham, DH1 3RJ

If this study has harmed you in any way, you can contact Durham University for further advice and information: Project Supervisor: Professor Pete Ward. Email peter.ward@durham.ac.uk St Johns College 3 South Bailey, Durham, DH1 3RJ.

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH STUDIES



Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

Title of Study: A Study of the Social Engagement of Small Missional Communities

King's College Research Ethics Committee Ref: REP(EM)/13/14-19

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organising the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part. If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

Please tick or initial

- I understand that if I decide at any time during the research that I no longer wish to participate in this project, I can notify the researchers involved and withdraw from it immediately without giving any reason. Furthermore, I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data up to the point of publication.
- I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes explained to me. I understand that such information will be handled in accordance with the terms of the UK Data Protection Act 1998.

Participant's Statement:

I _____

agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in the study. I have read both the notes written above and the Information Sheet about the project, and understand what the research study involves.

Signed

Date

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

REP(EM)/13/14-19



YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET

A Study of the Social Engagement of Small Missional Communities

I would like to invite you to participate in this postgraduate research project. You should only participate if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

The aim of this research is to investigate the way in which Small Missional Communities engage in social action and how the community and the members of the community understand social action in relation to the other activities of the group, such as meeting, worship, prayer, eating together etc.

This research is independent of any groups or charities and is done in partnership with the Small Missional Communities who have agreed to participate in the research.

At this stage in my research I would like to interview members of the communities to talk about [name of SMC] and the social action you are involved in. If you are happy to be interviewed it will take a maximum of two hours. The audio of the interview will be recorded and transcribed. When the interview is transcribed your name will not be used and you will be given a pseudonym. All interview recordings, transcripts and your personal details will be encrypted and safely stored in compliance with the UK Data Protection Act 1998. All research data collected in the interviews will be kept for one year after the conclusion of the research and then destroyed.

My hope is that through this research that [name of SMC] will be able to contribute to academic discussion giving the much need perspective of those actual involved in these communities. It will provide further evidence of the theological thinking present in such communities and contribute to a wider discussion on the place of social action within the life of Christian communities. I would be happy to give you a final copy of the report and hope that it might help to further reflect on the activities of the community.

It is up to you to decide whether to take part or not. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw from the study at any time and without giving a reason. You may also withdraw any data/information you have already provided up until it is transcribed for use in the final report. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form.

If you have any questions or require more information about this study, please contact me, James Butler, by email j.e.d.butler@durham.ac.uk or at St Johns College, 3 South Bailey

Durham, DH1 3RJ

If this study has harmed you in any way, you can contact Durham University for further advice and information: Project Supervisor: Professor Pete Ward. Email peter.ward@durham.ac.uk St Johns College 3 South Bailey, Durham, DH1 3RJ.

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH STUDIES

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.



Title of Study: A Study of the Social Engagement of Small Missional Communities

King's College Research Ethics Committee Ref: REP(EM)/13/14-19

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organising the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part. If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

Please tick or initial

- I understand that if I decide at any time during the research that I no longer wish to participate in this project, I can notify the researchers involved and withdraw from it immediately without giving any reason. Furthermore, I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data up to the point of publication
- I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes explained to me. I understand that such information will be handled in accordance with the terms of the UK Data Protection Act 1998.

Participant's Statement:

I _____

agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in the study. I have read both the notes written above and the Information Sheet about the project, and understand what the research study involves.

Signed

Date

Appendix 2 – Interview Questions

Interview Questions Lynwood

How did you get involved in Lynwood?

How would you describe Lynwood?

Why are you part of Lynwood?

What are the most important things about Lynwood?

Tell me about the core team.

Tell me about your church and any connections it has to Lynwood.

What about the relationship between Lynwood and other organisations?

How would you encourage someone to get involved in Lynwood?

Encourage stories and examples. Follow up themes arising such as prayer, discerning God, volunteering/giving, addressing people by name and the particular characteristics.

Interview Questions Airbury

How did you get involved in Airbury?/How did Airbury begin?

What are the most important things about the Airbury?

How would you describe Airbury to somebody who didn't know about it?

What keeps you involved in Airbury?

How is the relationships between Airbury and the churches in the town?

How does the social action connect to the life of Airbury?

What are your hopes for Airbury?

Follow up comments on prayer, drop-in, communion service, sensing God, involvement in local community/estate, relationship to church and interviewees particular involvement.

Interview Questions Hilchester

How did you get involved in Hilchester?

How would you describe Hilchester to someone who didn't know about it?

What are the most important things about Hilchester?

What keeps you coming to Hilchester?

In what ways is Hilchester and are you involved in social action?

Are you involved in any other church/Christian community?

How is Hilchester connected to the youth work charity?

Is there any element of Cell Group that you think if that stopped there'd be no point carrying on?

Is it important that Hilchester is on this estate?

Tell me about the men from the church in the neighbouring town and how you see their connection to Hilchester?

What are your hopes for Hilchester?

Pick up themes around the community house, the youth work, the estate,

Interview Questions Eastbark

How did you get involved in Eastbark?

How would you describe Eastbark to someone who didn't know about it?

What are the most important things about Eastbark?

What keeps you coming to Eastbark?

How is Eastbark engaged in social action?

What is the relationship between Eastbark and other local churches?

Is there any element of Eastbark that you think if it stopped it wouldn't be any point carrying on?

How important is it to have the houses?

What is the role of the leadership team?

What are your hopes for Eastbark?

Themes to pick up – discouraging people from other churches, prayer, learning

Appendix 3 – Table Summaries of Field Work

Overall Summary

SMC Pseudonyms	Lynwood	Airbury	Hilchester	Eastbark
Date of First Visit	01/05/14	12/09/14	24/11/14	08/03/15
Pseudonym of Gatekeeper	Alice	Claire	Andrew	Jenny
No. Visits	13	11	8	3
No. Hours of participant observation	65	36	30	32
No. Interviews	8	5	5	5

Summary of Interviews

Lynwood

Pseudonym	Date of Interview	Duration of Interview	Age (approx.)	Location
Rachel	26/06/2014	59 minutes	50s	Prayer Room
Ben	21/07/2014	39 minutes	50s	Prayer Room
Alice	17/07/2014	95 minutes	50s	Prayer Room
Tony	23/06/2014	70 minutes	70s	Office
Mary	21/07/2014	69 minutes	70s	Office
William	30/06/2014	19 minutes	40s	Prayer Room
Nig	10/07/2014	21 minutes	60s	Office
Sarah	17/07/2014	70 minutes	40s	Prayer Room

Airbury

Pseudonym	Date of Interview	Duration of Interview	Age (approx.)	Location
Claire	10/11/2014	83 minutes	50s	Drop-in Room
Margaret	07/11/2014	59 minutes	50s	Her House
Will	13/10/2014	75 minutes	50s	Drop-in Room
Liz	16/10/2014	80 minutes	50s	Her House
Michelle	7/11/2014	51 minutes	40s	Drop-in Room

Hilchester

Pseudonym	Date of Interview	Duration of Interview	Age (approx.)	Location
Andrew	17/03/2015	54 minutes	~30	His House
Amanda	17/03/2015	63 minutes	~40	Community House
Becky	17/03/2015	58 minutes	Late 20s	Her House
Charlie	17/03/2015	58 minutes	Late 20s	His House
Philip	17/03/2015	53 minutes	Late 20s	Community House

Eastbark

Pseudonym	Date of Interview	Duration of Interview	Age (approx.)	Location
Jenny	08/04/15	77 minutes	~50	Her house
Kate	24/06/15	30 minutes	20s	Community House 2
Ben	09/04/15	57 minutes	30s	Community House 1
Pete	09/04/16	49 minutes	~30	Community House 1
David	24/06/15	75 minutes	50s	His House
Lee	08/04/15	34 minutes	50s	Jenny's House

Summary of Documents Gathered

SMC	Documents
Lynwood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Besom Manual • Volunteer Manual • Lynwood News Letters 1-5, from 2008-2014
Airbury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Claire's blog; posts from August 2008 to November 2014 • Airbury Community Website • Annual Report 2013-2014 for AGM • Service sheet containing liturgy, prayer songs and reading, 12th September 2014, 3rd October 2014, 10th October 2014, 14th November 2014

Hilchester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Project Prayer email: 15 emails from 2nd Feb 2015 to 26th May 2015 • Introduction to Hilchester Missional Community written by Andrew • Hilchester Missional Community Vision and Values Document written by Andrew
Eastbark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary of community on website

Appendix 4 – Sample Extracts from Interviews and Field Notes

Interview with Ben, Lynwood

33	JB: How would you describe Lynwood to somebody who didn't really know what it was.
34	B: Christian or non-Christian?
35	Jb: Both
36	B: Interesting, the conversation comes up quite a lot on [at work]. Because we all talk about what we're doing on days off and time off. And Lynwood comes up virtually every time. People say Lynwood, never heard of Lynwood, what's that. And then you can explain that it's Christian and its free, and I find that a gentle way of saying to people I'm a Christian, rather than straight between the eyes with a few appropriate verses [laughs] so I find it a brilliant lead in for witnessing as well. They don't get it, a lot of the time. They don't get that we're prayer based, that we never make appeals for money or anything else, but that's, you see the connection between being a Christian and praying, and actually seeing results of prayer and that's what people find... it's usually a bit of a conversation stopper. [laughs] There is the assumption that every Christian is a Sunday Christian and they're needy people and all the rest of. But actually what we do is, we hopefully, by being Christ like and looking after those who can't look after themselves, in a world which is spiritually quite bereft that put's an angle on things which people generally speaking wouldn't think about.
37	And in terms of other Christians they find it intriguing, because, although [similar projects are] really really growing across the country, and there are churches who are fantastic socially, like St Martin's in the field who do some fantastic stuff with the homeless, feeding the homeless and the poor and the rest of it. But not every local church is in a position to do that.
38	JB: So how would you describe Lynwood so another Christian. If a Christian said to you "What is Lynwood?" what would you tell them?
39	B: I'd say that it's prayer in action. That's probably the way I would describe it. And it's Christianity in action. I'm going to keep coming back to the miracles we see. One of my oldest friends, he's a Christian guy from All Souls, but not somebody you, I mean he's been involved a lot as a Christian in church ministries but never in this type of outreach ministry really, and quite honestly I'm not sure that he actually gets this still. I've invited him along several times, but he's got a normal job so that's probably a bit more difficult. Certainly in the more conservative evangelical church, there's a reluctance to acknowledge we do have a God who still performs miracles today. And I think it would be very good, not just his, but everybody's spiritual health to see something like that, to be open to it. I needed to change, I came to, after many years of quite stale Christian, I put myself on an alpha course and started seeing miracles. So it's very good for our spiritual health. A good gracious God.
40	JB: How do you think that changes you, seeing miracles, how have you seen yourself changed?
41	B: Far more open to the work of the Holy Spirit. And just the attitude that actually, an attitude of expectation in prayer as well, really useful expectation, I probably wasn't a Christian who had great expectations of seeing much happen either in my life or other people's lives, but praise the Lord, that's changed. Expectation is very different of course to thinking that everything is going to be resolved, but you also do know that we have a God, he's never too early, never too late, always on time, so if he doesn't answer straight away I have every confidence he will answer in his way, what's best for myself and best for us as a Christian community. I needed to change.
42	JB: And I was going ask you how you would get someone to get involved?

43	B: Yep, to tell them actually you will see things happen – you will definitely see things happen. So come along and experience that and be fed, be spiritually fed by. Don't just bask and bathe in that, use that to do something which God can bless. God can't bless us if we're not willing to be participants as Paul says, and the blessings will flow, and I think it's when you see blessing flow, in terms of blessing flowing outwards, that is when we are blessed ourselves, that is when I feel blessed. Just seeing Angela's face today, just cutting her hedge, makes it all worthwhile. You sweat a bit, but just seeing somebody else blessed by what we do, what does it take, just a couple of hours of our time, whether we're out on the van, whether we're cutting a hedge, whether it's putting up a prayer room, whatever, just seeing when others are blessed. God uses that. Huge blessing, huge privilege
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Interview, Claire, Airbury

17	C: And then we hired Will. Which is out first paid worker. And the first guy that we ever had here, it was very much like a women's only community before and just almost naturally, but because some of those women had had domestic violence or abuse it was a very safe community for women, but just unwittingly, we'd never chosen it that way – it was just how it was. And suddenly when Will came, all the people, a lot of the people that'd been coming stopped coming because they couldn't handle a guy, but we felt like we'd really heard God speak about hiring him in a very direct way actually and it just ushered in a completely new....
18	JB: How particularly?
19	C: Well Will had come to be a volunteer, that's what he wanted to do – and he experienced a lot of mental illness himself and wasn't particularly steady at that point and was looking for volunteering as long term journeying back towards paid work but didn't feel well enough to sustain paid work at that point. But I met to interview him over at the coffee shop over the road but while I was talking to him I just kept having this very kind of nagging voice literally in the back of my head saying "pay him, pay him." And I... it's very rarely that you hear a very direct word like that, and I literally at one point was like "will you shut up" because I couldn't concentrate on what he was saying. And when I got out from there was like I'm not going to say that to him directly because it just might be wrong, but I went and prayed about it for such a.. you know for a good few hours in the next days and I just had this very very strong sense that I must not take him on as a volunteer and it was because he would feel able to come and go according to how well he felt if he was a volunteer whereas if he was paid he would have commit to it and it would make him commit and it did and I had to tell him directly what I'd heard and what I thought it meant and he had to go away and really think about it because he just didn't feel able to do it but actually he just kind of felt like he should be obedient to that as I felt I should be. And so we sort of put some terms around it that would be well... what kinds of things might you find hard, and what ways can we support you here so you could mediate around that so we made a bunch of arrangement like if you feel like you are having a panic attack you can go down and wash up the cups in the kitchen and just catch your breath for five minutes or if you say these things to me I'll understand that you needed to take a breather, not that people here needed to know that.
20	And so we just basically thought that we would strike it up and give it six months and see how it went and if he just couldn't manage it then we would accept that but I think he's had one day off sick in four years – he's been here more than me – [laughs]. So it's suddenly become that he is the regular contact and all of a sudden about two or three weeks after he arrived we had this contingent of homeless men who heard about us and came and we don't really know where they came from or how they knew about us but word got about and six homeless men started coming every session. And they were here morning and night, they'd be waiting for you outside when you opened up, and they'd

	<p>plug in their phones and go and get a wash in the loo, drink tea, eat breakfast and we started bringing in porridge and bread and toast, getting to know them, the kinds of things they'd been through and what they needed, and they literally were coming to see Will and because he's able to talk very openly about his experience with mental illness, very honestly and truthfully- vulnerably – they immediately could relate to that because all of them had struggled as well at various times. Some of them had very serious diagnoses really. And they just, you know, immediately responded to his honesty, came and we started to celebrate birthdays with them and have meals with them. They would meet us out on the street, if they had been given food they would invite us to eat with them and we just, I don't know, just developed some very sort of deep connections with them. And sort of became family really for them because they'd mostly burnt their bridges with family or not got safe family. And so that felt really important that we'd manage to branch out and have men here. And some of them got house then and we were able to support that and help them and get furniture for them and support them over quite a journey in, because it's quite a difficult culture change to being housed if you're homeless. You're suddenly very alone after living in a group of six men. And just that need sort of company and people that come round and people to help and that.... Just to sort of somehow normalise the experience and be able to talk about it. Some of them came to faith and got baptised. So yeah that was just quite an interesting time for us – and everybody – some of the women then drifted back and began to be able to feel safe and so it just became a much more mixed community than it had been.</p>
21	<p>JB: You talked about the experience of hearing from God about Will and you mentioned other things – you said we were all feel drawn towards this – and talking about the presence of the Holy Spirit – how does that fit in the life of the community?</p>
22	<p>C: Well I suppose it was a bit – it came a bit out of the three of us at the beginning – I'd say probably just naturally as people almost like, natural kind of charismatic-y types – and it wasn't necessarily our church back ground although one women did go to [the large charismatic Anglican church in the neighbouring town] which is a New Wine church that's very sort of spirit led – but the other churches that the other two of us were at were not so much at all – but it just seemed to be when we met together it was slightly our natural way of being, we just waited for words and pictures. We'd gone on a number of training courses and things that New Wine run. Somebody had gone on a dream interpretation course and we'd been on prophetic Holy Spirit days and all those kind of things so it was quite strongly in the mode of the way in which we worked. And I think when you start a community then that you are hoping will be church for people who are unchurched. You then have to start to mediate your public behaviour in ways that are more appropriate for people to come into. And I think we would more – those things would be indicative and probably quite clear in the way we would pray for people – so people would be able to pick up that - and we'd always pray for the Holy Spirit to come or words – to everything in everything.</p>

Interview Becky, Hilchester

34	<p>JB: What keeps you part of Hilchester group – what is it about Hilchester group that means you're still part of it?</p>
35	<p>B: It's I think about – when it was – maybe we were going to have to dissolve it for a while it was really amazing the real – I don't know what it was – the emotion of thinking that it might not be a thing I realised how much I depended on it. Because that was definitely my church where I met with God where I met with people that supported me in my faith – my friends, I think it was like my outward expression of my faith – you have an inner walk – and a life – and that could sustain you in theory without it – like if you were put in prison or whatever – the reality of God in you – but it was everything thing that I kind of – the outward workings of my faith and fellowship and that kind of thing really – yeah I</p>

	couldn't not go – if it's going forever [pause to check it's still recording]... The only way that I would not go was if it closed or I moved. There have been times when you don't have the energy for it but that's only just kind of – a temporary thing – it's vital to me with my faith – I mean I could manage without it just about – but I couldn't not go.
36	JB: And what do you think are the most important things or the real – the unique thing, or important things or special things about Hilchester?
37	B: Like it couldn't happen without them?
38	JB: Yeah
39	B: Ummm. I think, think the regularity of meeting with friends, caring about each other, being honest and accountable and open and the deepening which is – I think – vital. I think God's – seeking God's will for where we go with it. Allowing God to work and lead it and guide it. I think living – I think – I think having a connection with each other's whole lives – so not just having it as a meeting but... that kind of thing. [house mate comes in] I also think – the kind of whole like thing not just the meeting and a sense of wanting to bring God and impact the rest of the community is probably the other thing. I think another thing that aids that – so eating together is really important to us but doesn't have to be – the community house is really important but it doesn't have to be – so yeah-I think the connection with each other, letting God guide us and trying to bring God into the community are probably the three things.
40	JB: Brilliant. And you obviously – you've bought a house here – so you obviously feel quite committed to the estate – so what was your thinking in buying the house – and where do you see it heading?
41	B: Yeah well that's the thing - with our ideal of living amongst the people who we want to love and show God to – it's the best way of understanding and knowing and loving people and living alongside them. So we want to get as many people and as many community houses and as many individual houses up here as we possibly could. So that was definitely part of the drive so Andrew and his wife, Charlie and his wife, my house, the community house, Amanda will probably rent somewhere and some of the other people as well. So being amongst each other so you can drop round and share stuff and also make as much of an impact in our locality it could be – as we can. That's an important part of the thing – of the drive. So loads of people living up here would be amazing –more and more. And even if I don't stay – and you never really know – just having this house and getting people to live in it who are part of Hilchester is what I'd want to do – so even if I was moving away renting it to people who are members would be what I'll do – that's the aim as well – so- good.

Interview, Ben, Eastbark

55	JB: The prayer weeks. I know that you've got three prayer weeks a year –and then you also have prayer focuses each month. How does that – are they fairly – do you set themes – how do you plans those and how do they run.
56.	B: So we've always had three prayer weeks a year. We did also have early month, it might have been every Friday at the start we had a 24-1 or a 12-1, kind of fluctuated between the two – when we were one community I think three Fridays a month we might have done. I think what that's migrated into now – we had a time of doing 24-1s every week, and now what it looks like we have 3 prayer weeks a year and then we also have, yeah, every month there will be some form of a prayer focus; whether that be a prayer week, whether that be a 24-1, in September and October we do 5 weeks of 5 nights of prayer. So that's one hour for five nights for five weeks. We all join together as community and have a bit of a focus. And then there's another 5 one week of five nights of prayer as well. So we'll have one of those in each month but we try not to have more than one of those just because of burn out and everyone gets a bit. So with each of those – so 24-1s there isn't a prayer focus as such. We make sure that there's a prayer

	<p>wall and people come and we cover 24 hours or as close to 24 hours as possible with prayer. The prayer weeks there's always a theme so we tend to come up with just very simple themes. I think this one was – it was for instance something in the past we've done the different names of God – we've had a Bible verse or some form of a theme that will just direct how we decorate or put the prayer room in place and everything and there's normally more than one room and it will be different facets of the same kind of theme so there's always some form of a theme and prayer in a prayer week. The five nights of prayer and the five weeks of five nights of prayer we tend to have a theme in as much as there's normally a book in the bible that we go through. And we tend to read the same bit each night. On the five weeks of prayer or the five nights of prayer we tend to – part of that night that hour – the first 20 minutes or so will be reading that same bit of the Bible and that is just that repetition – really helps – different things come out of that every night – and yeah – so I think they're probably the main things that people put in there- just helps direct us really in our prayer on that week or night or whatever.</p>
57.	<p>JB: Is there a connection between the prayer here and the work in the school and the food bank and the bus – how connected do they....</p>
58.	<p>B: Yeah I think inevitably they are. I think first and foremost I think potentially the work in the schools and I mean the bus was kind of born a little bit before the prayer room but I think a lot of what's gone on since then – a lot has spanned out of the prayer room. SO inevitably then it is linked because it's born from a place of seeking God and being pushed out in that way. And then I think, yeah definitely it will kind of mould and overflow into that – just I think that our prayer and what happens in this place whether themed or not – it will impact on your life in general and that then impacts on what you're doing in the school and everything doesn't it. And then also in more practical and specific sense there are things that then happen in schools or bar and bus that then come back to the prayer room and then direct our prayers – so it's kind of like this two way thing where our prayers directly impact what is happening in school and the bus and just life but then equally that then comes back and directs our prayers and so on so you know it just goes on like that o I think that is like a cycle.</p>
59.	<p>JB Can you think of specific examples?</p>
60.	<p>B: Yeah I think generally just with things like mentoring and things like that that come up. I remember that we prayed for a very very long time that there would be doors opened in the school.. for <i>years</i>. And then all of a sudden we then – I remember specifically having a meeting in here with the whole of the community saying right OK all of a sudden the school have said yes to this we've got an option to do this this this and this and I think this was the café was the first thing that we spoke about and then that has then come round to OK, what shall we do – are we all going to... this isn't going to be an individual decision –this is - if we say yes this is the community supporting the school. So we had that meeting then we prayed about it there and we suggested doing the café and that then goes round again and then you're meeting people in café that have things going on in their lives that then come back and then some prayer again – and you're not just praying for doors to be opened you're praying for specific people that you've met through that cycle and that then goes back – and recently one of those individuals that we've been praying for gets baptised and now she's praying for her school in this prayer room and it's just like – wow where's that come from – it started off with us just praying for that school and now people in that school are now praying for that school and that's as a result of – yeah – so I guess that's a very high level couple of cycles of what's happened.</p>

Field Notes

260.	Lynwood 07-07-14
261.	Present Rachel, Nancy Angela, Grace, Bob, William, Nig, Emma, Brian

262.	I arrived to try and catch team prayers but there seems to be another prayer time going on. Rachel suggested I went to get myself a drink. I'm now sat in the office. There are two desks, one with a computer on it. My understanding is that most of the office is organised through paperwork to avoid big problems with data protection and also so that those less confident with a computer can find their way around.
263.	It's a fairly typical office with files, folders, a calendar, white board etc. Behind the door, on the wall there is a Batik of Jesus washing the disciple's feet. Above the door there is a collage with the word JOY across the middle of it. A large banner also hangs in the room which says peace in white writing against a black back ground with a white dove on it. There is a list of things which can't be accepted due to product recalls. On the desk there is a certificate of incorporation of a private limited company and a certificate of employer's liability insurance.
264.	There are a number of verses on the wall around the office: Prov. 4.23, John 1.3, Psalm 139.5-7
	At this point Rachel arrives saying she is sorry that the prayer time got out of hand and she is now ready for core team prayers. Alice is still away and Tony has phoned to say he won't make it, but she is expecting Emma to appear.
265.	Rachel has been away looking after her mum. She talks about the privilege of praying for her and spending time with her. She says he mum has to be in bed a lot of the time and is missing church and all the activities she's normally involved with. She says "it's strange being the spiritual mother for your mum" and then says – "although recently I feel more like spiritual sisters - which is great". Her mum became a Christian a couple of years after her - well she says 'born again' because her mum has always believed in God and been around church.
266.	We sit in the office as the prayer room is still in use. Rachel says that there isn't anything specific to pray about that morning but she does want to pray about core team - particularly that there would be some more people who could give their time to core team.
267.	I ask how people become core team members to which she is a little unsure and tells me it's a more organic process. The core team prayers on a Monday are just for the core team because sometimes there are sensitive issues to talk about and pray about. She says the core team feels a little small at the moment - due to people being away, Tony having to cut back and Ben currently being so busy sorting out his house after the flooding. Rachel says that Ben is really missing Lywood saying "because church on Sunday isn't enough is it?" She gives the impression that her sense of meeting with God and her Christian life is very much formed in Lynwood, rather than in the Sunday service.
268.	We begin to pray and Rachel puts out a chair in case Emma arrives - which she does about five minutes into our prayer time.
269.	Rachel begins with thanks. She says that we come with nothings - we have open hands and asks God to fill us and use us according to his will. She begins by praying for Alice. She very often uses the phrase "our Alice" when praying for her and there is a strong sense of her love and care for her through the words she uses and the tone of her voice. She says that she is carrying a large weight in Lywood and asks that other would be able to help her to carry the weight - that it would be shared. She prays about this for a few sentences and then suddenly realises that this is God's burden and asks that we would all carry it lightly.
270.	Emma has joined us at this point and she also prays for Alice and then prays for all the volunteers.
271.	Rachel talks about making way for Jesus - like John the Baptist, quoting Isaiah 40
272.	Emma then begins to pray for the poor and needy around the town. She says it breaks her heart - particularly all the lonely and hurting people that there are around. She prays that Lynwood might bring comfort, love, care and hope.
273.	Rachel then prays that people wouldn't settle for less than God. She prays that they

	wouldn't miss out by settling for church on Sunday. She prays that people would see God - particularly through getting involved in the work of Besom. She prays for release - talking of the Blind and the captives - for all those who just turn up to church on a Sunday. She has a picture of Ivy growing up around peoples legs while they sit in the pews and then a machete cutting the Ivy down and releasing people to experience God.
274.	I pray for the core team - and pray that people would not feel held back from getting involved through fear or not feeling good enough. I pray for the core team that they would have insight into who would be appropriate for roles and those who feel called but don't feel bold enough to step forward.
275.	I also pray for Rachel particularly as she has responsibility for Lynwood this week.
276.	Rachel prays for people over the summer -that they would sense God's call. She prays for people involved in the projects - the work projects of painting, gardening etc. - that they would meet with God and that God would be planting seeds - that they would yearn to be close to God.
277.	Rachel finishes praying that this week would be about God's will, God's appointments and that we would see him in all we do.

171.	Airbury Sunday Meal at Claire's - 05-10-14 5.30pm-7.30pm
172.	Present: Margaret, Will, Laura, Liz, Nigel, Claire, Steve, Michelle, Helen,
173.	I arrived at about 5.30 at Claire's house. It's outside of the town on the edge of a small village. It seems modern but built in a country style. I think I was first to arrive, just, but Michelle, and her husband (Steve) and daughter (Helen) turned up immediately after me. They had brought a pasta bake with them and Helen seemed to be complaining about the fact that it had broken crisps on the top.
174.	We went straight into Claire's kitchen and people began filling the oven with things and sorting stuff out. Steve made me a drink and I chatted to a few people asking how the event at the conference on the Friday had gone. Everyone seemed to be positive about it and Claire said there would be a bit more discussion about it during dinner. Will and Margaret arrived with Nigel. The big news was that Nigel had managed to get a job and therefore hadn't been there on Friday at the conference. Everyone was very pleased for Nigel.
175.	I had a brief chat with Will before we sat down. He had been in Cornwall with Margaret visiting a church of someone they used to know. It was connected to Heal The Streets and they were visiting and learning about that. Will told me how challenged he'd been meeting someone who had had a deformed foot from birth, but one day she had shown it to people and they had started praying for it and found that it had begun to heal - it was a slow process but definitely changes had occurred. Will told me he was quite challenged by it and it was something he'd forgotten about but felt like he should do more of - although he wasn't that bold. He said Margaret was more bold than him to pray for people - she wasn't so sure.
176.	We all sat down to dinner. The table was laid nicely. Claire tells me that they normally have more people and have to put out the camping table to make enough space for everyone to sit but today there is enough space just to sit around the normal table. The table has a red runner and red mats across it and candles - some real and some pretend.
177.	Claire said who will say grace. Will said "Margaret". Claire told Will that he couldn't nominate people. So Will had nominated himself. He protested a bit and there were some laughs and then he said grace.
178.	People asked me how my studies were going and so I gave them a brief summary of where I was at visiting communities, looking at the data I'd collected and how I was going to proceed. Will asked whether there would be a chance to look at what I wrote - I said there would be.
179.	Laura who was sat next to me told me that she had been involved in the Airbury for

	about a year. She first got involved through her neighbour, Sam, who was a gulf war army veteran but the war had very much messed him up. He had lived all over the place but had finally settled in the town. She had got to know Sam and had him round for dinner fairly regularly. In fact she sounds like quite a remarkable woman who seems to know everyone and care for so many people. She talks about going out for coffee with the people from Mencap and knows them all by name. She tells me how she calmed one of them down who had forgotten his medication and was shouting in the street, so she set him off in the direction of his home. She said she has a really good laugh with them and talks about how they are lovely lovely people.
180.	Sam seems to have had a big influence on people. He was very troubled and could be quite difficult at times, but at others he was really lovely. He apparently was very connected to the homeless in the town. He died last November. Will tells me that Laura was heartbroken, and how she sort out Claire because she was so sad. Laura tells me he was a lovely man and she would have taken him as a lover had she been a bit younger!
181.	Margaret told me that they had people coming for the gardening project on Tuesday so I said I would try and come. They have a field which they are gradually turning into a place to grow vegetables. They also connect to some of the people from Mencap. This encourages a conversation about people with learning difficulties. They talk about the influence of L'arche on what they are trying to do and the amazing stories that come from there. I shared a story I heard from Greenbelt about a high Anglican church working with L'arche (which Will said - oh good for them!) and how they said how good the high Anglican liturgy was for including those from L'arche and how it enriched the community. Will told stories of how he used to drive the minibus for people from Mencap and how sometimes it was quite chaotic. He told a couple of stories about how they had been sensitive toward Will when driving - asking other to be quiet so he could concentrate. They very much cared for them and spoke very fondly of them.

15.	24-11-14 – Hilchester Meal and Gathering
16.	Dinner is a 'bring and share'. They have made fish pie, and paella, pizza, garlic bread, salad. Rob says grace and everyone starts eating. There is plenty of banter round the table, talking about friends, about what has been going on and filling everyone in on some things that have happened in people's lives - people they should be praying for - and everyone decides it would be good to write a card to someone and arrange to go and visit someone else in Birmingham.
17.	David has turned up. He is French and much older than the rest of them who are all 20-30 (although Amanda must be older - I can't tell). He takes a lot of time reading through the form and asks me what it involves. I tell him it just means that he's happy for me to be there and to makes notes on what I see. He seemed to think it meant that he would have to go somewhere or do something - which I hadn't thought about as an implication of handing out the consent forms. He tells me he hopes that I will be like a thorn to drive them on. I tell him that I am actually very interested in what they are doing and think it is important that what is going on on-the-ground actually speaks into theological thinking. Becky agrees talking again about how there is something significant happening and pleased that people are thinking about it and reflecting on it. They ask whether I will be able to give them feedback and help them to think through what they are up to where they are going. I slowly pick up through the night that this is a time of reflecting and thinking and of change for the group. David says that is what he meant by the thorn - like the thorn in Paul's flesh which drove him closer to Jesus.
18.	Meal comes to an end and everyone begins to gather in the lounge.
19.	Tim and Chris are leading the evening but Andrew kicks things off. He begins by placing two envelopes in the middle of the room - one to cover the petrol of Tim and Chris coming up, and the other to go towards paying for a house in Kenya for a lady who hopes

	to have six houses to provide a place for people to live. I didn't find out much detail, only that it cost 300 pounds per house so Andrew hoped that they might be able to pay for the last one.
20.	He prays thanking God for his presence and asking him to reveal himself to us. He encourages everyone to stand, and then say, well I am going to and you can if you like. Most people do stand and Chris begins playing the guitar. We begin with "blessed be your name". Everyone is quickly engaged singing along. 2 or three with their hands in the air, others with their eyes closed and everyone in the room seems engaged in the worship, even those who've decided to stay seated are singing along, eyes closed with their hands open in front of them. This flowed straight into "we stand and lift up our hands". At various points phrases get sung a few times over including "more of you Lord" and "be present here". During this time Charlie places a cushion on the ground and kneels.
21.	Chris encourages everyone to speak out names of God. He begins with Rock. Others join in, creator, Fortress, safe place, refuge and strength, hiding place, Father, holy one. This leads into another song whose name will come to me but at the moment all I can remember is the line asking God to change the atmosphere.
22.	Chris then begins "Our God is an awesome God" but interspersing with repeated singing of the following lines; "One day I will hear your voice", "One day I will see your face", "one day I will see your throne", "one day I will bow down low".
23.	It struck me that although there was much of the normally behaviour from charismatic worship, eyes closed, hands raised, people on knees, intense expressions, these song weren't the songs about intimacy with God but about God's holiness and having reverence before God.
24.	Chris then said that it was an open heaven and that we should declare things because "what we loose on earth will be loosed in heaven".
25.	He said he would begin and encouraged Andrew and Charlie to join in. He began declaring that God reigns over their town, over the hospitals, streets, neighbours, over cancer, over heart attacks "you are not of this earth Lord". There were many other things too, but he was saying it so quickly this is what I took a note of. Andrew began listing off names of places, streets and buildings where they work. Then he began to list of the names of people that they work with, particularly lots of the young people. Chris is shouting, 'come on Andrew' as an encouragement to keep declaring things about God. He continues, 'Reign in their lives'.
26.	Andrew's prayers - transform lives, declare your power over heroin, way they be addicted to you. God you are above everything.
27.	Chris' prayers - declare change on the streets, 'it is hunting season', he declared it open, declared release, asked God to mark his territory and declared that deaf ears and eyes should be opened.
28.	Charlie prayed hope over the community, over the disappointed and prayed for joy and that it would bear fruit. He prayed for restoration and healing. For young people to rise up to the fullness of who they were made to be. He too lists names of young people. Andrew joins in with more names.
29.	David prays for God to open the way. Calling upon each person. You are God. Everyone sees your smile. They can see God through us - God is changing us.
30.	Charlie prays that God would 'flip the switch', 'Turn darkness to light - bring transformation'.
31.	Andrew recites Psalm 103 which he appears to have memorized.
32.	Chris calls everyone to stop being so British and to all pray out loud together. They begin playing louder and all raising their voices - some don't pray out loud but the noise of the guitars means that you don't really notice. They get louder and louder with everyone singing out and sing a couple of songs I don't recognise. Tim prays that we would have faith to receive. He says new things are being birthed in us tonight. 'We wait for you to

	walk into the room'. This seems to be reference to the line of a worship song.
33.	'Here we are standing in your presence'
34.	The song 'all hail the lamb' is sung. People are calming down a bit and some are flicking through bibles. Becky reads a passage from scripture which I don't recognise but sounds like post exilic prophets. She continues in prayer thanking God for his power, his tenderness and his presence. Referencing the verse she has read she says - take us to the high places so that we can pour ourselves out into the world.
35.	Charlie thanks God for the gift of knowing how high and wide and deep is the love of God and being filled with his fullness.
36.	As they finish he says 'I could worship all night sometimes' to which some nod around the room.

63.	Eastbark Visit 24-06-15
64.	
65.	Arrived at the community house at about 2.40 and briefly saw Darren. He sent me round to the other house which I found without too much trouble. There are some visitors from 24-7 Prayer who are staying here as well. They were just heading off to the school to have a worship time at the school. I phone Jenny who actually came round. She told me that there were some people who were happy to talk to me about Eastbark this evening after house meal.
66.	Jenny is heading off to the other college to meet up with a boy who's been suspended from the school. It's the first time the school have had to suspend someone so she's not quite sure how it's going to be. She tells me it's a bit confidential. They are doing a prayer week, so soon after Jenny arrives a couple of people turn up to do their hour in the prayer room. She tells me to make myself at home. She points out some of the prayer things around the room. There's little lanterns that they are making up with the intention of people praying through what's been locked up in their lives. She tells me that Darren did it earlier in the week and within 24 hours had a massive breakthrough - a miracle within 24 hours. So she suggests that's a good prayer station to start with!
67.	She heads off and I wait for everyone to return.
68.	
69.	Tim and the visitors turned up just after 4pm. They had been involved in the worship thing at the school. It had been planned by Carys, one of the girls who goes to the school and also attends the house meals. Tim gave a little testimony. He had been struggling from a bad back over the last few days. After the worship time suddenly his back feels much better. He said that during the worship time he had been quite teary which is often a sign to him of God's presence. Tim said that he thought it had been a powerful time and was talking about the prayers of the children (because he said they are all under 14 years old) and talked about a verse from Psalm 145 - vs 4: One generation with commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts.
70.	The visitors shared some things they'd found powerful. Praying for each other in pairs - paired up with people they didn't know. They commented on how the videos worked in the worship time too.
71.	
72.	Carys who had led it has been part of the café since the beginning. Tim shared a bit about her story. He said she was the 'success story' of the café although they didn't really talk about it like that. She had come through everything, getting involved in yr 7 when Kate met with her. She's from a single parent family. Kate had spent time with her through the chaplaincy work. Kate met with her mum as well and she asked 'what else can you do to help me?' Kate invited her to house meal and she's quite involved in house meal. From there she got involved in the café team and now is part of the leaders of the

	café team. She is really regular at house meal. She now does the prayer sessions on her own and is baptised. Interesting to note that 'doing a regular prayer session' in the prayer room is part of being part of the core of the community - having a regular time in the prayer room once a week. Tim reiterates 'she is the "success story" if you would say that - but we never would!'
73.	
74.	Kate and Tim share about Dan. He is the boy who was excluded from the school and they are very connected with him. Kate tells how she was in the prayer room at 3am and was doing the prayer station about breakthrough in things that feel locked in. She said her prayer was for Dan because they haven't seen him in 2 weeks and don't know anything about him. She was praying that there would be breakthrough in that relationship. After the worship thing she saw him at the school gate. She was able to chat with him and give him a hug. He has left home and been placed with foster parents out of his own choice. Kate was so happy to have reconnected with him and said that it was a God thing that they reconnected. Tim and Kate encourage everyone to pray for Dan so we have an open prayer time.
75.	
76.	Kate prays that God would bring Dan home. She thanks him that he went to look for the 1 leaving the 99. She asks God to speak into the chaos; that he would come to the café and be blessed. 'We pray for your peace'. She quote the worship song they have been talking about 'you make beautiful things out of dust'.
77.	Tim shares that during the prayer time at the school he had been sharing words with Ed, one of the visitors, about journey and about leaving God and returning to God and asks that Ed would pray for Dan. Tim laughs and says 'oh God your ways are funny' and then prays those things for Craig.
78.	They continue 'thank you for who you are - that you are a Father. Be a father for Dan. Would he see you as a loving father'.

Appendix 5 – Ethical Approval



10th December 2013

James Butler
School of Social Science and Public Policy

Dear James,

REP(EM)/13/14-19 –An Investigation into the Ordinary Theology and Ordinary Spirituality of Small Missional Communities in relation to their Social Engagement

I am pleased to inform you that the above application has been reviewed by the E&M Research Ethics Panel that **FULL APPROVAL** is now granted with the following provisos:

- Please note that notes of observations of participants interacting with others outside the community must be constructed and used with care in the light of the fact that formal consent will not have been gathered from these groups.
- Section 7.2: This section demonstrates that thought has been given to withdrawal of focus group data, but it is advisable to also consider whether it is realistic to expect to be able to remove data relating to one participant from a group discussion
- Information Sheet: It would be useful to indicate where the interviews and focus groups will take place.

For your information ethical approval is granted until **11/12/15**. If you need approval beyond this point you will need to apply for an extension to approval at least two weeks prior to this explaining why the extension is needed, (please note however that a full re-application will not be necessary unless the protocol has changed). You should also note that if your approval is for one year, you will not be sent a reminder when it is due to lapse.

Please ensure that you follow all relevant guidance as laid out in the King's College London Guidelines on Good Practice in Academic Research (<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/college/policyzone/index.php?id=247>).

Ethical approval is required to cover the duration of the research study, up to the conclusion of the research. The conclusion of the research is defined as the final date or event detailed in the study description section of your approved application form (usually the end of data collection when all work with human participants will have been completed), not the completion of data analysis or publication of the results. For projects that only involve the further analysis of pre-existing data, approval must cover any period during which the researcher will be accessing or evaluating individual sensitive and/or un-anonymised records. Note that after the point at which ethical approval for your study is no longer required due to the study being complete (as per the above definitions), you will still need to ensure all research data/records management and storage procedures agreed to as part of your application are adhered to and carried out accordingly.

If you do not start the project within three months of this letter please contact the Research Ethics Office.

Should you wish to make a modification to the project or request an extension to approval you will need approval for this and should follow the guidance relating to modifying approved applications: <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/innovation/research/support/ethics/applications/modifications.aspx>

The circumstances where modification requests are required include the addition/removal of participant groups, additions/removal/changes to research methods, asking for additional data from participants, extensions to the ethical approval period. Any proposed modifications should only be carried out once full approval for the modification request has been granted.

Any unforeseen ethical problems arising during the course of the project should be reported to the approving committee/panel. In the event of an untoward event or an adverse reaction a full report must be made to the Chair of the approving committee/review panel within one week of the incident.

Please would you also note that we may, for the purposes of audit, contact you from time to time to ascertain the status of your research.

If you have any query about any aspect of this ethical approval, please contact your panel/committee administrator in the first instance (<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/innovation/research/support/ethics/contact.aspx>). We wish you every success with this work.

Yours Sincerely,

Annah Whyton
Research Support Assistant



James B <james.e.d.butler@googlemail.com>

Ethical Approval

POUND M.J.P. <m.j.p.pound@durham.ac.uk>
To: James Butler [REDACTED]

Fri, May 22, 2015 at 4:22 PM

Hi James,

The cttee has considered your form and I am passing it by chairs action. (i.e. you are good to go).

Dr Marcus Pound
Assistant Director, Centre for Catholic Studies,
Dept. Theology & Religion
Durham University

MailScanner has detected a possible fraud attempt from "www.dur.ac.uk" claiming to be
www.centreforcatholicstudies.co.uk

[REDACTED]

Sent: 22 May 2015 14:52

To: POUND M.J.P.

Subject: Re: Ethical Approval

[Quoted text hidden]

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