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Challenging Leadership:

Mission-Shaped Presbyters in Methodist Fresh Expressions

Joanne Cox MA, BA

Abstract

The Mission-Shaped Church report by the Church of England prompted the Methodist and Church of England in the UK to respond to the dislocation being felt between the inherited model of Church, and the missiological challenges of the twenty-first century. The most significant ecumenical development arising from the initial report was the formation of the Fresh Expressions initiative, whose sole task was to release leaders and communities to found churches for the 'unchurched.'

Examples of Anglican fresh expressions are much researched. In this thesis, I explore how the Methodist Church in Britain has responded to the leadership questions raised by contemporary culture, and do this by examining ethnographically three case studies of Methodist fresh expressions. I argue against the assumption that Methodism is incompatible with the emerging church worldview, arguing that Methodist people have much to offer to the debate.

The main finding of this thesis is that leaders of fresh expressions and leadership styles often create tensions between a presbyter's self understanding of vocation within the Methodist tradition and expectations placed upon them. There are irreconcilable differences between the vision and values of a 'fresh expression', and the requirements of the local circuit or district. The discernment of specific gifts for pioneering ministries places pressure on the stationing system and on the understanding of what a presbyter is stationed to achieve. On account of the cultural assumptions of postmodern Britain, leaders are faced with the challenges of cultural accommodation, without necessarily having the tools with which to make such decisions. I argue that there is a need for fresh expressions to be denominationally distinctive before they can be distilled into something new. The thesis also reflects the costliness of research to an ordained minister embarking on practical theology.

This thesis exposes leaders as people who are highly motivated but with the potential of being highly flawed. It presents difficult questions before the Methodist Church in light of the collected evidence and reflects on the difficulties faced by the whole church as it continues to respond to the challenges of mission and discipleship in Britain today.

Declaration

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This project has taken place over three continents, at least eleven places of residence, and three appointments in the Methodist stationing system.

I am indebted to the Methodist Church for financially supporting this project as part of my own continued development. I am under no illusion that without this support, this project would have remained one of my many good ideas.

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cross with me, and for all the times when you pointed me to the horizon when I was stuck in forests of data. There is no doubt that this project is to be dedicated to you – the missional leaders of the past and the future who continue to pave the way. Thank you.

Introduction

'Remember your call.

*Declare the Good News.
Celebrate the Sacraments.
Serve the needy.
Minister to the sick.
Welcome the stranger.
Seek the lost.*

*Be shepherds to the flock of Christ.
As you exercise mercy, do not forget justice,
As you minister discipline, do not forget mercy,
That when Christ the Chief Shepherd comes in glory
He may count you among his faithful servants.¹*

I entered ministerial training in 2003. During my time in college, I noticed that a significant number of my peers were either wrestling with vocation throughout their training, and then not entering recognised patterns of ordained ministry once their training had finished, or that they left college, were ordained and then found their sense of vocation did not match the places where they were deployed to serve. At the same time, I noticed that I was doing the same thing, wrestling with a call to leadership, mission and to ministry in a church environment that at times seemed worlds apart from that for which I had been trained. This thesis thus began as an attempt to investigate what ordained leadership in the Methodist Church looked like for people who had been wrestling and questioning for far longer than I had, but who had deliberately remained within the denomination. I wanted to understand the significance ordination had for them, and what challenges remained for the leaders and for the Methodist institution. I wanted to investigate the effect

¹ Methodist Church, Faith and Order, *Methodist Worship Book* (Peterborough: MPH, 1999), 308

that the ensuing mission-shaped agenda had for these ‘maverick’ leaders in contemporary society.

At the same time, the Church of England began to invest heavily in a missional approach to its reflective practice, and the *Mission-Shaped Church* report was published.² Soon, terms such as ‘mission-shaped church,’ ‘fresh expressions of church,’ and ‘pioneering’ entered into common parlance. Questions about personal ministry and vocation were now being framed with the language of missiology rather than that of ecclesiology. The Methodist Church was not far behind the Church of England, and became the first denominational partner for Fresh Expressions when it began in 2005. This thesis responds to the need for specifically Methodist research into Fresh Expressions. Stories have always been a captivating feature of Fresh Expressions literature, but these very rarely featured as a part of academic scrutiny. They instead veered towards the anecdotal,³ risking a neglect of the nuances and advantages of narrative theology and in depth analysis, in the process.⁴

² Church of England, Mission-Shaped Church Working Party, *Mission-Shaped Church* (London: Church House, 2004)

³ Croft, Steve, ‘People with Gifts Needed’, *Mixed Economy Journal*, <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/sites/default/files/mixedeconomy1.pdf>, 19-21, (12th February 2011), see also Cox, Joanne, ‘Fresh Churches and Emerging Expressions: Current Currents in the Oceans of Liquid Churches’ in Frost, Rob, David Wilkinson and Joanne Cox, *The Call and the Commission* (Milton Keynes: Authentic, 2009), 141-142 and Atkins, Martyn, ‘Counting the Cost...and Paying It’ in Frost et al., *Commission*, 45-52

⁴ See Methodist Church, *Changing Church for a Changing World* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2007) which uses stories to illustrate points being made in the text of a conference report, and uses questions to provoke further discussion of the points being raised.

In 2009, 56% of Methodist circuits had at least one self-defined Fresh Expressions, totalling 846 Fresh Expressions of church occurring in association with Methodist churches.⁵ Fresh expressions of church are thus present in a majority of circuits and are becoming an increasing feature of church life. In turn, presbyters and deacons within these circuits are being asked to provide more and varied forms of worship and community for the various groups within the local circuit and church context. This research suggests that it is not possible to do both Fresh Expressions and inherited church at the same time and by the same leader.⁶ This thesis also takes seriously these statistics, noting that if there is an increasing trend towards Fresh Expressions of church within circuits, there are still significant lessons to be learned by both leaders and the Methodist Church, if processes and procedures are to be changed.

Very early into the research process it became evident that this project could easily become an exercise in linguistics. As Hollinghurst has noted,

‘I think we often underestimate the power of language. The words we choose conjure up images of what we are describing, and sometimes these can have unintended consequences.’⁷

⁵ Methodist Church, ‘Statistic for Mission’, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentoyou.content&cmid=3238> (1st February 2011). The ambiguity in this sentence represents two features of this statistical review. The first is that the statistics represent those communities who are self-defined as Fresh Expressions by the people submitting the statistical return. Secondly, it is representative of the analysis by the Methodist Church research officers who removed some data because it did not meet the criteria of Fresh Expressions.

⁶ ‘Inherited church’ is the term used by Fresh Expressions to describe church life that would be understood as more traditional in style. It is adopted here because of its uncritical use elsewhere, but noted that it is an unhelpful term when speaking into an institution which should not necessarily hear what they classically do in a critical and dismissive way.

⁷ Hollinghurst, Steve, ‘The Language of ‘Fresh Expressions of Church’ may be Killing our Mission’, <http://www.sharetheguide.org/blog/archive/2009/02/23/the-language-of-2018fresh-expressions-of-church2019-may-be-killing-our-mission-by-steve-hollinghurst> (27th February 2009)

In researching Fresh Expressions of church, and engaging in literature produced by those within the emerging church conversation, the right terminology seemed to be constantly elusive. Such an observation causes Stuvland to conclude that, 'emerging churches emphasise hermeneutics over propositions, interpretation over concretization.'⁸ One outcome to this thesis will be to test whether this is the case within the method and language of Fresh Expressions too. Hollinghurst suggests that the adoption of the language of Fresh Expressions risks neglecting the cross-cultural intentionality of mission.⁹ Subsequently, there are a number of choices that I have made in terms of the language of this thesis. When 'Fresh Expressions' (hereafter FX) is written with capital letters, it is in direct reference to the initiative born out of the MSC report, and led initially by Steve Croft and continued under the guidance of Graham Cray. The three case studies are referred to as 'fresh expressions' (hereafter fx) for two reasons. One is to delineate between the Initiative and the evolving communities. Secondly, it is to indicate that the communities did not always own the language of FX, and at times wanted to remain distinctive from a movement of which they were occasionally critical. Despite the ease with which some communities have adopted the descriptor, the leaders of the case studies herein were keen to remain distinctive from the groundswell of projects and ideas. Leaders were precious about their communities and wanted to protect what they were doing from some of the easy critique to be made of those jumping on a mission-shaped bandwagon. It is also worth noting that at the time of

⁸ Stuvland, Aaron, 'The Emerging Church and Global Civil Society: Postmodern Christianity as a Source for Global Values', *Journal of Church and State Advance Access*, August 2010, <http://jcs.oxfordjournals.org> (16th January 2011)

⁹ Hollinghurst, 'The language may be killing our mission'

writing, the understanding and practice of fx had moved on from 'Anglicanism taken out of its usual packaging and rewrapped to appeal to those uncomfortable or unused to traditional worship,'¹⁰ although in some cases this critique is still valid.

The term 'emerging church' is always used in this thesis without capitalisation. This is in an attempt to distinguish its wider influence within the fx debate, without being drawn into the more specific, and arguably more US based, debate about emerging and Emergent movements.¹¹ Throughout the course of this research, the debate and conversation surrounding emerging and Emergent church has rumbled on. In UK terms, the international fragmentation of the conversation has now settled into the broader and more denominationally focused conversations surrounding FX. FX, in no small debt to CMS and to the Church Army,¹² has enabled the mainstream denominations in the UK to hear and respond to the challenges of the emerging church movement. There are still provocateurs who remain critical of denominations and institutions, in line with Niebuhr's argument that denominations are the ultimate institutional hypocrisy,¹³ and thus suggest that in

¹⁰ Combe, Victoria, 'Church of England's Fresh Expressions', *Financial Times* www.ft.com/cms/s/0/d8f3d2e2-c718-11dd-97a5-000077b07858.html (16th January 2009)

¹¹ See Kimball, Dan, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), Yaconelli, Mike (ed.), *Stories of Emergence: Moving from Absolute to Authentic* (Grand Rapids, MI: Emergent YS, 2003), Gibbs, Eddie and Ryan Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (London: SPCK, 2006), Frost, Michael, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), Pagitt, Doug and Tony Jones (eds.), *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), Kimball, Dan, *They Like Jesus But Not the Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007) and Webber, Robert (ed.), *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007)

¹² 'Pioneer Church', <http://pioneer.cms-uk.org/> (19th April, 2011) and 'Church Army', <http://www.churcharmy.org.uk/> (19th April 2011)

¹³ Niebuhr, H. Richard, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York, NY: Meridian, 12th ed. 1972), 6

order to be truly missional in a postmodern and post-Christendom world, one needs to be outside of modern and Christendom institutions.¹⁴

One further linguistic note concerns the language of ‘pioneer.’ This is all the more complex as the Church of England and Methodist Churches now have formal pioneer ministries. What is potentially confusing is that although the term is used in both denominations, it means something different for both. On the whole, in this project, ‘pioneer’ and ‘pioneer mission leader’ refers to one of the leaders of the Methodist VentureFX project.¹⁵ As such, they are one of up to twenty people who have been selected to set up a Christian community for the under 35s. This is distinctive from the training in Pioneer Ministry offered by the Church of England and does not have the same breadth of diocesan deployment. The Methodist scheme also encourages laypeople to participate, and indeed the majority of Methodist pioneers are lay.

¹⁴ Hirsch describes ‘missional’ as meaning ‘to be sent into the world, we do not expect people to come to us.’ Missional is often used to draw a distinction between a church sent out and an ‘attractional’ model of church, whereby the objective is for people to “come to church.” See Hirsch, Alan, ‘Defining Missional’ in *Leadership Journal.net*, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/communitylife/evangelism/1720.html> (12th December 2008), Roxburgh, Alan, *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership and Liminality* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1997), Cole, Neil, *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005), Gibbs, Eddie, *LeadershipNext: Changing Leaders in a Changing Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2005), Roxburgh, Alan, and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006), Creps, Earl, *Off Road Disciplines* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006), Roxburgh, Alan and M. Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), Roxburgh, Alan, *Missional Map-Making* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010), and Roxburgh, Alan, *Right Here Right Now* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011)

¹⁵ ‘Venture FX’

<http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentoworld.content&cmid=2539> (11th April 2011)

This thesis investigates presbyteral Methodist leaders in fx, and asks questions of what ordained leadership looks like, how it works in practice and what strategic change needs to take place in order to enable the future trajectory of missional leadership. This is not to say that the Diaconal Order does not have something unique to say about this research question. It is an attempt to limit the research to one order of ordained Methodist ministry. Further work has already been conducted into the Diaconal Order,¹⁶ and it would be an interesting extension of both projects to find places and points of comparison and contrast within the orders and challenges of leadership therein.

The first chapter of this thesis provides a literature survey of the key texts for this thesis. It lays the context firmly within the debate on post-Christendom and the Church's response to this with the FX initiative. The chapter also grounds the research within a Methodist framework, advocating that Methodism still has much to offer the continuing emerging church and fx debate. The whole project is developed as a piece of practical theology, taking a difficult series of experiences, describing three case studies and drawing on theological and sociological tools in order to foster a greater depth of response to the initial questions and my own training and deployment experience.

Chapter two defends the method of research, and offers an autobiographical narrative of the fieldwork, in conversation with the leading texts on these research

¹⁶ Clark, David, *Breaking the Mould of Christendom: Kingdom Community, Diaconal Church and the Liberation of the Laity* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2005)

methods. Significant questions are raised here about the various roles apportioned to an ordained researcher when engaging in participant research.

Chapters three to five describe the case studies in detail. All names have been changed in order to protect the anonymity of leaders and communities. Each chapter describes the community itself, the local context in which it is situated, the local circuit setting and an account of the style of presbyteral leadership employed therein.

Chapter three introduces 'Connections', an Arts cafe in the centre of a busy metropolitan city in the north west of England. Analysis is offered on the nature of oversight in an ecumenical environment. I explore the symbiotic celebrations and tensions that arise when two fresh expression communities share the same physical space. The study of Connections provokes questions about the nature and purpose of Christian community within a business and consumer setting; the challenges of transition for community, and the role of women as members of a leadership team but never named as leaders in their own right.

Chapter four describes 'Watch This Space' (WTS). This is a cell church based fresh expression in an urban priority area of the north east of England. The demographic of the location provides crucial insights into the challenges of fx of church when they develop in a context with low literacy and high social needs. WTS is also interesting because it is led by an ordained woman, who reflects a great deal about

the challenges of being both a fx leader and a circuit minister. This framed further analysis on the tensions within circuits and districts between leaders and between churches. Given the deliberate cell structure, WTS also offers an example of what ongoing discipleship looks like for people who have no previous experience of church.

Chapter five explores 'Safe-Haven', a community for young professionals in a large cosmopolitan city in the south east of England. Safe-Haven is something of a deviant case, as it is led by a lay employee, albeit ordained pastor in Vineyard, rather than an ordained presbyter in the Methodist Church. The leader here raises the most significant questions about the pastoral care of leaders within communities and the risk factors involved in employing people who are themselves vulnerable. Safe-Haven offers an example of a value-driven community of people striving to make an impact in the social and political environment in which its members live and work. It also offers insight into a community of people who are encouraged to recognise 'brokenness' as a feature of their lives and the local community. The community therefore integrates more concerted theological ideas into their sense of collective identity.

This thesis is provocatively and ambiguously entitled 'challenging leadership' because it presents evidence for the multifaceted challenges that mission-shaped leadership brings to the Methodist Church, and offers conclusions for transformed practice. Chapter six offers twelve proposals for transformed practices in light of

the collected evidence and analysis. I recommend that the cost of leadership be taken seriously; in terms of the financial burden of mission and evangelism to the institutional church; the psychological wellbeing of leaders; and the ongoing cost of leadership to the families of pioneers. I argue that it is impossible for ordained leaders to engage in fx work and inherited church at the same time. The collected evidence indicates that fx projects are being used by leaders as an escape from these inherited models of church, and that they are often last resorts' for leaders who would otherwise leave the denomination. The use of Central Halls as a location for mission indicates that there is the need to rediscover a missiology of central halls applicable for the twenty-first century. Leaders of fx need to develop teams of people around them, in order to share the workload and to mitigate against the risk of abuse by leaders. Furthermore, a succession plan needs to be instigated from the communities at an early stage of development, and that this may not fit with the current systems of stationing and recruitment within the Methodist Church. Leadership needs to be seen as a long-term investment by the church, and that one success criterion for fx is the ongoing personal development of leaders well into this century. In order to achieve this, leaders should be expected to have the support of coaching, therapy, spiritual direction and mentoring in order to sustain their leadership. The Methodist Church should take seriously the encouraging statistics of the influence of FX over the course of the past five years, and be confident in taking more risks, and develop a learning environment which appropriately reflects upon failure. Theologically, the wider Church needs to take seriously the narrative theological approach that is inherently

taken by these communities. Leaders should become more confident and aware of their Methodist heritage, and the wider Church should expect to see and be challenged by the Methodist ecclesiology being practiced and developed by these communities. Finally, practitioner-researchers need to be self-reflexive throughout research projects such as this.

It is the conclusion of this thesis that in order to be mission-shaped in the twenty-first century, the Church needs leaders who are both challenging and reciprocally challenged about their identity, behaviour, and purpose.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

‘Ministry is in crisis today,’¹⁷ wrote Snyder in 1983. Twenty-six years later, Frost warned,

‘those in national leadership on the Church scene need to take urgent and radical steps to ensure that we find the right kind of gifted leaders to serve the Church of the future. The present systems are failing us.’¹⁸

These statements suggest that from the perspective of both the academy and also in practice there is a problem in both church leadership, and in understanding twenty-first century discipleship. Many writers and sociologists would agree that that the problem stems from the West shifting into postmodern and Post-Christendom worldviews.¹⁹ This research investigates what some of the perceived problems of ordained ministry are for Methodist leaders, and what solutions are being brokered in association with fx of church. In order to better frame the fieldwork, it is important to survey current literature, noting key contributions to the ever-expanding and now readily-critiqued *mission-shaped* conversation. Snyder reflects, ‘a renewed focus on leadership is absolutely essential to the renewal and growth of the church.’²⁰ This thesis focuses on leadership and promotes

¹⁷ Snyder, Howard, *Liberating Church: The Ecology of Church and Kingdom* (Basingstoke: Marshall, 1983), 167

¹⁸ Frost et al., *Commission*, 2-3

¹⁹ The use of ‘West’ here is in relation to the emerging church and Fresh Expressions debate being fuelled by the USA, UK, Australia, Canada, and in some areas, South Africa. Alternative terminology is available to describe the dissonance of experiences of Christians across the world, and usually the language of North and South is a better descriptor. In this case, however, it is clear than post-Christendom is potentially symptomatic of the West rather than the North. See Davey, Grace, *Europe: The Exceptional Case: Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London: DLT, 2002), Jenkins, Philip, *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa and Asia* (Oxford: Lion, 2008), Jenkins, Philip, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), and Jenkins, Philip. *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford: OUP, 2006)

²⁰ Frost, Michael and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st Century* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 165

transformed practice in order to see the growth of new churches as well as the growth of leaders themselves.

A Post-Christendom Context

As has already been intimated in my introduction, the UK context of this piece of research is a fascinating one for many reasons. It is a context of cultural and religious diversity, which challenges the methods and models of evangelism and mission. There is also an ever present need for culturally sensitive and inquisitive engagement within a local and global community setting. As Hollinghurst suggests, 'home evangelism needs to become an expression of cross-cultural mission.'²¹ The UK context is still feeling the consequences of the philosophical shift towards postmodernism. Statistically speaking, the UK is a context in which people declare a Christian faith, but who do not demonstrably follow this up in a formal church setting.²² As Murray-Williams describes in his formative book on the subject of Post-Christendom,

'For the first time in many centuries, Christians in Western culture will be able to tell the Christian story to people for whom it is entirely unknown – a challenging scenario but full of opportunities we have not had for generations.'²³

²¹ Hollinghurst, Steve, *Mission Shaped Evangelism: The Gospel in Contemporary Culture* (Norwich: Canterbury, 2010), xii-xiii

²² see Tear Fund, 'Churchgoing in the UK', 2007 <http://www.tearfund.org/webdocs/Website/News/Final%20churchgoing%20report.pdf> (2nd May 2010), and an analysis by Hollinghurst, *Mission Shaped Evangelism*, 12f

²³ Murray-Williams, Stuart, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World* (Milton Keynes: Authentic, 2004), 2

This is the opportunity to which many are responding, following the publication of the *Mission-Shaped Church* Report and the previous experiences of the Decade of Evangelism during the 1990s.

Frost-Hirsch in *The Shaping of Things to Come* offer a vehement critique of Christendom models of church life and leadership. In so doing, they set up a dichotomy between an old world order of ecclesial authority and autocracy of leaders, and a new world order of missional disciples engaging in holistic Christian community development.

‘Christendom is the name given to the sacral culture that has dominated European society... Christianity moved from being a marginalised, subversive, and persecuted movement secretly gathering in houses and catacombs to being the favoured religion of the Empire.’²⁴

For Frost-Hirsch, Christendom was about the linking of state and ecclesial authority that consequently brought Christianity from the margins of society into the heart of governance, strategy, politics and the Arts.²⁵ Robertson critiques their thesis on the basis of it being a Western text on Fresh Expressions,²⁶ but the emerging church movement is focussed on the US, UK, Australia and parts of South Africa. Arthur pushes this still further and calls this ‘cultural church conditioning.’²⁷ For Frost-Hirsch, they argue that the reverse movement is now true, and that the church is

²⁴ Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping*, 8

²⁵ Of note is that Reitveld criticises Frost-Hirsch for being too dualistic in their explanation of Christendom and post-Christendom models. Rietveld, David, ‘Review: The Shaping of Things To Come’, <http://www.anglicanas.org.uk/tasmaniananglican/200508/200508-16.html> (23rd July 2007)

²⁶ Robertson criticises Frost-Hirsch for having a mono-cultural approach to their book, and failing to reflect what is happening in other parts of the world and within the Africa-American Churches in the US. See Robertson, John Ed, ‘Review: The Shaping of Things To Come’, http://www.navigaotrs.org/us/ministries/metro_tools/items/Books%20Reviews/items/The%20Shaping%20of%20Things%20to%20Come.html (24th July 2007)

²⁷ Arthur, Eddie, ‘Review: The Shaping of Things To Come’, <http://www.facingthechallenge.org/hirsch.php> (25th July 2007)

now marginal and marginalised within society. Because of this reversal of fortunes, authentic Christian community can be reformed and reshaped in an entirely new way, contextually grounded for the contemporary missiological environment.²⁸

They commend the philosophical and sociological situation whereby Christianity is forced into being a marginal and subversive movement for the twenty-first century.²⁹ As Hjalmarson reflects, '[Frost-Hirsch] argue that the church must refine itself in terms of mission: to take the gospel and incarnate it in specific cultural contexts.'³⁰

The central thesis in *The Shaping of Things to Come* is that a seismic shift is required in the understanding and praxis of leadership, which will then support this new world order of Christian discipleship. They argue along with Niebuhr that denominations are the problem and not the solution to the current decline and apathy towards and from Christianity.³¹ 'It is time to step out of the box of Christendom in order to take on the problems raised by Christendom.'³² Frost-Hirsch illustrate their thesis with missional examples from the Western world: a shoe room in San Francisco,³³ a pub in Bradford³⁴ and the Burning Man festival in

²⁸ Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping*, 189

²⁹ That community development and a removal from society in order to better ones relationships is evidenced in Jones, Tobias, 'Why I'm Setting Up a Woodland Commune', *The Guardian*, 17th November 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2009/nov/17/tobias-jones-woodland-commune> (18th November 2009)

³⁰ Hjalmarson, Leonard, 'Review: The Shaping of Things To Come', <http://www.nextreformation.com/wp-admin/reviews/shaping-review.html> (23rd July 2007)

³¹ Niebuhr, *Denominationalism*

³² Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping*, 7

³³ Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping*, 2324

³⁴ Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping*, 10-11

Nevada Desert³⁵ are all exhibited as examples of Christianity in missional mode. Nearly a decade on from their thesis, such examples do not seem so alien even within a denominational structure. *The Shaping of Things to Come* sets the context for the developing Emerging Church and its debates. It catalyses the challenge of leadership³⁶ within this perceived new environment. As Gibbs notes, 'leadership styles must change in light of the fresh challenges the church faces.'³⁷ It is this contestation that will be the central theme of this thesis, albeit countering Frost-Hirsch on their dismissal of denominations as playmakers in the continuing debate.

Christian Britain is dead, argues Callum Brown. In *The Death of Christian Britain*,³⁸ Brown criticises the use of social science method in the development and promotion of secularisation theory, on the grounds that social sciences use the evidence collected to their own advantage and conclusions:

'Where before I believed that better social science would solve the problem of a theory in error, I now understand that the social sciences were the problem.'³⁹

Brown then employs cultural theory to discuss the reasons why evangelical Christianity thrived in Britain, especially in non-conformist circles, until the 1960s. He suggests that the decline, or death, of Christian Britain occurred after the 1960s, which is in conflict with many secularisation theorists who argue that the decline in Christendom occurred at incremental moments throughout the whole of the

³⁵ Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping*, 3-6

³⁶For Frost and Hirsch, they are talking about lay leadership structures. 'It is important for us to recognise the brute fact that not all existing ordained ministers are necessarily leaders,' Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping*, 172

³⁷ Gibbs, *LeadershipNext*, 47

³⁸ Brown, Callum G., *The Death of Christian Britain*, (London: Routledge, 2001)

³⁹ Brown, *Death*, viii

twentieth century.⁴⁰ Hollinghurst, for example, suggests that there were two liminal moments which accelerated the secularisation of Britain. He notes an industrial urbanisation of Britain, and a faster second stage of globalisation. He goes further to suggest that this second stage will be experienced by other countries at an even quicker rate than the experience of the UK.⁴¹

Brown's conclusions primarily highlight the significant place of women in the home as agents of evangelism and discipleship, and the changing gender roles within society throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which lead to the death of Christian influence throughout the whole of society. His thesis is significant for this thesis because of his use of non-conformist communities. His warning about the self-serving nature of interviews and ethnographic method is also important to note in the development of the method for this project.⁴² Furthermore, Brown contests that with the statistical decline in church attendance, there is also a decline in Christian influence in wider society. This, as Walton reflects, is one of the root issues for post-Christendom, and thus significant for the Churches.⁴³

Brown is not alone in his proclamation of the death of Christendom. Bruce also declares that God is Dead,⁴⁴ although the recent work of economist Micklethwait suggests that through marketing executives and self promotion, God may actually

⁴⁰ Bruce offers an outline of secularisation in Bruce, Steve, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 2-44

⁴¹ Hollinghurst, *Evangelism*, 93-96

⁴² Brown, *Death*, 116-117

⁴³ Walton, Roger, *The Reflective Disciple* (London: Epworth, 2009), 45

⁴⁴ Bruce, *Dead*

be back.⁴⁵ Bruce offers an interdisciplinary approach to secularization theory, noting issues of economics, globalisation, consumerism, science and new age spirituality as reasons for the inability of a Christian narrative to remain primary within society. He charges the Charismatic movement as being one of the key reasons for secularisation.⁴⁶ As Roberts notes, ‘a study of pneumatology in fresh expressions would be very welcome.’⁴⁷ Significantly, Bruce notes that ‘new organisations will be smaller than those founded by their parents and will gradually evolve in the same way.’⁴⁸ This thesis will need to test whether this is the case, and whether indeed FX are small, localised communities who run the risk of sectarian splits and inter-denominational evolution or self-destruction.

Bruce advocates that ‘it is easier to be creative with remote (or reinvented) traditions such as those of the Tibetans, Chinese, Celts or Native Americans than with the ones on your doorstep.’⁴⁹ This reinvention of traditions requires an understanding of the initial traditions, as well as the willingness to be playful (and arguably more individualistic), with them for the benefit of new adherents.

Murray-Williams indicates that traditions need to embody the story of their history and heritage in order to enable authentic and distinctive followers:

‘For the church to understand itself as a movement, not an institution, it needs to know its history and destiny...Post-Christendom churches must be

⁴⁵ Micklethwait, John and Adrian Wooldridge, *God is Back: How the Global Rise of Faith is Changing the World* (London: Penguin, 2009)

⁴⁶ Bruce, *Dead*, 185

⁴⁷ Roberts, Andrew, ‘The Acts of the Apostles: Resourcing and Developing Fresh Expressions of Church’ in *Epworth Review*, 36:3, July 2009, 27

⁴⁸ Bruce, *Dead*, 185

⁴⁹ Bruce, *Dead*, 135

communities that hand down traditions and tell stories that challenge other stories in society.’⁵⁰

Again, this research will reflect on the narrative of each community and the wider influence of the denomination which funded them.

Furthermore, Bader-Sayer goes further,

‘if [Post-Christendom] means a shift in which average people, especially young people, have a higher tolerance for ambiguity and find themselves more moved by narratives than apologetic arguments, then the emerging church is ready to offer a place to delve into divine mystery and ponder the Christian story.’⁵¹

As will be commented on further later in this chapter, a feature of contemporary writing both on emerging churches and mission-shaped praxis revolves around the use of narrative and story. Not only, as Bader-Sayer suggests, is there a greater use of story within evangelistic and missional methodology, there is also a great use of narrative theology when it comes to presenting theological reflections upon theology and practice. It is therefore important to use narrative and case studies in this research. Some texts run the risk of becoming anecdotal in their use of local narratives. By using fieldwork methods and case studies, this project follows the pattern set before it in other similar literature, it offers reflexivity on good practice and potential tensions in research such as this which can further inform this field of study; it demonstrates that fx communities exist, and are open and willing to participate in research throughout all areas of their own theological and practical life together; and it also offers space for the ambiguities and tensions within communities to be exposed and reflected upon.

⁵⁰ Murray-Williams, *Post-Christendom*, 277

⁵¹ Bader-Sayer, Scott, ‘Improvising Church: An Introduction to the Emerging Church Conversation’ *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 6:1, 16

When using the word *narrative* it is worth noting that there are two dimensions to this with regards to fx, and thus to this project in particular. The first is the narrative theology espoused by, amongst others, Hauerwas⁵² and Loughlin.⁵³

Graham et al., conclude that,

‘the church has a duty to present and embody an alternative narrative that has the power to nourish and sustain human life by showing the significance our human story achieves when it becomes part of the unfolding story of God.’⁵⁴

Thus, narrative theology is about how Christian communities embody and live out their understanding of God’s story in a way that is often both counter-cultural and deeply sacramental. Loughlin especially underlines the Eucharistic significance of Church as a living community retelling and intertwined with God’s story.⁵⁵ Graham again posits, ‘postmodern times are evoked as a context in which story-telling flourishes but where there is profound scepticism concerning the truth and authority of the stories we tell.’⁵⁶ Narrative theology responds with the contestation that by embodying the grand narrative of scripture, and by maintaining the liturgical pattern as well as a sacramental pattern of life, that it is possible and indeed preferable, to live life with a grand narrative.

Narrative is also used to describe the vernacular praxis of the local community. Not only is narrative about the grand story, but it is also about the local story as the community evolves and shapes its praxis and understanding. For Graham, this is

⁵² Hauerwas, Stanley and L. Gregory Jones (eds.), *Why Narrative* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997)

⁵³ Loughlin, Gerard, *Telling God’s Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996)

⁵⁴ Graham, Elaine, Heather Walton and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SCM, 2005), 80

⁵⁵ Loughlin, *Telling*, 223-245

⁵⁶ Graham, et al., *Methods*, 103

‘theology in the vernacular’⁵⁷ which is about ‘utilising the everyday language and symbols of ordinary people and paying attention to theological motifs in popular culture.’⁵⁸ For Astley, this is ‘ordinary theology,’⁵⁹ which is language appropriated in this thesis to speak of the theology and practice of community participants.

It will be important in this project to note how narrative is used, who in the community is charged with telling God’s story, and who in the community tells and keeps the story of the community. My instinct is that both roles will be apportioned to the ordained leader. The research will need to test this hypothesis, for if it is true, then there is potential to conflate both narrative and vernacular theologies. As Graham concludes,

‘the church exists not for itself, but to proclaim and enact the Gospel in human society; and thus pastoral practice is the living expression of the Church’s mission to the world.’⁶⁰

By using narrative in both these ways, the question is raised as to the denominational authority and power-play within a post-Christendom worldview. Narrative theology, especially narrative theology influenced by ordinary theology, empowers individuals and communities to develop their own means of reflection and their own systematic conclusions which risk being at best unorthodox and at worst heretical.⁶¹ Graham cautions that ‘church must become deeply assimilated

⁵⁷ Graham, et al., *Methods*, 200-229

⁵⁸ Graham, et al., *Methods*, 200

⁵⁹ Astley, Jeff, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2002)

⁶⁰ Graham, Elaine, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Practice in an Age of Uncertainty* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1996), 204

⁶¹ See Burke, Spencer and Barry Taylor, *A Heretic’s Guide to Eternity* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006)

into culture in order to fulfil its incarnational calling⁶² The challenge of narrative theology, therefore, is to what extent is there freedom and creativity to engage with God's story in a way that is both counter-cultural, local, and yet authentically Christian, Murray-Williams notes, 'can [we] re-imagine Christianity in a world we no longer control.'⁶³

Re-imagined Christianity will need to understand power in a way not experienced by Anglicanism. Methodism once again has the opportunity to be regarded as a crucially important denomination, not least of all through research such as this. By investigating practitioners in Methodist tradition it is possible to offer examples of what 're-imagined Christianity' might look like in a post-Christian environment from a denomination that has never sought to be in political or ecclesiological control. Indeed Bruce goes so far as to conclude that the very reason for Methodism's success was that it was a movement of social protest,⁶⁴ and Gladwell uses Methodism as an example of the transformation that can come about with a small group of people committed to change.⁶⁵ Methodism is positioned in such a place that as a denomination it has a history of schism and unity, small units of class meetings which are intentionally outward focussed for the purpose of mission, and a passion deep within its DNA which is about enabling people of every social class within society to have an identity and a respectability that other power structures have been and are, keen to prevent. Even within a secularised society, therefore,

⁶² Graham, et al., *Methods*, 202

⁶³ Murray-Williams, *Post-Christendom*, 8

⁶⁴ Bruce, *Dead*, 159-161

⁶⁵ Gladwell, Malcolm, *The Tipping Point* (London: Abacus, 2000), also quoted by Shier-Jones, Angela, 'Pioneering Circuit Ministry' in *Epworth Press*, 36:3, July 2008, 45

this juxtaposition between a corporate missional unit and personal esteem means that Methodism is implicitly able to adapt and adjust for the priority of mission in a way that other more powerful organisations fail to do.

The implications of post-Christendom provide the context for the mission-shaped conversation within the denominations. Christianity is ‘a minority language, only spoken by a few and needs a lot of translating.’⁶⁶ Alongside this, many Christians are living with the regular reality of headlines about scandals within leadership including sham marriages⁶⁷ and sex abuses perpetrated by priests.⁶⁸ As Murray-Williams notes, ‘the end of Christendom marks the collapse of a determined but ultimately futile attempt to impose Christianity rather than inviting people to follow Jesus.’⁶⁹ Whereas the Church was once seen as a pillar of society, Christians are now people who abuse their power or potentially flout the laws of the land. This thesis investigates small communities of people who are seeking to challenge these assumptions. The Church is a minority voice amongst many competing voices from people of different faiths or from those with no faith. Ex leaders have to lead in a Post-Christendom environment that is suspicious of authority, unfamiliar with God’s story, and yet open and actively interested in spirituality and community.

A Mission-Shaped Agenda

⁶⁶ Walton, *Reflective*, 46 and the CODEC research into Biblical Literacy, available at <http://pmpillips.posterous.com/pages/codecs-national-biblical-literacy-survey-2009> (11th April 2011)

⁶⁷ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-13044322> (12th April 2011)

⁶⁸ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10407559> (29th October 2010)

⁶⁹ Murray Williams, *Post-Christendom*, 47

By focussing on fx of church, and entering into this missiological argument via the emerging church movement, the cultural shift from Christendom to post-Christendom is often taken as a given, especially in some of the more recent mission-shaped publications. A fascinating counter to this assumption can be seen in *For the Parish*, which will be reviewed later in this section.

In 2004, the Archbishop's Council published the much-awaited *Mission-Shaped Church* (hereafter *MSC*) report. It subsequently became a best-seller, and laid the foundation for the FX Initiative. The report itself was the result of a two-year consultation process responding to the challenges discovered during the 'decade of evangelism' and taking into consideration some of the challenges beginning to be heard via the emerging church debate. As such, it is the most significant piece of missional work done by the Church of England in the last decade, commanding a reimagining of ecclesial vision, a multimillion pound budget for FX Initiative, the development of Ordained Pioneer Missioner⁷⁰ training and the institution of Bishop's Mission Orders⁷¹ in order to support the work of communities within the Parish system. The report has subsequently influenced the missional strategy for many denominations and agencies,⁷² provided the basis for an influx of books on the topic of being 'mission-shaped' and inspired criticism of both the report itself,

⁷⁰ http://www.acpi.org.uk/downloads/Ordained_Pioneer_Ministers_Guidelines.pdf (13th April 2011)

⁷¹ <http://www.churchofengland.org/clergy-office-holders/pastoralandclosedchurches/pastoral/bmos.aspx> (13th April 2011)

⁷² As of the submission of this thesis, Fresh Expressions had partnered with eight denominations and are also involving a larger number of agencies and organisations. <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/about/partners> (10th April 2011)

and of FX; the initiative and the missiology. This sub-chapter will give an overview of the main published material in order to demonstrate the impact that *MSC* has had within the British Church.

According to *MSC*, the Church, 'must prepare for change. New expressions of church and mission will be needed, new ways of thinking on ethics, politics and evangelism.'⁷³ *MSC* outlined the contemporary cultural climate by drawing conclusions from data on social trends, and then further developing the changing themes of a networked society,⁷⁴ consumer culture, and post-Christendom.

'Church plants and fresh expressions of church represent the emergence of a diametrically different approach [to mission] that is both theologically appropriate and strategically significant.'⁷⁵

The report notes the cultural shifts taking place in a UK context and offers a narrative which both takes these shifts seriously and offers the Church of England means and methods of response. The intention was a missiology based on an incarnational model of contextual theology, rather than the attractional model that inherently superseded the report.

⁷³ Murray-Williams, *Post-Christendom*, 3

⁷⁴ The report cites the work of Castells, Manuel, *The Rise of Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2nd ed. 2000) when it describes the networked society of the twenty-first century. The theory of networks has continued to be of interest to sociologists and to the continuing developments in social media. Further evidence of this can be found in Holland, John, *Emergence: From Chaos to Order*, (Oxford: OUP, 1998), Johnson, Steve, *Emergence* (London: Penguin, 2001), Surowiecki, James, *The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many are Smarter than the Few* (London: Abacus, 2004), Brafman, Ori, and Rod A. Beckstrom, *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organisations* (New York, NY: Portfolio, Penguin, 2006), Shirky, Clay, *Here Comes Everybody: How Change Happens When People Come Together* (London: Penguin, 2009), Leadbeater, Charles, *We-Think: Mass Innovation not Mass Production* (London: Profile, 2009), Shirky, Clay, *Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age* (London: Allen Lane, 2010)

⁷⁵ *MSC*, 12

The influence of networks, globalisation, and consumer culture can be seen in the suggested groupings of the then newly-coined term ‘fresh expression.’ Although the list of twelve groupings no longer forms a part of FX’ working definitions, it is important to note the influence of consumer culture and third-space literature with the inclusion of cafe-church;⁷⁶ the contextual theology of liberation theology in the inclusion of base-ecclesial communities; the importation of American evangelicalism through the language of seeker church;⁷⁷ and the liturgical rituals developed by alternative worship communities.⁷⁸ MSC attempts to provide the cross-sections of church life and experience being experimented with at the turn of the millennium. Early fx of church utilised church buildings and planted separate congregations within the church premises,⁷⁹ although more work is now being encouraged which takes contextualisation outside of church premises.

MSC states that ‘it explores how we are called to be and to do church, and the benefits and disadvantages of existing Church of England expressions of church.’⁸⁰

As the strategies of FX have been invested in, this language of inherited church is

⁷⁶ Schultz, Howard and Dori Jones Yang, *Pour Your Heart Into It: How Starbucks Built a Company One Cup at a Time* (New York, NY: Hyperion, 1997), Hashemi, Sahar and Bobby Hashemi, *Anyone Can do It: Building Coffee Republic From Our Kitchen Table* (Chichester: Capstone, 2002), Lloyd, Michael, *Cafe Theology: Exploring Love, the Universe and Everything* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2006), Brown, Juanita, *The World Cafe: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations That Matter* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2005), Cohen, Ben and Jerry Greenfield, *Ben and Jerry’s Double Dip: How to Run a Values-Led Business and Make Money Too* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1997), and <http://www.cafechurch.net/> (17th April 2011)

⁷⁷ Hunter III, George, *Church for the Unchurched* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996)

⁷⁸ Baker, Jonny and Doug Gay, *Alternative Worship* (London: SPCK, 2003), Ward, Pete (ed.) *The Rite Stuff: Ritual in Contemporary Christian Worship and Mission* (Oxford: BRF, 2004), Baker, Jonny, *Curating Worship* (London: SPCK, 2010) and Dawn, Maggie, *The Writing on the Wall: High Art, Popular Culture and the Bible* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2010)

⁷⁹ The Methodist flagship fresh expressions of Tubestation <http://tubestation.org/> (17th April 2011), and Wesley’s Playhouse <http://www.thisisit.me.uk/> (17th March 2011), both renovated the church premises so that they were fit for a new purpose.

⁸⁰ MSC, 1

still dominant. MSC and FX are not intentionally offering an ecumenical or ‘deep’⁸¹ vision of ecclesio-missiology, despite the openness of FX to dialogue and funding from denominational and agency partners. Ford doubts whether such a broad church ‘[could] actually exist.’⁸² From the perspective of this thesis, it will be important to note whether fx take their denominational context seriously. I argue, along with Walton, that it is important for all Christian discipleship to ‘dig deep into the traditions as we have received them, to read them critically and creatively and to be open to their readings of us.’⁸³

Given that the report is from the Archbishop’s Council, the Church of England terminology should not be over-critiqued. However, if the report is going to continue to challenge and renew all the churches in strategic partnership with FX, the Anglican default for church and mission needs to be challenged.

‘The Anglican calling, because of theological conviction, is to be a church for all...To be a Church for the nation, the holes in our national network need to be filled.’⁸⁴

Neither in ecumenical conversations and commendations of this report, nor in the subsequent FX development, has such a theological conviction been scrutinised.

⁸¹ “Deep Church” is a phrase initially coined by CS Lewis, but now used by a number of constituencies to describe what Bretherton and Walker note as, ‘neither an attempt to simplify restate or reconstitute the Christian tradition, this is tantamount to ancestor worship, nor does it take its bearings from the emerging culture, to do this is simply to assimilate to the prevailing hegemony, rather, to be a deep church means to stand on the cusp or the breaking point of both the Christian tradition and the emerging culture, deeply rooted in the former while fully engaged in the latter’, Walker, Andrew and Luke Bretherton, *Remembering Our Future: Explorations in Deep Church* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), xvii and Belcher, Jim, *Deep Church: A Third Way Beyond Emerging and Traditional* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), and Orr-Ewing, Frog and Amy Orr-Ewing, *Deep: Passion, Character, Community* (Milton Keynes: Authentic, 2008)

⁸² Ford, John T., ‘Review: Deep Church’ *Religious Studies Review* 36:4, December 2010, 270

⁸³ Walton, *Reflective*, 26

⁸⁴ MSC, 35

However, it seems to be a fundamental premise for church planting and FX, especially as the UK context is now fuelled by the abstraction of the 'Big Society.'⁸⁵

Framing the discourse of fx with church planting initiatives necessarily introduces the planting methods of Holy Trinity Brompton and St Thomas Crookes, especially for an Church of England audience.⁸⁶ Although used as templates for church planting, they are qualified with the warning against developing clones rather than church plants. *MSC* makes clear that its priority is that 'contextual awareness and response rather than cloning a style or variety of church, is always the better missionary approach.'⁸⁷ Church planting models such as these feature in *MSC* despite such methods being much critiqued by fx practitioners in conversation. As FX comes to an evaluation review of its successes and failures over the last decade, the contrast of small fx communities will be judged alongside the bigger planting successes of these more traditional church planting models. For this thesis, it is noteworthy that Methodism has little contemporary history of church planting in this way. Although the Church planting agenda is part of a wider evangelism strategy within the Western Church, the full constituting of a new church is very rare within Methodism. A different study may elicit reasons why this is the case,

⁸⁵ Bretherton notes that 'what churches need to realise is that, whether they like it or not, in the eyes of the coalition government, they are already enacting the big society policy agenda', Bretherton, Luke, 'Big Society and Church', *Guardian: Comment is Free*, 7 October 2010 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2010/oct/07/big-society-church> (26th January 2011)

⁸⁶ See Murray, Stuart, *Planting Churches: A Framework for Practitioners* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), and *MSC*, 66, see also the observation that missional churches fail to grow to the same extent as city based large mega-churches, in Kimball, Dan, 'Missional Misgivings' http://blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur/archives/2008/12/dan_kimballs_mi.html (8th January 2009)

⁸⁷ *MSC*, 73

but the absence of church plants and yet the already stated statistical success for small fx communities says something quite profound about the missional identity of the Methodist Church as a small unit of people living in context together, over and against a larger gathering. As Hollinghurst notes, ‘the essential unit of cross-cultural evangelism will be small missionary communities, incarnations of the body of Christ in each culture.’⁸⁸ On the basis of the experiences of fx, the communities that are evolving are small missional teams of leaders who are supporting small communities of discipleship.

One of the neglected arguments within *MSC* is the need for clear succession planning within leadership strategies and community structures. Pioneers are, by definition, people who catalyse community. These entrepreneurial and creative personalities will require careful supervision and advice on exceptional succession planning, either through indigenous leaders or through the processes of the Methodist Church.

‘It will often be the case that a new leader should be recruited from outside. However, more consideration should be given to the possibility of the next leader emerging from the established team and, as necessary, being given further training in context.’⁸⁹

Succession management is a crucial question for many, but is even more significant with a new and fragile community. The transition of leaders is underlined here as a feature for the research. As will be discussed at length throughout the rest of this thesis, leadership succession and longevity are critical issues for the current fx

⁸⁸ Hollinghurst, *Evangelism*, 247

⁸⁹ *MSC*, 134

communities, not least of all because two of the three case studies were researched during a time of transition.

MSC is significant because it fuelled a conversation and provided the strategy by which the Church of England began to respond to cultural changes in the UK, and engaged and equipped the Church for contextual mission. The recommendations at the end of the report tackle some of the more complex ecclesiological and governance issues that such passion and vision engender. The endorsement of the Archbishop of Canterbury also demonstrates the significance of the mission-shaped agenda for the Church of England. In hindsight, and in light of the experiences reflected in the rest of this thesis, it is arguable whether the report itself goes far enough. It was an invitation that the Church has taken, and along with ecumenical partners, has wrestled with ever since.

The report and its consequential decisions continue to be criticised. Most notably, John Hull's *Mission-Shaped Theology*,⁹⁰ who argues that *MSC* remains driven by Anglican ecclesiology rather than a wholesale alternative theology of mission. As Hull commented, 'we looked for a mission-shaped Church and found a church shaped mission.'⁹¹ Fresh Expression's own response *Mission-Shaped Questions*,⁹²

⁹⁰ Hull, John, *Mission-Shaped Church: A Theological Response* (London: SCM, 2006)

⁹¹ Hull, A *Theological Response*, 36

⁹² Croft, Steven (ed.) *Mission-Shaped Questions: Defining Issues for Today's Culture* (London: Church House, 2008)

and the most recent *For the Parish*,⁹³ which one fx leader referred to in conversation as a 'blistering attack on all things mission-shaped.'

MSC has also spawned a range of responses from different constituent groups within the Church of England, furthering the criticism that the mission-shaped agenda promotes homogenous units. The intention of the Mission-Shaped series is to provide discussion and reflection from practitioners about the ways in which *MSC* is adopted and adapted in different parish contexts. It is easy to neglect the ecumenical impact that *MSC* has engendered. In *Mission-Shaped Spirituality*, Hope provides a vision of apostolic ministry that calls clergy afresh to the adventure of missional leadership. She concludes:

'clergy may need adventure more than anyone else. Most – highly motivated, sensitive, passionate, caring, longing to be used effectively in the service of the gospel of God – signed up so that they could make a difference.'⁹⁴

Her thesis, as with all those who contribute to the mission-shaped series, is interspersed with narrative examples of leadership and church life, reflections and scripture. Hope takes the outward focus of the *missio Dei*, and notes that the force behind the missional agenda is none other than the Holy Spirit. This theological assertion offers much to *MSC* and provides a strong foundation onto which a deeper pneumatology can be appropriated and discussed.⁹⁵ Walton points out the

⁹³ Davison, Andrew and Alison Milbank, *For The Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions* (London: SCM, 2010)

⁹⁴ Hope, Susan, *Mission-Shaped Spirituality* (London: Church House, 2006), 108

⁹⁵ Marsh, Clive, 'Appealing to 'Experience: What does it mean?', in Marsh, Clive et al (eds.), *Unmasking Methodist Theology* (London: Continuum, 2004), 126-8 and Jones, Charles Edwin, 'Reclaiming the Text in Methodist-Holiness and Pentecostal traditions', http://wesley.nmu.edu/wesleyan_theology/theojrnl/26-30/30-2-08.html (22nd April 2007), Kim, Kirsteen, *The Holy Spirit in the World: A Global Conversation* (London: SPCK, 2007), Kim, Kirsteen, *Joining with the Spirit: Connecting World Church and Local Mission* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2009),

flaw in Hope's 'one-way traffic' of following mission-shaped spirituality as he detects that,

'Hope, like so many other writers in the field, implies that Christian spirituality is about what the church can bring to others, and not so much about what might be received.'⁹⁶

The shift from an attractational model of evangelism and discipleship risks ignoring the mutual transformation that is evident in contextual missiology.⁹⁷

Responding to the perception that *MSC* and *FX* exist and succeed primarily in suburban environments, *Mission-Shaped and Rural* offers an exploration of a mission-shaped agenda within the countryside. This contribution offers a profound emotional reflection on the changing landscape of Christian attendance, and is a stark reminder that in the countryside, Parish churches are in a spiral of decline. Gaze notes, 'some models of church will continue to connect as rural culture continues to change and will develop, flourish and bear fruit.'⁹⁸ Her concluding words offer a haunting recognition of the struggles of the countryside as well as the hope, 'together, we are dying to live.'⁹⁹ There are examples throughout Gaze's book which demonstrates that there are examples of authentic, culturally appropriate mission using tourism, ecology, agriculture and community

Cox, Harvey, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality And the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 1995), Drane, John, *Do Christians Know How to Be Spiritual: The Rise of Spirituality and the Mission of the Church* (London: DLT, 2005), and Alison Morgan, 'What Does the Gift of the Spirit mean for the Shape of the Church', in Croft, *Questions*

⁹⁶ Walton, *Reflective*, 67

⁹⁷ Donovan, Vincent, *Christianity Rediscovered* (London, SCM, 2nd edition, 1982) and Bosch, David, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 420-432

⁹⁸ Gaze, Sally, *Mission-Shaped and Rural: Growing Churches in the Countryside* (London: Church House, 2007), 105-6

⁹⁹ Gaze, *Rural*, 109

development, albeit in entirely Church of England contexts. One colleague commented in conversation that ‘a more Anglican book would be hard to find.’

Walton, although broadly affirmative of *MSC* and *FX*, offers a series of concerns about the document and subsequent inheritance. Although I comment on the ecumenical absences, Walton pushes this even further. He notes that there is a lack of interfaith engagement in the developing missiology, which for something which takes contemporary culture so seriously, is a perilous omission for some cities in the UK.¹⁰⁰ Citing Peter’s meeting with Cornelius in Acts 10, Walton again picks up his criticism of the seeming inability of the Church to be informed and transformed by God through culture. By failing to give God credit for being active in the world outside the control of the Church, there are significant dangers to the developing spirituality, catechesis and worshipping life of the evolving communities.¹⁰¹ It will be important for this thesis to observe how communities assimilate and share their theology as a community, and how this is communicated back into the Church.

Although not part of the mission-shaped series, Hollinghurst has taken on the mission-shaped agenda in his contribution *Mission-Shaped Evangelism*.

Hollinghurst argues that evangelism should not be dislocated from the discipleship and community work of *fx*. Given Walton’s critique of *MSC* being too church-orientated, it is significant that Hollinghurst advocates that within *fx*, ‘God [is]

¹⁰⁰ Walton, *Reflective*, 68

¹⁰¹ Walton, *Reflective*, 70-74

enabling a great spiritual awakening, not in the church but outside it.’¹⁰² His central contestation is people in contemporary UK society are engaging in spirituality in a variety of ways. Hollinghurst offers the *MSC* agenda the opportunity to reflect on ways of sharing ‘good news in today’s cultures,’¹⁰³ which are grounded in, but distinctive from, the models and methods of the past. These include offering a theology of atonement which reflects the different orthodox theologies of the Christian faith;¹⁰⁴ engaging with the questions of spirituality that people are asking,¹⁰⁵ especially when it comes to the supernatural and creation;¹⁰⁶ enabling diversity, individuality, and community in a way that precludes conflict; and to participate in social action as a means of evangelism and kingdom living. As with those writing in the mission-shaped series, Hollinghurst goes on to provide stories and evidence of practical ways that these areas have been used by Christian groups in order to share their faith authentically and compassionately. Hollinghurst offers further support to Hope’s argument that fx needs to be more pneumatologically literate.

Alongside the mission-shaped series, a further body of work is beginning to be written and produced by FX. These include a series of DVDs which showcase the communities that demonstrate what it might mean to begin a community for those

¹⁰² Hollinghurst, *Evangelism*, 59

¹⁰³ Hollinghurst, *Evangelism*, 198-216

¹⁰⁴ See also Chalke, Steve and Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), Green, Joel, *Salvation* (St Louis, MO: Chalice, 2003), Green, Joel and Mark Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), Mann, Alan, *Atonement for a Sinless Society: Engaging with an Emerging Culture* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005) and Bell, Rob, *Love Wins* (London: Harper Collins, 2011)

¹⁰⁵ Frost, Rob, *A Closer Look at New Age Spirituality* (Eastborne: Kingsway, 2001)

¹⁰⁶ See McFague, Sally, *Super, Natural Christians* (London: SCM, 1997)

with no experience of the Christian faith.¹⁰⁷ These DVDs accentuate further the narrative theology which undergirds much of the analysis and communication of fx, and promotes a narrative and an ethnographic method for this thesis too.

FX has not shied away from its critics, nor from the difficult questions that the method and experience has presented for the Church and for practitioners. This is most evident in the *Mission-Shaped Questions* tour and subsequent book.¹⁰⁸ Topics open for debate and discussion include Atkins and Drane offering reflections on what constitutes a church;¹⁰⁹ Dakin promoting a global worldview for mission;¹¹⁰ and a series of biblical investigations questioning whether the praxis of fx is scripturally orthodox.¹¹¹ *Mission-Shaped Questions* is a sympathetic yet robust exploration of some of the early issues being raised by fx of church. It is sympathetic in that it takes for granted the value and vision of fx as a missiological approach, although employed the insights of respected theologians rather than practitioners, in order to respond their experiences.

¹⁰⁷ *Fresh Expressions DVD 1* <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/resources/dvd1/> and *Fresh Expressions DVD 2* <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/resources/dvd2/>

¹⁰⁸ Croft, *Questions*

¹⁰⁹ Atkins, Martyn, 'What is the Essence of the Church', in Croft, *Questions* 16-28, and Drane, John, 'What Does Maturity in the Emerging Church Look Like?', in Croft, *Questions*, 90-102

¹¹⁰ Dakin, Tim, 'What is at the Heart of a Global Perspective on the Church', in Croft, *Questions*, 42-53

¹¹¹ Dunn, James, 'Is there Evidence for Fresh Expressions of Church in the New Testament', in Croft, *Questions*, 54-65, and Alexander, Loveday, 'What Patterns of Church and Mission are found in the Acts of the Apostles', in Croft, *Questions*, 133-145

A later analysis of FX is *Evaluating Fresh Expressions*.¹¹² Although the method is similar to *Mission-Shaped Questions* insofar as it constitutes mainly academic theologians offering insight and reflections upon fx and communities, it also invites a number of - mainly Anglican - practitioners to offer their reflections. The text includes both proponents of FX, and those who contest that in order to remain prophetic and culturally distinct, fx need to remain outside of denominational control.¹¹³ *Evaluating Fresh Expressions* demonstrates the continued learning and theological reflective practice that characterises fx. Produced towards the end of the first phase of FX' life, this book clearly shows that practitioners and members of the FX initiative are willing to be scrutinised and questioned through every development, and from numerous angles.

Such scrutiny has led furthermore to the development of the Ancient-Faith, Future-Mission series of books, which take a specific tradition within the Anglican tradition and exposes it to the implications and practices of the mission-shaped agenda.

Fresh Expressions in the Sacramental Tradition answers the questions of those who argue that 'an authentic mark of the church is its sacramentality.'¹¹⁴ Again resulting from a conference, this text explores how sacramental elements of the Christian faith are incorporated or central to the development of new communities, both in the UK and in the USA. The contributors in this compilation are almost universally

¹¹² Nelstrop, Louise, and Martyn Percy (eds.), *Evaluating Fresh Expressions: Explorations in Emerging Church* (Norwich: Canterbury, 2008)

¹¹³ See Rollins, Pete, 'Biting the Hand that Feeds: an Apology for Encouraging Tension Between the Established Church and Emerging Collectives', in Nelstrop and Percy (eds.), *Evaluating*, 71-84

¹¹⁴ Croft, Steve, and Ian Mobsby, *Fresh Expressions in the Sacramental Tradition* (Norwich: Canterbury, 2009), viii

practitioners, reflecting on the practices and learning from their own, often alternative worship style, communities. Together, they explore the rites, rituals, metaphors and mystery of the Christian tradition, and argue,

‘we can choose to work with God, with all the risks that will entail, or we can hold back and opt to cling onto the familiar, with all the dire risks that will entail.’¹¹⁵

The most recent tradition to be rediscovered in the missional framework of fx is that of monasticism. *New Monasticism as Fresh Expression of Church*¹¹⁶ is the first attempt to join together the diverse streams of emerging thought on the benefits of monastic rhythms of life as part of missional community.¹¹⁷ For FX, the interest in monastic rhythms comes about through the desire to bring cohesion and meaning into community development; willingness to be linked with a community through covenant relationships in a networked society; need to sustain the habits of character discipleship (Methodists might name this ‘holiness’); and because the self-discipline of monasticism speaks profoundly and prophetically into a consumerist worldview. Each contribution offers a model of monasticism which links together abundant generosity, ecological concern, personal discipleship, spiritual disciplines and hospitality – or else offer examples of communities where these are already practiced and evidenced. Given the transient nature of

¹¹⁵ Burns, Stuart, ‘Concluding Thoughts’, in Croft and Mobsby, *Sacramental*, 172

¹¹⁶ Cray, Graham, Ian Mobsby and Aaron Kennedy (eds.), *New Monasticism as Fresh Expressions of Church* (Norwich: Canterbury, 2011)

¹¹⁷ See also Simpson, Ray, *The Church of the Isles*, (Suffolk: Kevin Mayhew, 2003), Bessenecker, Scott, *The New Friars* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), Jamison, Christopher, *Finding Sanctuary: Monastic Steps for Everyday Life* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2006), Claiborne, Shane, *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), Freeman, Andy, *PunkMonk*, (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2007), Wilson-Hartgrove, Jonathan, *New Monasticism: What it has to Say to Today’s Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2008) and Adams, Ian, *Cave, Refectory, Road: Monastic Rhythms for Contemporary Living* (Norwich: Canterbury, 2010)

contemporary life, and the time-limited strategy of FX, it is particularly stark that Burns concludes,

‘one of the gifts of ‘traditional’ monastic life is its long haul perspective of life commitment: a life commitment to live with the same bunch of people come what may, so that rather than walk away, one has to work through the difficulties.’¹¹⁸

The rediscovery of monasticism as missional method acts as a reminder to the FX and MSC agendas that discipleship is a life-long endeavour of a ‘koinonia’ community.¹¹⁹ Mission-shaped Christianity in the twenty-first century is neither private nor individualistic.

What is most significant in texts from FX is that they too are neither private nor individualistic. The collaborative nature of the texts demonstrates that as communities are formed within a locality, theological reflection and denominational challenge is done in dialogue with other practitioners. As such, it will be once again important to incorporate an ethnographic method into this thesis, in order to enable the voice of the reflective practitioner to be heard in the context of their community.

The most sustained and influential critique of FX is *For the Parish*. It begins with the observation that FX ‘is already a commodity in the American supermarket: a brand of scented cat litter.’¹²⁰ This sets the tone for the rest of book. The research method is based entirely on the written texts of MSC, rather than on the lived experience of communities. In terms of *For the Parish*, the lack of written materials

¹¹⁸ Burns, Stuart, ‘Reflections on New Monasticism’, in Cray et al., *Monasticism*, 143

¹¹⁹ Roberts, Andrew, ‘The Acts of the Apostles’, 29

¹²⁰ Davison and Milbank, *For The Parish*, x

of any level on *MSC* is an obvious and immediate drawback to a text that ultimately draws conclusions based on an unfair and unrealistic caricature.¹²¹

For the Parish sees no irony in critiquing the ecumenically diverse FX initiative on not being parish based, 'they are not intended to be out-workings of the mission of the local church but independent entities without any relation to the parish in which they operate.'¹²² *MSC* indicated that missional ecumenism was aspirational. The cross-denominational constituency of FX means that it is impossible to suggest that a Parish model will now universally work for FX.¹²³

'The division of Christendom into parishes...evolved...as the basic unit of ecclesiastical administration and pastoral care...clergy and laity recognised their mutual obligations and knew they belonged in a Christian society and a culturally central church.'¹²⁴

The use of this denominationally limited language is stark, but consistent with the tenor of the rest of the text. This can be seen in contrast to the deliberately ecumenically inclusive language used by Shier-Jones in her reflections on Pioneer Ministries.¹²⁵ This observation may offer interesting evidence for the fieldwork stage of research, especially given that one of the research sites is an ecumenical project. It raises questions as to whether there are denominational tensions within language or within practice at local level.

¹²¹ Graham Cray, 'For The Parish: A Response', (unpublished)

¹²² Davison and Milbank, *For The Parish*, vii

¹²³ See also Croft, Steve (ed.), *The Future of the Parish System: Shaping the Church of England of the 21st Century* (London: Church House, 2006) and Bayes, Paul and Tim Sledge, *Mission-Shaped Parish* (London: Church House, 2006)

¹²⁴ Murray-Williams, *Post-Christendom*, 69

¹²⁵ Shier-Jones, Angela, *Pioneer Ministry and Fresh Expressions of Church* (London: SPCK, 2009)

Given Milbank and Davison's inaccurate assumption that the Parish is the formational unit of discipleship,

‘the Parish is where we begin to learn the grammar of the Christian life, to play ourselves like an instrument. It is the nursery of heaven where we encounter all ages and sorts of people’¹²⁶

it will be important to notice how this is developed within a fx context, and to discover in what geographic or legal terms leaders define their work. Where is there a community of people who are enabled to develop the habits¹²⁷ of the Christian faith? Specific questions will be asked about the relationship of the community to its Circuit and local geographic context.

For the Parish continues to criticise fx for being homogenous units, formed around a specific hobby or target group.

‘They are special interest groups: ‘church’ whether of bikers, bookgroup members or participants in any other leisure activity or demographic that defines the consumerist criterion for membership.’¹²⁸

This is a fair assumption given that there are examples of surfing communities¹²⁹

and the ever-popular Messy Church.¹³⁰ What this fails to take into account,

however, is that networks in post-Christendom are mainly peer related. In order to form a community and to build relationships within such a socially networked society, it is important to be relationally and socially engaged with people. Thus surfing or craftwork, for example, become a vehicle for relational evangelism and

¹²⁶ Davison and Milbank, *For The Parish*, 211

¹²⁷ Wright, Tom, *Virtue Reborn* (London: SPCK, 2010), 37

¹²⁸ Davison and Milbank, *For The Parish*, vii

¹²⁹ www.tubestation.org (2nd January 2011)

¹³⁰ Moore, Lucy, *Messy Church: Fresh Ideas for Building a Christ-Centred Community* (Oxford: BRF, 2006) and Moore, Lucy, *Messy Church 2: Ideas for Discipling a Christ-Centred Community* (Oxford: BRF, 2009)

discipleship rather than the end product.¹³¹ This criticism belies a further problem with *For the Parish*, which assumes that Christendom still exists. The suggestion that the whole of social life revolves around a Parish system and the primacy of the local Parish Church and Parish priest neglects all of the contextual evidence already discussed in this review. Cray notes that even within Anglicanism, the Parish model is much more flexible than that portrayed by Milbank and Davison:

‘if, as the authors...claim, the parochial system ‘defines the C of E’s ecclesiology’ then that ‘definition’ has regularly been supplemented by additional provisions; chaplaincies of many sorts, chapel of ease, religious communities...and so on.’¹³²

For the Parish accuses fx of ‘a thorough going embrace of postmodernity’,¹³³ but in so doing denies the influence of culture and cultural change on the Church. *For the Parish* usefully warns against the complete inculturation of the church into consumerism, but fails to develop any cultural theory into the argument. As Cray points out, the authors criticise an incarnational approach to missiology, but neglect to comment on the method of contextual missiology in an historical context. ‘*For the Parish* may dislike this whole incarnational principle but it has been the theological basis of cross cultural mission around the world, mission which is now required here.’¹³⁴

Within contemporary denominational Church life, there are tensions and inter-denominational arguments about the nature and practice of ecclesiology. In the midst of this crisis, *MSC*, emerging church, and fx provide the opportunity for both

¹³¹ Frost and Hirsch note that, ‘heterogeneity is a discipleship issue, not a missional one’ in *Shaping*, 52

¹³² Cray, *For the Parish: A Response*

¹³³ Davison and Milbank, *For the Parish*, 117

¹³⁴ Cray, *For the Parish: A Response*

reflecting and learning from the past and leading forward into a renewed vision of the Church. Taylor contends that,

‘in this crisis there is opportunity. We can offer the culture the richness of our Christian heritage – the beauty of new expressions of faith and community that have the power to sustain us in a time of fragmentation.’¹³⁵

The language of crisis firmly places this continuing dialogue within the post-

Christendom arena, and thereby connects to the work of Brown, Bruce, Davie, and

Frost-Hirsch, who all talk in powerful and urgent terms about the context of

contemporary Western Christianity. However, Walton offers a valuable

observation into this emotional space by noting that ‘we should not expect

discipleship to be a question of simply passing on a fixed collection of traditions and

practices.’¹³⁶ It will be significant in the fieldwork phase of this research to observe

through collaboration and ethnographic methods, to what extent Christian

discipleship is viewed as a learning exercises of rites and rituals – the ‘grammar’¹³⁷

as Davison and Milbank put it, and to what extent it enables the investigation and

development of these rites and rituals for a contemporary society through a

relationship with Jesus.

A Methodist Contribution to Leadership in Times of Renewal.

It is important to note that ‘surprisingly little research has been published about

Methodist ministers in Great Britain’¹³⁸ Despite Haley’s quantitative study in 2006,

¹³⁵ Taylor, Steve, *The Out of Bounds Church?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Emergent YS, 2005), 27

¹³⁶ Walton, *Reflective*, 25

¹³⁷ Davison and Milbank, *For the Parish*, 211

¹³⁸ Haley, John and Leslie J. Francis, *British Methodism: What Circuit Ministers Really Think* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2006), 56

and some collated essays published at the turn of the millennium, there are very few pieces of empirical research or study on British Methodism. This project, therefore, offers a unique contribution to the fields of FX research, Methodist theology and practice, and into the wider academic sphere of practical theology.

From a popular perspective, Atkins' book *Resourcing Renewal* takes seriously the challenges of the *MSC* report. Atkins continues to frame the debate in the language of renewal, rather than reformation. For Atkins, any emerging ecclesiology is firmly grounded in the experience and understanding of the *missio Dei*. The Church is the ultimate fresh expression of God's active work in the world, and the necessary response of Christian disciples. 'At the heart of mission-shaped ecclesiology is the conviction that the Church, in a multitude of expressions, is essentially missionary in nature and character.'¹³⁹ The framing of fx, *MSC* and emerging church literature all focus at some point on what makes a church a church. Atkins constructs his reflections on mission-shaped ecclesiology in terms that reflect Murray-Williams' own Christendom and post-Christendom dichotomy.

'Those who believe that the essential nature and purpose of the church is primarily missiological rather than ecclesiological, seek to reverse the Christendom maxim that the church shapes mission. For them, the God of mission, active, alive and seeking to redeem all things, must always define and shape the Church, not vice versa. And because of that fresh expressions of church are a wonderful and welcome missiological inevitability.'¹⁴⁰

Atkins contends that 'fresh expressions can be models for the renewal of the

Church in the mission of God.'¹⁴¹ This thesis, by investigating three contexts in

which fx are evolving alongside traditional Methodist congregations, will need to

¹³⁹ Atkins, Martyn, *Resourcing Renewal* (Peterborough: Inspire, 2007), 37

¹⁴⁰ Atkins, *Renewal*, 46

¹⁴¹ Atkins, *Renewal*, 68

note whether there is any evidence that either are models of renewal for the other. Atkins is optimistic in his analysis of FX as being a source of renewal.¹⁴² Atkins offers another Methodist interpretation of renewal and mission, deeply rooted in his personal convictions and experience, and primarily written for a Methodist audience.¹⁴³ *Resourcing Renewal* is an accessible rather than academic text. Atkins argues that ecclesiology and missiology are inevitably intertwined in God's project of renewing the Church. This research takes some of Atkins' hunches and anecdotes, and further explores these insights and issues to discover what is happening within fx communities.

A scholarly approach to renewal movements is to be found in the writings of the Free Methodist, Howard Snyder. His work is important for fx and for this thesis, as he contests that Methodism acts a blueprint for renewal movements. Snyder defines a renewal movement through noting a series of markers for the community. A movement arises because of recognition of "better times" in the past. This is linked to acknowledgment of the immediacy and presence of the Holy Spirit at work in the world.¹⁴⁴ It is worth noting that McLaren commends, 'without this charismatic, contemplative posture, I can't imagine what my life would be.'¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Atkins, *Renewal*, 41

¹⁴³ The text of this book was printed during Atkins' Presidential year and thus informed his public addresses in 2007-8.

¹⁴⁴ Christopher Wright's 581 page thesis on the missio Dei contains 8 references to the Holy Spirit. See Wright, Christopher J. H., *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006)

¹⁴⁵ McLaren, Brian, *A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I am a Missional + Evangelical + Post/Protestant + Liberal/Conservative + Mystical/Poetic + Biblical + Charismatic/Contemplative + Fundamentalist/Calvinist + Anabaptist/Anglican + Methodist + Catholic + Green + Incarnational + Depressed-yet-hopeful + Emergent + Unfinished Christian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan YS, 2004), 180-181

Tensions also appear between the institution or denomination, and the new movement. This tension consequently means that the movement also finds itself in conflict with the world, and subsequently calls people to greater radical commitment. Renewal movements are also noticeable because of the significant number of lay people who take on positions of leadership. Radical engagement with and against the world begins to evolve in working on behalf of the poor and those who are marginalised for whatever reason. Renewal movements have a strong sense of justice. The final mark of a renewal movement is the energy it creates as more and more people are enlisted.¹⁴⁶ Further study into FX could explore how many, if all of these markers, are present within fx of Church.

Snyder is an important figure in these conversations because his work is picked up by other leading protagonists. Frost-Hirsch, for example, use Snyder to argue that the strain between movement and institution is necessary, agreeing with 'Snyder's observation that renewal movements typically live in tension with the dominant church institution.'¹⁴⁷ The argument incites the possible conclusion that movements exist better without an institutional infrastructure. Such are the leanings of academics such as Rollins, who push this further by concluding that by adopting FX into the institutional fold, it is actually a subversive action designed to silence the movement altogether. 'By the very process of [providing space], the radical voice of these groups is actually suppressed.'¹⁴⁸ However, Snyder is rather

¹⁴⁶ Snyder, Howard, *Signs of the Spirit: How God Reshapes the Church*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997), 24-25

¹⁴⁷ Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping*, 205

¹⁴⁸ Rollins, 'Biting the Hand That Feeds', in Nelstrop et al., *Evaluating*, 72

more influential because his work is being used as a recalibration and rediscovery of Christian identity as the subject of kingdom-living people, rather than institutional objects.¹⁴⁹

It is interesting that Snyder, and to a lesser extent, Atkins, have been brought into the debate about emerging and MSC. What is even more significant is that their arguments are evident in reports and evaluations and texts on the subject, but they and their other Methodist colleagues, unlike Reformed¹⁵⁰ and Anglican¹⁵¹ writers, are not heralded by the initiative as key contributors to the ongoing debate. Marsh reflects on this tendency more generally as he notes,

‘Although British Methodism is a theological movement, it plays down the fact, lest it seems too high-falutin. This helps us to see why British Methodism also plays down its individual theologians.’¹⁵²

There is lack of available Methodist voices and evidence feeding into the missiological conversation.

This being said, it is important to focus some attention on what makes the

Methodist strand of this thesis so appealing. Craske comments:

‘Given Methodism’s origins, it should be at the forefront of mission...Methodism should equally be at the forefront of enabling British Christianity to see what the contemporary equivalent of that past Methodist calling should be in its mission.’¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ Snyder, *Liberating*, 11 quoted in Atkins, *Resourcing*, 16, and Baker, Jonny, ‘A Quote’, http://jonnybaker.blogs.com/jonnybaker/2006/06/a_quote.html (12th February 2010)

¹⁵⁰ See Carson, D.A., *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and its Implications* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005) and Belcher, *Deep Church*.

¹⁵¹ See Mobsby, Ian, *Emerging and Fresh Expressions of Church: How are they Authentically Church and Anglican?* (London: Moot, 2007) and Volland, Michael, *Through the Pilgrim Door: Pioneering a Fresh Expression of Church* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 2009)

¹⁵² Marsh, *Unmasking*, 4

¹⁵³ Craske, Jane, ‘The Threads With Which We Weave: Towards a Holy Church’, in Craske, Jane and Clive Marsh, *Methodism and the Future: Facing the Challenge* (London: Continuum, 1999), 177

Methodism began as a movement, exhibiting all the signs already distinguished by Snyder. Guest and Taylor suggest that Methodism was the catalyst of the contextual mission method evidenced today.¹⁵⁴ Methodism's DNA is as a missional movement. Methodism, if it is still true to its identity, should continue be at the cutting edge of learning, practice and training when it comes to missional method. Part of this research project, therefore, is to investigate whether indeed fresh and fresh expression leaders identify with Methodism as a missional movement, and indeed whether these practitioners are trained, resourced and networked in such a way as to be able to share their reflections and experiences of being at the cutting edge of ministerial missional practice.

There is an apparent lack of confidence when it comes to contemporary Methodist identity, however. McLaren fails to offer Methodist rhetoric to his broad theological statement,

“I want to prepare like an Evangelical, preach like a Pentecostal, pray like a mystic, do the spiritual disciplines like a Desert Father, art like a Catholic and social justice like a liberal.”¹⁵⁵

For Percy, the reason for Methodist apathy is that Methodists are not known for much beyond temperance, and even that is dwindling.¹⁵⁶ Methodist people are unsure of their identity, or at least unable to conform to stereotypes.¹⁵⁷ It is interesting that even in McLaren's *Generous Orthodoxy*, he hopes for a 'new

¹⁵⁴ Guest, Mathew and Steve Taylor, 'The Post-Evangelical Emerging Church: Innovations in New Zealand and the UK', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 6:1, 49

¹⁵⁵ Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping*, 27

¹⁵⁶ Martyn Percy notes, 'I have yet to meet a Methodist who does not drink' in Marsh, *Unmasking*, 207

¹⁵⁷ For a detailed piece of research into Methodist practice see http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/methodist_denominational_report.pdf (27th January 2011) which offers a detailed analysis of Methodist responses to the Church Life Survey of 2001

Methodism, one as catalytic and relevant in our day as the Wesleys' was to theirs...May God save us from forgetting to look back.'¹⁵⁸ There is a danger that this silence in contemporary Methodism may make British Methodism a tradition of the past, with nothing to say in contemporary missiology and ecclesiology. By investigating the practices of fx, it will be important to see what vestige of Methodism and of renewal movements is present in these new communities, and in the theological identity of the leaders. Percy comments that,

'it is my belief that Methodism should focus and reflect on its core strength – those gifts and charisms that gave it a strong movement identity in the first place.'¹⁵⁹

Is Methodism mission-shaped? And if so, what is Methodism's unique contribution to the theological, practical and missiological development of FX? These will be key questions to investigate during the fieldwork phase.

When it comes to questions of presbyteral leadership in British Methodism, *What is a Minister*¹⁶⁰ is a formative text. It is a collection of essays and reflections from clergy and laity, all exploring the various different interpretations and understandings of ministerial practice within Methodism. 'Primarily, this book is about ministry as it is experienced day by day within the Methodist Church at the start of the twenty-first century.'¹⁶¹ Each contributor is engaged at some level in theological education, and as such demonstrates academic sensibility as well as the experience of training people for ministry. The book offers ten individual

¹⁵⁸ McLaren, *Generous Orthodoxy*, 220

¹⁵⁹ Percy, Martyn, 'Back to the future: A Search for a Thoroughly Modern Methodist Ecclesiology', in Marsh, *Unmasking*, 210

¹⁶⁰ Luscombe, Philip and Esther Shreeve, *What is a Minister?* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2002)

¹⁶¹ Luscombe and Shreeve, *Minister?*, xii

perspectives on the exercise of ministry within the Methodist Church, from servanthood, and sacramental ministry, to an exploration of the diaconate. There is no over-arching theme or narrative to which the authors subscribe, and there is no coherent conclusion to answer the question of what is a minister. Marsh comments that the contemporary circuit minister experiences the presbyterate as, '[an] unreasonable ratbag of responsibilities and roles.'¹⁶² His conclusion is supported by the statistics and analysis recorded in *British Methodism*¹⁶³ and quickly begins to raise further questions about the psychological wellbeing of presbyters and leaders of Methodist communities.¹⁶⁴ A question for this thesis is whether this is the same for those in presbyteral leadership of a fresh expression.

It is clear from the contributions in *What is a Minister?* that there is a deconstruction happening in terms of presbyteral leadership. Griffiths notes, 'it is my view that the demystification of the minister's role and the democratisation of ministerial activity are among that most serious mistakes that were made in the twentieth century.'¹⁶⁵ An investigation into fx and presbyteral leadership needs to reflect on whether what is discovered is another symptom of leadership malaise, or a prescription to it. Marsh intimates that presbyters are people who are theologians in residence, acting as local guardians, and leading worship, including Communion, in ways that are contextual, offering pastoral oversight and

¹⁶² Marsh, Clive, 'Priests and Prophets but Not Servants: The Presbyterate Between the Body of Christ and the Reign of God', in Luscombe and Shreeve, *Minister?*, 73

¹⁶³ Haley, John and Leslie J. Francis, *British Methodism: What Circuit Ministers Really Think* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2006)

¹⁶⁴ It is worth noting here that Howcroft delineates between the role of Presbyter with that of a leader, and advocates that they need not be the same thing. See Howcroft, Ken, 'Ministerial Roles in Methodism', in Luscombe and Shreeve, *Minister?*, 147

¹⁶⁵ Leslie Griffiths, 'What is a Presbyter', in Luscombe and Shreeve, *Minister?*, 19

management where necessary and appropriate.¹⁶⁶ It will be interesting to see if there are parallels of this vision in the exercise of leadership within fx, and who gives permission for these to be taken up. Are leadership roles a right of the community or an authority of the overseeing denomination? This research will need to test which of these is the case, in turn asking serious questions about succession management.

From the dialogue in the emerging church, the implications of *MSC*, and argument in *What is a Minister*, it is possible to conclude that

‘there is an urgent need today for the Church to consider creatively and imaginatively how the whole body of presbyteral ministers can best be used to enable the Church to be a sign, a foretaste and instrument of the kingdom in the twenty-first century.’¹⁶⁷

This thesis feeds into this creative tension and offers direct evidence as to what is currently happening in local situations with presbyters stationed in fx communities.

As Luscombe wisely notes, ‘ordained ministry has the task of mission and not maintenance.’¹⁶⁸ A contemporary reader now analyses this in light of *MSC*, rather than on its own terms.

A Methodist contribution to the body of FX literature is hard to find, but the single authored monograph *Pioneer Ministry and Fresh Expressions of Church* is one such

¹⁶⁶ Marsh, Clive, ‘Priests and Prophets but Not Servants’ in Luscombe and Shreeve, *Minister?*

¹⁶⁷ Bellamy, Clifford, ‘Calling or Cop-out? Sector Ministry Today’, in Luscombe and Shreeve, *Minister?*, 64

¹⁶⁸ Luscombe, Philip, ‘Where is the Minister?: The Place of Ministry’, in Luscombe and Shreeve, *Minister?*, 40

example.¹⁶⁹ Shier-Jones comments on the stereotype of pioneer-type leaders, and thus raises the question of the function of leaders within fx.

‘Someone wading through the wealth of material available on the internet on pioneer ministers and fresh expressions of church ...could be forgiven for assuming that all pioneer ministers are young, energetic, IT savvy, wear jeans and polo shirts, and predominantly (although not exclusively) middle class.’¹⁷⁰

I would add ‘white’ and ‘male’ to this list, and Bielo adds educated and upper-middle class to his stereotype.¹⁷¹ It is a source of much anecdotal reference that most pioneer-type leaders within the church are both under forty and male. Shier-Jones therefore offers two significant points for this thesis. She highlights the importance of noting the effect of gender in fx of church, both for leaders and the leadership teams that they work alongside. In terms of this thesis, it is thereby important to be intentional in selecting at least one female leader for the fieldwork stage of research.

Shier-Jones offers the first attempt at exploring what pioneer ministry may look like in FX. It is a practical workbook outlining the importance of vocation and vision on the part of the pioneer, and then offering key pieces of advice about developing teams, protecting the Self, growing as a disciple and maintaining the boundaries of ministry. The method of the text is a reflective tone, using case studies and scripture to further defend the development of fx and pioneering ministry within a Methodist context. As such, the text fits well with the tone and tenor of the mission-shaped series. Shier-Jones makes clear that even newly appointed

¹⁶⁹ Shier-Jones, *Pioneer*

¹⁷⁰ Shier-Jones, *Pioneer*, 3

¹⁷¹ Bielo, James S., ‘The ‘Emerging Church’ in America: Notes on the Interaction of Christianities’, *Religion* (2009), [doi:10.1016/j.religion.2009.02.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.religion.2009.02.007) (17th February 2009)

pioneers, 'should expect to undertake theological training.'¹⁷² This raises the question for this thesis about the continuing training and development of leaders, and to what extent pioneering-types are supported and in what areas of training they require support and intervention. This text offers success indicators, as well as cautious reminders about the welfare of ministers – both of which are applicable to the wider exercise of ministry beyond the fringe of fx.

A Practical Theology for a Mission-Shaped Church

Practical theology as a discipline in its own right only came to the fore in the latter part of the twentieth century. At its most basic, it is 'a way of looking at the world with which you will be familiar already.'¹⁷³ It is a method of taking both contemporary context and theology seriously, and as such finding a reflective and altered understanding and response to a situation, experience or concept.

'Practical theologies' task is to make practice more theological and in that way it makes theology more practical.'¹⁷⁴ Practical theology is, therefore, an important methodology of this thesis, as it takes seriously the contemporary context of postmodernism, rises to the criticism placed upon *MSC* and *For the Parish* by offering case studies of the experience of leadership within fx, and builds on this experience by offering reflection and further work to be undertaken by leaders at all levels of the Church. It is also an important method choice for this project

¹⁷² Shier-Jones, *Pioneer*, 18

¹⁷³ Croft, Steven and Roger Walton, *Learning for Ministry: Making the Most of Study and Training* (London: Church House, 2008)

¹⁷⁴ Cameron, Helen et al., *Talking About God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology*, (London: SCM, 2011), 17

because, as Walton suggests, ‘disciples who live openly in the world will want and need to tell their stories.’¹⁷⁵ Practical theology enables the narrative to be told, and the underlying reflective practice of ‘ordinary’ Christian disciples to be shared in ways that honour their lived experience, but also enable others to journey with them. The implication of this for this thesis is that there is far more reflective practice happening within these communities than immediately seems apparent.¹⁷⁶ Practical theology is a way of capturing this ground-level theological practice, in a robust way. It is also a way of allowing communities to come to a greater self-understanding of their practice in theological terms.

Practical theology is not without its own critics. As a discipline it is still viewed in many quarters as a lesser partner to the discipline of theology.¹⁷⁷ Pattinson goes so far as to suggest that students should be ‘steered towards the empirical’ because that will guarantee a commitment to rigorous research.¹⁷⁸ Practical theology, after all, has the potential to be wholly reliant upon contextual practice and/or run the risk of using a multiplicity of data in uncritical and untrained ways. The focus on experience as a priority,¹⁷⁹ and the amalgamation and importation of different disciplines can reduce the focus on theological discovery and orthodoxy. The multi-disciplinarity of practical theology potentially demands much of the theologian,

¹⁷⁵ Walton, *Reflective*, 106

¹⁷⁶ Astley, *Ordinary*

¹⁷⁷ Browning, Don, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996), 3. Ballard and Pritchard call practical theology a ‘Cinderella field in theology’ in Ballard, Paul, and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society* (London: SPCK, 1996), 1

¹⁷⁸ Pattinson, Stephen, *The Challenge of Practical Theology: Selected Essays* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2007), 275

¹⁷⁹ Davison and Milbank, *For the Parish*, 128

who risks stumbling into other disciplines, running the risk of plundering these alternative resources whilst unknowingly neglecting crucial nuances or trends therein.

In recent years practical theology has continued to develop credibility and rigour as a discipline. Ward notes that 'disembodied theology is gradually being replaced by a concern to locate the doctrinal in the practices and expression of Christian communities and traditions.'¹⁸⁰ Practical theology is now held in good standing in ministerial practice, academic studies, and therapeutic care. It is a recognised part of formal theological training, largely because it takes context, experience, and theology seriously. '[Practical theology] is not a discipline which can be undertaken only at second hand in an armchair with a book.'¹⁸¹ It recognises the lived experience of both the researched and the researcher. This is the case for this project. Practical theology cannot be dislocated from the experience in which it examines, and should not exist merely as an intellectual pursuit. One aim of practical theology is informed practice, which is further developed in the development of 'Action-research' models of practical theology.¹⁸² Practical theology is an ever evolving piece of work.

The inclusion of experience in amongst empirical analysis and ethnographic research, where appropriate, is a good place for an investigation into Methodist

¹⁸⁰ Ward, Pete, *Participation and Mediation: Practical Theology for the Liquid Church* (London: SCM, 2008), 48

¹⁸¹ Pattinson, *Challenges of Practical Theology*, 250

¹⁸² See Cameron et al., *Talking About God*, and McNiff J and Jack Whitehead, *Doing and Writing Action Research* (London: Sage, 2009)

theology and practice to begin. Methodism is renowned for its theological preference towards experience.

‘Experience...is the governing principle with Methodism all the way through, not only with respect to the actualities of personal religion, but with regard to religious rites, and ecclesiastical regulations, and evangelistic methods, and indeed everything else.’¹⁸³

Cracknell further notes, ‘[Methodism has] a corresponding prominence given to the relationship between faith and experience.’¹⁸⁴ As will be stated throughout this thesis, Methodism is thus a pragmatic movement. By this, I mean that by intentionally prioritising both faith and experience, Methodist practice is primarily determined by “what works.” On an initial view, this could lead to missing the intentional reflexive practice that is actually going on. Cracknell notes that the theological questions of Methodist spirituality are always grounded with the question of how to put it into practice:

‘There was nothing considered so ‘crass’ or ‘worldly’ that it fell outside the scope of Methodist Spirituality...The question “how should we pray” was always intertwined with the question “what are we to do.”’¹⁸⁵

Methodism as a movement is interested not only in the reflection, but in the incorporation of renewed and revitalised practice because of an experience. Throughout this thesis, therefore, the shorthand that Methodism is pragmatic means that it is a movement which explores experience and seeks to ground theology and reflection in a practical way: what Maddox calls ‘practical divinity.’¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Bett, H., *The Spirit of Methodism* (London: Epworth, 1937), 125-6

¹⁸⁴ Cracknell, Kenneth, and Susan J. White, *An Introduction to World Methodism* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), 93

¹⁸⁵ Cracknell, *World Methodism*, 157

¹⁸⁶ Maddox, Randy, *Rethinking Wesley’s Theology for Contemporary Methodism* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood, 1998), 35. Maddox goes on to argue that Wesley’s theological method was that of practical theology, incorporating systematic theology into practical and applicable action.

Renewed reflected practice is often implicit in Methodist spirituality, and as such can often go unnoticed by an observer, and be subconscious by those doing it.

In responding to critics of the discipline of practical theology, Ward notes that:

‘the kind of critique, analysis, theological construction and creativity demanded by academic work can no longer be seen as being a different kind of thinking to that which takes place on a day to day basis in Christian communities.’¹⁸⁷

Theological reflection is to be grounded in the context of daily practice within a community of Christian disciples. This makes practical theology a significant contribution to the way in which the Church is able to understand, reflect and respond to the challenges of fx. Practical theology is appropriate for a study of fx communities because of their innovation and creativity. The energy within the communities to try new things and to re-discover ancient traditions, coupled with the freedom given to leaders and communities by the mainstream denominations means that there is a wealth of experience and reflection happening at a grassroots level, but which needs to find a rigorous and credible way of affecting policy, change and further investigation. The risk is that the current learning from fresh expression communities is not translated into the everyday experience of denominations, of other church communities, nor indeed into the academic environment.

¹⁸⁷ Ward, *Participation and Mediation*, 48

O'Connell suggests that practical theology is part of the role of discipleship, '[all] Christians are called to theological reflection.'¹⁸⁸ Practical theology puts theological reflection into the hands of those participating in community, rather than being the right and privilege of those who are trained and set apart. This contrasts with the argument of Hauerwas who proposes that theology and scripture should remain in the hands of those who are capable of communicating the message correctly.¹⁸⁹ Theology is not an ivory tower exercise, it is an engaging discipline that involves, incorporates and informs the whole life and practice of the people of God. As Ward contends, practical theology is 'the spiritual discipline whereby those in the Church reflect critically on their contemporary forms of expression and practice.'¹⁹⁰ It is thus useful because it is engaging with the lived experience of individual or groups. It does, however, run the risk of becoming so insular that it fails to engage with the global context of which it is a part.

One benefit of practical theology is that it is a liberating form of theology, which serves to promote the voice of those who have been previously marginalised. This is a useful note to be made, given that the emerging church vision is for an increased marginalisation of Christian community, a deliberate shifting of Church focus to be about engaging outside of what Frost-Hirsch call the 'bounded [or

¹⁸⁸ O'Connell Killen, Patricia and John De Beer, *The Art of Theological Reflection* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1994), 143

¹⁸⁹ Hauerwas, Stanley and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1993)

¹⁹⁰ Ward, *Participation and Mediation*, 165

centre] set.’¹⁹¹ A good example of this liberation of the marginalised is *Nobodies to Somebodies*. Reddie working on the experience of education for those within the Black community, comments that, ‘practical theology can be understood in many ways.’¹⁹² He goes on to develop his research based on a dialogical method, arguing that ‘practical theology is essentially a continuing dialogue between the ways in which people think about God and how these ideas and forms of understanding are practiced.’¹⁹³ Reddie’s research is helpful in that it demonstrates the use of research method in the context of developing resources for, and tools for, worship and discipleship education. For Reddie, its advantage is that it is a discipline that gives a voice to all participants, and equalises all those involved in the process.

Practical theologians today would contest that all theology is practical theology. ‘It is our contention that ‘theological reflection’ is not a novel or exceptional activity. Rather, it has constituted Christian ‘talk about God’ since the very beginning.’¹⁹⁴

In their two-part work on *Theological Reflections*, Graham, Walton and Ward use seven lenses through which to view theological reflection. These seven lenses of theological reflection are emotional intelligence and spiritual disciplines; scripture and story; incarnational theology and revelation; communal development of

¹⁹¹ Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping*, 33-59, and 206-210. See also Edson, Ben, ‘Called to the Centre?’, <http://www.sharetheguide.org/blog/archive/2009/07/20/called-to-the-centre-by-ben-edson> (29th January 2011) where Edson states, ‘whilst I recognise the importance of the relationship to centre, it seems that we need to nurture the new emerging edges rather than the edges defined by the centre.’

¹⁹² Reddie, Anthony, *Nobodies to Somebodies: A Practical Theology for Education and Liberation* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2003), 3

¹⁹³ Reddie, *Nobodies*, 4

¹⁹⁴ Graham et al., *Methods*, 1

narrative theology; public engagement; theological action; and local or marginal theologies.

‘We have chosen to take a number of historical ‘snapshots’ that we think are indicative and exemplary of the development of each method, and suggest processes of creative theological thinking.’¹⁹⁵

Although not caricatures of methods, the seven perspectives are presented in a way that demonstrates the historical developments behind each model, and key theologians who have contributed to its development. In some cases, there is a need to cross-reference some of the models, and to be aware that they are not presented as final authorised categories for theological reflection. Indeed, this project requires the methods and resources of at least three of the methods: narrative theology, local theology and incarnational theology. Rather, the models outline seven perspectives of theological reflection with scriptural, historical and systematic developments. *Method and Sources*¹⁹⁶ together offer a good categorisation of the range of approaches that practical theology can take, and make a keen argument for the primacy of scripture and traditional theological reference points within research and reflection. This goes some way to respond to the earlier criticism that, done inappropriately, practical theology and theological reflection can descend into a chaotic bricolage of information.

‘Theological reflection is still easier said than done. Received understandings of theological reflection are largely under theorized and narrow, and too often fail to connect adequately with biblical, historical and systematic scholarship.’¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ Graham et al., *Methods*, 12

¹⁹⁶ Graham, Elaine, Heather Walton and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Sources* (London: SCM, 2007)

¹⁹⁷ Graham et al., *Methods*, 60

Theological reflection is a process, not a product.¹⁹⁸ Graham, Walton and Ward never intended to produce a 'one-size fits all' thesis for practical theology. What they have achieved, however, is a formalising of the resources of theology: scripture, reason, tradition and experience, and have outlined means and methods for practitioners and academics to improve their practice at engaging with the contexts and experiences that they are faced with on a daily basis.

One of the principle ways of approaching practical theology or theological reflection in recent times has been through a process called 'the pastoral cycle.'¹⁹⁹ This process is four-fold: experience, exploration, reflection and action. Such a linear process, however spiralled the outcome, is still a manufactured way of engaging with an experience.²⁰⁰ As a process, it is an artificial tool. It is helpful to outline the stages for greater understanding and reflective practice. However, by dissecting an experience with whatever plethora of interdisciplinary tools are available or required, the overall outcome can be paralysing for the practitioner who is faced with files of information. Theological reflection at its best makes creative and resourceful use of whatever materials are available in order to gain understanding and affect response and practice. The pastoral cycle also separates experience from both reflection and action. 'The pastoral cycle tends to reinforce the dislocation between reflection and the every day.'²⁰¹ It can appear false to move through the cycle in such a formalised way. The practical outworking of the cycle is

¹⁹⁸ Graham et al., *Methods*, 15

¹⁹⁹ Ballard, and Pritchard, *Practical Theology*, 85-6

²⁰⁰ Ward, *Participation and Mediation*, 35

²⁰¹ Ward, *Participation and Mediation*, 35

often far more dynamic and inter-connected, as responses vary and theological reflection responds to analysis in dialogue with each quadrant.

Practical theology is indeed, theology. The danger, picked up by Davison and Milbank, is that practical theology and theological reflection prioritise experience and the counsel of the social sciences, to the neglect and detriment of theological engagement and sufficient reflection. They note that:

‘the adoption of the ‘pastoral cycle’ in much theological training for the ministry is another practice that is responsible for much unfortunate thinking about the mission of Christianity to culture.’²⁰²

They argue that the pastoral cycle necessitates the application of a Christian perspective onto an otherwise secular experience, rather than taking the Christian experience as a given and subverting or circumnavigating any secular experience. They also caution that ‘the social sciences make good servants but bad masters’²⁰³ and critique sociology’s supplantation of theology. The penultimate outcome of their book is a call to a far more adept theology of culture than they perceive as offered through current FX literature. This is an important call for further work, to which this project is ill-equipped to serve, but to which Ward’s work on culture may provide an interesting conversation partner. It is also important to hear the caution about the relationship between sociology and theology in a piece of fieldwork research such as this. There is the risk that this project becomes another piece of theologically lightweight investigation into theologically lightweight culturally bound attempts at building community on quasi-Christian values.

²⁰² Davison and Milbank, *For The Parish*, 128

²⁰³ Davison and Milbank, *For The Parish*, 229

Theological reflection keeps theology on the agenda for practitioners. In so doing, however, it runs the risk of romanticising experience in favour of an authorised response. In a search for a theologically rigorous and astute response, there is the potential to evade a holistic appreciation of the situation, experience or practice. In a pastoral or therapeutic setting, the temptation is to move to a theological answer rather than an emotionally intelligent²⁰⁴ or spontaneous examination of the situation as it is experienced by another. In maintaining a high view of theology, theological reflection in isolation risks devaluing or dehumanising the very people groups who are subject to the experience.

Cameron moves the pastoral cycle beyond formal boundaries by arguing that theological reflection is an art.²⁰⁵ This is further nuanced by Astley, who argues that theological reflection is a dance form.²⁰⁶ As such it requires both individual performers as well as a performative community. Their method includes incorporating a trained theologian into a community to help the action-research of local communities. The model designed by Cameron incorporates four 'voices' of theology.²⁰⁷ This is a significant contribution to the field of practical theology, as it allows for the ordinary theology of a community to be heard as a constituent voice in reflection. They conclude that,

‘the theological embodiment at the operant level in particular will be renewed as its own authentic message comes to light and is more clearly understood by those living it out.’²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ Goleman, Daniel, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York, NY: Bantam, 4th ed., 2006)

²⁰⁵ Cameron et al., *Talking About God*, 15

²⁰⁶ Astley, *Ordinary*

²⁰⁷ Cameron et al., *Talking About God*, 54

²⁰⁸ Cameron et al., *Talking About God*, 58

In so doing, all participants in the community have the ability and potential to be theologians in residence in their own right.²⁰⁹

Practical theology is a dialogue between disciplines, events and communities.

Browning, makes such an assertion in his formative thesis on practical theology.²¹⁰

Practical theology is about asking questions in order to come to a concrete practical and theological conclusion.²¹¹ For Browning, reflection within a community often comes out of, or results in periods of crisis or conflict.

‘Practical theology describes practices in order to discern the conflicting cultural and religious meanings that guide our action and provoke the questions that animate our practical thinking.’²¹²

Such an observation is useful in the context of this thesis, due to the transient nature of the community life studied.

That practical theology is grounded in both experience and theology is important to note in light of Alsup’s work *Practical Theology for Women*.²¹³ It is worthy of note not because of its misuse of the term practical theology, although this is in itself an important point. For Alsup, women need to have a book that expounds scripture for them, in order for them to be more informed and of better character. Given the links Alsup has with Driscoll, it is no surprise that *Practical Theology for Women* is not so much a feminist text as a defence of female deference, determined through scripture. Alsup’s aim is to challenge those women who:

²⁰⁹ Cameron et al., *Talking About God*, 75

²¹⁰ Browning, Don, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*

²¹¹ Browning, Don, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 56-7

²¹² Browning, Don, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 48

²¹³ Alsup, Wendy Horger, *Practical Theology for Women: How Knowing God Makes a Difference in our Daily Lives* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008)

‘argue that they don’t want to know more theology that their husbands know. They seem to fear that studying theology will turn them into theological Amazon queens who naturally relegate their husbands to some second-class position in the home...no matter where our husbands, fathers or pastors may be in the their spiritual journey, when we ladies grow in our understanding of God’s character and attributes, it can only be a blessing for our homes, our marriages and our children.’²¹⁴

Alsup’s book stems from one of the key conservative church communities initially involved in the Emergent tradition: Mars Hill, Seattle.²¹⁵ If practical theology is criticised for being more practical than theological, Alsup has constructed a book about theological practice which is entirely grounded in scripture and Calvinist doctrine, causing a separation from experience and practice rather than a reflection upon it. Her introductory definition is that ‘theology is the root, foundation, and framework for practical living that reflects wisdom and understanding.’²¹⁶ Given the comments already made concerning the nature of the theological tensions within emerging churches and reformed traditions, this book stands in the midst of that gap. It is an evangelistic text, scripturally filled and offering a catechesis for discipleship, lacking in cultural engagement and broad theology.

Practical theology takes into account the desire for the interdisciplinary interaction between ethnographic methods, observation of practice and theological interpretation.²¹⁷ Practical theology also demonstrates the importance of the

²¹⁴ Alsup, *Practical Theology*, 22

²¹⁵ This is an important distinction to note in light of the emerging church debate. Mars Hill: Seattle is the church led by Mark Driscoll, and has strong evangelical conservative values and teaching. Mars Hill: Grand Rapids is the church led by Rob Bell, and is thus often the target of criticism from the Reformed tradition, especially in light of Bell’s book *Love Wins*.

²¹⁶ Alsup, *Practical Theology*, 25

²¹⁷ Cameron, Helen, Philip Richter, Douglas Davies and Frances Ward (eds.) *Studying Local Churches: A Handbook* (London: SCM, 2005)

autobiographical, or as Ward coins, the 'auto/theobiographical'²¹⁸ voice as part of research method. Practical theologians often write out of their own experiences in order to generate a rigorous and applicable challenge and conclusion to a broader situation.

Practical theology understands that life and experience is messy and complicated. 'Recent focus on [concrete] theory has tended to avoid discussion of the rather messy, confused and confusing body that the church is.'²¹⁹ Practical theology methodology with fieldwork methods is an appropriate underlying methodology for this project, because of the complexity of the fx field of study. It is a discipline that wrestles with practice and theory and is concerned with reconciling these in ways which can be imaginative, creative and lead to new discoveries about humanity and about God.

Graham in *Transforming Practice*, argues that,

'theology is properly conceived as a performative discipline, in which the criterion of authenticity is deemed to be orthopraxis, or authentic transformatory action, rather than orthodoxy.'²²⁰

Graham's contribution to the field of practical theology is that she shifts the discussion from being one of ethical values and response to something that is about performance of theology within a community. She challenges the subjugation of women's experience, by indicating that postmodernism offers the context by which women can be liberated to practice their faith in a way that is authentic to women's

²¹⁸ Ward, *Participation and Mediation*, 4

²¹⁹ Ward, *Participation and Mediation*, 41

²²⁰ Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 7

experience and also changes the broader culture. The traditional patriarchy of theology is challenged as women discover their participation in community life:

‘feminist spiritual direction honours the integrity of women’s experience in the context of a patriarchal society which excludes women’s perspectives and needs from what is normative.’²²¹

For Graham, practical theology shapes the formal practice of those who have been marginalised by a society. Graham offers a model of practical theology whereby the context of postmodernity, pastoral theology, pastoral care and a theology of practice are all explored in detail, in order to develop and enhance a reflection on the nature and experience of women in spiritual oversight. From this basis, Graham then offers three spheres of women’s practice: liturgy, spiritual direction and preaching. Graham argues that ‘a critical theology of pastoral practice cannot be pursued without close reference to concrete examples of engagement.’²²² Her three examples lead her to a series of conclusions about renewed transforming practice. This is a compelling model to follow, taking seriously the dialogical nature of the stages in the pastoral cycle, and allowing for fieldwork elements to form a significant part of a transformed practice.

This thesis, therefore, adopts this model in order to discover transformed and transforming practice for missional leaders in the Methodist Church. McKnight comments that ‘praxis shapes theology and theology shapes praxis.’²²³ This thesis has already reviewed some of the key literature in the field of what Graham calls ‘the age of uncertainty.’ Three contexts will then be researched using fieldwork

²²¹ Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 183

²²² Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 172

²²³ McKnight, Scot, ‘What is the Emerging Church?’, (unpublished), 16

method before an analysis is offered which brings suggestions about the transforming practice of ordained Methodist leaders in fx.

Summary

Challenging leadership in Methodist fx necessarily incorporates missiology, Methodist theology and ecclesiology, and wider debates about the nature of both Church and mission from a post-Christendom worldview. In recognising that the source of this question stems from experiential practice of ministry, it is important that this research engages with the discipline of practical theology. This is in part to enable fellow practitioners to further enhance their own praxis. In part, it is in recognition of the range of other disciplines which inform this thesis. Finally, a practical theology facilitates the use of ethnographic research methods with which to conduct a contextual investigation and analysis. Practical theology recognises that the researcher is both observer and practitioner, and engages with the experiences that this subsequently elicits. In many ways, it is a humane way of engaging with the research question, identifying the self amidst both practice and the ongoing theological discourse.

Having set the scene in the literature review, attention now turns to a justification of the research method and selection of case studies.

Chapter 2: Research Method

'Methodism has valued personal experience...stories have been used to inspire and encourage people in their personal and communal pilgrimage of faith.'²²⁴ Stories have also been used to challenge the very institutions that broadcast the stories. The aim of this chapter is to provide the method through which the stories, or narrative, of the communities will be told and analysed. Hamilton notes that the development of a 'alternative story' is an attractive approach taken by significant Emerging Church leaders as they seek to communicate their experiences and practices.²²⁵ The purpose of this chapter is to outline the methods chosen in the course of fieldwork, and the consequences of some of those decisions.

There is now a new generation of ordained leaders released for mission and church planting in the Methodist Church. They have been discerned and trained within the inherited structures, and are now resourced to create something new for the contemporary UK context. Their experience is one of tension between the inherited structures, and their own sense of calling and practice. This research investigates these leaders and suggests that there needs to be a significant change of understanding and practice from the inherited Church, but that these new leaders also need to address issues of character and accountability if contextual mission is to continue into the twenty-first century.

²²⁴ Glasson, Barbara, 'Stories and Storytelling: The Use of Narrative Within Methodism' in Marsh, *Unmasking*, 100

²²⁵ Hamilton, Andrew, 'A Call to Missional Revolution', <http://www.emergingchurch.info/reflection/andrewhamilton/index.html> (24th July 2007)

The key research questions are:

1. What do fx leaders *do*?
2. In what ways do ordained leaders describe, understand and practice their leadership?
3. How do circuits respond to these leaders, released for contextual mission?
4. What does the Methodist Church need to learn and listen to in light of these findings?

The first priority was to set the criteria for the selection of the research sites. Once these sites were established, the methods of data collection used within each were participant observation, semi-structured interviews with senior leaders of the Methodist church, fresh expressions leaders, and community participants, and a questionnaire survey issued to the members within each community. These methods are explained, and explored below. Having used these methods in three contexts, it was then possible to code and analyse the data in order to answer the research questions I set out at the outset. Throughout the thesis I offer a self-reflexive narrative that comments on both the communities and the tensions of being a practitioner/researcher within the context of research in practical theology.

Choosing the research sites

Locations were chosen on the basis of the following criteria.

1. Communities needed to be funded by, and located within, a Methodist Circuit.

One of the unique contributions that this study makes is that it focuses the research question around and within a Methodist context. In turn, one of the objectives of the research was to investigate whether Methodist theology could be used as a means of enriching the fresh expressions movement. Although unintentional, all three communities researched were physically located within a Methodist building. This generated its own complexities for both leaders and communities associated with the 'host' congregations, as well as within the fresh expression itself.

2. The communities needed to have been in existence for over two years.

At the time when fieldwork was undertaken, the national FX initiative had just moved into its second five-year strategic phase, and was under new leadership. With this shift in leadership also came a renewed focus on the expected outcomes of the communities and congregations that had been launched during the previous five years. By restricting the case study communities to those which had been in existence for at least two years, there was a significant possibility that the initial work of leaders would have begun to evolve and develop, and that there would be a core group of people involved in the community. Communities over two years old will have had opportunity to begin to form their own identity, both as a group of people, and also within the circuit setting of which they are a part.

3. The leader of the community should be ordained as a presbyter in the Methodist tradition.

Within the Methodist Church, the ordained roles of presbyter and deacon are separate and equal ordinations to different tasks, outlined in their respective ordination services²²⁶ and in the Conference reports, 'What is a Presbyter'²²⁷ and 'What is a Deacon.'²²⁸ Jackson has commented that, 'presbyters and deacons are to refract the light of God going through all baptised people in different ways.'²²⁹ There is a long tradition of emphasising the difference between those who exercise a liturgical and sacramental ministry and those who strive to make a radical socio-missional difference.²³⁰ In order to limit the scope of this thesis, and to be able to make more general comments about the current role of a presbyter in the Methodist Church, this thesis is focussed on this – the presbyteral - order of Methodist Ministry. There is scope for further work to be done in terms of the Methodist Diaconate, Venture FX Pioneer Mission Leaders' scheme or even a comparative study with ecumenical or parachurch partners, but this is not the purpose of this project.

As an ordained presbyter myself, adopting this specific focus was also a means through which my own ministerial practice, and to an extent ministerial ambivalence, could be part of the research process. As will be noted later in this

²²⁶ 'The Ordination of Presbyters, Usually Called Ministers', in Methodist Church, *Methodist Worship Book*, 302, and 'The Ordination of Deacons', in *Ibid.*, 316-17

²²⁷ Methodist Church, 'What is a Presbyter?', <http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=churchlife.content&cmid=342> (9th November 2007)

²²⁸ Methodist Church, 'What is a Deacon?', <http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=information.content&cmid=883> (9th November 2007)

²²⁹ Jackson, Sue, 'What is a Deacon', in Luscombe and Shreeve, *Minister?*, 118

²³⁰ Jackson, 'Deacon', 123

chapter, this brought an unanticipated dimension to the research, and especially to fieldwork experiences, and reflections on these will, it is hoped, be of value to other ordained ministers who choose to pursue research in practical theology in the future.

On the basis of these three criteria, ten leaders from across Britain were initially contacted as potential participants in the project. Of these, one was already taking part in a separate research project. Three leaders failed to reply. A further three, despite initial contact proving positive, eventually did not meet the above criteria, or felt that they could not participate in the research at this time. Given the time constraints upon the fieldwork element of this project, the aim throughout the selection process was to have three locations for research. The three remaining leaders agreed to participate.

Connections²³¹ was the first to be contacted and the leader very quickly provided documentation to help with the planning process, including business plans, advertising, menus, leaflets²³² and the leader's own unpublished postgraduate thesis.²³³ Connections is led by Andrew. There is a second fresh expression community within the building, Luminosa, which is led by Mark, an Anglican Deacon. The leader of Watch This Space (hereafter WTS) also showed interest and

²³¹ All communities and the named leaders therein have been given pseudonyms in order to protect their anonymity.

²³² Genzuk, Michael, 'A Synthesis of Ethnographic Research', http://www.rcf.usc.edu/~genzuk/Ethnographic_Research.html (11th March 2009)

²³³ McKnight notes that one characteristic of emerging churches is 'cool names for churches' which is a feature further demonstrated in fresh expressions. McKnight, 'What is the Emerging Church?' (unpublished)

after a telephone conversation agreed to the study. WTS is led by Emma, but in transition to being led by Simon. A third location and leader initially showed a great deal of interest and committed to the study through both telephone and email exchanges. In following these up, however, it became apparent that the community itself was very embryonic to the point of potentially still at a fragile phase of its development. Eventually, the leader failed to return emails or telephone calls. I was, therefore, left with two secure research locations, which would have worked well for a simple comparison but would not have been as illuminating as a three-way comparative study. The short listing process meant that there was not a reserve community in place.

At the same time, a further community was suggested by a Methodist senior leader I had interviewed. It was an interesting suggestion because it was located within a Central Hall.²³⁴ This context provided a direct comparison with Connections, which itself was located within a Central Hall setting. It also offered the potential to investigate the missiological imperatives of Central Halls in comparison to the Fresh Expressions initiative. There was a potential nuance required to the selection criterion, however, as the leader was ordained in a different tradition from Methodism and was not recognised as an ordained minister within the circuit.

²³⁴ Munsey Turner offers a useful summary of the significance of Methodist Central Halls, 'Go into the nearest town or city centre. You will find the parish Church or Cathedral...In a big town or city there could be a Methodist Central Hall, dating from the turn of the [twentieth] century when there was a 'Forward Movement' in Methodism expressing a great concern for the poor of the large cities. The 'Hall' was probably used for all sorts of civic and educational events – the United Nations, for example, had its first Assembly in Westminster Central Hall.' Munsey Turner, John, *Modern Methodism in England 1932-1998* (Peterborough: MPH, 1998), 1. Methodist Central Halls are thus places of mission and social engagement which make them interesting features of the Fresh Expressions and Mission-Shaped Church debates.

Because of the significance of the location and the Church's links to the British Methodist Connexion, I felt this as a third case study could enhance a comparative analysis, as well as offer insights into the potential influence of Methodist structures outside of the boundaries of Methodist communities.

I approached the community of Safe-Haven to see if they were willing to participate. The decision to enlist this third community also provided a 'deviant case,'²³⁵ a site which had potential to deviate from expectations because of the ecclesial background and training of its leaders, someone not steeped in Methodist heritage or inclined towards a position of denominational defensiveness. It also raised the possibility of exploring in more depth whether the ministry of leaders in fx is shaped more by the personality of the leader, denominational context, or other factors such as community constituency or location. In order to provide insight into the denominational aspect to being a fresh expression, I arranged interviews with the leaders' presbyteral colleagues. This was a strategic decision for Safe-Haven, although the local leadership for all three sites were invited for interview, in order to provide their own interpretation of the impact of the fresh expression in both its local context and in the wider Circuit.

In this way, Safe-Haven became the third site, joining WTS and Connections. Safe-Haven was led by Jake, who was an ordained pastor within the Vineyard tradition, but who was a lay employee of the Church.

²³⁵ Silverman, David, *Interpreting Qualitative Data* (London: Sage, 3rd ed., 2006), 309

All three leaders were involved in discussions about my participation in their communities. In each context, the leaders were keen that I fully participated in community life. Two of the three locations articulated that they wanted me to 'come and serve alongside us.' As will be shown, throughout the research, the application of principle reflected the leader's own willingness to trust individuals to join the communities even for a short time as an equal to themselves. It also highlights a tension for the ordained researcher about the extent to which vocation, participation, leadership skill and deep questioning brings conflict in the overall research process. All three leaders requested that they also be involved in the analysis of the research, both through an exit interview and through being able to comment upon the completed chapter about their community. This was agreed upon, and their comments form a later part of this chapter. All participants in the research were offered the opportunity to receive a copy of the completed and examined thesis.

As far as possible, the identity of the communities remains anonymous throughout the thesis. There are certain features which are important to the context of the community which may reveal their geographical location, but all of the communities, leaders and participants are given a pseudonym. British Methodism is, however, a small family, so efforts to keep details confidential may be only partially successful, especially to an informed, 'inside' reader. However, the utmost care has been taken to keep the research locations confidential, in accordance with

the ethics policy agreed with Durham University's Theology and Religion department.

Participant Observation

In order to contextualise the communities and to offer a rich evidence base for the research, I engaged in a period of participant observation in each context. Davies describes participant-observation as,

‘consist[ing] of a single researcher spending an extended period of time...living among the people he or she is studying, participating in their daily lives in order to gain as complete an understanding as possible of the cultural meanings and social structures of the group and how these are interrelated.’²³⁶

Participant observation offered the flexibility to observe people and events in context, and to then test hypotheses through the semi-structured interviews. The observation stage meant that I was able to respond to events as they happened. By focussing on observations of behavioural patterns, I was also able to note the pragmatic and behavioural responses that are so characteristic of Methodist leaders. Researching behaviour meant that there was a focus on functionality of leader and community, and as such focused some of the further questions in terms of the understanding of leadership as function over ontology.

Participant observation also enabled an empathetic understanding of the communities and the leaders. Due to the relatively short amount of time I was to spend in context, participant observation aided the development of rapport with

²³⁶ Davies, Charlotte Aull, *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others* (London: Routledge, 2nd ed., 2008), 77

the leaders as quickly and effectively as possible.²³⁷ The richness of material provided in the subsequent interviews demonstrates that this was largely successful.

Participant observation also enabled the capture of information from people who would otherwise have been disenfranchised from the research because of their lack of literacy skills. There is recognition of the humanity of practical theology and ethnography that risked being missed in the development of method and analysis.²³⁸

I spent three consecutive weeks in each location, living in the cities. In WTS, I stayed with the leader and their family. In Connections, I rented a room in a shared house with members of the community. In Safe-Haven, I stayed with leaders of another community in the city who were able to discuss my initial reflections. As Davies further notes,

‘participation in the everyday lives of people is a means of facilitating observation of particular behaviours and events and of enabling more open and meaningful discussions with informants.’²³⁹

By residing so close to the contexts, I reviewed and reflected upon the communities within their wider contexts, as well as through seeing the leaders behaviour both at work and at rest. As such, I discovered that hospitality was an important feature of these communities. It was, therefore, important to accept this when it was offered. Notably, it was in all locations at the point of initial contact. Through being in close

²³⁷ O’Reilly, Karen, *Key Concepts in Ethnography* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2009), 19

²³⁸ See Hem, Marit Helene and Kristin Heggen, ‘Being Professional and Being Human: One Nurse’s Relationship with a Psychiatric Patient’, in *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 43(1), 2003, 101-108

²³⁹ Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, 81

proximity to leaders and communities it became apparent that leaders valued integrity, and were keen to demonstrate a high level of accountability. I was invited to share in the whole life of the community and their leadership, observing them in the home environment as well as the work context.

The purpose of using participant observation was to gain an understanding of community identity: what happened when the community met together, who attended, the physical layout of the space and what happened if that changed, as well as to study the means of communication used by the community. I made note of the symbols and rituals that were used by the community. These provided useful data sources because of their imagery and their use of language. I also collected the printed materials produced by each community, business plans, publicity documents and research documents. For example, in Connections posters were displayed promoting Buddhist meditation. This was significant because it was displayed next to the community's own 'tea and yoga' advertising, and demonstrated that the local community recognised that Connections was a place for spiritual investigation.

Interviews

In order to gain as complete a picture of community life as possible, I also arranged a series of semi-structured interviews. Interviews enabled ideas to be tested and individual opinions sought. As Thumma concludes,

‘direct observation can be a powerful tool for understanding congregational dynamics. This method allows you to detect and participate firsthand in subtle nonverbal patterns of interaction, symbolic rituals and power relations.’²⁴⁰

There is a risk that observation alone could have been skewed by my own perceptions and prejudices, just as there is a risk that interviews produce a ‘representation’²⁴¹ of a situation rather than its actual reality. By including interviews alongside the observation I further developed those relationships that I had begun to build with community members, seeing them in their daily context, and discovering insights into meaning of their day to day lives.²⁴² Taken together, interviews and participant observation corroborated and triangulated the evidence which I collected. This in turn enabled a rigorous and robust resource from which to begin the analysis. The build up of information would, with semi-structured interviews, give an ever-expanding supply of material with which to explore and draw comparisons and conclusions. As Holstein and Gubrium advocate,

‘interviewing takes advantage of the growing stockpile of background knowledge that the interviewer collects in prior interviews to pose concrete questions and explore facets of respondent’s circumstances that would not otherwise be probed.’²⁴³

This further adds to the accumulation of collected evidence.

I organised a series of semi-structured interviews with representatives from these groups of people: leadership team members, community participants, and

²⁴⁰ Thumma, Scott, ‘Methods for Congregational Study’, in Ammerman, Nancy T., Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley and William McKinney, *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1998), 203

²⁴¹ Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data*, 117

²⁴² McKenzie, John S., ‘You Don’t Know How Lucky You Are Here!: Reflections on Covert Practices in an Overt Participant Observation Study’, in *Sociological Research Online* 14(2)8, <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/14/2/8.html> (16th January 2011)

²⁴³ Holstein, James A., and Jaber F. Gubrium, *The Active Interview* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995), 46

Methodist colleagues with the local circuit setting. Each interview was pre-arranged either by personal conversation or through email contact. Each interview was recorded onto a digital recorder. Silverman notes the threefold benefits of tape recording as being about a public record of conversation which can be replayed and which can also reflect better the pattern of speech.²⁴⁴ Although I took notes throughout the interviews, these notes enabled follow up questions and recorded potential points of cognition with other interviews and observations. By recording the interviews, an accurate record was available throughout the analysis phase of research, which enabled me to revisit the content in order to notice any verbal inflections and hidden meanings behind what was being said. This is not to say that on their own the recordings offer a complete version of the conversation, but it does provide the rich text data onto which the notes of the physical spaces and interviewee posture can sit alongside.

The method of semi-structured interviews was employed in order to be able to have the flexibility to clarify and respond to the answers provided by the interviewee. In each interview, I had a list of questions that I wanted to include, but also followed up on both answers and observations in order to probe deeper into the respondent's responses.²⁴⁵ [APPENDIX 2]

²⁴⁴ Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data*, 203-205

²⁴⁵ Rubin and Rubin offer a comprehensive outline for the preparation of questions and probes in Rubin, Herbert J., and Irene Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2nd ed., 2005), 152-72

For every interview, the main research question was outlined and a participant sheet provided, one for signature and one for the interviewees to take away. All respondents were also asked to sign an ethics form agreeing to the storage of the interview data until the successful completion of the thesis, and the recording of the interview in process. The interviewees were given the opportunity to stop the interview at any point – an offer that one interviewee took. All data was backed up and stored on a password protected file on an external hard drive. Interview transcripts were printed out and kept in a locked filing cabinet.²⁴⁶

Interviews gave respondents the opportunity to tell the narrative of the community from their perspective before further exploring their perceptions and thoughts concerning the exercise of leadership. Rubin and Rubin note the importance of this richness in interviews:

‘richness means that interviews contain many ideas and different themes, often including those that you did not anticipate when you began the study. Richness allows depth interviews to unravel the complexity of other people’s worlds.’²⁴⁷

Throughout the fieldwork, it was this richness that was the objective for the interviews. Follow up questions and later conversations in the community provided some space to explore the complexities and messiness of community life, ministerial vocation, and contemporary fx practice. This provided a number of insights about the tensions between the community and the denominational structures surrounding it. The interviews also provided space for those for whom the transitional elements of community life were difficult, and space to talk through

²⁴⁶ Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing*, 206

²⁴⁷ Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing*, 134

some of their emotional responses. Many expressed a feeling of disenfranchisement and dislocation from the process and thus the leadership team.

A consequence of the semi-structured interview was that some observations and thought processes of investigation began to be amalgamated into the local narrative of the community. This in turn raised questions both about intellectual ownership of ideas and about the integrity of the mutuality of the interview process. In two locations the leaders themselves repeated questions and comments that they had said in the interview in conversations with members of the wider community. In both instances, this occurred in a formal leadership team meeting, thereby incorporating their answers to questions into the strategic planning of the local community. The details transferred from interview into the local community included details of researcher observations, raised in the interview for purposes of credibility or insight, as well as new avenues of the leaders' thinking which had been inspired by the interview.

Such behaviour reflects the equitable dialogical nature of interviews and supports the statement that 'interviewing...is better understood as a process in which interviewer and interviewee are both involved in developing and understanding.'²⁴⁸ It also has the potential to raise questions of confidentiality with regards to the research, breached not by me, but by the leaders. It also raised the question of whether this behaviour could undermine a project like this, as even with a

²⁴⁸ Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, 108-9

participant contract in place, community members and leaders did not regard their participation with the same high regard to confidentiality as was offered to them. Research conducted through semi-structured interviews offers the opportunity to reflect upon intellectual copyright, as well as issues of power and possession within the context. My presence in community as participant observer, as well as the questions I was asking, provoked reflections internal to the community which may not have been revealed to the leaders had I not probed into specific areas of practice or understanding.²⁴⁹ The presence of a researcher changed the nature of the internal conversation. In turn, there was a risk that my own observations and commentary would be undermined by the immediacy of the community response to my challenges.

A longer term project would be able to discern if this was a consistent feature of fx communities insofar as they were always trying to be engaged with the challenges of the local context, or whether it was a defence mechanism of a community attempting to constantly respond to the institutional challenges required of it.

This pattern of behaviour revealed the fluid and flexible nature of these fx communities. A significant feature of the fx communities is their ability and willingness to engage in debate and to be transformed by it. A feature of this project, brought about through the relational aspect of participant observation and the relational nature of the interview process is that leaders, and to a certain extent

²⁴⁹ Holstein, and. Gubrium, *Active Interview*, 29

interviewees, considered themselves to be equal parties in the research process.

The response from the feedback stage of the research would also suggest that most leaders considered themselves to be collaborators and colluders with the conclusions too. There is deep sense of joint ownership for this project. May offers a helpful reflection on the mutuality and emotional impact of research. He concludes,

‘Research must never be parasitic – it should be available for contemplation, sometimes even as a guide to action, but the researcher should be prepared to engage in dialogue over the research.’²⁵⁰

In subscribing to a mutual dialogue, it is necessary to relinquish some control over the learning and research environment. The language of ‘learning communities’ goes some way to explore this feature of a constantly engaged and engaging community process of learning and development. The speed at which this is done, and the variety of people who are instinctively involved in this is in turn a significant feature of the assumed means of development for fx of church. Information was not treated as sacred or sacrosanct by those being researched. The implication of this observation is partly that a research project risks being undermined by the very people being researched as comments and questions become part of a public interface before the thesis is complete. This juxtaposes with the alternative implication that the dialogue and initial findings were credible, and accepted by the community as part of their ongoing narrative.

In determining the sample for interviews, there were a number of key participants with whom I wanted to guarantee an interview.²⁵¹ Davis notes the importance of

²⁵⁰ May, Tim, ‘Feelings Matter’, in Hobbs, D., and Tim May (eds.), *Interpreting the Field: Accounts of Ethnography* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 94

discovering these key people for research and the value that they add to rich research because they are the people who are willing to invest in the project as equal partners.

‘Ethnographers virtually always develop key [participants], individuals who for various reasons are either very effective at relating cultural practices or simply more willing than most to take the time to do so.’²⁵²

The key participants for this study included the leaders themselves: those appointed and paid for by the Methodist Church. I was also interested to observe if there were gatekeepers within the community who I also needed to pay attention to, and gain the confidence of.

‘Key [participants] are therefore useful in that they are normally happy to help and are full of information and advice. However, gatekeepers are also useful in as much as they enable us to contact the hidden groups and individuals.’²⁵³

In each community it was important to discover these gatekeepers. At WTS and Safe-Haven, it was the leader who acted as gatekeeper. In Connections, the gatekeeper was a member of the leadership team, and one of the original members of Luminosa.

I deliberately use the language of participants rather than informants as it better represents the feedback loop and appropriation of conclusions, experience through the research. O’Reilly comments,

‘The language of informants has thus tended to give way to that of participants in order to reflect the more equal relationship we attain between researcher and researched and the way that ethnography is a means of learning together.’²⁵⁴

²⁵¹ O’Reilly, *Ethnography*, 136

²⁵² Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, 81

²⁵³ O’Reilly, *Ethnography*, 22

²⁵⁴ O’Reilly, *Ethnography*, 136

I quickly learned that both researcher and researched are in a complex symbiotic participatory relationship.

Holstein and Gubrium recognise the importance of representations, 'that is, how well the characteristics of those sampled represent the characteristics of the population of interest.'²⁵⁵ As part of the initial contact with leaders, I asked them to nominate people who they felt would be helpful to the research. This often involved those who held leadership roles in the community. Having taken the advice of the leaders, I then interviewed members of the community who I had observed as being regular participants. All interviewees had personal contact with me before the formal interview, a mechanism to enable the building of rapport and trust. I deliberately interviewed men and women within context, and tried as far as possible to interview people from different racial and economic backgrounds, insofar as they were representative of the participants within the community. Furthermore, the three case studies offer conclusions that are representative of faith in Methodism, and have application to the wider Church and initiative.

One of the key questions for research was the relationship of fresh expression to their host communities, especially within a Methodist context. In order to explore these relationships from the context of the local circuit, it was important to arrange an interview with the superintendent minister of the circuit. The tensions between practice and expectations were stark, and raise questions about communication

²⁵⁵ Holstein and Gubrium, *The Active Interview*, 21

strategies as well as the potential ambiguity of purpose and practice of circuit ministers.

In total, twenty-eight interviews were conducted across the three contexts: 9 in Connections, 6 with WTS and 13 in Safe-Haven.

In order to explore the tensions of being part of a circuit, and the national relationship between fresh expression and the Methodist Connexion, I conducted interviews with senior leaders within Methodism and its denominational partners. A further 7 interviews were conducted with these senior leaders. These included three Strategic Leaders of the British Methodist Connexion, one Chair of District, an Anglican Diocesan Bishop, a college tutor with a specific remit of developing training for Anglican Pioneer ministers and two other senior members of the Methodist Connexional Team.

All of the interviews were reviewed and transcribed within a week of the contextual work. The initial review of the data was accompanied by making memo notes of links between each interview and the relevant literature.²⁵⁶ On the next review, a summary was made of each interview, the key points, interesting quotes, concepts to follow up on and themes that linked to other interviews or to the literature survey of the field of research. In subsequent reviews of the transcripts and tapes, the interviews were coded to highlight key themes and concepts.²⁵⁷ This data was

²⁵⁶ Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing*, 205

²⁵⁷ Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing*, 201-223

then synthesised in order to produce the observations and conclusions which follow.

The physical space for the interview locations was an important consideration, in order to aid the comfort of the interviewee, as well as the quality of the recording. Holstein and Gubrium note that 'ideally the interview should take place in private.'²⁵⁸ In most cases, this occurred. Many interviewees offered a visit to their own homes for the interview, demonstrating another indication that hospitality is part of community life. Such invitations were also helpful to get a deeper sense of the local context, as I had to physically navigate around cities and suburbs that I had never been to. Serendipitously, I was doing the contextual missiology demanded of the pioneer ministers I was researching.

Survey Questionnaire

The aim of the questionnaire was to provide further triangulation in the data, and to see if the conclusions from the leaders and the nominated participants were the same as wider perceptions of the community. The questionnaire also had the potential to expand the sample of those participants in the research. [APPENDIX]

The questions were designed using the language of the Methodist Church's own documentation about the skills of leaders and the expectations of their ministry.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸ Holstein and Gubrium, *The Active Interview*, 11

²⁵⁹ Methodist Church, 'What is a Presbyter'

This was an intentional decision in order not to introduce further skills to those already authorised and adopted by the Methodist Church.

Forty-five questionnaires were handed out across the three locations, whilst I was present. I received a total of nine in return. In each location, the questionnaire element of research proved unsuccessful. Reasons for this include:

1. The language of the survey generated by transposing the Methodist Church document, failed to connect with the respondents.
2. The literacy level of some respondents was lower than I had expected.
3. There was a high level of individualism shown in the community responses to worship, and some wanted to remain anonymous, and therefore did not want to be observed filling in a questionnaire.
4. Respondents had difficult experiences with leaders in the past, and were thus unhappy in discussing any form of leadership beyond a corporate exploration of a context and situation.

The survey questionnaires failed to achieve their potential. This in itself was a useful learning experience for the reasons already outlined, and in turn provoked useful reflections upon the demographic, education and experience of those within the community, which may have otherwise remained neglected.

The information gathered from observation, interviews and survey questionnaires were coded and cross referenced in order to produce the individual case studies and to draw together the conclusions.

Feedback

Each leader was sent a copy of the chapter that corresponded to their community. In all three cases, the leaders no longer had any pastoral charge over the research sites. The leaders were able to add comment to the analysis stage of the research process. The chapters were not sent to the present leaders of the communities, as it was assumed that the communities have evolved under new leadership. It would also breach the confidentiality of the participants.

‘Most of the time, interviewees will find you have represented their opinions accurately and will recognise their world in the description you created.’²⁶⁰ Such was my experience with two of the contexts. The comments received from Connections and WTS were positive and demonstrated continuing reflexivity and humility on the part of the leaders. Significantly, both informally reflected on their emotional response to the text. Despite both psychological and geographical distance from their respective communities, both Emma and Andrew discussed their comments in terms of closure. This raises a question for future research about how leaders leave community, and how they are able to critically reflect

²⁶⁰ Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing*, 268

upon their experiences in both formal and informal ways. Given that one major conclusion is about the psychological wellbeing of leaders, there is scope for significant work to be conducted into the ongoing support, mentoring and counselling for leaders as they transition into new contexts. This is especially significant for Methodist presbyters who are expected to move on a regular basis.²⁶¹

Rubin and Rubin comment on the experience of one researcher who received feedback on work that contradicted their work.²⁶² They helpfully outline a process of review that moves between the original evidence and the comments retrospectively made, in order to represent the comments, whilst remaining faithful to the gathered evidence. This was something that became increasingly necessary with regards to the chapter on Safe-Haven, with the demands of a pastoral relationship on one hand and the weight of evidence on the other.

The feedback process brought into focus the challenge of staying true to the collected evidence on one hand, and the need to respect the confidentiality of an employee on the other. As will be noted throughout this thesis, there were significant observations made about the wellbeing behaviour of both leader and the community. Although the chapter was written prior to Jake's resignation from the community, publicly described by Jake as a 'moral failure', the chapter was sent to

²⁶¹ Methodist Presbyters are stationed annually by Conference for an initial period of five years, which is then open to re-invitation by a local circuit meeting for up to a further five years, to a total of twelve years. See Methodist Church, *Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*, Volume 2 (Peterborough: Epworth, 2009), 718f

²⁶² Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing*, 269

him a year after the fieldwork had concluded, and six months after he had left the community. Subsequently, Jake and his wife offered critical comment about the chapter content as they felt that the chapter reflected on the ensuing situation in Safe-Haven rather than the community as it was in the previous August. These comments enabled me to look back through my field notes and through the interview content and tighten up the language about the fragility of leadership demonstrated by Jake. I was able to remove the protective language that I had employed, and instead be more specific about what was said and the potential risks within the community. Rubin and Rubin are right to caution against a defence mechanism when it comes to receiving critical comment,

‘when most people, including us, receive criticisms, their instinct is to try to defend themselves, but in this case, it is better to set the defensiveness aside and try to repair the manuscript in accordance with the feedback.’²⁶³

In this instance, I took the criticism seriously, but the repair to the manuscript was the strengthening of the descriptions and the arguments rather than the removal of them, as Jake had inferred.

The analysis of Safe-Haven’s leadership demonstrates that the process of research can have a therapeutic effect for some participants, both in a relational and professional capacity, from the interview stages to the final draft analysis.

Etherington articulates this well,

‘being in reflexive relationships with our participants creates a level of intimacy that might invite them to reveal previously unarticulated, deeply personal stories... However, these new insights may be entirely unexpected by the participants.’²⁶⁴

²⁶³ Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing*, 268

²⁶⁴ Etherington, Kim, *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher: Using Our Selves in Research* (London: JKP, 2004), 226-7

The research process enabled Jake to begin to articulate insights and revelations, thoughts and feelings, which he had previously not spoken about. Although useful for an individual, such an experience demonstrates the complexity of being an ordained researcher in practical theology. Those researchers who are trained in pastoral care, and whose vocation expects them to be able to build deep and intimate relationships with people, often very quickly, run the risk of receiving information and evidence that is deeply sensitive, provocative and potentially damaging for both the leader and their community. Decisions have to be made about the appropriateness of using such material in the final thesis and with regards to the handling of confidential material.

These comments enabled me to recognise the significance of the wellbeing of the leader in fx communities and to recognise that the language of accountability that appeared throughout the interviews offered a means by which leaders were already aware of the risks to themselves and to their families, when they pioneer communities.

This means of feedback served to corroborate the analysis of the data collection, and tightened the argument with regards to a specific context, albeit with broader application. This form of feedback goes some way to support Silverman's ambivalence towards formal validation in qualitative research. 'I believe these [validation] methods [of triangulation and respondent validation] are inappropriate

to qualitative research.²⁶⁵ Silverman is not suggesting that these tools are not useful, but rather arguing that the means of validation within a quantitative project are different from that of a qualitative context. He continues, 'we should not assume that techniques used in quantitative research are the only way of establishing the validity of findings from qualitative or field research.'²⁶⁶ In my research, the range of methods employed for this project, as well as the feedback loops throughout the research and analysis phase, demonstrate means of maintaining the thoroughness and credibility of the research project.

Further feedback of conclusions was elicited informally from FX employees, and within the context of the FX research symposium, held in Durham on 17th November 2010. This enabled a peer review of this thesis within a context of academics and practitioners.

Self Reflexivity

Swinton describes reflexivity as, 'a mode of knowing which accepts the impossibility of the researcher standing outside of the research field and seeks to incorporate that knowledge creatively and effectively.'²⁶⁷ Ward develops this further as part of his autoethnography for exploring practical theology and culture.²⁶⁸ I agree with them both that the fieldwork methods employed in this study require reflexivity

²⁶⁵ Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data*, 291

²⁶⁶ Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data*, 302

²⁶⁷ Swinton, John and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM, 2006), 59

²⁶⁸ Ward, *Participation and Mediation*

and reflection on my part as researcher, complementing and contrasting with the observations and conclusions I have drawn. As Ward states, '[reflexivity is] a vital and creative aspect of any practical theology.'²⁶⁹ Etherington offers an excellent methodological engagement with the tensions of the reflexive self in the process of research in her book, *Becoming a Reflective Researcher*. She notes the importance of being aware of a researcher's responsibility to those being researched *alongside* being aware of the researcher's responsibility to oneself.

'the principle of self respect shows that we not only have a responsibility towards participants in research but also towards ourselves...when we involve our selves reflexively in the research [rather than] as distant 'neutral' observers. We need to promote our own wellbeing, to avoid doing harm to ourselves, to have respect for our own rights to be self-governing, to be treated fairly and impartially, and to trust our participants to take some responsibility for themselves and their part in the process.'²⁷⁰

My own ministerial experience and practice has been affected by the experience and practice of research. I am neither an 'impartial observer'²⁷¹ nor a 'hostile outsider'.²⁷² I am neither entirely outside of the situations that I researched, nor am I intentionally critical of them. I act as a "critical friend" to those engaging with, and from, FX.²⁷³ In terms of research and personal praxis, therefore, I share some of the same frustrations and freedoms that the colleagues I studied explored with

²⁶⁹ Ward, *Participation and Mediation*, 4

²⁷⁰ Etherington, *Reflexive Researcher*, 211

²⁷¹ Bretherton, Luke 'Beyond the Emerging Church', in Walker and Bretherton, *Remembering our Future* 32

²⁷² Walker and Bretherton, *Remembering Our Future*, 32

²⁷³ 'A critical friend can be defined as a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critiques of a person's work as a friend. A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward. The friend is an advocate for the success of that work.' Costa, A. and Kallick, B. 'Through the Lens of a Critical Friend', in *Educational Leadership* 51(2), (1993) 49-51

me. This means that this research is not a piece of exotic ethnography²⁷⁴ with clearly defined, 'alien,'²⁷⁵ community and myself as 'native stranger.'²⁷⁶ In turn, it demands that the research is not merely a biographical investigation, but cognate with the demands of the qualification of a DThM, is also to some extent autobiographical. Coffey notes that 'the legitimization of autobiographical ethnography continues to be fraught,'²⁷⁷ although within anthropological circles, auto-ethnography has evolved throughout much of the last decade.²⁷⁸

The end thesis recognises the difficulties with the messiness of research. As F.Ward writes,

'doing ethnography is a messy business. And the messiness does not go away. The processes of turning observed life into text are messy, full of difficult questions that have to be faced.'²⁷⁹

This complexity in ethnographic research is demonstrated throughout this research process, and forms an important feature of the conclusions. Reed-Danahay offers a compelling argument when she suggests that, 'the autoethnographer is a boundary-crosser, and the role can be characterised as that of dual identity.'²⁸⁰

Amongst the many conclusions within this thesis is that the experience of research for the practitioner/theologian is one of a multiplicity of roles, some elicited, others expected. Autoethnography focuses attention on the self of the researcher in the

²⁷⁴ Van Maanen, John, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography* (Chicago, IL: Chicago, 1988), 14

²⁷⁵ Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, 77

²⁷⁶ Coffey, Amanda *The Ethnographic Self: Fieldwork and the Representation of Identity* (London: Sage, 1999), 19

²⁷⁷ Coffey, *The Ethnographic Self*, 18

²⁷⁸ Reed-Danahay, Deborah (ed.), *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social* (Oxford: Berg, 1997), 1-2, and 7f

²⁷⁹ Ward, Frances, 'The Messiness of Studying Congregations using Ethnographic Methods', in Guest, Mathew, Karin Tusting and Linda Woodhead, *Congregations Studies in the UK: Christianity in a Post-Christian Context* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 125

²⁸⁰ Reed-Danahay, *Auto/Ethnography*, 3

field in a way that enables ministerial reflection and reformation in a way that may be omitted through other ethnographic modes. There is humaneness to this approach which I find compelling, and given my own experiences, helpful throughout the analysis and presentation stages.

This thesis is not purely autobiographical (about oneself) nor autoethnographical (about one's community,²⁸¹ or about interpreting one's cultural assumptions²⁸²), but offers self-reflexivity re my own interactions within the community. Motzafi-Haller concludes,

‘I needed to discover for myself, to construct from my own experiences, the links between such reflexivity and the analytical insights it produces, between the personal and the theoretical.’²⁸³

My experience of research forces me to sympathise and agree with her. Even with method in place to protect participants and researcher in the process, experience of research is something quite different outside of a textbook.

Coffey goes on to describe ‘field roles’ and explores the ethnographic self in familial terms.²⁸⁴ My own experience of research has not been so much the language of family, but the language of roles. Whilst engaging in research of leadership roles, I have also experienced communities subconsciously inviting me to adopt several different identities which required sensitivity, dexterity and on a few occasions my professional training as a pastor. The roles required of me ranged from listening

²⁸¹ Reed-Danahay, *Auto/Ethnography*, 8

²⁸² Chang, Heewon, *Autoethnography as Method* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast, 2008), 9

²⁸³ Motzafi-Haller, Pnina, ‘Writing Birthright: On Native Anthropologists and the Politics of Representation’, in Reed-Dahanay, *Auto/ethnography*, 219

²⁸⁴ Coffey, *The Ethnographic Self*, 24-6

ear and pastor, leader, preacher, confidante, and even at times as an alternative voice or joint leader within the community. O'Reilly develops on Coffey's conclusion by noting,

‘people often find it much easier to relate to someone in terms of a role they understand and which is accepted in the setting. This role may be that of ethnographer, or it may be as mother, daughter, [and] stranger.’²⁸⁵

Although not solicited, I was apportioned different roles at different times by community members and leaders. I constantly had to monitor these roles and my responses to them because of the implications for research and pastoral relationships. The willingness of leaders to require role affirmation from a researcher demonstrates a desire from fx leaders to lead in teams (despite my evidence in this thesis suggesting that often team work is severely lacking). They have a desire to form a learning community from, as Jake noted in conversation one day, a ‘kindred spirit’. Such experiences offered opportunity to reflect upon my own acquiescence, adoption and adaptation to these roles in each location. This also highlights the need for team ministry and team development in fx.

Such reflexivity is vital, because it begins to demonstrate that I remain critically aware of the participatory nature of self within the research, whilst at the same time struggling with blurred boundaries. As Coffey comments:

‘a weakness is not the possibility of total immersion, but a failure to acknowledge and critically (though not necessarily negatively) engage with the range of possibilities of position, place and identity.’²⁸⁶

I am, therefore, aware and appropriately critical of the roles apportioned me. It also serves as a narrative for other ministerial professionals entering fieldwork, that

²⁸⁵ O'Reilly, *Ethnography*, 11

²⁸⁶ Coffey, *The Ethnographic Self*, 36

they too may be properly reflexive, self aware and cautious of the difficulties that role negotiation demands of the ordained researcher.

Although I was prepared for the challenges of different roles, there was one role that I had not anticipated. In Safe-Haven there were a number of instances where I was asked questions by the leader and by the community, which would have been asked of Jake's wife, had she not been on maternity leave. I was often used as a pastoral carer or confidante by members of the community. I was also a theological reflective partner for Jake, who looked to me for affirmation, conversation and debate when it came to decisions both about the community and his life. My opinion was that some of this interaction went beyond the boundaries of research, and were overly intimate, especially given the short length of time that I had known Jake. This is interesting in terms of research, but suggests that there is the potential of significant personal cost and risks of power abuses to the researcher as well as the researched in research such as this.

This also illustrates how research of this kind is neither clear cut nor easy. This is a messy piece of research, with many interesting and rich conclusions and observations being hidden *in* the mess but hopefully not *by* the mess.²⁸⁷ O'Reilly notes that there is a continuum to participant observation and a personal dialogue

²⁸⁷ Muncey, Tessa, *Creating Autoethnographies* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2010), 74. Muncey talks about the messiness of the analysis period. I am struck by the sense of the messiness of note making and 'scribbling' as Muncey talks about, and how this is also reflective of communities of people. Ethnographic research cannot always be clean and tidy, especially when those communities are searching for meaning and identity of their own but within a given framework of values, ideals and doctrine. See also Ward, 'Messiness', 125-137

to be had with regard to how far one participates and how far one observes a context.

‘the important thing is to know why you want to become involved before pursuing (or not) a fully participant role, and then to reconcile your intentions with practical issues on the ground.’²⁸⁸

By acknowledging this need to be self-aware and reconciled to the various roles and responsibilities within research, there were also fascinating conclusions to be drawn, whilst at all times trying to preserve the confidentiality and anonymity of the sources and not being influenced by subsequent behaviour and contact with communities and leaders.²⁸⁹

Throughout the research, I constantly questioned and reflected upon the ways my presence may have been affecting the communities. Given some of the conclusions and findings of this research, this sense of reciprocity of relationship remains a vital part of the production and publication of the thesis.²⁹⁰ There are significant implications with this research that are not only about this piece of research in isolation, but also about the ongoing credibility of me as a presbyter in the Methodist Church. Practical theology is a costly kind of research. As a researcher in the field in which I am also employed, there is a cost to be paid in terms of relationships, collegiality, further employment, and even balances and checks about the integrity of the research.

²⁸⁸ O’Reilly, *Ethnography*, 162

²⁸⁹ O’Reilly, *Ethnography*, 62

²⁹⁰ Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing*, 34

A final observation in terms of reflexivity relates to the question of gender. This is not a substantive view of gender roles in fx, which would be a fruitful area of further study. However, gender is an important consideration.²⁹¹ I was aware from some of the colloquial writings and responses to ‘emerging churches’ and fx in blogs and conversations, that gender was an issue for some involved.²⁹² The stereotypical leader of new ecclesial communities was a white man in their late thirties, and as one Pioneer Mission Leader commented, ‘cool and trendy.’ Many of the key leaders for cultural change in the British Methodist Church are white and male. As such, I was keen to see whether gender did play the part that some conversationalists had intimated it might.

I deliberately made sure that one of the structured questions in the interviews was asked on the topic of gender, having been influenced by both the stereotype of pioneer leaders²⁹³ and the work of Willhauck on *The Web of Women’s Leadership*.²⁹⁴ This question asked of Emma provided the space for her to talk about her inclusion in emerging church conversations, rather than her alienation from it. There is still the perception that fx and the emerging church are less than diverse, but it would be unwise to conclude this solely on the basis of the research

²⁹¹ Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data*, 85

²⁹² Driscoll, Mark, ‘How Men Should Treat Women’

<http://www.marshallchurch.org/media/luke/jesus-forgives-a-sinful-woman/how-mark-driscoll-says-men-should-treat-women> (1st May 2011), and Mars Hill, ‘Annual Report 2010’

http://www.marshallchurch.org/files/2011/01/30/20110130_mars-hill-church-annual-report-fy10_document_9299.pdf, 18-19 (1st May 2011)

²⁹³ see Sayers, Mark, ‘Masculinity and the Emerging Church’,

<http://marksayers.wordpress.com/2009/06/02/masculinity-and-the-emerging-church/html> (22nd June 2009)

²⁹⁴ Willhauck, Susan, *The Web of Women’s Leadership: Recasting Congregational Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2001)

evidence gathered in this project. It is, however, possible to suggest that women may not be the sole initiators and the pioneers, but they may be the people who support the leader and who encourage the flourishing of the community.

I took special note of times when my gender was commented upon, or where I was flirted with in order to ask me to undertake a task to serve the community, which happened in more than one context by both men and women in community. This latter interaction heightened my awareness of the sexual politics at work in fx communities.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the methods employed in the fieldwork element of the whole thesis and offered justifications for the choices made in light of ethnographic methodology. Comments and critiques have been offered as to the effectiveness of such methods. I have also offered an exploration of why some methods did not produce the anticipated outcomes. There is an autobiographical voice to this chapter which also provides a reflexive approach to research in practical theology. The following three chapters explore the analysis of the three fieldwork locations.

Chapter 3, Case Study 1:

Connections

Connections is an independent cafe business in a busy metropolitan centre. The cafe website describes the venue:

‘Connections is not-for-profit, community arts space, linked to the Methodist Church and located in the heart of the city’s Northern Quarter. Our lovely cafe, in which we always choose fair trade, organic, locally sourced and sold produce, is the setting for an exciting and varied arts programme- and much more besides! We believe in the power of bringing all people together through creativity to explore and share community, meaning and spirituality.’

Connections is an Arts Cafe, specifically designed to attract the artisans of the creative quarter of the city. It is important to note that Connections is a physical space, a business and then a mission opportunity for the church. The concept behind Connections is to provide a venue for a number of community groups, volunteer programmes, gallery displays and hospitality. In many ways, Connections is about the people who participate: ‘If the venue burnt down...we would just go and find another space. Connections would continue.’ The two questions asked of me when I arrived at Connections were, ‘how was your journey,’ followed by ‘are you here to help?’

The fieldwork research at Connections was complicated by the complexity of relationships between leaders and employees of effectively two fx sharing the same venue. Part of this chapter, therefore, attempts to tease out some of the difficulties and critiques of this partnership or ‘adoption’ of two quite distinctive Fresh Expression adventures, both within the City Centre, although the majority of

the chapter will reflection on Connections in isolation. The joint leadership team would suggest that the communities are symbiotic, and thus it is not possible to talk of one without the other. I want to argue that such comment is an idealistic hope, but is not the current reality. One leadership team member reflected,

‘there is a bit of a divide between Connections and Luminosa...Luminosa is a community of people who meet together on a Wednesday, but Connections is so much bigger.’

There is an observable dislocation between the two communities as opposed to the vision and talk of them being wholly interchangeable.

The most significant and distinctive feature of leadership in Connections for this thesis is the way in which leadership is a shared partnership, both with volunteers and employees. Connections demonstrates an equity of leadership through which the named leader releases its employees to develop their own job descriptions and ‘ministries’ – such as a volunteer scheme for underachieving teenagers. Mark noted, ‘there’s a element of missional thinking as to what [each community] is, and how [everyone] can get involved.’ Many leaders of fx talk about the importance of developing teams, and helping people discover their vocation. Andrew in Connections appears to do this instinctively, although it is more difficult for this to be said for Luminosa, whose liturgical practice means that participation risks being limited to those trained or authorised by Church authorities.

Context

It is unusual to reflect on a UK context whose entire identity has been defined by an act of terrorism and the subsequently redevelopment of the city. The redevelopment is indicated by Andrew's own research, and through the National Statistics database.

In 1991, according to Andrew's initial research into the city, there were 966 residents in the city centre. In 2004, the number was over 15000 and rising. In the specific postcode area covering Connections, according to the National Statistics database,²⁹⁵ the number of residents in 2007 was 2870. This is an area of commercial and retail properties. It is home to the largest Marks and Spencers in the UK, and attracted two outlets of Selfridges. In the midst of fashion labels, artisan houte couture (in both the fashion label sense and the new and upcoming design), and tucked away amongst the vintage stores promoting vinyl records, body piercings, charity stores and art shops, resides Connections.

'The nature of the City Centre, the nature of being a hub and specific not needs of [the city] but specific nature of [this city] that exists and so create a church within that is to understand neighbourhood. It is neighbourhood when you think, this is where I do all my stuff. Just because I don't have my postcode here doesn't mean it isn't my neighbourhood.'

The resident population is expanding at a phenomenal rate. According to the National Statistics database, the City Centre is a hub for visitors and workers. 51% of workers in the postcode area are managers or those who would describe themselves as having a professional occupation, 40% of the demographic have at least one degree. Over 82% of the population are aged between 16 and 44. 36%

²⁹⁵ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/index.html> (12th March 2011)

describe that they have no religion, and only 40% state that their religion is 'Christian.'

The part of the city where Connections is physically located is in the City's Northern Quarter.

'The Northern Quarter has long been known as the 'creative quarter' of [the City] -- the home of many fashion designers, creative agencies, art galleries and quirky retailers. Whilst these still remain the area is growing in popularity with bars, restaurants and residential development - it is becoming the new vibrant area to live-work-play among many age groups -- and is forming a contemporary and inspirational extension to the core of city centre.'²⁹⁶

For some, such a location is an alien and threatening one. As the superintendent of the circuit reflected:

'I was trying to avoid saying hippy...I don't know whether the Bohemians who relate to Connections just flung off their suits and put their kaftans on or whatever.'

For others, such as the following quote from a member of Andrew's former support group, it provides a slice of a subculture within the City, either a creative potential, or else is disproportionately representative of an environment. The Superintendent continued:

'if I use the example of Connections we're actually almost speaking of a sub-culture with the culture of [The city]. In other words, that 20, 30 year old approximately, club-going, young middleclass and working in the city, that could be said to be a sub-culture of the culture or whatever.'

What is clear is that there is a specific and growing population of young professional adults, and a lack of religious engagement by them into the local churches.

²⁹⁶ <http://www.northernqtr.co.uk/> (1st February 2011)

The City was born through an entrepreneurial spirit and has continued to evolve along these lines, with an alternative narrative being told through the independent music scene and amongst the artisans of the underground parts of the City Centre.²⁹⁷ The emotions of disillusionment, isolation and depression are kept beneath the surface of what is happening in this context. It is particularly apt, therefore, that Connections remains an underground, basement, space. It speaks prophetically to the rest of the city of what it means to build community with those most forgotten and hidden in society. It is a community bought together in a basement room with a side entrance, and a grey exterior.

Circuit

The relationship between the leaders of Connections and Luminosa, and the staff of the circuit, has not been an easy one. It would be easy to conclude this even from the interview with the superintendent minister who, during the interview, accepted three telephone calls, which cumulatively took longer than the interview itself. One conclusion could be that there is a lack of interest in Connections, in amongst the other important work of serving a circuit. However, amongst the interruptions were some interesting reflections and comments about the nature of fx in a large metropolitan circuit. However, the tensions and lack of concentration on Connections should not be dismissed too easily. Andrew reflected, 'I have never

²⁹⁷ See also Marconie, Stuart, *Pies and Prejudice* (London: Ebury, 2007)

felt like part of the circuit.’ There are four main reasons for the tension of relationships in the circuit context.

Firstly, experience shows that the circuit members do not invest in the project. At the very inception of Andrew’s role as City Missioner, a prayer room was created to enable people to pray for the City Centre. Andrew takes up the story:

‘One of the first things I did was a prayer for the City day and set up in the Chapel which is above Connections in the Central Hall, a really kind of quiet siting, sort of different stations with different prayer ideas and actions to really help people focus on the city and where we’ve going. Advertised all round the circuit.’

Despite the advertising and the presentation, no one within the circuit – member nor staff of the leadership team – came to this event. Such an experience became the root of a lot of expressed disappointment towards the circuit members, and the source of the decision to break free from any of the circuit networks that existed.

In turn, the silence of the leadership within the wider circuit fermented views about the project as a whole, furthering the gap of misunderstanding between them. The superintendent of the circuit had a clear vision for what a project might look like for the professionals of the city:

‘you could sort of create this haven of peace or prayer room or boiler house or one of these whole things, which might be of service to the needs of those who are under terrific pressure, particularly now, where they could just chill but chill with God. But I do think that that needs to be where the people are.’

In sharing this concept, however, it belied a prejudicial stance against the artisan community in which Connections was located. There is a sense, especially in conversation with the superintendent minister, that Connections is so totally

counter-cultural to the rest of church, that it almost demands little attention within the circuit.

Secondly, there was in evidence a clear disconnection between the circuit expectations of the community and the community themselves.

‘I think a couple of times the question has been asked if my young people could do something at the Circuit service which I find highly patronising and we’re talking about people who run their own businesses aren’t going to stand up and do a little song and a dance for the rest of the Church’

The belief that the ‘young people’ are patronised by those within inherited models of church may not be a new insight, but it is still an interesting observation with regards to the relationship between Connections and the circuit. Again, there was a perceptible frustration and sadness in the way that Andrew talked about this, as instead he took to their defence as the community protector or guardian.

The frustration is noted, but remains a further silence in regards to the relationship of circuit and community:

‘I think at times there’s a frustration at Connections/Luminosa that there isn’t more support from within the Circuit for some of its activities, but I’m not sure that that’s wholly realistic when you look at the profile of the people in the Churches, that they are likely to be able to be other than prayerfully involved for the work of the project’

In contrast to this, it is also possible to conclude that the community themselves are a little precious about their own identity. There is a sense of elitist sensibilities of being of a different order to the circuit, not wanting to be contaminated or constrained by the culture of the church. One of the real practicalities of this situation is that Connections could not perform for the circuit service because it is

not a worshipping community in any recognisable form. Such misinformation about Luminosa and Connections is not unique to the local circuit context, however. One member of the leadership team reflected that a family member:

‘...said to me “I hear you found a lovely lively Church in the City Centre”. It’s like yeeess, because to her you know a Church with young people must be lively and thriving you know and singing and dancing and waving your hands in the air when it’s almost the opposite of that’

A third reason for the tensions within the circuit team is the way in which Andrew was appointed to the circuit. Whereas common practice is for a circuit to take some initiative and ownership of a project, there is a sense within the circuit leadership that they were not consulted about Andrew’s appointment or his project. Andrew was, therefore, appointed by the district to a specific city centre location, and it was the responsibility of the circuit to find ways to support and deliver whatever this project turned out to be. Within the team, therefore, there is some resentment about the means, methods and relationship that Connections has to the wider circuit. One of Andrew’s colleagues notes this tension.

‘If it is a Fresh Expression of Church it needs to be somehow connected with the other Churches too in the Circuit and be part of the Circuit meeting, be part of the District and the Connexion. If it doesn’t then it can be seen as a Circuit project, but then it would lose its definition of being a Church, as being the same as or equal to the other churches in the circuit. So as FX develop, they do pose interesting questions to what would be regarded as the established way we have of understanding Methodist Churches in terms of the connectedness of Circuits and Districts.’

Finally, a fourth reason is the withdrawal from public profile of Andrew. Whereas Safe-Haven talked about the importance of a power base to leadership, and a public profile for all leaders, Connections does not have representation at anything

at a circuit level. This is not the official position, but the choice that has been made by Andrew to avail himself of the opportunity to engage with staff meetings or circuit meetings. He says,

‘I’ve not ever felt part of the circuit, because I have been getting on with this and then I’ve got to circuit, if I go to a Circuit Meeting or staff meeting, the culture of those meetings and the things that are being discussed are completely on a different page...none of it is relevant to me.’

Andrew has even limited his preaching appointments in the circuit to a handful a quarter: ‘being on the plan is like a cultural shift for me...and causes me a lot of work.’

The result of the tensions between personalities on the circuit leadership team and the low profile that Connections appears to have within the circuit’s life is that Connections exists in almost splendid isolation. The fact that Connections is in the basement indicates some objectifying body-language which hides people away in a low corner, so they are not to be seen nor heard. In turn, ‘most people don’t have a clue’ that Connections is situated within a Methodist Central Hall, nor indeed that it is in any sort of Church building altogether. The risk is that there is no feedback loop between the circuit and connections: and indeed no higher accountability.

‘At the same time we want to be part of the wider church and we want to be in relationship, but I think we’ve got to work out what that means but so has the wider church’

The role of the circuit meeting within the Methodist Church is to provide oversight and wisdom in all aspects of mission and ministry. With Connections remaining unrepresented within these conversations, there is a risk of future power struggles or even power abuses.

With conversations about the stationing process and the means and methods for employing a replacement for Andrew, there was also a strong sense that the Luminosa community felt obliged to the Methodist Church and in some ways indebted to them in a way that they were unprepared to pay back. As one of the interview panel noted, 'when you've got funding from someone then you are in some way indebted to them perhaps.'

Both the circuit and the leaders of Connections and Luminosa are aware of the benefits and tradition bestowed upon them in being located in a Central Hall. The Superintendent of the Circuit said, 'it's interesting that Connections is based in the Central Hall, which in its day was a Fresh Expression of Church.' A member of Andrew's former support group reflected,

'I could say that Connections has got more in tune with the values and the ideas that went into the creation of a Central Hall...doing something for the people who are actually there and responding to the needs of the city centres.'

For members of Luminosa, it is the cause of the 'bloody wine thing,' whereby the regulations of the premises do not allow alcohol to be consumed on the premises. The Central Hall, and its congregation, has been subject to the decline in attendance, financial stability and weekly useage. Whereas the Cathedral has renewed its part in the local narrative, damaged as it was in the attack that devastated the city in the early 1990's, the Methodist Central Hall remains untouched by redevelopment and by terrorist. Without Connections, the

appearance of the Central Hall is that it has very little to say to the wider community in the contemporary society.

This is not to deny that the location of the Central Hall as a venue is not received as a gift from the circuit to Connections and Luminosa. The way in which leaders and employees speak of the context, however, is more out of frustration about what is limited, rather than by what is enabled. A Valentine's event which was going to include handing out condoms and safe sex advice was curtailed because of the potential of press involvement and bad publicity for the project. For one employee, these were the two key issues of the venue:

'Yes, we're not allowed to give out condoms on Saturday nights at night café. I'm not really sure how I feel about that, but that was an impact. We're a non-alcohol venue: that affects some of the things that we can do'

Despite the ambivalence shown and felt towards Connections from members of the circuit, Methodism through Connections has a lot of positive things to demonstrate in terms of building communities. The willingness for people like Andrew to be given a broad remit to explore fx within a given locality is noteworthy. In turn, the networking of Luminosa and Connections demonstrates both the benefits of ecumenical working and an awareness that ministry is not a one-person vendetta. Andrew exemplifies what it is to develop a team of people and to enable people to take ownership of the evolution of a vision. Methodism is not threatened by ecclesial structures or by personalities. One leadership team member caricatures the difference between Methodism and Anglicanism thus:

'It's more like, [Andrew] is like Oh yes, Circuit sign that off or sign that off and [Mark's] like What we have to do is get this Bishop's Mission Order and go through this piece of legislation, it's got to go through General Synod and [Andrew] is like the Chair of District said it would be alright. A real real contrast between these Anglicans that are stuck in their very English we've got to have laws, we've got to have certain ways of doing things, we've got to fit into structure with Methodist which is from what I can see far better. Sounds like a good idea, let's do that.'

Community: Connections

Connections has many different identities. It is an Arts cafe. It is a community of volunteers. It is the location for a night cafe and street angels project in the city centre. It is a gallery space. It is a venue for hire. It is a catering company. It is the basement room in a city centre Central Hall.

As a business, Connections offers a wide variety of locally sourced, organic products as well as a large selection of fairly traded drinks. Cakes are baked on-site and add to the array of sandwiches, pies and paninis on sale every day. The business side of the community is also expanding to include a buffet catering opportunity. The cafe is open from 10am-6pm every day throughout the week, and also stays open for local community groups at various times during the week. Lumniosa meets on a Wednesday, the night cafe opens on a Saturday night into Sunday morning, Cinematograph meets once a month to discuss movies, and life drawing happens on a Tuesday evening. The venue is also open for hire by local community groups.

Aesthetics are important to Connections, focussing upon the artists in the locality. The multi-level room has a pleasantly chaotic feel to it. There is a hotch-potch of chairs and seating arrangements. Each table is covered with a different fabric cloth and token flower. There are sofas in a games corner and DJ decks overlooking the space. Various iPods are plugged into the sound system throughout the day, playing an eclectic mix of acoustic and ambient tracks. With baked good freshly prepared on the premises, it is no surprise given the eclectic nature of the community description that the on-duty chef 'put a few ingredients together' and 'invented' a recipe for treacle tart.

It is not always clear what Connections is selling. In basic terms it is a cafe, and thus sells coffee, cake and lunch. However, the launch of art exhibitions and the use of the window space for a Lent installation of 40 volunteers locked in a box for twelve hours each, suggests that part of cafe experience is about the art and about how community participates in and engages with art. The development of 'Tea and Yoga' suggests that the cafe is selling some form of spirituality and wellbeing regime. The night cafe and street angels project is a brand for social change and drunken sanctuary. Life Drawing classes are about the collision of the innocent and the voyeur. In many ways, Connections is evolving in a way that is trying to sell and commodify community.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁸ This sense of community and spirituality as a reaction towards and against culture is reflected in Sayers, Mark, 'Emerging Church is about Culture NOT Theology', <http://marksayers.wordpress.com/emerging-church-its-about-culture-not-theology/> (29th April 2009). It is also reflected in Tomlinson, Dave, *The Post-Evangelical*, and implicit in Ward, Pete, *Liquid Church* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 2002)

The ethos of Connections is difficult to capture.²⁹⁹ Employees and leaders of the community talk in broad terms about hospitality, community, inclusivity and loving service. However, unlike Safe-Haven, these values are not written up and published. These are the underpinning values, but they are not in place in any concrete fashion. Such an ethos has an inherent sensibility within the community, as one employee described:

‘When I first came to Connections it was a café that my friends took me to lunch. I handed in my CV that day and it was the first time I had been to Connections and it wasn’t until my interview that I realised it was anything to do with the Church and even then it was only a couple of months after that I realised it was actually to do with the Church’

What this indicates beyond the values that are tangible parts of the atmosphere of the cafe, is that the Christian foundation is even more inherent than discernable.

Andrew reflects such comment and concern:

‘Have we created something that’s too good an outreach, I mean that takes away the focus because it works so well?’

One member of staff jokingly remarks, ‘I wouldn’t even have come here if I knew it was a Christian cafe.’ The cafe is not emblazoned with iconography or profound graffiti on the walls. It is a place designed for conversation and coffee. Andrew notes that Connections was always designed in such a way that it need not be a church nor Methodist:

‘it’s about building Connections as a place and I think as a result of that you build it as a community’

One of the leadership at Luminosa commented that Connections ‘camouflaged’ Christianity.

²⁹⁹ For a study on the significance of ethos and values for communities under stress or during transition, see Pohl, Christine, ‘Why Ethos’, (unpublished), 2006

Significantly, as Andrew notes, 'it is important that there is a place in the City base distinctively like Connections rather than Starbucks or even any of the other independents, it's quite different.' There are, however, three International brands of coffee house franchises on the road parallel to Connections. What is distinctive about Connections, therefore, is its intention to build community and to discuss spirituality and Christianity, the focus on the arts and the provision of an arts space, and the silent fact of it being located within a church context.

Links with local churches are most clearly seen in the Night Cafe work. Volunteers from different churches across the city serve the city centre after-hours. A safe taxi service is provided, toast is consumed in vast quantities and numerous games of trivial pursuit are played. At the time of the research, the website for the community advertised that:

'Every Saturday night / Sunday morning from 2am until 6am, Connections Art Cafe transforms into the very special ConnectionsNightCafe. Providing a safe, welcoming and entirely alcohol free space in which...clubbers, and assorted night-owls can come together for a post club/bar wind-down, ConnectionsNightCafe is a truly unique nocturnal operation with an incredible vibe.'

Although a crucial part of the work of Connections, the general manager of the cafe notes with regret that Andrew has not served at the night cafe for over a year, despite being the main force behind its conception.

Employees take on the responsibility of developing the direction of the community, often working well beyond contractual hours in order to see through an idea or

running a project or event. One staff member who wanted to develop a volunteer scheme for 16 year olds came into to cafe outside of their shift pattern in order to set it up. Each member of staff is connected and invested in community, although the staff turnover was also quite high. A number of staff members have left after about a year to eighteen months because of the high work ethic and expectation on staff. Such an observation does ask significant questions about the burnout of leaders and participants and the reasons why small communities become places of refuge for the short term, rather than permanence for the long term.

As is noted throughout this chapter, Connections does not communicate its Methodist heritage and funding. The general perspective from staff is that the context has more constraints and challenges because of its Methodist location. The ordained leader is not involved in the networks of practitioners that mean that Connections does not have a high profile within the wider fx publicity. That the leadership is more egalitarian also means that the Methodist values and principles of Andrew are only a small part of the wider leadership steering the community. When specifically asked about the influence of Methodism, Mark comments, 'I am not an expert on Methodism...what Methodism offers distinctively from Anglicanism, I wouldn't know.' All this is to say that Connections offers a huge amount in terms of community and creativity. Its lack of observable ecclesiology beyond the links to Luminosa may be the thing that continues to make the community open to critique and challenge by those within the circuit leadership.

Community: Luminosa

Broadly described as an alternative worship event, Luminosa meets once a week in Connections. The relationship between the two communities is not an easy one.

The language used by the leadership team of Luminosa to describe their cohabitation is that of a step-family. They are two communities brought together, but without mutual unanimous agreement or care for each other. A good illustration of this is that as researcher, I introduced the staff of Connections to the leadership team of Luminosa. They did not know each other's names, even though they had shared the cafe space for over two years. The language of cohabitation is deliberate. Throughout the research, there was a specified desire for the two communities to be joined together and to celebrate mission and ministry as a unified unit, yet this was balanced with an apathy or ambivalence to achieving this in practice. As one member of the leadership team reflected, 'there's a bit of a divide between Connections and Luminosa. I don't know if you have picked it up.'

That a divide exists at all makes teasing out the observations of Connections quite difficult. However, there are a number of observations which together offer clue as to why such 'exclusivity' might exist. It is important to note these, as they demonstrate the depth of community and begin to let some of the guiding

principles of the two emerging churches shine out. According to the self-defined patriarch³⁰⁰ of Luminosa,

‘For me trying to tease them apart, there’s massive overlap but crudely Luminosa is a worshipping community, Connections is a community which is focussed on mission. Now that’s very crude because many people who come to Connections will then overlap into worship community, some people who go to Luminosa will overlap and be involved in the mission stuff.’

This delineation of worship and mission is articulated from the Luminosa community. It is indicative of a community that meet together to ask deep and fundamental questions about faith and belief in the underground cafe, but also reflective of a community who are not so motivated to act upon these conclusions in a more public or community way. On one hand, Luminosa gathers together people who are articulate enough to write long blog posts saying why God cannot exist, whilst on the other hand, has the potential of being a place of anonymity and performance for individuals. Mark comments,

‘there are times when a couple of people in Luminosa say, ‘no, I don’t believe in God at the moment.’...so often we are a place where we can say, ‘no, I don’t believe, but I want to believe.’ For me that is significant.’

The sense from this part of the interview is that, for Mark, Connections is the place for unbelief and Luminosa the place to question assumptions. There is a sense that community members are reluctant to speak about their faith outside of the context provided by the worship gathering, and within it are keen to deconstruct both personal and corporate faith.

³⁰⁰ On one occasion, the leader declared, ‘I fathered this community and now you need to grow up without me.’ There are significant issues of the psychology of leaders as intertwined or distinct from the communities which they lead.

Luminosa is a transplanted community. Its eight year history in the city has seen it move venue from dining table to Cathedral and now to Cafe. It has a history all of its own, and as such has a specific view of how it can impact a locality. Participants travel into the city centre for events and travel home again via the complex motorway systems surrounding the urban sprawl. One leadership team member comments, 'I doubt whether it is close to 50% of the community who do not commute.' There is a sense, articulated in conversation with Andrew, that Luminosa in some ways is threatened by the potential of Connections. Now that Luminosa is located within a specific context in the city centre, there is a feeling amongst some members that they are being constrained into conforming to the Bohemian as opposed to the beauty and aesthetics of 'proper church.' As with WTS, Luminosa is another example of a fresh expression before the term existed. The large numbers of researchers who visit the community for empirical data is a double edged sword for the community. The profile given to Luminosa by the ordained leaders makes it a priority for research, and yet the leaders often feel that they are living under a microscope and do not have a remit to fail. Luminosa needs to maintain its position on the radar of researcher and of bishops in order to source further funding, to prove its viability as 'church' and rather more subtly, to keep the profile of the leadership up.

This opens up the question of funding and ongoing support of projects and communities beyond their initial start-up.³⁰¹ There is a strong perception in

³⁰¹ Preston, John, 'Spent up of Sustainable', *Mixed Economy Journal*, <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/sites/default/files/mixedeconomy1.pdf>, 26-27. Preston notes

conversations outside of FX that contextual mission is costly, too risky and potential non-ecclesiological. Several interviews hinted at the potential for Connections to become a fully fledged business, and for Luminosa to continue its itinerant existence and to move on from the Central Hall. Connections and Luminosa currently receive equal funding from the Church of England and Methodist Churches, but this, according to the Superintendent, cannot continue indefinitely. The café business aims to be self-sustainable, and will achieve this by the end of the year. The nature of transitional leadership in Connections/Luminosa also brings serious questions to the stationing system within Methodism, as it interacts with the processes and procedures of other denominations. There are further questions raised about the different support structures within the Church of England and Methodist contexts, with the Methodist Church being seen as a more flexible structure than its Church of England counterpart. This is further supported in a research consultation where one delegate commented, 'if the Anglican Church cannot sort this out, then I'm just going to become a Methodist.'³⁰²

Luminosa risks being overwhelmed by the challenges Connections sets out to meet in terms of its radical shift in missional thinking and practice. As one member of the leadership team of Connections/Luminosa noted,

'I don't think Luminosa owns Connections in the sense that Connections almost stands alone in its staff team is really particular and as a result of that Luminosa doesn't really feel like it buys into the Connections thing and doesn't really own it.'

that 'lots of thought, research, prayer and hard work goes into new mission initiatives, yet the sustainability of such new expressions of mission and church will be at least partially governed by establishing sustainable revenue streams.'

³⁰² Church Planting Research Consultation, 15th – 16th March 2011, Birmingham

Connections is a group of hard working, dedicated, locally-based employees and consumers. It is on the cusp of spiritual conversations, but even the staff have pluralist viewpoints of faith and spirituality. During the research, there were two practicing Wiccans, a goddess worshipper, an agnostic and a Christian on the staff, which all contradict FX stated aim of intentionally developing a Christian community. The greatest risk of the community is that the creative part of Connections takes off, and the cafe becomes another independent location within the city – a successful business, but without a Christian community developing within it. Andrew even went so far as to suggest that Connections would, in time, birth its own autonomous fresh expression of church or spirituality.

‘I think it’s highly likely that in a few years’ time there will be a Luminosa community and Connections community and a sort of, another faith community within Connections which will have to and will look different to what Luminosa is like.’

Alternatively it would merely find a new location and go on selling ethically sourced coffee and organic pie and peas. Again, Andrew muses:

‘the best thing for Connections would be to leave the Central Hall and buy a shop somewhere else, and be left alone to do its own thing.’

This lengthy introduction is required because there are several comments to make. Luminosa is a well researched, and highly respected community. Connections has little or no research written about it, and certainly none in the public domain. The two communities are intimately linked together. There is continued funding from both the Church of England and the Methodist Church for a leader to oversee both communities, and to develop them further. However, there is no official partnership agreement in place for the ecumenical working of the project, which

raises questions about the ecumenical nature of a local project as well as the FX relationships ecumenically. As Connections is in a Methodist building, the legal, disciplinary and ecclesiological guidelines are broadly of the Methodist Church, although again the extent to which this is monitored and accounted for is rather more ad hoc. There is a very shallow understanding of membership to the Luminosa community, and Connections is a consumer and customer driven environment. There are thus deeper questions about membership and financial arrangements back to the Parish and Circuit which in normal experiences would be calculated on a membership basis.

Despite protestations and PR to the contrary, 'it is impossible to see Connections on its own,' it is indeed possible to speak of one community without the other. What is interesting is that the leadership team of Luminosa were keen for this not to happen whereas Connections, on the other hand, were quite happy to be more independent and outspoken in their contributions to the research. One leadership member notes, 'Luminosa might not last forever, but for now it's my community.'

This is important for one further, crucial, factor. Connections, during the period of research was entering the second phase of transition. Both the ordained Methodist presbyter who pioneered Connections, and the ordained Anglican Deacon who pioneered Luminosa, announced their resignation from the community just before or during the research period. The general mood in Luminosa was one of trepidation and distrust in the circuit leaders, especially the circuit superintendent,

who would be charged with the responsibility of finding a replacement leader to oversee both communities. One leadership member reflects this fearfulness, 'it's quite frightening to think that [the District/Diocese] may put a lot of pressure on and the wrong person may get selected.' During the mid-week meeting where the process of finding a replacement leader was outlined, there was a strong feeling that Luminosa did not necessarily need to be in a joint venture with Connections, and that such a starting point was unhelpful. The communities' cohabitation continued to be a cause of conflict rather than celebration. Connections, on the other hand, were more pragmatic, seeing the whole transition as disappointing, but that managers come and go. Jobs were secure and the business is making money. A new member of staff is a part of the transience of life that is regularly a feature of the generation that Connections represents.

It would be ideal for this thesis and for FX to be able to talk about Luminosa and Connections in such a way that demonstrates a glorious and harmonious relationship, a celebration of ecumenism, and a combined vision of community. It would be ideal to discover discipleship at the heart of each community, and that the fuel to the whole enterprise be, as Andrew regularly commented, 'loving service' both to each other and to the City Centre. Alas, such ideals remain the province of Venn diagrams drawn by the leadership team to persuade Luminosa of how it will exist without its own leader and pioneer.

Leadership Observations

In Connections, the line between community and leadership is unclear. In contrast to the other research locations, the community is about enabling those within the community to discover their vocation and to do something about it. One leadership member reflects, 'I'm generally from the school of thought, you know it is well giving your opinion, but [you need to be] prepared to actually do something about it, rather than just whinge.' Community at Connections is therefore about discovering one's place in society, being valued, and being enabled to take the risks to see people become leaders in their own right. One staff member is to be promoted to General Manager. One staff member runs the night cafe. Another dreams of 'having a filing cabinet with lots of files for each of the volunteers' and the development of a community allotment in order to source more of the local produce for the cafe.

As has already been noted, the most significant leadership observation of Connections, according to the volunteer manager, is the 'flat leadership' structure. Leadership is a collective noun at Connections. Staff comments vary from the exuberance of 'we've got all the ideas...need to be sustainable,' to the reflection that 'Connections literally takes over my life.' Within this, there is recognition of valuing what each participant in community brings to Connections, as well as the clear and present danger of staff burnout. The high level of creativity within the staff is matched by the creativity of the artisans within the community at large. In enabling a team structure, and providing boundaries, values and guidelines rather

than rules and contracts, the net result is that the creativity of those engaging with Connections is captured and nurtured. This is not to say that Connections leadership does not have its fair share of creative differences and divergences of opinions. But each person seems to take responsibility for what they can, and support those things which they cannot do themselves.

Andrew notes that his model of shared leadership is one which he thrives on.

When asked about the important features of leadership at Connections, he responds:

‘Getting more people involved in community, linking people up together, networking, giving people confidence, like developing people’s skills, all that social inclusion stuff that I think Connections is about, that ticks all of those boxes because that’s what’s important for me. So, yes just building that community development side of Connections, because I think that’s what it’s about, we need to do it so let’s do it.’

A critique to this pluralism of ideas and energy is that, despite its physical location, Connections currently presents no specific Christian edge or agenda to the cafe, beyond a series of unpublished values, and the need for the cafe to remain within the confines of the Methodist Church’s Constitutional Practice and Discipline. Even the 40 project: where an artist is locked inside a glass box for a day with three objects, is only made explicitly Christian by the personal reflections made by Mark on his blog.

Andrew talks about being the leader of communities such as Connections as being part of his vocation as an ordained presbyter. For him, evangelism is about ‘loving

service' and word and sacrament can take many different forms both within and outside of the inherited church. Ordination for Andrew is part of his vocation, being ordained is not a means to an end in exercising his leadership. He does what he does as a presbyter; he is not a presbyter in order to do what he does. Both Andrew and Mark are regarded as, 'pioneers,' 'leaders,' and 'the boss.' They are also highly regarded as 'friends.' The volunteer manager talks of Andrew as, 'my mate.' Interestingly, this also contrasts with the way that Andrew behaves within community. Despite having an articulated sense the difference it makes for him to be ordained, very few people know that he is ordained, and he rarely uses such language. However, the level and cost of relationship is high. One leadership team member resigned from the team in order to 're-engage with the community.'

For the wider community of Connections, it is fair to say that few of the customers would know that Andrew is ordained, or indeed that he was the founder of the cafe. Within the wider leadership team of Luminosa, there is a suggestion that ordination gives people a greater authority and credibility when it comes to external agencies, and that is perhaps true of the relationship and connections that Andrew has developed with the local authority, local healthcare professionals, businesses and police force. Whoever the leader of Connections, ordained or lay, they act as a figurehead for the values and practices of the community at large. Furthermore, ordination is immaterial for the leadership team, as one member articulates, 'you can't limbo under my definition of ordination.' What is enthusiastically endorsed is a theologically trained 'theologian in residence.'

Mark's own journey towards ordination is intrinsically and irrevocably linked with the development of Luminosa. Luminosa experience a vocation to the priesthood as part of their journey too, and many have adopted the sacramental language that Mark uses.

'my reflection is in many ways I've been a Deacon to this community for 7 years and an Anglican understanding of the Deacon, so that evangelistic, pastoral, sharing the word with them, but haven't had the sacramental ministry. So when I'm priested, I'll be able to break bread, preside at communion for people and perhaps in many ways that's, it's, as Luminosa is growing into, has grown into being Church, maybe that me breaking bread and sharing wine as the person who pioneered it, is a sign of actually now is the moment that we are [in].'

The issues herein are personality based, although further contrasting research between Church of England and Methodist fx may tease out further theological issues.

As with all the fx researched, the fact of being an ordained leader provides one with permission to seek and serve the Kingdom of God, and the time in which to explore such communities. It gives the communities authority within the church and provides the leaders with the security by which to explore and build. Both the courage of an institution like the Methodist Church to give permission to leaders to step out of circuit ministry into something far more creative and contextual, and the ability of these pioneers to use their authority in order to further the development of the communities in which they find themselves.

An interesting reflection upon the equity of leadership can be shown through the use of pronouns in the interviews. Mark, the pioneer of Luminosa, constantly used a personal pronoun when talking about the communities he is a part of. There is an inherent and observable patriarchy in his language 'I have fathered this community and it is now time for you to grow up without me.' Mark published the story of Luminosa broadly, and it is adopted by researchers in the field as a 'success story' of emerging churches in the UK context.³⁰³ Significantly, this is noted with some scepticism by others within both communities: 'I mean Luminosa has yes it's got a short history really and a lot of it is tied up with Mark. It can't continue like that.'

Andrew's responses were very different. His responses to questions about both leadership and the community were almost always prefaced with 'we.' The story of Connections is not one that is told very often. Connections has a shorter history, and has not yet achieved many of its aims as a Christian community. In large part, this is because the story of Connection's development is to be a story for the community and the consumers to tell, rather than an individual. Thus the narrative of Connections, and its ecclesial potential, is carried up in the ordinary theology of those who participate in community at any single moment. Connections is not researched and not written about, and Andrew is not keen about defending nor promoting it beyond that which happens organically within the locality.

³⁰³ This appears on Mark's blog, but is not referenced here to preserve the anonymity of the community.

The question of leadership for Connections is, therefore, bound up in the outworking of leadership within the community, and who tells part of that story. In turn, leadership is far more about mutuality and relationality than about target achievements and strategies. As Andrew reflected,

‘[Leadership in Connections is] very mutual and I think because I was also aware that I need to earn people’s respect before I could do anything else, and yes if I started preaching to people, then we wouldn’t have got anywhere, so it’s been building relationships’

In an egalitarian context, where all employees and indeed some volunteers have the opportunity and desire to develop both community and strategy, a vital component is that of relationship. Leadership throughout Connections is about relationship and friendship. Invariably, this is demonstrated at a number of levels both within the community and throughout the levels of local governance.

Connections is a place for people to come to when they do not want to belong in society, through disenfranchisement because of mental health problems, low education, abuse, lack of church background or else deliberate dislocation from city life because of the creative and artisan scene of the Northern Quarter. The leadership of Andrew models a way of life which is about giving time, space, and service to those who are marginalised or who deliberately distance themselves from community.

‘Here it’s been a genuine sort of “I want to get to know you, what makes you tick, how you’re doing” and the very natural thing that’s happened from that is people do it back to me. Friendships have grown from it.’

Connections challenges the assumption that all leadership is to be authoritarian or hierarchical. Instead, at the core of the values of community is to build a network where everyone has a place and a value.

This being said, it is interesting to note that following a Luminosa evening, a trip to a local pub saw the leadership sat at one table and the rest of the community members who were present, sat at tables the other side of the room. When beer was bought, the same division existed, with drinks being bought for the leaders by the leaders, and everyone else making their own purchases. As much as equity and equality is practiced and espoused – especially within Connections – this is not always evidenced in the social behaviours outside of the building.

There is a deeper aspect to relationships at work too. Andrew reflects on the nature of Christian leadership to be prophetic, and the role that Connections plays in demonstrating a counter cultural way of life to the wider locality.

‘There’s something within the Night Café work I think which embodies that and shows other people how to do it, so there’s something there, and I think in running a business how you can do it in a way that’s ethical, where staff are valued and all that, so there’s lots of being prophetic in that. Yes.’ Connections does this through the values of the purchases within the cafe, as many products as possible are ethically sourced, organic or locally produced. The work of the night cafe provides an alcohol free environment in the part of the city which is brimming with night clubs and late-licensed bars. Andrew has also been invited to judge the ‘All Bar None’ awards which:

‘talks about whether [clubs and bars] serve people who are drunk, spot checks on them, it looks at their kind of record of looking after people, their drugs

promotions, how sensible that is... what initiatives they take to make sure we leave their premises safely ... that for me personally is very much a role of saying what could be done better and what was wrong and standing up and actually saying “you know from my experience with Street Angels and meeting people this Club did that, that was wrong” and wanting to see that improved.’

A much noted feature of leadership, and especially ordained leadership, is the role of the reflective practitioner. In terms of preparing for a job description of a new leader, the unanimous consensus is that a leader for Connections and Luminosa needs to be a theologically reflective person. There is a part of this opinion which is directed towards what is currently not present, or what is arguably hidden within the community. As one of Andrew’s circuit colleagues reflects:

‘The results of the people, the charismatic people, may be beautiful but they may be bad theologians, and you need also the reflective people who can see what’s happening with the sparking of ideas and be able to interpret that to say OK what’s the theology behind this.’

Another colleague notes,

‘charismatic or the people who start, tend to be the people with vision, then to be the people who can think out of the box. History says they can in danger of being autocratic powerful people, just objectionable people in the long term, but you need that type of person to do that.’

However, given the pluralism within the community, it is fair to note that the role of a Christian leader within Connections, according to both Mark and Andrew, would be one of guarding and guiding a Christian narrative in and amongst other principles and practices. During the course of research, after all, ‘Tea and Yoga’ began on a weekday morning, and Buddhist meditation was regularly advertised on posters around the building, although it is fair to note that most of these mysteriously disappeared over time.

The need for a theologian in residence, or theological practitioner is articulated well by one member of the community. This is a sentiment that could be said by a generation of people, not just a professional in a large city. One member of Luminosa's leadership team reflects:

'I just thought it's funny because I need to ask questions like that to make sense of things in my head and I don't want someone necessarily to tell me the answer but I want to be able to discuss it and explore it rather than you know "you're not towing the party line," you know and I love the fact that you can ask questions.'

In this way, to be a theological reflector is about discerning the right times to speak out, and the right moments to enable the whole community to ponder and wrestle with the questions of life and death that affect them. It is worth noting that both Mark and Andrew are highly qualified theologians, who have both continued with their higher level theological education alongside leading the communities of Luminosa and Connections respectively. Andrew completed his MA just before he left the community. Mark continues with his own PhD studies. All the leaders who have participated in this research have at least Masters level degrees in at least some facet of theology. It is only WTS where such learning and continuing learning is not matched within the community as a whole.

Leaders are theological reflectors, and it is observable many of that those within FX are incredibly reflective people. There is a question mark over how this learning is communicated and how the respective communities respond to this. In Connections/Luminosa, participants in community enjoy the questions, and are gifted with a safe space where their questions and their creations are displayed and

pondered upon. Amongst the named leadership, however, there is a perceptible tension with regards to who owns and who tells which story. There is a challenge within the leadership of Connections to tell the account of a Methodist context and the wrangling and prayerful discernment within a circuit context, which risks being neglected in the more public account of the two communities. It remains unclear where the theological reflection within Methodism is happening or having an impact beyond the colloquial. The leaders may need to begin to publish their work and support the continuing critique and development of missional ecclesiology.

The articulated boundaries of control within Connections are the limitations of the physical space: both in terms of its walls, and in terms of the regulations of the technicalities of being housed in a Methodist Church. Even then the physical space is often subverted, or at the very least played with, as exhibitions use corridors and external spaces alongside the multi-platformed cafe. As has been intimated before, the theological limitations are those laid down at Luminosa, and even then these are part of the gate-keeping evidenced by the leadership there, rather than those imposed by or to Connections. As one member of Luminosa reflected:

'I still think there's some things that you can say and some things that you can't even though we think we can say anything. The example I gave last week when I was not having a good week, was if I turned up week after week after week and said 'I don't believe in God, I think this is all shit' pretty quickly the community would get very fed up with me, so there's a fundamental line of we do all agree on some stuff and even the people who would come to Luminosa saying they don't believe in God won't say that every week. They'll just come and be part of the community the best way they can and so there are some fundamentals that are givens. You know we are a Christian community not a Buddhist community.'

Conclusion

Leadership at Connections succeeds by having confidence in people, as is demonstrated by the development of the volunteer co-ordinator, the freedom employees have to develop themed events, and through the willingness of Andrew and Mark to build a wormery in the cafe courtyard, on the suggestion of a customer. There is a nuance to this which is about being able to interview and employ the right people for the jobs in the cafe – which means that there is a contractual arrangement in place, and a transaction at work for those paid to work in the cafe. However, with this comes an understanding of creative freedom, reciprocity of generosity, and a significant say in the way that the cafe runs and develops.

The model of equity and mutuality is mirrored in the way the night cafe is staffed and run – and this is with volunteers. What is part of the experience for employees is thus modelled and experienced by those with no transaction, no contract and little training beyond the intermittent intervention of healthcare professionals or the local constabulary. Even conflict and disagreements become a place not of control or of power, but of creative solutions. This fluidity and ability to participate and wrestle with problems and ideas is highlighted by a member of the leadership team reflecting that ‘I sort of enjoy the conflict a little bit because it pushes you, it makes you think.’

Connections is a fresh expression of community, but it is unclear what its evolving ecclesiology is. The dislocation between Connections and Luminosa further complicates the question of an emerging expression of Christian discipleship and mission within the city context. However, it is an example of what is possible in a Central Hall location and with full time staff. It is one example of teamwork dependent on lay employees and a consumer culture, helping those on the fringes of society to engage with other people.

Chapter 4, Case Study 2:

Watch This Space

'We weren't set up to be anything, we started with a blank piece of paper and then 8 years in we got another blank piece of paper. Maybe in 5 years' time we'll... well 5 years time we will get another blank piece of paper.'

Watch This Space (WTS) is a community based in the north east of England. The community is rather low-tech in their approach to most aspects of their life together. Unusually, there is no website for the community and emails are kept to a minimum between leaders and between members,

'I think if we send an email out I think that's it, that's a job done. It takes a bit more than just an email, people just don't reply to an email so you don't know whether they've read it.'

This is then reflected in the means of accessing the community and becoming a part of it. In order to know the community, one needs to participate in it. This is achieved by personal invitation and a connection with a current member of the community. The community is thus one which is grounded in family links and deep friendships, as people relate to those around them. Face to face relationship is the primary discipleship model employed by the community.

'It [is] all through relationship evangelism predominantly: that there was somebody there who [has] a good friendship and relationship with a friend and invite[s] them along to something.'

The language of membership is deliberate. WTS is a Methodist Church. They pay a Circuit Assessment, which in turn heavily relies on the direct debit contributions of members to the community, participants are encouraged to be members of the Methodist Church, and WTS appears on the Circuit plan as a regular and planned

Sunday congregation. Whereas the other contexts illustrate a more flexible model of being and belonging to community, WTS is intentionally hard-line about membership. 'If you are a member of another church, please stay there' is the advice given by those in leadership to prospective participants. Even to join a cell group, an individual needs to be invited by the leadership team.

WTS is structured around the practices and values of Cell Church. Many of the features of WTS compare with the summary of Cell Church offered by Harvey.³⁰⁴ For WTS it is possible to trace the influence of the Church Growth Movement for the leaders, themselves being mentored and coached by those heavily invested in the movement. The focus upon the cells means that the congregational part of worship on a Sunday is no longer seen as the priority for discipleship, '[a] shift has moved the centre of the church life from the congregational service to the small group.'³⁰⁵ As will be demonstrated later, there are also a number of ways in which the leaders control the means and the message for the community. The values that are the plumb line for all the activities of WTS are taken directly from Cell Church

UK:

'Jesus at the centre,
A community of love and honesty,
Every member grown,
Every member in ministry
And evangelism,
And so we make sure that the things that we are doing fit in within those values.'

³⁰⁴ Harvey, David, 'Cell Church: Its situation in British Evangelical Culture', in *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, Volume 18, No. 1, 2003, 95-109

³⁰⁵ Harvey, 'Cell Church', 98

The weekly Cell meeting is the main focus of community life, although there are other events to which members and participants are encouraged to attend. There are no glossy handouts or snappy sound bites to the community at WTS. It is as rugged as the community from which it has evolved. What marks out WTS as valuable within this thesis is the extent to which the locality and the social context determine the actions of the community. WTS is a community of people drawn together from a very small and specific location and social group, with the specific intent of reaching others within their specific location and social group.

During the course of fieldwork observation, the leadership was in a state of transition. The last of the remaining two initial leaders of WTS were moving to new posts from the start of the following year, and so the community was shifting from leaning heavily to the leadership of one ordained person to a lay leadership team. This transition of leadership comes a few months after WTS altered its objectives from being a church for the frustrated members of other local churches to being a place for 'not yet Christians' to discover more about Jesus and the Christian Faith in a non-threatening (Church) environment. The shift in objectives was conducted in an open conversation and prayer retreats for the community, but has consequently raised some significant questions and observations both about leadership and the perception of ordained leaders, as well as about how a community continues to function with the same values but altered and shifting objectives, as will be explored later in this chapter.

To understand the community of WTS, one must take extremely seriously the context in which it resides. The desires, aspirations and social needs of the community are reflected in WTS and vice versa. What makes WTS a fascinating research location is that it is arguably the context and not the content which is radical, different and fresh. One popular critique of FX and the like is that they are run by the middle classes for the middle classes in the middle ground. WTS shatters this delusion. From a basis of understanding and taking the geographic and demographic location seriously, it is then possible and necessary to observe the life of the community itself. As with the other locations for fieldwork, WTS offers a smorgasbord of events and points of access for those who would define themselves as being on the very fringe of Christian community. As with the community at Connections, those on the edges of society would include those with debt problems, addictions, mental health diagnoses, family breakdowns and unemployment. These are the very same people who find themselves at the centre of community at WTS, and are often the people who are then invited to lead cell groups or to share testimony with the rest of the community.

Context

WTS is located within one of the largest urban centres of the north east. The Ward statistics are skewed somewhat by the diversity in housing and professional occupations of some inhabitants within the locality. One of the incoming leaders of

the community, Simon, noted this tension as he expressed his own desire to be involved in the more difficult parts of life in the town:

‘that area around [the geographic location of the Church building] is really socially deprived. It’s kind of like going downways, you can go down into [one part of the town] one way which is quite a rich area but going the other way...which has huge social problems you know – unemployment, addiction issues, all the social issues that you get.’

The ward in which WTS exists is 2km² in area and has an adult population of 8720, according to the national statistics database. The area is served by a busy motorway network and numerous dual carriageway road systems which enable many of the more economically active populace to commute both to places of work and of leisure. The area has attracted a large amount of regeneration money over the past decade, in part at least due to the poor social standards of living associated with this part of England. There has been an expansion in leisure and cultural facilities as well as the continued provision of local authority supported projects for children and adults alike. However, this also means that there is a poverty line that is recognised locally, but which can be more difficult to unearth in the contemporary environment.

The 2001 census revealed that 82.42% of respondents declared themselves to be Christian: over 10% higher than the national average. The town’s churches, however, do not represent this in their own attendance and membership. There are a number of large Pentecostal and Free Churches in the locality. These have a history of being Church Plants from the nearby City, and so many of the smaller, local churches, are struggling for their existence. The perception from the

leadership of WTS is that these larger churches are poaching on their territory, attracting people to a large church where it is possible to be anonymous and to have the privilege of worshipping with the best of technology and musicianship. This is over and against churches that have been in the city for hundreds of years who are desperate for passionate people to come and serve their own locality. There is a duality in these observations. There is a humility to enable and support what is being done, but also a resentment that the smaller churches could be doing similar if only there were more people, better resources or a willingness to change. What this statistic also indicates is that there is a latent faith base which is more synonymous with being 'white British' than it is with any affiliation to Church or discipleship. The town is proud of its place in England and, despite a history of protests, pit closures and poverty, there is a strong bond of family life and humanity.

A useful illustration of the impact of the lack of social mobility and multicultural awareness is that of one community meal. The table was laid out with the ingredients for fajitas. However, no-one in the community knew what the ingredients were, or how to construct the meal. Rather than be shown – or even asking – the majority of the community picked at the nachos and did not eat that evening. Although an observation that is easy to dismiss, the event demonstrated the fear and lack of self confidence for people when they were faced with something unfamiliar to them. There was no engaging with a new etiquette, or a passionate investigation into a new experience. Instead, together, the community

subconsciously demonstrated their objections and fear towards something different and extra-ordinary. In this instance they voted with their mouths and did not eat together, even after the cook showed them how to make their meal. This is one minor incident, but a reflection upon the undergirding value towards that which is known and comfortable in preference that that which is other. This is far deeper than a menu. It goes deep into the politics, social mixing and ethical decision making of those within the local society.

Furthermore, interviews with community members proved difficult, as many participants did not want to be recorded on tape. This belied a lack of confidence not in the community, but in their own ability to talk about the community.

Although recorded semi-structured interviews were difficult to arrange, all the community members wanted me to join them in their cell groups. The nature of WTS is encapsulated in the open hospitality and expectation of participation within people's homes and through bible studies and cell groups. Later, note will be made too of the anti-intellectualism amongst members of the community, which is a further extension of this.

According to the statistical tool ACORN,³⁰⁶ the postcode area directly surrounding the church building is classified as 'low rise terraced estate for poorly off workers.'

WTS benefits from having a majority of mobile members, thus many participants

³⁰⁶ <http://www.caci.co.uk/acorn/whatis.asp> (3rd March 2010). 'ACORN is used to understand customers' lifestyle, behaviour and attitudes, or the needs of neighbourhoods and people's public service needs. It is used to analyse customers, identify profitable prospects, evaluate local markets and focus on the specific needs of each local community.'

commute up to five miles to the Sunday worship and to the weekly Cell meeting.

The challenge of building a community is heavily constrained by geographical factors. Within the community, the level of poverty was silently indicated. On an away day to a nearby city, for instance, some members were embarrassed because they could not afford the bus fare nor lunch that day, and refused what they considered to be 'charity.' The context has a great deal of pride, even if the pride hides some of the social problems that are also experienced by the town.

The general attitude of the context is one of aspiration and of provision. WTS is part of this story, but not the whole. The location is beginning to thrive once again with the impetus of Government and European Grants for regeneration. It is this impetus for regeneration which is reflected within the Circuit in which WTS resides, and perhaps gives a socio-economic reason why a 'regeneration' of a fx has its place in the locality.

Circuit

The circuit has seventeen churches and seven ordained members of staff.

WTS is further on in its story and its experience within circuit than many other fx churches in the Methodist Connexion. Of the most striking differences is that over the course of its development and existence, WTS has gone from what Emma called a 'blank piece of paper' to being recognised as one of the circuit churches. This

transition has also included negotiations with one of the other church councils and an agreement to share a property. There is an explicit intent not to share worship or local church management together at this stage.

The local church context, therefore, is one of support, approval and encouragement to continue to evolve and review WTS.

What WTS offers to the wider debate, therefore, is a critical reflection on how a new and intentionally formed community is able to renew a circuit model – and in so doing, gain the respect and trust of a circuit so that the new community can make a further radical shift into a new territory. WTS began as a renewal movement for those who were disenfranchised and frustrated with the church.

‘Two Churches in particular within the Circuit had been very much resourced by WTS so people from those Churches had gotten involved in WTS, grown in their faith, seen new ways of being involved in Worship, Evangelism and Outreach and taken that back into their local Church.’ From renewal, WTS has now taken the more radical decision to focus solely on those who have no current church connection, from whatever denomination. It is interesting that one leadership team member reflected, ‘apart from the people who run it, I wouldn’t say it’s Methodist at all.’

WTS, therefore, is credited with being the community through which the whole circuit rediscovered its calling and roots as Church. With a group of refreshed and resourced people, other churches are now reaping the rewards of those who have been discipled within WTS, and who were released back into their local setting.

‘So we said to a good number of people, thank you very much but you know if you want to be free, go back to your local Church, that’s fine, don’t feel guilty about it and the way that we did that was we gave people the option to become members of WTS for the first time.’

WTS began before there was any language to describe what they were doing. The circuit took a courageous decision to set aside and support two members of staff into an area of ministry that was ahead of the times. By tracing the relationship between the circuit and the experience of those within WTS, it is possible to ask the question: does a Fresh Expression need to renew the ‘inherited’ church before it can be missional? Not only is this a profound question about the exercise and oversight of power, WTS demonstrates a need and desire to unite and renew what already exists almost as a consequence of being different to the standard expectation and experience of church. Once WTS demonstrated that as a community it was safe, once it began to have a noticeable and profound impact upon people and the local community - only then did they received the affirmation, impetus and permission to be even more radical in its reach. From WTS experience, it is possible to contrast the aims and objectives of FX as being able to grow out of a Church context, listening to its community.

It is important not to see the links to the local church context as something which is an easy co-existence. Both the community as a whole, and the leadership, have felt that they are torn between the expectations placed upon them by what they call the ‘inherited church’ and by their own passion and desire for evangelism and mission into the locale. Comments reflect that WTS still feel ‘like second class

citizens,' constantly trying to justify their existence and the resources offered to them. One leader commented that their dream for the future of WTS is to 'see us accepted as the church by the church,' although in circuit terms they also said that 'I don't actually feel anything negative in the [host] Church itself, and I feel quite supported in the circuit.' Such comments are due to the recent evaluation and reorganisation of the work at WTS, 'It felt like stopping and starting again.' It is also reflective of the current expectations laid upon the community because of their need for financial security as a recognised Methodist Church in its own right, at least by the circuit.

A further crucial reflection on the relationship between WTS and the local church is that WTS meets every Sunday afternoon in a Methodist Church premises.

Unintentionally, this means that the body language of WTS is open invitation to come and join the community, which is rather unusual for church communities so steeped in contemporary ecclesio-missional practice which would be more capable with going out into a community. What this does illustrate is the ways in which a circuit can support and resource a new congregation by using the assets of the buildings it has in Trust.

WTS, therefore, works with the local circuit and is highly regarded by them. In terms of the local church, the leaders have negotiated a partnership with an already existing church and now share their premises at minimal cost and without the expectation of involvement in the local politics of property management. WTS is

one of the churches on the circuit plan. This is not always reflected in how WTS feel that they are treated, but they are well on their way to ‘the established Church letting [WTS] be church.’ Even the language used of WTS is that of being a church or a community of people, rather than a project or a series of events. One person marks this transition in these stark terms: ‘WTS is a Church now rather than a project.’ The local church context is replicated throughout the connexion. What is unusual is the way in which a project has transitioned into a recognised church – and renewed people and parts of the circuit in the process.

Community: WTS

The story of WTS is indelibly intertwined with the development of FX – but WTS was born before this language and branding existed. WTS is one of the Methodist landmark FX and boasts one member recently becoming a senior leader within the FX organisation. Whereas FX has given permission for communities like WTS to evolve, WTS provided FX with the practical evidence for how they intended those expressions to begin and evolve. The community, therefore, carries the burden of being a flagship enterprise at the same time as vying, albeit without the competitive urge and posturing of other fx, to be one of the first FX in the country.

As with all the contexts researched in this thesis, WTS operates with a series of events or access points into the community. One long-standing member of the community takes up the story as they have experienced WTS.

‘It was set up originally as a Project about six years ago now and the aim was to attract 18-40 year olds... we [have now] moved away from the 18-40 thing and I think now it’s basically become a new church in ...I think the focus now really is to get people who have never been to church or people who have been to church and been disaffected in some way and trying to get them back into church.’

Over time WTS has shifted from being a community for 20-40 year olds to being Church for those who have no current Christian community. The evolution has taken place over the last twelve months, and has coincided with the transition of leadership from one ordained leader, Emma, to a lay leadership team headed up by Simon.

Initially, the transition happened through a Circuit review process. Simon reflects:

‘We were just looking at where WTS was to go and we had a couple of prayer days and invited people who were around WTS to come along and pray and think about where we need to go and look for God’s direction and God’s vision, and we spent a good, in total probably a year and a half I would say as much as that, looking, feeling something was wrong and thinking what do we need to do, where do we need to change it.’

The sense of dissatisfaction with the community, coupled with intensive prayer and discernment, caused the community to reflect about their values and their practices. In terms of research, the acknowledgement about prayerful discernment is a unique feature here. For the leaders of WTS, no action was taken without eighteen months of prayer and conversation as a community and as a leadership team. Simon reflects that the role of ‘a small leadership is to look at vision and direction.’ This is a major contrast with Connections, where prayer is seen to be an unnecessary feature of the life of a leader, and with Safe-Haven, where prayer was rarely discussed or evidenced outside of the worship events. This constant reflection and re-orientation, however, means that, as Emma reflects, WTS ‘[is] still

vulnerable let me be very clear.’ WTS’ leaders are under no illusions that the community is fragile and full of fragile people all searching for Christ-centred community. Emma reflected in an conversation, ‘part of me won’t miss circuit ministry – there is so much trauma [in WTS], even with such a small group of people.’

As one member said, ‘the cell is my church’ is the basis of the community. Every week there are cell meetings around the town for those who are a part of WTS, and an associate cell for those who are keen to meet together, but who attend other churches in the locality. The cell provides the values through which everything else is organised. There is a high expectation that people will be involved in cells, and will begin to lead parts of the programme too. This shared leadership is currently a little more hit-and-miss, depending on the cell group, but it is certainly the theory that everyone in the cell takes some responsibility for the delivery of material and the leading of the discussion together. This is a feature not just of WTS, but of the Cell Church Movement.³⁰⁷ Having said this, it is noteworthy that each community member is invited to join a cell following an interview with the leadership. Cells are heavily protected by the leadership and thus although they are the focus for the community, they are also precious and contained. This contrasts with many Cell Church models where ‘one cannot be in a cell church without becoming part of a cell.’³⁰⁸ At WTS, the worship and ‘feasting time’ is open to everyone, the cells are by invitation and interview only.

³⁰⁷ Harvey, ‘Cell Church’, 99

³⁰⁸ Harvey, ‘Cell Church’, 99

Every week is a worship event – ‘WTS@5.’ Beginning with a meal together, this is then a further hour of contemporary worship, video clips and preaching. There is always some sort of creative ritual response. One week, the theme was to be ‘captivated by God.’ The text followed a series on 1 Peter. The video clips included Susan Boyle’s audition on *Britain’s Got Talent*. The response activity invited people to look in a mirror and think about being captivated by God, whilst listening to an instrumental version of ‘Beautiful’ by Christina Aguilera. This format was regularly observed during the fieldwork, although it was often stated that whoever leads worship and preaches has the freedom to break from this liturgical ordering.

Even the Alpha course is noted as being too great a step for some people to take in their spiritual journey, and so there are also regular ‘seeker’ events hosted by WTS. This has included showing ‘The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe’ at Easter, a Valentine’s Day labyrinth experience, and the taking over of a comedy club and an Clean Comedy Night being put on with performances by some of the UK’s leading Christian Comics.

The constant reflection on what WTS does as a community and how they go about engaging with people in the locality is partly about the high level of reflexivity of Emma. Her ability to ask critical questions and to reflect deeply about a subject is demonstrative of the reflection done by so many of her contemporaries in

leadership of such communities.³⁰⁹ A feature of leadership which Emma made explicit, however, was whose other comments and criticisms were allowed to impact the direction the community was taking, and whose were heard but then ignored:

‘if suppose somebody had a complaint about something you were doing, if they weren’t in the 18’s to 30’s [age bracket] we said early on that we wouldn’t listen to the complaint or the suggestion.’

The community remains focussed on its aims of enabling the unchurched and dechurched to join a worshipping community and to discover what it is to follow Jesus together.

Alongside listening to and ignoring critics, WTS is defined by the Cell values.

Communities like WTS and Safe-Haven have strong value systems which act as the plumb line which calibrates everything that the community does, and gives members the opportunity to act in accordance with those values too.

‘They’re not just the core values for the cell but it’s actually the core value for everything that we do with WTS, so when we’re working in the different areas of WTS whether it be in the contemporary worship or the cell groups or the social activities or the Alpha courses, those values are paramount.’

These are not doctrinal statements, but values on which WTS exist. When it comes to the doctrines and discipline of the Methodist Church, there is a subversiveness in the leadership team which demands flexibility,

‘we won’t intentionally go out of our way to sort of break the rules of the Church, that wouldn’t do, so we do follow the rules of the Methodist Church. I’ve never read [standing orders] I’ve no intention of reading them...we’ve all got a good idea of what the Methodist Church is about.’

³⁰⁹ See Volland, *Through the Pilgrim Door*, Male, Dave, *Church Unplugged* (Milton Keynes: Authentic, 2008), Guest, Mathew and Steve Taylor, ‘The Post-Evangelical Emerging Church’, 53-56, Ganiel, Gladys, ‘Emerging from the Evangelical subculture in Northern Ireland: An Analysis of the Zero28 and ikon Community’, *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 6:1, 38-48, Edson, Ben ‘An Exploration into the Missiology of the Emerging Church’ and Belcher, *Deep Church*.

The positive language of values and the strong sense of identity, “this is who we are and this is who our community seeks to minister to,” also filters through into the leadership language about the Methodist Church. Emma further developed this:

‘I think there’s a growing pride to be part of the Methodist Church, that we’ve almost gone through the ‘Oh goodness do we have to be in the Methodist Church’ bit, to start and to recapture our heritage and realise where we’ve come from and that growing sense of self-realisation and self-appreciation, it’s good particularly obviously in WTS’s case the way that Wesley ordered people into cells and bands.’

Methodism and the Methodist tradition is something that Emma celebrates and articulates, although she is also aware that many within the community cannot and do not share her view. Emma was keen to ‘rediscover our heritage, and that side of things.’ What is striking, however, is the immediate adoption of the language of Cell Church, but not the appropriation of the language of Wesleyan Class Meetings. There is a dislocation between the Methodist tradition and the contemporary exploration of that through the Cells. This may be merely a difference of language, but my contestation is that this is a subconscious, rather than conscious decision on the part of the leadership team, based on their overall willingness to reflect on the ecclesiology of Methodism; and to continue to participate in its structures and governance. The lack of Methodist language is because the lay leaders do not know the language, rather than because they chose not to use it. The affirmation of being a part of Methodism is not universally acknowledged by the community. One member said,

‘I’m not passionate about Methodism, I’m passionate about Christ.’

It is important to note that these quotes come from people who articulate great frustration with institutions and establishments, the Church included in a list that during conversations also included comment about politics, the NHS, local bus routes and the virtue of marriage. In a community of people who self-define themselves as unchurched or dechurched, it is no surprise that the treasure and value of Methodism is not espoused. Either they have no experience of what this looks like, or they have been broken by denominations and are not in a psychological position to respond positively towards institutions. It is, therefore, a challenge for communities like WTS to communicate the depth of heritage and history in ways which brings healing, unlocks something of faith and experience and which also takes seriously the confusion and hurt individuals and communities feel.

WTS is an example of a community finding a best-fit way to talk about who they are and what is important to them, using the tools available to them from the cell movement, Methodist Church, Fresh Expressions, and other influential charismatic leaders within the locality.

Linked to the theological and ecclesiological heritage, is an inherent anti-intellectualism which is in evidence within WTS and is reflective of the values characteristic of the context. When asked about Methodism and theology, Simon replied 'I don't read church history, it's dull.' When pushed, the reply came back 'I don't read theology books. There is no point.' Leaders in other contexts are those who have been trained and tested by an institution and who are deeply reflective

people. Simon stands apart from this, and is rather brash in his dismissal of both theological reflexivity and about being set apart by the Church in order to fulfil the task to which he is appointed. Other members of the leadership team draw the distinction between ordained leaders 'who have been trained and so know all of the answers,' and lay leaders like themselves who enable people to 'develop their own networks...to solve their problems or to be a shoulder to cry on.'

For the community, there is some impact of having nationally renowned leaders behind WTS. That the two initial leaders now hold key posts within the Connexional framework of Methodism does reveal a deference of opinion and theological wisdom which relies upon those who have gone before. Crudely, those within the community become lazy to the stimuli of questions and prefer to be, as one leader noticed 'spoon-fed'. The social tendency is to defer to the highest trusted influence, in WTS case, this was Emma and her husband and former community leader, Stuart. Even when leaders and members were asked about their heroes, the names given and the stories told were of local people, acquaintances and people within the community. The list included other church leaders in the vicinity, or else visiting preachers who had shared the platform at major conferences with Stuart and Emma.

Relationship, therefore, is key to influence and decision making. The demographic makeup of the context requires a leader to be trusted and to be known as someone of integrity. There is a subconscious distrust of anything or anyone unknown. The

fajita account detailed previously just one illustration of a deeply seated resentment and fear of faceless and nameless influences. There is a myopia in social existence, to which the Church community is not immune. Whereas the hallmark of 20s-40s communities is that everything is open to debate and discussion: at WTS the opposite is true. The values are focussed, the teaching is clear and the ethical markers of members of the community tend towards the conservative: in terms of dogmatic views of authority, attitudes towards the bible and uncompromising sexual ethics, couched in the comment by a member of the community: 'I think Paul is mint!'. One cell group member commented 'today I have learnt that I have biases with the Bible, and I am not sure what to do now.'

Further linked to this anti-intellectualism is a conservative standpoint which demands clear ethical preaching. WTS' mandate is for clear preaching and strong boundaries. Most telling is that one member confessed: 'I get slightly confused between good leaders and good preachers.' Preaching is a priority for the community. In part this is because the generational make-up of the community is of those people whose educational experience was of being told what to think in the classroom. In one cell comment was made that that they needed to take notes from the service in order to have the right answers ready for the cell the following week. There is a fear of getting things wrong, which runs deep in the psychology of the members of the community. The community has a didactic approach to life. They want to be told what to think and why. An away day looking at Bible Basics saw one person forlornly sigh, 'I can't do no more today.' The session had lasted an

hour. It would be interesting to see how this evolved during the discussions within the Alpha course, although evidence suggests that the discussions would be another opportunity to reinforce the group dogma rather than engage in the debate.

This didacticism alongside the desire for boundaries within the value system, all combine in the passionate evangelical mix of the community.

‘I think people probably, some people are more conservative than others, and I think it’s largely on an issue by issue. I think when it comes to actual salvation I think everyone’s very conservative evangelical, salvation through faith in Jesus Christ is what we preach and is what we believe.’

This does not tell the whole story, however. The community is heavily influenced by a local Pentecostal Church which is theologically conservative in its views, demonstrated in the rhetoric and conservatism of cell members who attend both communities. Although there is no ecumenical partnering with the leadership of the local fellowship, there are still some people who attend the rally-style meetings there in order to hear ‘truth.’ There is a very clear set of ethical values at play in the community, which is not always challenged by those in leadership.

Anti-intellectualism is a perjorative observation of the community at large. The leaders respond to this and pastorally work with the community and not against them. The life experiences and language may be different from more traditional forms of church, but the leaders are at least subconsciously aware of the needs and language of the community and use this as a further value. There is the potential for collusion, but Emma’s own continuing academic engagement indicates that

even if Simon and others are unwilling to read theology, there is still oversight that values and articulates a deeper engagement with scripture and the practical and academic discipline of theology.

One final observation of the community is that of hospitality. The language of hospitality is key to all three research locations, but demonstrably means different things. For Connections, hospitality is shorthand for the service industry. For Safe-Haven hospitality is about the catering options of a large Central Hall. For WTS, however, hospitality is the crux of relationship, and has a sacramental intentionality. Emma noted 'food is integral to what we are doing, it's not just a convenient thing of getting people together, but it's about truly taking on board of what Jesus said, 'when you come together eat and remember me.' It is over a meal that worship begins. It is in people's homes that Cell takes place. It was over dinner that interviews were arranged. It was with family that the research and researcher was accommodated. The desire to live alongside people and to offer an open door and an open table is a clue to the deep desire to live alongside people and to participate with equity. Even a daughter's 21st birthday party became an occasion for an invitation to join a party.

For all that is commented and criticised about the social myopia, anti-intellectualism and aspirational issues of the wider community, it is perhaps with the abundant and gracious hospitality offered to strangers in the community that the silent language of the kingdom is spoken. Open tables and doors are not

preached about nor discussed, but it is how the community best engage with each other. It is perhaps this which then also forces open the conversation about Sacraments within FX most acutely. Open tables become places of refuge and grace and care and conversation – and it is in these moments that the community at WTS demonstrated giving and grace far beyond their means. WTS speak far louder with actions than with words. They generously provide for the circuit assessment. They serve the local homeless community through the Cornerstone project. They enable family and friends to find forgiveness, no matter how grave the situation. Relationships are deepened and Jesus remains central to the explicit evangelistic intention of the community, even when the fajitas remained uneaten.

Leadership Observations

There is a sense in which ordination for those within WTS is strategic.

‘I’m not sure I agree with ordination in the first place. I can’t see a precedent for it in scriptures, I think it’s exclusive, unnecessary, and yet here I am as an ordained person, but I realise that if I was to fulfil the thing that I feel God has called me to I have to go.’

Another ordained leader said with a wry smile and flippancy, ‘I’m a rebellious lay person hiding behind a white collar.’ During training, ordination was the only option for someone with a calling ‘to leadership and to mission.’ Emma’s confession is that ordination itself is not a vocation, merely the means of exercising the vocation of leadership. For Emma, and some of her peers, ordination to the Presbyterate is a means to an end. If there were alternative routes of employment and vocation, Emma would have taken them,

'I also don't think it made one iota of difference that I was ordained but I did think if I had been in a similar position as a lay person I would have [taken it] because it's me, it's not the ordination, it's who I am, it's the gifts that God's given me.'

The shift to enabling ordained leaders to exercise missional leadership is not a shift towards extraordinary ministry per se. Emma articulates this instead to be about correct stewardship, discernment and deployment of gifted people in the right places for ministry. Simon noted the tension he felt between a call to ordination and a call to being the leader of WTS, 'I thought God was calling , me to be a Methodist minister, and then the next day was like 'no, that's not what I'm called for'...I know I am called to WTS and to my work.' Ordination may not be one size fits all vocation to circuit ministry. Through being ordained, Emma noted that by being ordained, she is better able to lead, evangelise and be recognised in the wider Church.

Linked to this is the tension that Emma and her contemporaries feel about how they relate to the wider Church and connexion. Emma's role, although changing, includes leading an 'inherited model' Methodist chapel, alongside WTS. This has been the cause of a great deal of psychological and practical tension in leadership, which is part of the current wider debate about leadership and vocation.

'it's almost presumed that because I have got the Fresh Expression, it's not quite as important as the inherited Churches, so actually well just leave that alone for a bit and come and work in the inherited Church, as if that's the cherry on the cake rather than actually a bit of the cake itself.'

At an away weekend of the Mission-shaped Ministry course³¹⁰ one speaker noted that 'it is impossible to do FX and Inherited Church at the same time,' yet this is exactly what is expected of a vast majority of Church leaders within Methodism. The perception that has to be battled is between making a deliberate decision to focus on what is seen to be 'the fun stuff' whilst at the same time, colleagues become swamped with the number of occasional offices and pastoral duties required within the inherited model. This is not merely a constant battle of false and great expectation and willpower. This is the real-life situation of colleagues suffering from clinical stress and the temptation to 'just help out.'

'it's a constant pull and it's very hard to keep your brain focused on initiating new things, on looking in a visionary way, on mentoring new leaders and things like that when you know you've got somebody sick in hospital who expects a visit or there's a Church Council that needs extra preparation in the inherited Church and for me a lot of the time the inherited Church has won the battle.'

FX becomes the 'attractive carrot' alongside which other aspects of Christian life and ministry are associated with. There is a real sense of the tensions that this brings, and mourning for the lack of integrity that is thus demonstrated.

The language here is telling. The battleground is between vocation and vision on the one hand and a pastoral concern and circuit permission givers (or blockers) on the other. The risk with all fx that rely upon a host Church to fund them is that eventually the leadership is held to ransom by the highest contributor: most often in terms of finance, but also in terms of time and ministerial provision. Emma commented that she often 'feels guilty' when she makes a decision that supports

³¹⁰ http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/sites/default/files/fe-missionshapedministry-brochure_0.pdf (10th May 2010). The Mission-Shaped Ministry is course designed to equip leaders to engage with and develop Fresh Expressions of Church.

the ministry of WTS rather than her colleagues or inherited models. Such tensions are known by senior leaders and are expressed in nationally delivered courses. Yet the reality is still experienced painfully by local leaders such as Emma. In her case, one solution has been to find another job which is more dependent upon her leadership and missional vocation. The pastoral task of ordained leadership is one of the clear boundaries for WTS and the transition to a lay leadership team. Simon demonstrated self awareness when he said,

‘I am not a people person, and I don’t pick up on people’s feeling very well. I don’t like the thought that I am ministering to everyone else’s beck and call.’

One way that WTS is challenging the expectations of ordained ministers, is to take seriously Emma’s own reflection that she would have been a lay leader if the church enabled it to be so. As WTS continues to change over the coming months, it does so with a group of three local lay leaders, of whom one is recognised as the overall leader of the community, albeit supported by a local circuit minister for pastoral and sacramental purposes.

The self-confessed lack of emotional intelligence of Simon - his form of pastoral care being ‘pull your socks up and get on with it’ - is seen by Emma as the opportunity to provide oversight and accountability to the community from an external person. The same is true for the theological dexterity and reflection aspect of leadership, which Simon is ambivalent towards, ‘I don’t read theological books. They annoy me.’ There is a distant relationship to the Superintendent within the

circuit, so the community is not left floundering or without an accountable and wise counsel. Together, the leadership are gradually enabling the WTS community to come to the conclusion that 'it's not the dog collar that is actually in charge, you know.' The community together are able to come to the joint understanding that authority and leadership is earned, and not bestowed in a ritual or ceremony.

'So I think being a lay person for all it has issues with some people in this Church about the role and authority, not status but authority, I think it also has more freedom than you might get as a minister, freedom to say and do things that you might not want to.'

Accountability and oversight are key features of the leadership community. All the leaders have a mentor, and accountability trios are also in operation to support and sustain the ministry of the leaders, and to protect the community.

'Accountability is very, very key in what we're doing. We've always had a strong level of accountability both within ourselves and the Circuit more than any other local Church would have with the Circuit.'

This is not to say that there are not potential places of conflict for lay leaders in WTS. One voice of concern was that the transition from one powerful personality to someone with less authority and charisma would be a hard transition for all involved.

'I think you know Simon has been chosen to be the Leader and I think the transition period will be difficult when Emma does actually stand back. It will be difficult but it will continue, it won't fold, it will grow but I think it will be difficult.'

There is a sense in which this is partly due to the strong personality driven style of leadership previously enjoyed by the community. There is also a part of the community life that does not deal with any form of change well, and giving authority and leadership to one from within the ranks, so to speak, can be difficult for people who assumed that they would also have been given that opportunity to

step up, or else have wanted to have been involved in some sort of selection process. What is also interesting to note is the background comment about the community 'folding' because of the loss of a personality.

Emma expressed surprise that WTS identified themselves as leaning towards being a personality driven community. Jesus may be at the centre, but the leader has the platform. This is not just a question of a physical platform at WTS, although true. This is also a reflection on the platforms of national conferences and within the FX publicity that the leadership have earned. Emma is honest and reflective in her response to this criticism, and the impact that such comments have had upon her leadership style.

'there was a time when it was pointed out to me that certain people came to WTS because of my personality and I found that very hard to take because I realised that if that was true then as I left it would all fail. So it has to be about, it has to be about team work and not having any special person at the front heading everything up so we share a lot of what we do, I don't get all the glamorous jobs.'

Throughout the research period, the personality of the leader is a key point of reflection. Stuart notes, 'a lot of the Church growth stuff revolve[s] around good leadership and a star leader.' For WTS, personality is acute because of the promotion track through which the leaders have progressed on. Both Emma and Stuart are highly regarded leaders within Methodism, and on the evidence of WTS' longevity and development, this is well deserved. What is surprisingly absent is the language of vocation by the leaders. There is a strong sense of being called to set up WTS, but coyness about discussing the process towards a move away from the community. With WTS being the primary focus of ministry, there is a sense that

discussing anything outside of that sphere is in some ways a betrayal to the community. None of the leadership team demonstrated the arrogance that other leaders in research have occasionally flaunted. Again, the context may provide the window through which to view this behaviour.

One feature that I anticipated to be a significant reflection of both personality issues and of the leadership at WTS is that of gender in leadership. The research phase indicates that this is an issue that is transposed into the context, rather than a feature of the community per se. Emma reflects 'I've seen much more of the issues [of gender] in the inherited Church than what I have in FX.' Emma does not find that gender has much of an influence within the conversation and community. There is something to be said for an entire movement that prides itself on inclusivity and a place for those who are disaffected by church community. Traditional views on gender in leadership are not perceived as an issue by leaders nor by participants. In part this is because the arguments have moved on significantly. There may also be something to say for the continuing patriarchy of pioneer ministry, and the fact that gender is not perceived as an issue because it is still primarily men who have the opportunity to exercise this form of ministry.³¹¹

Emma suggested that reading gender issues into the discussion is a 'bad hermeneutic.' As one community member said, 'I actually like women preachers...we are all equal.'

³¹¹ See Fitch, David, 'On Being and Emerging Church in the Christian and Missionary Alliance', Fuller Theological Seminary, Fall 2008, http://documents.fuller.edu/news/pubs/tnn/2008_Fall/8_cma.asp where he concludes that 'the issue of women in ministerial authority has been very difficult to navigate...theological issues like these are so crucial to our church's representation of Christ to our community.'

Within fx, there appears to be an inherent protectionism that is demanding of both leaders and members, an unwritten contract of expectation and behaviour. Those who fail by these criteria – be they leaders or prospective members – are excluded from community, which in itself is faithful to the Methodist ethos of Wesley's band meetings. For WTS this manifests itself within the Cell groups.

'There are problem people who can't settle in a Church and we are aware that we've got a couple of people like that... The difficult people we have to be very honest with them and we're quite protective of the cells. We'll say anyone can come to Sunday worship, anyone, that's open, but we're a little bit more protective about who comes into cells.'

The history of WTS records people with traumatic backgrounds who have attempted to join the church, but who have become very divisive. In one instance '[WTS] lost an entire cell of new Christians.' Emma noted that a church with the sole objective of reaching those who found no home within the traditional church structures had the potential to be attractive to those with destructive personalities. WTS learnt the hard way about how this may manifest itself in community life.

The language of protectionism is about protecting the community from extreme versions of themselves. People who bring with them traumas and past experiences require professional care over a long period of time, to begin to heal. This quickly raises questions about the emotional intelligence of leaders to act quickly and compassionately to respond to the immediate and longer term needs of members, as well as to provide adequate support outside of community life. Given the urban context, it is no surprise that intervention is required for a significant number of crisis situations. Drane offers a similar reflection and warning for leaders of

emerging churches, 'leaders will need to ensure that such new ventures are not hijacked by those whose main concern is to find healing for their previous hurts, and who would be satisfied with an individualistic and introspective form of spiritual expression.'³¹²

There is also a part of the gatekeeper role which is about preserving the purity of the project. The gate keeper maintains the community and enables those already present to grow and develop and mature together. They are also able to determine the right moves to make in order to do what FX defines as 'growing into mature expressions of Church.' Not only is the reputation of leadership constantly under the microscope of funders and researchers, the expectation is that WTS is a flagship church and should continue to be so. Those who would risk collapsing the venture altogether are directed elsewhere. The sharing of prophetic visions for the community by those at the highest office of Methodism, alongside the references in discussion forums and cluster meetings about the community, all indicate that there is a desire to preserve the community as it currently stands: come what may. There is a national project at stake here, not just that of a small community in an urban town.

It is interesting to note how reflexive the leaders of WTS are about leadership, vocation and enabling those within the community to discover their calling and gifting, in contrast to the inability of community members to articulate qualities or

³¹² Drane, John, 'The Emerging Church', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 6:1, 7

gifts of leadership through interview, conversation or questionnaire. One interviewee responded to the leadership question, 'I don't know, that's your area. You tell me your answer and I will see if I agree.'

Conclusion

WTS has adopted the language of FX, and is a prototype for the organisation. WTS has developed from a renewal movement into a church for the unchurched, and has done so firmly within the policies, procedures and discipline of the Methodist Church. The current transition to a locally sourced lay leadership team, overseen by a presbyter in the circuit, is indicative of the potential within Methodism to resource and support fresh ways of being Church with a view to the long-term development and sustainability of the Church. WTS contribution to the wider conversation is its context, rather than content. WTS is part of a largely working class urban context with significant social problems, attracting large amounts of Government regeneration money and support.

It is the context and not the content which makes WTS a community of interest for any study into fx and Methodist leadership. The actual format of WTS is an amalgamation of concepts and ideas taken broadly from the Church Growth Movement.³¹³ What is startling is that WTS is an example of a Fresh Expression within an urban context in a socially deprived area of the United Kingdom. The

³¹³ Engle, Paul (ed.), *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004)

leaders are keen to protect the community, but despite the influence of highly charismatic communities on the peripheries, this is more about maintaining a sustainable community and preserving the precious time and effort of volunteer leaders, than it is about any sort of spiritual battleground. The community is complex and chaotic – but then it is most reflective of the context.

WTS asks the critical question of whether indeed it is possible to do church planting alongside more traditional forms of ministry, the tensions of which are most keenly felt by Emma as she reflected personally and deeply on her experience and expectations of ministry within this context.

Chapter 5, Case Study 3

Safe-Haven

From the website, any prospective visitor to Safe-Haven is invited to be a part of:

‘A collective of young adults from around [a large multi-cultural City in the South of England], who are exploring what a life given to following Jesus Christ means for today. We want to be known as people who live our lives centred upon Jesus Christ and his dream for creation. People who love life and live it to the full, always finding ways to contribute something good to our community and our world.’

This use of language is indicative of the focus and values of the community. The membership is fluid and self defining. Jake, the employed leader of the community commented ‘the language I use depends on who I am talking to.’ It is unclear what makes one a member of Safe-Haven, as people affiliate themselves to the community through social media and personal relationship with Jake, beyond attendance at the mid-week service. For the purposes of this chapter, the language of membership is used to describe those who attended Safe-Haven while the research was being carried out. Many participants observed that Safe-Haven is a ‘safe form of emerging church’ and as such espoused the fact the community is Christ centred, following firmly in the evangelical tradition passionately espoused by the host Church through historical documentation, and throughout the interview process with members of the leadership team. The host Church itself is a Central Hall which houses an audio-visual company, catering company, Conference business and financial department. Such theological and ecclesiological foundations also ground the evangelical heritage of the leader (who is ordained in

another evangelical tradition) and the experiences of many of the community members. According to Jake, the unique 'marketing strategy' of Safe-Haven is to reach students and young professionals within the city limits.

According to Jake, the community is:

'a place to pull, it's a place to socialise, it's a place to be known, it's a place to learn or worship or be creative, it's all of these things to lots of different people...and it's meeting together, it's about forming people but for lives that make a difference.'

Making a difference is crucial to the community: politically, socially, globally and personally. This is seen to be achieved through teaching on the ten values and through encouraging good practice and achievements within the community. The ten values of the community are: worship, pray, create, explore, live, transform, influence, give, celebrate, include. These are the underlying principles of the community, as well as themes for the preaching and teaching session of the gathering.³¹⁴ It is interesting, however, that when community members are asked what the values are, they cannot remember, 'I don't think I can think of the values...it's on the leaflet and there are ten of them.' Safe-Haven intentionally 'commissions' or sends people out to re-engage with the world in which they came from, be that in work or at university, and into the wider world. Another community member notes,

'I think Sanctuary attacks also the big issues of global social justice, the poverty and inequality world-wide in [the city]. Although we only do a little bit of charity giving and people go to the open door meal. It's there on Safe-Haven's outlook and I think broadly it's about living as a Christian in a modern city.'

³¹⁴ Future work could be carried out on the nature, content and communication of community value systems. Lucy Moore comments that Messy Church has the values of 'chilling, creating, celebrating and chomping' in Moore, Lucy, 'Messy Church is Not a Club', in *Mixed Economy Journal*, <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/sites/default/files/mixedeconomy1.pdf>, 5

Guest notes in relation to *Visions* that ‘what seems to hold the core group together is not so much a shared set of professed beliefs, but shared principles of practice.’³¹⁵ In Safe-Haven, this may also what is going on.

The adoption of the name ‘Safe-Haven’ as a community brand reflects the need for space for spiritual exploration in a place of refuge or retreat from the threatening World.³¹⁶ In conversation, Jake noted that Safe-Haven is ‘an odd church for odd people.’ Participants are encouraged and enabled to live out their faith in the world in ways which make a positive and lasting impact both upon themselves as corporate individuals, in terms of being a group of individuals, as well as those employed by international corporations, and in wider society. There is regular opportunity to serve at a local homeless shelter. Local and international charities are supported through the voluntary giving (‘tithing’) of up to 25% of the community’s income, decided by a democratic nomination and voting system during community meetings. Many participants are themselves employed in the public sector or by non-governmental organisations, and one member has started their own dance company working with those with special educational needs.

Added to this sense of making a difference in the present, there is also a long-term view of discipleship and evangelism. Jake often says, ‘I am building a church for my grandchildren’s grandchildren.’ This immediately highlights a tension between the

³¹⁵ Guest and Taylor, ‘The Post-Evangelical Emerging Church’, 56

³¹⁶ see also Jamieson, ‘Post Church,’ 72

long term future of a community and the short and medium term participation of members, one of whom noted,

‘Jake has said ‘if I build a church for my grandchildren.’ I don’t think the rest of us can actually cope with that. We’re probably about 5-10 years ahead at the most.’

The concept of a century of community development is an abstract one for many, but counters the suggestion that such new ways of being Christian community in the twenty-first century are merely fads and fashions for a present generation. Furthermore, this raises interesting tangential observations about Jake’s own strengths in leadership, as it is unusual in church leadership to discover someone who is both a strategic thinker, and a ‘futurist.’³¹⁷

Context

The most recent statistical data for this Southern English city can be found in the City Council’s own report from 2007. Such evidence indicates that the geographic location of Safe-Haven is notable for a number of reasons: transience, high levels of deprivation hidden beneath the perception and projection of wealth, beauty and pleasure, and a large non-English residential population which are swelled by a significant immigrant workforce. The urban context is not only used as a designer silhouette for Safe-Haven’s publicity, it is the lifeblood which fuels the very heart of Safe-Haven’s aims and values. The street opposite the host-church is named ‘Safe-Haven’ thus uniting the community inside the building with the locality and context.

³¹⁷ See Buckingham, Marcus, *Now Discover Your Strengths* (London: Pocket, 2004), 98-99, and Wiseman, Albert L., Donald O. Clifton and Curt Liesveld *Living Your Strengths* (New York: NY, Gallup), 2004, 56-57

This is a city that is constantly on the move. It is a city of only 8.31 square miles, but which has a visiting population of an estimated 28.5 million people alongside the residential population, estimated to be 232,000 people. The nearest national railway station to Safe-Haven sees on average 80 million passengers per year. The average speed through the city is a meagre 8mph. Large numbers of people commute through the city or else enjoy the local tourism. There is transience to life in this city. Large numbers of people are constantly on the move, be that to work or to business meetings or to participate in the local nightlife. The city boasts a twenty-four hour mentality to life. It is a place where experience is important, and where there is often the blurring of moral and ethical boundaries both in business and in pleasure.³¹⁸

As such, the community at Safe-Haven also reflects this temporality of life. Many people engage with the community for between 18 months to 3 years, before they move out of the city or move onto a different community. One community member notes,

‘Jake is very aware of the transience of the community. On average most people seem to stay about 2 or 3 years in Safe-Haven because they are passing through, and he’s realised that he needs to get them on board as leaders as soon as he can if they are going to be there long enough to make a significant contribution.’

Communication between meetings is via email and social networking sites, as is noted by the community administrator,

³¹⁸ Local Council ‘Facts and Figures’ document, (London, Crown) 2007-8. Actual reference hidden to protect the anonymity of the location.

'[Jake] does not keep a pastoral list with address and phone numbers on as these change so much in the city. Everything is done through email or Facebook.'

Such a high percentage of population entering the city for work and/or pleasure also means that the community of Safe-Haven is a gathered community with many members being from different and distant parts of the surrounding area. What marks Safe-Haven from the Methodist Church congregation on a Sunday is that the majority of members at Safe-Haven are commuting from working in the vicinity, whereas on a Sunday many people commute in purely for the Sunday services, demonstrated during one Sunday service when a long-standing member of the choir resigned because the bi-weekly commute from Eastbourne was now too great for them in their retirement.

Safe-Haven, by meeting on a Thursday evening, becomes part of the working week and routine, rather than an additional purpose of a visit into the city centre. There are many implications of this which are out of the scope of the research, but one significant implication is the degree to which the locality is seen to be a part of the mission of the congregation, and thus whose responsibility it is to be involved in local engagement. Within the wider Church, there is a sense that it is the leadership team, rather than the congregation, who are involved in the networking and influence of local businesses and infrastructure. This contrasts with those within Safe-Haven, many of whom are already involved at the coal-face of influence and thus the role of Safe-Haven is to equip them for their working and social lives.

The city hosts 21 wards which are in the top 10% of the deprivation scale for the whole of England.³¹⁹ The community recognise that many people are ignorant of the reality and costliness of city life, and seek to counter this in many different and subversive ways. Examples of this have included worshipping together publicly in a local park, running specific charity drives, enabling volunteering and challenging the leadership team of the host Church to engage with environmental and economic issues which led to the business being granted a 'green award,' despite the politiqué of the Superintendent minister who, according to Jake, 'doesn't believe in global warming, so it is hard to see what impact that will have for the church who are rather apathetic on this issue.'

Only 55.8% of the city's residents are born in the UK, compared to a national average of 90.7%. There are 182 different nationalities represented in the city. Safe-Haven's value of inclusivity is partly evidenced through the proportion of non-English members. During the research period, there were people from Australia, South Africa, Philippines, New Zealand, Scotland and Uganda. There are many links kept with people across the world, whether they are those who have returned home or those who have emigrated for work purposes. Safe-Haven is a small and fairly new addition to the church-based opportunities available within the city. This is true of the host church too, as the Superintendent reflects on the politics of being an international church community:

'Most of our congregation (on a Sunday) are poor and working class. A lot of them are new to their jobs and a lot of their money goes back to African

³¹⁹ Local Council 'Facts and Figures' paper.

or the Philippines...we now in our leadership team have Ghanans, Nigerians, Sudoians, Gambians, West Indians, Phillipinos – so that everyone has someone at the top table.’

Beyond the boundaries of ethnicity, ecumenism is also important feature of the work done by the whole church leadership, and extends beyond the traditional denominations. Many members of Safe-Haven have experience of other forms of Christian worship, with some still maintaining membership at some of the bigger churches in the city. For others, Safe-Haven is as one member commented, ‘a last ditch attempt at church.’ Some members of Safe-Haven have a background in another religion, or else are on a spiritual journey incorporating a plurality of belief systems. Another member commented, ‘I know what I believe, so I have created my own god that I worship. I like it this way.’ Such exploration and plurality is seen to be creative and enlivening for the community at Safe-Haven.

Circuit

The host church is a Methodist Church. It is one of a few single-church circuits in British Methodism. The ministerial leadership team consists of 2.5 time Presbyters, plus a paid supernumerary and a Deacon. Jake, the ‘young adult pastor’ is a lay employee and a non-voting member of the leadership team. Together, they are supported by 2.5 time administration staff. The Senior Circuit steward notes,

‘this church is wonderfully well resourced compared to many – well, to all – other Methodist Churches. I mean, there is no other Methodist Church that I know of has a building like this, and we are very very well resourced, we are committed to all the work we do.

The mission statement of the Central Hall notes that its purposes are:

‘Simplicity in worship, spirituality in religion, loyalty to the Evangelical truth, fellowship with Christ and His people, high ethical ideals and a healing and uplifting ministry.’³²⁰

The statement is a reworking of the original vision documentation for the building of the premises at the turn of the last century. These purposes underpin the work of the host church. In turn, these have been reworked into the values of Safe-Haven. What is thus interesting and rather confusing is that there are different forms of mission and value statements at play within a single organisation – from the sub-contracted companies to the separate congregations and community groups. The contrast is in how the organisations function rather than in doctrinal statements. Whereas the church offers a mission statement and clear management directives by which these objectives aim to be achieved, Safe-Haven galvanises the community around value statements and various worship experiences.

Those who do access the host church for worship experience an hour and a half service including organ music, choral anthems, contemporary worship songs, and a central sermon. Oratory is something the host church is proud of, demonstrated by a plaque dedicated to the great preachers of Methodist’s yesteryear who took the platform and pulpit. There is a strong musical tradition including a robed choir and full-time employed Musical Director and Associate accompanying on the organ. There are children’s groups and youth groups on a Sunday. The mid-week service over lunchtime offers further preaching and hymnody, although again this is made

³²⁰ Taken from a leaflet outlining the ‘Conservation Plan’ for the Central Hall, published in November 2001.

up predominantly of those who travel in for the service and not those who take a lunch break from business in order to come to worship.

There are apparent tensions between Safe-Haven and the host church. One demonstration of this is that the mid-week Bible study clashes in its timing with Safe-Haven. One church member reflected the ongoing church mentality of 'when will the young people join us.' Jake reported a conversation whereby they were asked, 'why doesn't the leader just do games with them so that they will come on a Sunday rather than leading worship so that they don't have to?' A member of Safe-Haven's leadership team reflected, 'I think Jake wants [the members of Safe-Haven] to come to Christ more than to Methodism. That would be where [they] would leave it.' Given Jake's non-denominationalism, it is possible to conclude that such statements are reflective of Jake's ambivalence towards a denominational authority, rather than the intention of the church. There is a lack of clarity about what Safe-Haven aims to do and the way in which it interacts and intersects with the 'main' congregation or 'big church.' As the circuit steward reflected,

'we want to see that work thrive, but there are people who are saying, well you know, it is part of us or it isn't, basically...it is trying to work out the relationship...it is not meant as hostility.'

Even five years into the journey of Safe-Haven there seems to be a lot of reflection in conversation and in interviews from the church and from Jake about the disconnection between the Sunday services and the community night at Safe-Haven. Jake mourned the fact that only one lay member of the leadership team had ever been to a Safe-Haven night. Visits by the team clergy are done on nights

when communion is to be taken, if at all. One team member commented, 'I have only been three times.' This limits the wider clergy team's access to an opportunity to lead worship, rather than taking the invitation to participate alongside the other members of the community. Indeed, on one occasion, I as researcher was asked to lead communion because Jake could not do so, thus blurring significantly the boundaries of pastor, researcher, and member of the Methodist connexion. It appears as though Jake is left to run Safe-Haven, with limited appraisal and oversight meetings with the team leadership. This 'soft-touch' approach offers Jake creative freedom, but also frustrates the Superintendent who acutely feels the tensions between Safe-Haven, the host church and Jake:

'It's been really hard holding in the Sanctuary. It would have been a bit easier if Jake had been a Methodist, it's a help that [his wife] is, but I think Jake...at his heart, he thinks that Methodism is a dead duck and therefore in a sense he hasn't got the heart to...really encourage participation.'

In turn, Jake reflects,

'I almost want to use the term 'toxic church' – because actually I think a lot of what church is, is toxic, in its power structures, its leadership structure and the way we want to keep ticking boxes and jumping through hoops.'

Even with a passion for 'accountability' alongside a freedom of creative expression, there are undeniable differences of opinion about ecclesiology and practice between Jake and the leadership teams, which are further transferred onto Safe-Haven and the host church.

The Methodist church context thrives on its evangelical credentials, and has an international reputation for prioritising mission and expository preaching ministry. The church boasts its evangelical heritage in its ethical values as well as its weekly services, which can be difficult for some to handle when Safe-Haven is concerned.

The Superintendent notes:

‘What’s distinctive about [Safe-Haven] is that although it’s evangelical and its style is sort of charismatic etc, there is not the prescriptive teaching on, particularly on sexual relationships, therefore it is a place where a number of them that are living together, a number of gay people find they’re at home.’

It is unsurprising that sexual ethics becomes the lens through which the challenge of evangelicalism and post-evangelicalism find their mark: but given the eclectic context of the church the disconnection from the wider society is also marked.

Whereas the Church is keen to provide a place of safety *from* the outside world, Safe-Haven seeks to provide that retreat *for* the outside world. The perception that Christianity is defined by an individual’s stance on sexuality and sexual ethics is a common feature of contemporary debate.³²¹ This is further supported by one senior leader saying that ‘The [Methodist] Church’s views on homosexuality are Neanderthal.’ What is noteworthy in Safe-Haven is the openness of Jake to conversations about personal relationships, pornography, and sexuality. For one, male, community member, this is a highlight, as,

‘Jake opened up to the congregation and said ‘look, I’m not perfect’...it meant a lot to me, and Jake shared what he had gone through, to get where he is now.’

Jake talks about this in terms of ‘integrity.’ A different female community member, however, mentioned that,

‘I’m not going to sit down and pray with Jake, that would not be appropriate or something I would want to do...I don’t know where that feeling comes from though.’

Throughout the research period, Jake disclosed and discussed intimate details of his life and sexual practice and preferences with members of the community, which in turn solicited similar disclosures from them.

³²¹ See Kimball, *They Like Jesus But Not the Church*, 136-162

Within the mission of the church, come the implicit adoption of business models when it comes to measuring and managing the church. There is a separate business plan and business partnership which oversees the franchise and running of conference facilities. The church runs a company which trades at around £6million per annum. Such a strong business orientation also means that there is a strong business mentality to ministry. Success criteria are first and foremost numerical ones – budget, profit, and people. Safe-Haven has a strong financial background, able to stand almost independently from the Methodist Church. However, the community is perceived to have stagnated in terms of increasing membership. There is a tension between the traditional success criterion of numerical stability employed by the Church, described by the Superintendent as ‘get bums on seats boy!’ and the desire for intimate and ‘deep’ discipleship at the heart of Safe-Haven. Jake suggests, ‘it’s not about the numbers. Really early on, God told me not to count the numbers – so I don’t count anymore.’ The initial vision of Safe-Haven was to evolve quickly to fill the 2500 seating venue at the centre of the Central Hall. Cynically, according to the Superintendent, the shift to not counting the numbers may be Jake evading the reality that this vision has not come to pass:

‘over the last six months, Jake has shifted his vision. I’m not sure to what extent he has shifted it, or whether his vision now suits his lifestyle...I would like to see Safe-Haven back to a reasonable size.’

It also acts as a further intentional subversion of the expectations and methods of the Central Hall by Safe-Haven. Financial success and stability is the vital motif of success for the church, and as such is also the expected success criterion for Safe-Haven. For Jake, success is more difficult to tie down, and he instead focuses on the

core values of the community as markers for the community identity and discipleship.

Safe-Haven began as a response to a specific situation within the church context. A member of both leadership teams (Safe-Haven and the host church) takes up the story:

‘So [the team leader] was therefore in a situation where what [they were] beginning to feel was our way forward was not going to be hugely attractive to young adults...Therefore [the team leader] convinced the Leadership Team that we should set up such a group and also one of the real problems here is getting people to invest in ideas, because financially we are so well off, and therefore [we] asked people to commit £10,000 a year between them...200 people take up 200 shares of £50 which would give us £10,000 a year. We advertised the post. We had not a huge number of people applied. We short listed 3 and...thought [they were] the right person.’

The method of the church mirrors that of a number of situations across the country.

There is a perceptible gap in the congregation, and thus a specific project is discerned to be required to manage the gap and to fill it. In this context, a community is developed with a dedicated leader in response to the “missing generation” within the church. As the Superintendent reflects, ‘We sought people who could deliver what we are looking for to fill the gap.’ A clergy team member comments that ‘Jake earths the Gospel with young adults. A Fresh Expression must...make the presence of God tangible to a new generation.’ The host churches’ standing within the national framework of Methodism requires that Safe-Haven be given space and credibility both in terms of internal publicity and on the wider FX agenda. What is surprising, therefore, is how little Safe-Haven is talked about in wider ecclesial settings. Although given a prominent profile on the church website, Safe-Haven runs the risk of being treated as ‘second class’ or ‘semi detached’ to the

rest of the churches' life. One member of the church clergy leadership team reflected 'I have never heard any of the Church leaders say [that Safe-Haven is] second class, but I have certainly seen all the body language which suggests they are.' In turn, one Safe-Haven member comments,

'I don't see much of Methodism in Safe-Haven really...it's pretty much your evangelical mainstream church with...stratospheric blue sky thinking on Jake's part. I don't really see much of Methodism in there.'

This is manifest further in the clergy team who remain concerned that Safe-Haven will leave the Methodist fold.

'The question [the Superintendent] is asking is 'how much are you drifting away from Methodist Central Hall'...because it does seem to have that drift.' In turn, members of Safe-Haven see any relationship to the church as negligible.

Other than providing the hospitality of a venue and the wider safeguards of good order, community members struggle to find the connections between the Methodist Church and their existence. As one community member reflected, 'Methodism, I think, it feels like a compromise to me.'

As is reflected throughout the country, Methodism provides the financial resources and permission which enables the community to get on with discovering what that means to be a Christian community within the immediate cultural context over and against the theological and ecclesial one. In turn, the community becomes a statistic of credibility to the wider Church. Communities are given the freedom to experiment as long as they participate in the feedback loop of allowing the host church to engage with difficult ecclesiological and demographic issues that they would otherwise find it difficult to attract. Cases like Safe-Haven indicate that there are also challenges concerning the personal ethics of leaders, and which host

churches risk avoiding. For the individual communities comes the sense of a community being caught beneath a 'glass ceiling' and constrained by the expectations and limitations of the church. In turn the church fears being left behind as culture shifts and current missiology threatens the status quo. The current solution is a mutual stalemate, where the church and new community are 'held together,' for fear that at any moment everything might break. This struggle is played out amongst the leadership, but in both cases the community is shielded from the reality and pain. As the Superintendent notes, 'I have had [Jake's] back,' in contrast to Jake's converse reflection 'what they [the church] don't know doesn't hurt.' The leaders of both Church and Safe-Haven are wary of each other, and are mutually critical of each other's personality and leadership styles in open conversation as well as in interview settings. Consequently, members of Safe-Haven openly reflect on what might happen should Jake leave the community, 'which he will have to in the next few years.'

Community: Safe-Haven

During the research period, there was an average of 30 people per meeting. Of these, the gender split was even, despite the revelation from Jake that when he first started Safe-Haven, he was the only man for the first eighteen months. The numbers were apparently deceptively low due to the vacation period in which the research took place, and the membership list reflects a greater population of around 80 participants. The research took place outside of the academic term,

otherwise there may have been a number of students present too, although the profile of the community in its current form is of mid-twenty year olds upwards, rather than those of university age. In part this is due to the level at which the content is pitched ('treat us like postgrads'), in part to do with the community identity and in part to do with the desire to ask the critical engagement with questions of faith that is often ignited through the criticality taught in university and carried into life following graduation.

Safe-Haven meets on a weekly basis for 45 minutes of food, followed by worship lasting until around 9pm when people leave for the long commute home, or else go to one of the nearby pubs.

There are five different styles regularly applied to evening events:

Deeper – where an expert in a particular field is invited to speak on their area of expertise, and to then respond to question.

Original – which is similar in style to Jake's own Vineyard heritage, and includes extended worship and a 45 minute talk.

Remixed – a magazine style format, exploring everyday issues and 'taboo' subjects such as the environment, sexuality and discipleship.

5th Thursday – a Eucharist service, led by one of the Presbyters in the Church. This means that Communion is celebrated about once a quarter by the community.

Space – an alternative worship, creative service. In the past this has included a dance workshop, painting, and the development of prayer stations.

Platform – an open mic event to which community participants were asked to invite their friends and colleagues to; as well as to perform themselves.

No evening is the same, and the styles are intermixed on a random basis. During the research period, the themes for the evening were taken from the ten values of the community, thereby allowing the community to deconstruct and explore these values in greater detail.

Each evening is carefully branded and marketed using powerful iconography in the publicity. There is a high quality to all the publicity material. Information booklets outline the values and include bible passages and powerful imagery, all produced by Jake. Smaller publications are scattered at strategic points around the church for visitors, again including a slogan, values exposition and imagery. Each week, an email invitation is sent out with a flyer attached advertising the week's title and including any information about guest speakers and forthcoming events. This is also posted Facebook, on the community website, and linked to Twitter. The community remains consistently at the cutting edge of social media communication, which is again linked to the expertise of Jake and the importance of various communications strategies for the context.

Although the leader sets an agenda for 'creating church for the next century', it is significant that the work of the community is to build disciples for a three-year period. One community member who had been in the community for 3 years

referred to themselves as a 'veteran.' In a fx context, it opens a conversation as to whether Safe-Haven will ever be in a position to mature into a full expression of church, or whether it merely requires a three-year cyclical discipleship programme. At Safe-Haven there is no-one who has been involved for the whole five years apart from Jake and his partner. Relationally, this is very costly, as there are important relationships that have been invested in which cannot thrive to the same extent outside of the church fellowship. It does provide a useful lens through which to observe new communities, however, as people move on as things continue to evolve from the initial vision. Given the continuing focus on life-long discipleship and the incorporation of spiritual disciplines into the small group networks, it will be interesting to see if members do begin to stay longer than 3 years, if or how they are able to use their gifts and develop their vocation, how the community begins to settle, and what impact is made on succession planning.

Safe-Haven for many is not their sole Christian community, which is an interesting observation given the intention of FX to reach those people who otherwise have little or no experience of Church life. Safe-Haven participants are ecclesially polygamous, but not with the Circuit church. As Jake notes, 'I guess people have their own church that they go to on Sundays outside of Safe-Haven...I don't see that there should be any real obligation to go to the main church.' There are unique challenges that this presents for Safe-Haven, especially in terms of the balance between intellectual debate and high concept questioning, and learning the basics

of the Christian faith. Members at Safe-Haven exist on these complex levels of faith development. One member suggest that,

‘I think spiritually that does create a bit of flakiness [in Safe-Haven] – a sort of lightness of spiritual character. It’s only now right for me, because I have come from another church tradition and I’ve been trained and grounded on all sorts of stuff, prayer and worship..., I can now experiment, explore more easily.’

For many, Safe-Haven is part of their shared Christian journey and plays the role of being a place to reflect deeply and theologically whilst making a local difference in various social action projects.

This multi-church participation is demonstrable of the ambivalence that community members have to denominational identities. For the inherited congregation furthermore, it is an issue because the church feels that if members of Safe-Haven go anywhere on a Sunday it should be to the same building that welcomes them during the week. Not doing so is somehow unfaithful to the, in the words of the Superintendent, ‘£60,000 per year we put into Safe-Haven.’ It is an issue for Jake because it implies that Safe-Haven is not enough, and that for it to be a legitimate church there is something missing. It is not, however, an issue for the participants, who seemingly have no qualms about the plurality of their experiences. Such is the tension within the co-existence of Christendom and post-Christendom assumptions and approaches to the whole of life, and it is perhaps the core of the suggestion from a national leader that ‘it is impossible to do traditional church and FX at the same time by the same person.’ There is a clash of perceptions about what the function of communities such as Safe-Haven is: a spiritual resting place, an option amongst a vast marketplace, or a place to travel into.

Safe-Haven is described by Jake as a 'research and development department' of the Church, although one member commented 'it is not an experiment, it is an exploration.' Initiated as a pragmatic response to a missing generation within the church community, it is no surprise that initial conversation revolves around the practicalities of the meetings and their content. The expectations of the members are high, as it is anticipated that they will be able and willing to think at a deep level, and respect each other's deconstruction of values, doctrine and belief. This method is also highly demanding of the leadership and, and of Jake. The leader is expected to have a high level of theological knowledge, as well as the ability to locate concepts and ideas in to everyday experiences of the community members. Behind this pragmatism is a deep rooted desire to disciple the members, to engage with their questions and to provide both the spiritual disciplines and the openness and inclusivity which seeks to find answers and common ground together. This is further developed in the current term's programme by the development of small groups studying together the *Renovare Spiritual Formation Workbook*.³²² The community is different to the other churches in the area, and is valued by the members for 'being unique' in the city.

Leadership Observations

³²² Smith, James Bryan, and Lynda Graybeal, *A Spiritual Formation Workbook: Small Group Resources for Nurturing Christian Growth* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2nd ed., 1999)

Safe-Haven is led by a lay employee of the Methodist Church, although he has been ordained within the Vineyard tradition. As one church leader stated, 'they think that they are ordained.' For Jake, Safe-Haven is an opportunity to seek healing and solace from a difficult leadership situation in Vineyard, which both he and the leadership talked openly about. It is a place of freedom to do whatever he wants to do with a community who allow Jake to do whatever he feels is right beyond Jake's own background and experience, the community view of leadership is seen in a number of different ways. For one member of the community, 'he's just the pastor to guide us and help us.' For another he 'sets the vision and keeps us going.' Whether it is the relationships within the wider circuit staff team, or as a part of the Safe-Haven community, Jake has a profound role and influence. It is unclear as to what extent Jake is Safe-Haven and Safe-Haven is Jake. The identity of the community and the leader seem intricately interconnected.

In terms of ordination, especially given the above response of the Superintendent, it is worth noting that there are means and methods within the Methodist community for people ordained in different traditions to be received into Full Connexion and thus for their ordination to be recognised. There are also means and methods for circuits to ask for dispensation for specific individuals to give communion. Neither of these avenues have been taken with regards to Safe-Haven. Jake is one of a number of employees and is part of the team involved in the running of the church and Conference business. The circuit did not want to ask directly for an ordained person 'because the Conference might have sent us a prat.'

This sense of power and autocracy of leadership is thus evidenced within the wider church environment, as they wish to be able to hand-pick talent and to maintain this by way of contract. There is a lack of faith in the stationing systems of the Methodist Church which are more inherent than this off-the-cuff comment by the Superintendent. There is also a desire to maintain line managerial control over a leader and a community which has the potential to break-away and form something new and divorced from the structures and vision which created it.

One of the key observations about the leadership at Safe-Haven is about the perception of arrogance. As the Superintendent notes, '[people think Jake] is up themselves...full of themselves.' It became apparent that arrogance was one side to a leader who was also vulnerable and fragile. In his exit interview, Jake reflected:

'Scratch beneath the surface and you find a blathering wreck who's enslaved, trying to be like the other Church Leaders who've got it all sorted down the road and who are completely incompetent, I don't know how they made the grade because there's so much wrong in the way we pitch Church Leadership.'

Indeed, there were moments where this vulnerability risked becoming the means of sabotaging of career, family and friendship.

'You've got to be vulnerable ... so there's vulnerability and insecurity, we're all insecure, some of us are more you know up-front about it. But I think also I mean that's really needed of leadership today, I think we need to be vulnerable, I think in a sense actually it's our vulnerability, exposed vulnerability that allows people to connect with us because they are all vulnerable, we're scared so yes, and I think sometimes arrogance is thrown on someone when it's not necessarily fair because people don't take the time to look closely at what's going on...God puts us back together again and again, again and again.'

Whereas the traditional value is that vulnerability is weakness, the exposing of weaknesses and frailty brings about individual and corporate identity and healing.

Significantly, Jake was able to offer a significant theological reflection on the nature of vulnerability in leadership, which is stark, given the exploitation of leadership roles over him in past appointments:

‘There needs to be a strength to leadership I think and there needs to be a vulnerability to leadership, you need both. It’s being vulnerable to ideas, to being challenged, you need to do all those things, you’ve got to be vulnerable to being hurt, wearing your heart on your sleeve, to articulate your vision that might get thrown back in your face...Is God arrogant because he’s consistently who he is? She’s glorious.’

For the community, the language and exposure of vulnerability at times verged on the voyeuristic, which in turn demanded a high level of maturity and emotional intelligence from the community in order for them to deal with such revelations and soliciting of information. Given the vulnerability (and in Jake’s terms) ‘oddity’ of some members of the community, this emotional maturity could not be guaranteed. There were times when disclosures made by Jake in public and in conversation made me feel awkward and exposed. If this was the case for a visiting researcher, it raises questions about how the wider community respond to disclosures of both a psychological and sexual nature.

What marks out the leadership style of Safe-Haven and many other locations is the high level of self-awareness the leaders have.

‘I’m a hopeless romantic ... in this optimistic rose-tinted view of the world that anything is possible, but that’s what God’s put in me. I’m hopeful and I think people just misinterpret all the time, they think oh you know he’s cocky, arrogant, young, you know inexperience and that.’

There is the risk for over-compensation and self-aggrandising, but this is more in jesting than in reality. When asked what are success criteria there was a little irony intended with the answer ‘a Dove award and a couple of Grammy’s,’ and later on,

‘a bigger house please.’ Jake runs a tightrope between being vulnerable, and attaining towards a celebrity status. Further work into the parallels of celebrity and leadership could prove beneficial in another piece of research.³²³

Throughout this research, a number of current leaders of fx of church bring with them a lot of psychological baggage, often caused by the dual-existence of being formed and shaped within institutions that neither understands them nor releases them fully. In Jake’s terms this is both the Methodist Church that employs him, and the house-church movement which had formed and ordained him. This in turn means that people like Jake are self-defined ‘broken and wounded individuals’ who are drawing together communities of like-minded people without all the resources or support to offer healing. The Safe-Haven administration recognised that

‘there have been countless people that have come to Safe-Haven because they’ve been broken whether by other people, other churches or other community groups. They really do find their Safe-Haven in Safe-Haven.’

Fx and pioneer ministry becomes an escape route from authorised ministry, or in Jake’s case from the overbearing leadership experienced within Vineyard. FX communities can also be a place of reconciliation and/or collection of people with difficult de-churched backgrounds and psychological imbalance. A positive ‘oversight’ and ‘accountability’ at Safe-Haven, therefore, is the wider team

³²³ See Ward, Pete, ‘God’s Behaving Badly: Celebrity as a ‘Kind of’ Religion,’ *The Other Journal*, <http://theotherjournal.com/2010/10/22/gods-behaving-badly-celebrity-as-a-%E2%80%9Ckind-of%E2%80%9D-religion-2/>, Raschke, Carl, ‘On Cultural Neuroses, Primal Screams and the Psychology of Celebrity’, *The Other Journal*, January 2011, <http://theotherjournal.com/2011/01/25/25/1071/> and Bowler, Catherine, ‘Wanted: Celebrity and American Prosperity Preacher’, *The Other Journal*, December 2010, <http://theotherjournal.com/2010/12/07/wanted-celebrity-and-the-american-prosperity-preacher/> (31st March 2010)

leadership of the circuit, which can and does offer the sage wisdom and spiritual maturity that both leader and collective are desperately seeking.

Throughout the research Jake tended towards being both defensive of the community, and protective of the leadership roles that were distributed to them. Jake talked about offering space for people to participate and 'setting the bar low' enough for people to not be able to 'fail', but this was not always followed through on. On one occasion, I was asked to set up the room for the showcase evening, including place settings, table decorations, confetti and candles. When I had finished, I left the room for a few minutes. On my return, Jake had extinguished all the candles, moved the tables and rearranged the chairs. Even when a task had been delegated, Jake still offered at best quality control, and at worst, interference.

Jake's use of the language of failure is fascinating here, and perhaps is better interpreted as letting Jake down, such is the personal expectation of Jake upon himself. Jake often talked about 'giving things away' but Jake, as with the example above, often repeated or finished off jobs after he had delegated them to other people. In turn, there were very few times when people within the community were willing to take on areas of responsibility. There was a perceptible lack of confidence shown by community members, who were often concerned that they were not good enough at a certain task. It was not clear whether this was a generic feeling amongst a generation of London inhabitant; or else the breeding of insecurity which mirrored Jake's own tension between vision and vulnerability.

There were times when Jake appeared to compensate for his vulnerability through expectations of control. For example, on the last day of research, Jake commented to me, 'you never knock when you come into the office, and that annoys me. I could be doing anything or watching anything in here.' I, assuming that having a key to the office meant that I could have access to it, also reflect that this is this tension of access and control evident in the way that Jake leads the community. On one hand, everyone has an open invitation to participate and to share in community. On the other hand, there is a heavy oversight and unspoken expectations about what this might look like in practice. Such behaviour could demonstrate the insecurity of leader and community and the subconscious negotiation that takes place within Safe-Haven. This is further underlined by the Senior Circuit Steward remarking that, 'if people fail, it is usually because of some personal weakness, or some, you know, 'circumstance.'"

The evolving communications strategy is also of interest in terms of suggesting evidence of control and insecurity. The skill involved in creating grunge-style publicity materials to be emailed out to the database means that there are few people capable of doing it. This is coupled with Jake's own interest in graphic design and the writing of worship music. This particular skill set consequently means that Jake creates the imagery, the music, the publicity and delivers the content for each service. When this is noted in conversation as potentially being problematic, Jake reflected that he is a 'a self-critical perfectionist,' and was rather

defensive in tone in his subsequent response. Having said this, there is a quality to the publicity materials which reflects the talent of Jake as well as the professional expectations of the community. There is, however, the potential for harm and abuse when music (provision, lyric, and worship leading), media, image and spoken message are controlled in this way by a single individual. Such potential of power and personality were hinted at by members of the clergy team, but were not explored in detail in the research. One clergy team member notes,

‘there are dangers around a personality, which is why we are quite keen on growing the leadership beyond just Jake. But I do think that Methodism is frightened of personality, we’re very insecure about it.’

Perhaps in order to avoid some of the dangers associated with personality, Save-Haven has developed a leadership team. Jake takes up the story:

‘I’d rather people piss out of the camp than in. You know I’d rather have them involved, people who are difficult, I’d rather have them you know involved. We have sort of set the bar really low so we can include more people because I think that’s what Jesus did, He didn’t choose the likely suspects, so we often go for the, you know some of our representations are very clearly gifted and some are very clearly not, we don’t try and sort of stipulate all these criteria for leaders. Now sometimes I think I’m wrong in that and ... there should be a kind of character test and ability test for all those things, but that’s not what I see Jesus doing at all. I see him taking the people who are good at fishing, good at putting their foot in it all the time, good at beating up Romans in alleyways... all these people with clear character flaws being chosen by the King of Kings and Lord of Lords to transform the earth.’

The underlying philosophy of this is the sense that Jake feels that he too could not pass the bar either. Such inherent self-esteem issues raise questions about how these can be addressed without a cost being paid by an individual community. This is the intention and practice with the 30-strong leadership team. What is interesting

is the extent to which these people act as a leadership team, and how much they are a support group for Jake's own ministry.

The method of joining this leadership is articulated by one member of Safe-Haven,

‘I think it is quarterly. Jake holds a leadership forum and invites anyone who's doing anything **vaguely leaderly** to come along, which is the structure really – Jake and about 20-30 leaders – an ever changing list.’

There is little delegation of authority and power within this leadership team. There are no criteria for being on the leadership team, although it is by personal invitation. This means that an individual needs to be noticed and be in relationship with Jake and the community before they are able to contribute to the broad spectrum of decision making. A further problem that is recognised is that the deconstructive temperament of articulate young adults makes decision making near-on impossible. Thus many decisions are taken by Jake rather than in the large gathering, under the auspice of unity, but arguably also showing the autocracy of Jake. One member noted that ‘it is Jake who holds the purse strings.’ It is, after all, easier to make a decision rather than to wait for community consensus in an environment where deconstruction and questioning is the *modus operandi*. Such autocracy is not necessarily born of trust issues, but of pragmatism at just wanting to get something done.

There is thus a dualism between the leader-omnipotent and the leader-corporate, which becomes evident in order parts of the community life. The website, for example, is full of inclusive sentences inviting participation in community.

However, the tabs then include links to the Jake's podcasted sermons, and then

Jake's blog (to which comments have been disabled) and also include a link to his personal webpage. In a technological age, it is not surprising that these all feature as part of the community homepage, but what is distinctive is that there is only the promotion of a single voice to and from the community. As has already been noted, there is one person who controls the message, the iconography, and the content of the website. There are some incredibly talented people who are a part of the community who are employed by large corporations in the city: yet their participation is limited to a weekly production team. Given what has been said about the woundedness of leaders, the statement that '[I] am not a number 2,' and, in Jake's words, 'obsessive' desire for perfection, it may be possible to suggest that leaders who have started a community from scratch and nurtured it, struggle to let other people change and mould it, whilst the founder of the community and forger of vision and values is still present. There is also the body language which protects the community from 'failure' by not taking risks on in the wider public sphere. Whereas people are invited to lead worship, share prayers, preach or contribute creatively 'live,' the external messages to both Church and World are self-edited.

A final noteworthy point in terms of Safe-Haven and leadership is the importance of mentors. One Circuit staff member noted:

'When I look at the sermons I preached they were theologically inadequate, biblically incorrect and yet I had people like Dr Donald English, Rob Frost, Rev Dr Peter Graves, Dr Stanley Leyland in the congregation, and they never threw a bucket of cold water over me, they gave me more and more opportunities to grow and gently taught me where I needed to make changes.'

The leader of Safe-Haven considers himself to have been 'mentored' by Brian McLaren and Jason Clark. 'I've had a lot of amazing doors open to me and a lot of great mentors all the way, great opportunities.' One challenge to reflect upon further must surely be the way in which leaders are discerned, and then the ability and willingness of leaders to act as mentors and spiritual friends to nurture such development and flourishing. The risk is that with a missing generation in community, there is also a missing generation within leadership and the richness of experience and the wisdom of mentors is not passed down to nor experienced by, others.

Conclusion

This urban context is complex because of its cosmopolitan and corporate nature. The transience of life means that there is the potential for people never to commit or invest one hundred per cent because life within the community is only ever a short to medium term experience. Alongside this is a strong sense of Jake's leadership style and psychologically obsessive compulsions which mean that some people are unintentionally disenfranchised from the community. This is also manifested in the comparatively short-term contracts that are given to Jake. All the signals are, therefore, that at Safe-Haven and for someone with the entrepreneurial gifts of Jake, leadership of a community is something that is a short-term gift. The Superintendent notes,

'I like Jake, he's a great guy, but it's been difficult recently and I think that I would want to bring in someone who is more of an enabler than a leader.'

Leadership is something contracted for the present, and for the next year, but then open to renegotiation and development, depending upon the outcome of undisclosed success criteria.

Safe-Haven is a community based on ten values, rather than a mission statement. Galvanised on these values, the community are encouraged to explore faith and deepen discipleship in a very intentional and yet contemporary way. There are issues of team working which are evidenced at all levels, and this to an extent results in the high authority of the leader within the community. There are observations of power and authority which are exposed through the cognate expressions of vulnerability and integrity which has the potential for abuse and misuse, but the wider team framework with the church provides some of the accountability required to oversee the community development.³²⁴

Safe-Haven draws the best from a wide variety of Christian resources and seeks to enable its members to engage with their spirituality and to live well in the world. The community are a collective of 'people who love life and live it to the full, always finding ways to contribute something good to our community and our world.' The leadership team within the wider church offer the critical edge which enables 'something good' to be discerned and acted upon within the structures of a pioneering and busy business and worship centre.

³²⁴ Another exposure of Fresh Expressions to the charge of potentially being manipulative can be found in Morris, Anne, 'Music in Worship: The Dark Side', *Practical Theology* 3:2, 2010, 215, who argues that the 'potential for emotional manipulation in [alternative worship contexts] is considerable, but no ethical guidelines have been issued for those planning such event.'

Conclusions

Frost and Hirsch suggest that in Christendom mode,

‘It is important for us to recognise the brute fact that not all existing ordained ministers are necessarily leaders.’³²⁵

This thesis has explored the leadership practices of three ordained leaders in

Methodist fx. I have used practical theology and ethnographic methods in order to

investigate what the challenges of exercising leadership might be, in a mission-

shaped context. In this chapter I offer an examination of current Methodist

ecclesiological documents in light of the evidence of this thesis, and suggest three

options for the future role of the Presbyteral ministry. Following these conclusions,

I present twelve proposals required for the continuation and development of

missional presbyteral leaders and fresh expression type communities. These

conclusions indicate that transformed practice is required, if lessons are to be

learned, and if fx are to continue to be a learning communities led by missional

leaders into the twenty-first century.

The Future Role of the Presbyteral Ministry.

Background to the current Methodist position on Presbyteral ministry

The current Methodist position on the role and function of Presbyters can be found

in the 2002 Conference report, *What is a Presbyter*.³²⁶ This document is the current

³²⁵ Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping*, 172

document on the topic of ordained Presbyters building on previous Statements made in both the 1974 Statement of Ordination³²⁷ and the Statement of Conference *Called to Love and Praise*.³²⁸ *What is a Presbyter* has been followed up with Conference reports on the role of Deacons,³²⁹ Circuits,³³⁰ Circuit Superintendents,³³¹ District Chairs,³³² and the most recent publicity report on the nature of vocation, *Is God Calling You?*³³³ Together, these recent documents all demonstrate the priority of ministerial oversight at all levels of the Methodist Church in the UK. There are historic documents and sources on which these all rely and of which they take account. The 'inherent pragmatism' referenced earlier in this thesis is also contained within these documents:

'It has to be said with ordination, as with much in Methodism, we do not have a considered theology which we then put into practice, rather we find theological reasons for what we are already doing because what we are doing works well.'³³⁴

Within the current series of statements and reports, therefore, there is to be found a theological rationale for ordination, ministry, mission and even some discussion of leadership. However, these are all borne out of the primacy of experience and

³²⁶ Methodist Church, 'What is a Presbyter?' 2002, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=information.content&cmid=342>

³²⁷ Methodist Church, 'Statement on Ordination,' 1974, http://methodist.org.uk/downloads/Faith_and_Order_Statements_Vol1_0409.pdf

³²⁸ Methodist Church, 'Called to Love and Praise,' 1999, www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf99_called_to_love_and_praise.doc

³²⁹ Methodist Church, 'What is a Deacon?' 2004, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentogod.content&cmid=883>

³³⁰ Methodist Church, 'The Missional Nature of the Circuit,' 2008, www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf08_17_1_FO_report_appendixA1_MissionalNatureofCircuit.doc

³³¹ Methodist Church, 'What is a Superintendent?' 2005, www.methodist.org.uk/static/conf2005/co_08_whatiscircuitsuper_0805.doc

³³² Methodist Church, 'What is a District Chair?' 2006, www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/Conf06_What_is_a_District_Chair_pc.doc

³³³ Methodist Church, 'Is God Calling You?' 2010, www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/can-is-god-calling-you-0111.pdf

³³⁴ Methodist Church, *Statement on Ordination*, 110:8

practice. The 1974 Statement on Ordination goes so far as to suggest that the framing of ordination in terms of the

‘functional... ontological... temporary... suspendable... makes it difficult to see ordination in the context of the ministry of the whole people of God’³³⁵ and thereby suspends all such definitions, a position with which all subsequent documentation seems at ease.

That the Methodist Church employs such inherent pragmatism is useful for the purposes of this thesis, as this same *modus operandi* offers the space and the opportunity to challenge the Methodist Church to once again look at the current practices of Presbyteral ministry and leadership within fx communities.

Furthermore, it begins to offer a theological rationale that pushes either towards a new ‘Order of Mission,’ or else requires that the role of the Presbyter is limited to a pastoral role, in order to enable those ministers (lay or ordained) who feel called to a ministry of mission to be able to be contemporary missionaries and pioneers in a local or itinerant setting.

There are three significant written documents that inform Methodist understandings of the practice of Presbyteral ministry: The Deed of Union, the Statement on Ordination (1974), and the Conference report ‘What is a Presbyter’.

The Deed of Union includes the following clause:

³³⁵ Methodist Church, *Statement on Ordination*, 110:9

‘Those whom the Methodist Church recognises as called of God and therefore receives into its ministry shall be ordained by the imposition of hands as expressive of the Church’s recognition of the minister’s personal call.

The Methodist Church holds the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and consequently believes that no priesthood exists which belongs exclusively to a particular order or class of persons but in the exercise of its corporate life and worship special qualifications for the discharge of special duties are required and thus the principle of representative selection is recognised.

All Methodist preachers are examined tested and approved before they are authorised to minister in holy things. For the sake of church order and not because of any priestly virtue inherent in the office the ministers of the Methodist Church are set apart by ordination to the ministry of the word and sacraments.’³³⁶

The Deed of Union is the groundbreaking document that brought together the various streams of ‘Methodist’ congregations into what is now known as the British Methodist Church. The clause on ordination is significant here for a number of reasons. Firstly, it sets ordination in the context of vocation and calling – something which those involved in this piece of research all articulated for themselves.

Ordination is also seen as set in the context of a specific worship setting with the ‘laying on of hands,’ thus offering a symbol both to the individual and to the wider Church of the authorisation being offered through the ordained person. It is not accidental that such a symbol is widely recognised by other denominations as the means by which ordination is bestowed onto a person through a Church authority or agency. Crucially, the 1932 Deed of Union and all subsequent documents, Statements of Conference and reports include reference to the ‘priesthood of all believers,’ thereby recognising that all members of a Methodist society are also expected to exercise their own ministry in response to the gifts given to them

³³⁶ Methodist Church, *Constitutional Practice and Discipline*, 2011
<http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/pubs-cpd2011-240811.pdf>, 213-14

through the Holy Spirit. This does not negate that certain functions require representative selection, for which ordination to the Presbyteral Order of the Methodist Church is one. This includes a requirement of testing, training and probation prior to the act of ordination.

The 1974 Statement on Ordination picks up the concept of ‘representative selection’ and highlights that ministry is expected of all disciples of Jesus within the Methodist tradition:

‘in their office the calling of the whole church is focussed and represented, and it is their responsibility as representative persons to lead the people to share with them in that calling.’³³⁷

The statement goes on to outline the process of training and selection, discipline, ‘sector ministries’ and the nature of service (diakonia) within the church. A person who is suitable for this representative role is: ‘... one who in the end convinced that [they] ha[ve] no choice but to offer [themselves] for the ordained ministry,’³³⁸ which given the reflection of Emma, Jake and Andrew seems also to fit their own sense of calling both to ordained ministry and to the development of fx.

Finally, the 2002 report *What is a Presbyter* takes its foundation each of these documents, alongside the then newly-commissioned Ordination service, and offers to the Methodist Conference details of what the Presbyteral ministry entails: ‘a ministry of word...sacrament...and pastoral responsibility.’³³⁹ From this conclusion, one can infer various key characteristics and tasks the Presbyter is expected to be

³³⁷ Methodist Church, *Statement on Ordination*, 111:14

³³⁸ Methodist Church, *Statement on Ordination*, 110:10

³³⁹ Methodist Church, *What is a Presbyter?*, 4

and to fulfil.³⁴⁰ It is clear from this report that the primary place for the Presbyter's work is within the Church or present ecclesial community; through the provision of worship, sacramental ministry and in the pastoral oversight and responsibility that comes both with the Office and with also being the legal Chair of Trustees for the church premises. It is worth noting that Statements of Conference have the highest priority for ecclesial governance, and reports defer to, and build upon, these Statements.

'Church order' as a starting point

The Statement to Conference on the ecclesiology of the Methodist Church, *Called to Love and Praise*, and the report *The Nature of Oversight*³⁴¹ explore the nature of ordination within broader ecclesiological frameworks, and draw the conclusion that ordination is a requirement for the benefit of good church order. Accordingly, 'the church's life needs to be ordered, and therefore, different orders and roles exist within the one ministry of Christ dispersed through the whole people of God.'³⁴² All members of the Methodist Church need to be ministered to, as disciples of Jesus, and also to be ministers to others in the widest possible sense. For good order, however, some need to be set apart in order to lead worship, administer sacraments and to have pastoral oversight. As *Called to Love and Praise* notes,

³⁴⁰ Methodist Church, *What is a Presbyter?*, 7

³⁴¹ Methodist Church, 'The Nature of Oversight,' 2005, www.methodist.org.uk/static/conf2005/co_05_natureofoversight_0805.doc

³⁴² Methodist Church, *The Nature of Oversight*, 4.4.3

'The partnership of ordained and lay ministers remains vital to the work and well-being of the Church, even though this truth has often been lost sight of in the history of the Church.'³⁴³

Presbyteral ordination is for the benefit of, and service to, an ecclesial community.

FX communities are those which, by definition, have the potential to become ecclesial communities, but are not of themselves mature expressions of church at the present time.

There is a tension, therefore, in an order of ministry designed for the good order of an already existing ecclesial community (often of generations of people within the same family group and networks); and a group of people who are exercising a missional ministry which has the intent and imperative to create and nurture what may in the end look very different to the current order. This tension has been demonstrated in this thesis through conflict between the community and the leadership in both Safe-Haven and Connections, and has been exposed as psychologically difficult for the leaders themselves, shown most clearly through Emma's description of feeling 'guilty' when she spends time outside of the inherited church. Being ordained has enabled Emma and Andrew to be part of God's mission to their localities and to begin to develop WTS and Connections, respectively. There is the sense within this research, however, that this has been achieved

³⁴³ Methodist Church, *Called to Love and Praise*, 4.5.4, 26

despite their ordination, whilst also enabled because of the way that Connexionalism enables Presbyters to exercise their vocation.³⁴⁴

Within an fx context, church order cannot be the primary motivation for leadership, nor can it be the source of character indicators and functions. As is demonstrated in this thesis and developed further in the conclusions, the skills, gifts and graces of a pioneer set aside by the Church and commissioned to start by listening to where God is at work in the world, and then joining in, are necessarily different to those required by a Presbyterian ordained and stationed to serve an inherited Church – a pre-formed group of people in a Circuit context - for the explicit purposes of word, sacrament and pastoral care.

The contemporary Methodist (and indeed Anglican) Churches are not the first to ask these questions of the tensions between mission, maintenance, management and governance. Mr Wesley himself wrote, ‘soul-damning Clergymen lay me under more difficulties than soul-saving laymen!’³⁴⁵

Missional imperative: the case of Coke and Asbury

In 1784, Wesley wrote an open letter declaring the following:

³⁴⁴ See Methodist Church, *The Nature of Oversight*, section 2 and Methodist Church, ‘The General Secretary’s Report to Conference, 2011,’ <http://www.methodistconference.org.uk/media/41172/2-the-general-secretarys-report-0511.pdf> (paragraphs 18-26)

³⁴⁵ Wesley, John, ‘A Letter to Rev. Thomas Adams’ in Wesley, John, *The Works of John Wesley* (Grand Rapids: MI, 3rd ed., Vol. 13, 2007), 209

'I have...appointed Dr Coke and Mr Francis Asbury to be joint Superintendents over our brethren in North America...If anyone will point out a more rational and scriptural way of feeding and guiding those poor sheep in the Wilderness [of North America], I will gladly embrace it. At present, I cannot see any better method than that I have already taken...they are now at full liberty, simply to follow the Scriptures and the primitive church.'³⁴⁶

It was this decision – a decision of missional imperative over the requirements of Church order - which may have finally caused the schism within the Church of England and thus enabled the movement of a people called Methodist to become a denomination in their own right. This was not an act of church order; it was an act of ecclesial defiance. The missional needs of a continent, as well as the ecclesiastical need for someone to preside at the Eucharist, became the measure by which Wesley, going against the Bishop of London, ordained two missionary priests and sent them to America. As is recorded in *Called to Love and Praise*, 'mission was seen as prior to church order, although Wesley saw the need for ordination before anyone else might preside at Holy Communion – hence his ordinations for America, Scotland and England.'³⁴⁷ This continuing Methodist desire of mission over and against Church authority is termed 'missionary effectiveness' in *The Nature of Oversight*:

'instead, the ordering of the Church's life is more to do with missionary effectiveness as a consequence of responding to the call of God to diverse ministries as God's people in the world.'³⁴⁸

One conclusion of this research, as will be noted later, is that one avenue open to FX and to the Methodist Church is to follow this precedent and to ordain people in a local situation for a specific missional imperative. The history subsequent to

³⁴⁶ Wesley, John, 'A Letter to Dr Coke and Mr Asbury' in Wesley, *Works*, 252

³⁴⁷ Methodist Church, *Called to Love and Praise*, 4.5.6, 26

³⁴⁸ Methodist Church, *The Nature of Oversight*, 4.4.3

Wesley's act, which saw schism within the Methodist camp, may suggest dangers in taking a similar line of action. It would be remiss in a thesis on the role of ordination in FX for this possibility not to be articulated.

There is a subversive streak within Methodism, noted already in the term 'inherent pragmatism', which enables sufficient flexibility within Church structures to allow a response to the missiological and contextual needs of a locality and of the Connexion. The desire for 'missionary effectiveness' over and against rules and regulations, is the genius, and the curse, of Methodism. It is the increasing flexibility of constitutional discipline, the desire to enable people to make decisions based on a precept of 'holy risk' and the expectation that Conference rightly functions as a place of conferring - which perhaps enables FX to have such an influence within Methodism. There is a sense in which the 'divine discontentedness'³⁴⁹ of many Methodists (exhibited again throughout the interviews with community members) and the willingness of some leaders to take such holy risks, finds a home in a denomination which at its very beginning put mission ahead of order.

This inheritance is not one that has been neglected. *Called to Love and Praise* has a distinct missiological edge to it, as it set a conversation about ecclesiology into the context of Scriptural History and the missionary work of God.

'The unity of the Church and its mission are closely related, since the triune God who commissions the Church is One, seeking to reconcile and to bring

³⁴⁹ Atkins, Martyn, 'A Discipleship Movement Shaped for Mission' Podcast – September 2011
www.methodist.org.uk/static/dsign

the world itself into a unity in Christ. In this mission, the Church's vocation is to be a sign, witness, foretaste, and instrument of God's Kingdom. This involves evangelism and social action, and, in our day especially, engaging with people of differing cultures and religious faiths.³⁵⁰

The Methodist Church is at its very heart a missionary church, following a missionary God: 'God's mission and kingdom are the primary 'givens', from which all derives and on which all depends. The Church is agent of God's mission.'³⁵¹ The challenge being posed by fx is that the ecclesial communities that are being formed may well look different to the host-churches which accommodate and founded them. FX call the inherited church to once again remember its call to make disciples and to look outside of itself. The institutional church calls these new communities to remember their inheritance and to be concerted in their efforts to become mature expressions of Church in their own right.

Leadership as a recognised factor

The key language employed by Presbyters in fx appointments in this research has been that of 'leader.' It was the language they used themselves, and it was the language that I adopted to talk about them. What is noteworthy in this discussion that there is very little language about leadership or vision or entrepreneurialism in the official church documents.

What is a Presbyter does not use the word 'leader' until its penultimate page. The report then goes on to say that the *task* of a Presbyter includes:

³⁵⁰ Methodist Church, *Called to Love and Praise*, 3.2.1, 15-16

³⁵¹ Methodist Church, *Called to Love and Praise*, 1.4.1

‘sharing pastoral oversight with other presbyters, usually exercising oversight in Christian communities, offering leadership and vision, and ensuring that decisions are made according to Methodist practice.’³⁵² It appears that leadership and vision are a low priority, and only exercised in a team setting. This caution about the language and exercise of leadership continues in *The Nature of Oversight* – which is rather ironically the document that outlines the oversight, leadership, governance and management roles and responsibilities within the Methodist Connexion and Connexional Team. Commentary upon leadership herein is almost always qualified with comments on the nature, use and misuse of power.³⁵³ Maxwell’s main cliché is that ‘everything rises and falls on leadership,’³⁵⁴ yet the documentary evidence seems to be much more cautious about using the term. Even the 2012 selection criteria for Presbyteral ministry are reticent, noting that candidates should ‘show leadership potential’ and demonstrate an ability to ‘work co-operatively as a member of a team, empowering others.’³⁵⁵ It is, therefore, possible to conclude that the role of Presbyter is not primarily a leadership role, at least outside of a worship context. If this is the case, then it is even more interesting that those within an fx context see themselves as leaders of communities, exercising oversight, vision and direction for a community in a circuit setting. Without a theologically robust understanding of leadership in fx (lay or ordained), fx may well be limited in their impact and longevity.

³⁵² Methodist Church, *What is a Presbyter?*, 7

³⁵³ See Methodist Church, *The Nature of Oversight*, 1.13 and 1.14.16

³⁵⁴ Maxwell, John C. *Developing the Leader Within You* (Nashville, TN: Injoy, 1993), ii

³⁵⁵ Methodist Church, ‘Selection Criteria for Ordained Ministry in the Methodist Church 2012’ http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/dev_per_Selection_%20Criteria_%20for_%20Ordained_%20Ministry_%202012.pdf, 3. This is in contrast to the VentureFX selection criteria which states that candidates need to be ‘visionary, initiators, collaborators, evangelist, leader, and flexible.’ Methodist Church, ‘VentureFX Selection Criteria’, <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/ev-venturefx-leaders-criteria-070909.pdf>

The Nature of Oversight comments that ‘Servant leadership remains leadership.’³⁵⁶ Leadership is constantly defined using a servile model of leadership, rather than an entrepreneurial or charismatic form of leadership. Despite this theological preference in the existing documentation, this thesis demonstrates that there is an awareness from the leaders in this research that calls into question the tension pioneers feel between being servant, and being more powerful, creative and visionary. This tension of role, vocation and expectation may suggest that the Methodist Church has not reconciled itself to a full Christology of leadership. The servant model of leadership is one way of leadership exemplified by Jesus – but fails to leave room for the power, anger and influence also found in the Gospels. *The Nature of Leadership* tends towards seeing anything other than a power-less leadership as negative. There is a danger in the report that leadership is grounded on a limited Christology implicit in other documents and in the expectations of the exercise of leaders.

‘All power derives from God. Therefore all personal power (charisma) and all institutional power (taking the form of authority) must be understood as derived power...where it is not understood as gift, where it is used to demean others, and where no attempt is made to clarify how it can be shared, then power is abused and God, as the source of all power, is dishonoured.’³⁵⁷

There is the implicit fear that with leadership comes power, and that with power comes the abuse of such power. This incarnational tension in turn leads to leaders apologising for their gifting or their personality or else finding alternative ways to exercise their ministry in a way that recognises their personhood and gifting. Such a refined position seems somewhat out of synchronisation with a movement whose

³⁵⁶ Methodist Church, *The Nature of Oversight*, 4.2.5

³⁵⁷ Methodist Church, *The Nature of Oversight*, 4.1.5

history has been so intimately intertwined with charismatically powerful people, such as Wesley, Coke, Asbury and Bunting. These significant figures in Methodist history may well be the people being intimated in *The Nature of Oversight*: ‘too much power in the hands of the rather immature itinerants was one cause of the splits which led to the formation of the United Methodist Free Churches.’³⁵⁸

One challenge that demands further work from the Methodist Church must, therefore, be to become less opaque about the nature of the exercise of leadership in the Church, and more confident in positive uses of power, authority and charisma in ways which release the whole people of God to be confident not only about what God has called them to, but about who God has called them to be. This must surely be an aspect of a ‘discipleship movement shaped for mission’³⁵⁹ which enables the whole people of God to be whole people of God. It may well be in so doing that:

‘The exercise of leadership in and for the Church, however, can at least recognise that it will occur in settings where the will of God is being sought through and beyond human will at work. The purpose of such activity and such leadership should be stressed: the celebration of the presence of Christ, the enabling of the life of Christ to be participated in, the empowerment of individuals to see themselves ‘in Christ.’³⁶⁰

Once this has been undertaken, it will become clearer to determine whether the role of the Presbyter is a leadership role beyond worship, or whether there are other roles and responsibilities that require different skills and gifting to which current Presbyters would be better deployed. By reconciling a theology of power and theodicy for the Methodist Church, the role of a Presbyter would more likely be

³⁵⁸ Methodist Church, *Called to Love and Praise*, 4.2.12, 20

³⁵⁹ Methodist Conference, *The General Secretary’s Report to Conference*, 2011

³⁶⁰ Methodist Church, *The Nature of Oversight*, 4.2.5

released to be a visionary and leadership role, supported with the management and oversight of a Circuit Superintendent. Until then, however, the tensions will remain throughout stationing, fx, and through candidating – as candidates fail to find themselves described within the authorised and ordained ministries of the Presbyterate and the Diaconate, and as these self same systems fail to deliver what is ‘required;’ for such ‘requirement’ has not been adequately articulated.

Furthermore, nowhere in these reports and statements of the Methodist Church does it explicitly say that the role of the Presbyter (nor indeed any layperson) is to be an evangelist, except for that which is noted in the 2005 report on the role and nature of an evangelist – which remains an aspirational piece of work within the Methodist Church.³⁶¹ There are references to ‘enabl[ing] and encourag[ing] others to grow in their discipleship,³⁶² and the need to be representative, ‘to be public people who represent God-in-Christ and the community of the [Methodist] Church in the world.’³⁶³ Yet there is little in any of the Church documents on order or ordination which recognise the role of Presbyter as cognate with the role of an evangelist. Within a missional framework, it must therefore be possible to ask the question of this thesis – what does a Presbyter / leader of an fx community actually do – and moreover, what does the Church require them to do? As the influence of *MSC* continues to impact on the Church, and as the statistics for mission³⁶⁴ continue

³⁶¹ Methodist Church, ‘The Role and Nature of an Evangelist’, 2005

<http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentogod.content&cmid=353>

³⁶² Methodist Church, *What is a Presbyter?*, 7

³⁶³ Methodist Church, *What is a Presbyter?*, 3

³⁶⁴ Methodist Church, *Statistics for Mission*,

<http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentoyou.content&cmid=3036>

to demonstrate the increase of fx in Methodist Churches, it is becoming more urgent in making sure that the right people receive the right training, the right deployment and the right recognition and authorisation for their work, be they lay or ordained, Presbyterian or youth worker. One of the key training requirements is for evangelists to be trained in both evangelism and in contextual missiology. This remains a fundamental marker for the ongoing work of 'The Fruitful Field.'³⁶⁵

Sacramental roadblocks

It would be remiss not to recognise that one of the main contestations within fx communities is the debate about who is able to preside at Communion.

Colloquially, this remains the most significant difference between laypeople and Presbyters, and the most discussed feature of succession planning. The 1974 *Statement on Ordination* notes that 'the Eucharist, which sacramentally expresses the whole gospel, is the representative act of the whole Church, and is fitting that the representative person should preside.'³⁶⁶ The role of a Presbyterian is clearly defined as a role and responsibility of word, sacrament and pastoral care. The introduction to the ordination vows for Presbyters includes the clause, 'to preside at the celebration of the sacrament of Christ's body and blood.'³⁶⁷

³⁶⁵ Methodist Connexional Team, 'The Fruitful Field: Consultation Document'

<http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=openyou.content&cmid=3571>

³⁶⁶ Methodist Church, *Statement on Ordination*, 111:16

³⁶⁷ Methodist Church, *Methodist Worship Book*, 302

The delineation of whether a leader can or cannot preside at Eucharist is not only a question of church order, although that is an underlying reason. There is a more subtle implication of a leader being able to preside at a Eucharist – a community that celebrates sacraments meets one of the key indicators of being a mature ecclesial community. From one perspective, not having a resident leader who can preside is a subtle way of controlling a new movement and preventing them from maturing. This is perhaps unfair, and a counter argument would be that sacramental offices are being provided by other members of a circuit staff team, albeit not always involved in the day to day lives of those within the fx community. However, it is possible to suggest that the current debates on sacramental theology within the Methodist Church and how such offices can be authorised where there is ‘missional deprivation’, could be the institution inadvertently undermining fx by not enabling them to grow into a fully sacramental ecclesial community.

Local ordination (whereby an individual is ordained specifically to serve in a locality or community setting) offers a solution to the underlying arguments about who can and should preside at a communion service for a new community. It also sends clear signals to these new Christian churches that they are a valid, valuable and valued part of the whole ministry of the Methodist Church. By recognising the leaders that are already within them, as well as recognising people with a visionary, entrepreneurial, collaborative, creative, leadership vocation, the Church has the potential to send powerful signals to FX and to ecumenical partners that fx and new communities are not merely passing fads, but are highly resourced and well

regarded parts of Christian mission, with the intent that a proportion of what have been ‘experiments’ may soon become constituted, resourced churches in their own right – and accepted as part of the Methodist Connexion. Such a move would have positive implications for communities, lay leaders and for Presbyters and Deacons who feel called into this ministry, and would offer to circuits the opportunity to deal positively with the conflicts that are currently masking the good work being carried out in circuits and in fx.

Towards a new order of missional leadership

For missional effectiveness, therefore, it may be possible to suggest several possible scenarios for fx communities with respect to the status of their leaders vis-a-vis the wider Methodist church, on the basis of Methodist history and the current experience of Presbyters in circuit³⁶⁸ and those Presbyters interviewed as part of this thesis.

1. That FX need to follow Wesley’s example and ordain those in local ministry in order to offer sacramental ministry, and to recognise the skills, gifts and calling of local indigenous leaders within the context.

This would also begin to tease out the question raised later in the conclusions regarding succession planning for fx communities. This would be difficult to argue at Conference, and would be unlikely to succeed in the current climate. However, it is worth suggesting that it is one possible outcome from a conversation on the

³⁶⁸ See Haley and Francis, *British Methodism*

nature of leadership within fx. There would be less objection to this from fx than there would be from the wider Methodist Church.

2. The calling of Presbyters, although not in contradiction to the leadership of fx, is not synonymous with missional leadership. For this reason, a new order of ministry may need to be developed which enables Presbyters, Deacons and lay people to exercise a supported, recognised, trained and authorised ministry of mission, evangelism, pioneering and church planting.

From the discussion in this section, it is clearly the case that throughout historic documentation and within current practice and selection, the role of a Presbyter is not that of a visionary, a leader nor indeed of an evangelist or missionary. There are ways of interpreting such documents in such a way as to encourage and defend such practices within the Presbyteral order, but from the documents it is not the expectation (nor arguably the will of some local circuits in practice) for Presbyters to engage in this form of ministry.

This conclusion has the potential to be difficult within an ecumenical conversation, as other partners of FX are investigating what this might look like for their own denominations and agencies. However, such an order could offer the accountability, oversight, community and support that, as has been shown, leaders of fx hanker after. This could be offered at a regional level, and be supported by other denominations and agencies, such as CMS or the Church Army who already have regional training units to support such groups of people. Following the example of St Paul, such an order also has the potential to have both a local and an

itinerant component, thereby recognising the calling of some, like Stuart, to a local context, and also enabling people like Emma, Andrew, Mark and Jake to move into new appointments and to start something afresh in a new location – before they burn out or inadvertently undermine their ministry.

This also means that there is ample opportunity for local indigenous leaders to be recognised and authorised, and thus questions of succession are not solely reliant upon the provision of sacramental offices. From the empirical data collected herein, it is also important to reflect that one of the main reasons why laypeople do not want to be a Presbyter relates to the perception that there is no space or spare time for the leader. Presbyteral ministry is seen (and demonstrated by many leaders) to be life-consuming. Any new order would need to take care to recognise the tension between a life-long vocation and an all-consuming work pattern.

It would need to be debated as to whether a new order would require a new ordination, distinct from the Diaconate, and perhaps more similar to a monastic missional order, or whether there would be the possibility of commissioning an individual for a short period of time. It would be a better fit with Methodist practice, and an honouring of a lifelong vocation, if there was an ordination process of some description for a new order. This would have serious ecumenical implications, however, in terms of relationships with Rome and in light of the Anglican-Methodist Covenant.

3. Limit the role of a Presbyter more closely in line to the existing documents.
Alternatively, be open up the Presbyteral role to be more outward focussed and missional in practice and understanding. Both of these options would require a re-writing of *What is a Minister* and *What is a Presbyter* in light of the experience of pioneers and those engaged in fx ministries. Either way, Presbyters with a calling to something other than the renewed definitions and expectations be offered the support, retraining and financial incentives to exercise their ministry in different ways.

There are consequently two potential outcomes. Either the Presbyteral ministry begins to again have a missiological imperative by which Presbyters are expected, trained and equipped to be contextual missionaries within the circuits to which they are appointed; or that the role of Presbyter remains a role of ecclesial order, and thus current Presbyters are limited in their missiological work – with the expectation that those with a calling to a missional form of ministry do so not as Presbyters but as a member of that mission order. Currently, on the evidence of this thesis, Presbyters with a calling to missional and fx work are finding ways of exercising this call outside of a circuit appointment or alongside other circuit responsibilities. By being more explicit about the expectations of Presbyters and Deacons appointed to a circuit, it may be possible to avoid more Presbyters compromising their professional wellbeing.

Summary

In light of the discussion in this thesis about the role and function of Presbyters when they are appointed to fx communities, it is appropriate to conclude the thesis with a reflection on both the theological understanding of the Presbyteral ministry and a series of comments on how this intersects and transects the missional leadership demonstrated by Andrew, Emma, Mark and Jake.

The Presbyteral ministry within the Methodist Church is first and foremost an appointment for church order. The primary driver, therefore, is ecclesiastical order and not missiological inspiration. That being said, the missional imperative of the New World saw Wesley's radical act of schism in 1784, when he himself ordained Coke and Asbury to be Superintendents in America. Since then, the role of a Presbyter has become synonymous with worship, sacramental theology and pastoral care. For some, such as Emma, the Presbyteral ministry has been a place for her to demonstrate leadership gifting and creativity. However, it is not clear from Conference Statements, reports to Conference, ordination services nor selection criteria, that leadership, evangelism, mission, vision and creativity are core parts to the role of a Presbyter. Indeed, the most recent document on oversight, leadership and governance consistently defines leadership alongside either 'servant leadership' or a theological and sociological exploration of power and power misuse.

This section, therefore, takes seriously the conflict, tensions, successes and reflexivity of practitioners demonstrated throughout this thesis and yet notes that

within the current understanding of Presbyterian ministry, Emma, Andrew and Jake are not necessarily exercising a Presbyterian ministry in strict terms. They are offering word, (in Emma and Andrew's case) sacramental offices, and pastoral oversight – but they are also demonstrating a high capacity for contextual engagement, mission, evangelism, apologetics, creativity, justice engagement and representation in communities that are distant from a mainstream, conventional Methodist community. Given the example of Jake and Stuart, this thesis also demonstrates that such ministry is being exercised by laypeople, with the outcome that sacramental theology then becomes a distracting stumbling block for much of the inherited church.

The final part of this section, therefore, offers three alternative solutions to the current situation. Firstly, there is the radical (and unpopular) suggestion that following Wesley's example, ordination should be offered to people where there is missional need. Secondly, a new order of ordained ministry be developed which enables local people to be recognised and deployed locally for the long term, and which also enables apostolic itinerant missional leaders to be moved regularly and quickly in order to ignite and inspire new expressions of ecclesial communities, and to offer oversight and mentoring to local members of the order. Thirdly, there is a serious suggestion that key documents on Presbyterian ministry be rewritten and re-examined in light of this thesis and other qualitative work being done in the area of contemporary missiology. The outcome here would be either an opening up of Presbyterian ministry in order for it to be more intentionally missional and

contextually focussed rather than ecclesial, or, alternatively, such an exercise could limit the role and expectations of Presbyters and thus enable people with leadership, evangelistic and visionary gifts to be deployed by the Connexion to different roles other than that of a Presbyter or Deacon.

It is clear from the evidence in this thesis that the role of Presbyter is currently a broad one. For the wellbeing of individuals, communities and the Church, such variety cannot continue. Furthermore, until the Methodist Church is able to reconcile itself to a theology of leadership and power which releases charismatic people rather than consistently being threatened by the potential of failure, there remains the real and present danger that leaders and communities will continue to resist the institution and the perceived bureaucratic demands placed upon them.

Further conclusions about Presbyteral Ministry exercised in Methodist Fresh Expressions.

Leadership is costly.

FX are expensive. The cost of leadership in fx is multifaceted. There is the cost to the Methodist Church to be in partnership with the Initiative. There is the relational cost of being a weaker partner in the partnership. There is the psychological cost to leaders who feel torn between two masters. Furthermore, there is the loss of capable leaders to the stationing system who are now put into single stationed appointments of small communities, further burdening their circuit

colleagues with multiple congregations and pastoral oversight. Of note here, but commented on in more detail later in the conclusions, is the cost to family stability, as leaders reach breaking point in their own wellbeing. Finally, fx communities are financially costly, especially using success criteria of expenditure over numerical Membership growth to the Methodist Church.

The FX initiative is a partnership between Christian denominations, agencies and the Lambeth Partners. It was born out of the Church of England report *MSC*, and remains substantially funded by the Church of England. In interviewing Methodist members of the FX partnership, there are underlying assumptions and power issues which affect the national organisation, and which in turn affect the ecumenical relationships at local level. At times, such as in Connections, or at a strategic level, it is evident that the partnership of FX is neither a happy nor equal one. As a consequence, it is possible to conclude that Methodists in some Methodist fx feel like they are taken less seriously and given less support than that which was afforded to Church of England colleagues working in the same context. Further examples of this are that FX statistical research is only funded for Church of England examples and that Methodist national representatives do not fit easily into the current organisational framework of the Methodist Connexion, and are thus managed in different ways by different people depending on the perception of management oversight.

FX, as an example of a wider issue of ecumenism and Covenant, causes people in British Methodism to feel as though they are a mere footnote to Church of England power, politics and practice. The lack of Methodist examples in literature and debate exemplifies this. Davison and Milbank's demonstrates that this is more than mere perception,

‘it is already to yield a great deal of ground to think of the Church of England as simply one denomination among many in this country. Historically, this is not how we have seen ourselves, nor does it reflect our legal position.’³⁶⁹

This parochialism and denominational arrogance is a negative indictment on the potential of ecumenical partnerships in a UK context of covenant relationship.

However, it is also worth leaders remembering that Methodism began as a movement of people committed to social transformation and personal discipleship, which quickly became independent of its Church of England roots. Methodists are in a good position to know the subversive power of being marginal within the civic and political authority of a time and context. Methodism offers the opportunity for all denominational partners to recognise that mission is often most effective when it is from a marginalised position. That FX is now both multi-agency and multi-denominational means that the dangers of assumed parochialism and the experience of being ‘second class’ can be engaged with as part of being one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

There is a relational cost to working ‘in partnership with others wherever possible,’³⁷⁰ which in the case of fx is often paid by the leaders. Ordained leaders,

³⁶⁹ Davison, Milbank, *For the Parish*, 3

³⁷⁰ Methodist Church, ‘Priorities for the Methodist Church,’ <http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentogod.content&cmid=559> (1st May 2011)

stationed to a local circuit, run the risk of being torn between their sense of missional leadership and discernment, and the requirements of the circuit leadership team. This thesis demonstrates that the freedom offered by working in fx also brings pressure to maintain the status quo, or to uphold the traditions in a palliative model of church leadership. A mixed economy in Methodism risks falling into two camps: the fresh expression and the Methodist congregation. Leaders often found it easier to subvert the structures with the sentiment as Jake said of, 'what [the circuit] don't know won't kill them.' In order to maintain missional development, this thesis demonstrates that presbyters risk intentionally sabotaging their relationship within the circuit in order to protect and preserve their communities.

Not only do leaders like Emma talk about the burden of guilt she feels about having the ability to tackle the 'fun' side of ministry whilst deliberately not plugging the gaps created by colleagues who themselves find themselves under psychological distress. There is the converse response from within circuits who find an increasing burden placed upon presbyters stationed with the specific intent of, as one Superintendent put it, 'keeping the show on the road.' There is an interesting absence of missional language by senior leaders when it comes to fx – it was very rare for fx to be given credit for being a missional or evangelistic wing of the church. Fx were a burden to resources, and leaders were a problem to contain or else misunderstood in intent and practice. There was little credit either toward evangelism or to the social action being undertaken by all three communities.

There is a conflict between the circuit and fx, which appears to be one of mutual collusion. Superintendents support the traditional Methodist congregations, freeing the space for fx, whilst keeping a tight control over the leaders. In turn, the presbyters leading fx often resent the controls placed upon them, seeing them as the authority structures of the Methodist denomination. This resentment leads to greater apathy towards senior figures, other Methodist congregations and towards the institution.

This conflict in a mixed economy is further hindered by the financial cost of fx. VentureFX has the potential of an overall budget of £7.5million, which is perceived by some within the church as unjust for small communities and those leaders deemed to be 'special.'³⁷¹ Many Methodist congregations are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain their buildings and the payments that they have to make in order to support all the work of the denomination. Fx communities often find themselves pressurised to pay for the premises which they rent, and to contribute to the circuit funds through a donation or assessment. The poor relationships between circuit and fresh expression can make justifying this cost all the more difficult. What is significant about Luminosa, WTS and Safe-Haven is that they all do contribute to the Circuit of which they are a part. In each case, it was the community members who asked for the opportunity to 'pay-back' the circuit. This is

³⁷¹ Stuvland noted that in relation to the emerging church that they tended, 'to be small and decentralised communities that value commitment and accountability over meetings and institutions.' Stuvland, 'Emerging Church and Global Civil Society', 21

not the case for many fx, which are run with very little income and on limited expenditure.

This thesis demonstrates how small communities can evolve and develop with the right leadership and the right financial commitment.³⁷² I want to argue that although there are many costs to be paid, that the combined costs of mission are worth it, and that there is potential to learn lessons now which mean that relational costs for circuit or for families becomes part of fx history. This thesis illustrates that lives can be transformed by being part of a missional fx community. The risk is that such communities fail to be funded well enough or for long enough to enable them to have the full impact of their potential. This thesis also demonstrates that many leaders and participants in fx do not have strong denominational affiliations. FX is in an ideal position to use this ambivalence for missional advantage, and to demonstrate what partnership and discipleship might look like in a networked (or connexional) rather than homogeneous society.

Despite the critical way in which FX is treated from within parts of the denominations, it cannot be forgotten that FX has given leaders and communities the opportunity to 'dream' and to improvise.³⁷³ FX is responsible for an increased confidence within the Methodist Church for mission and contextual engagement.

³⁷² Guest and Taylor note the significance of material support to communities such as these, and the substantial personal financial costs incurred by individual leaders in 'The Post-Evangelical Emerging Church,' 54-55

³⁷³ Bader-Sayer, 'Improvising Church', 16. On the theme of improvisation see also Miller, Donald, *Blue Like Jazz* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003), and Wells, Samuel, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (London: SPCK, 2004)

Indeed there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that where there is a thriving missional Christian community, other local Churches begin to grow and discover their missional identity too. The leaders of fx of Church continue to wrestle against the system and challenge its authority. They also need to take the time to remember and respect that it has been these systems and authority structures that have funded, released, and dreamt with them in order to see these communities come to birth.

Leaders struggle to do both inherited church and fresh expressions

As has already been noted, there is significant tension between the personalities of superintendents and presbyters. I want to argue that this poor relationship is symptomatic of the tensions within the institution itself: on one side supporting the traditional church oversight, complete with doctrinal preservation and authority structures, and on the other hand, the missional motivation of leaders who are impatiently trying to elicit change within what they perceive as an otherwise dying institution. There is a clash of leadership styles and outcomes between Superintendents and mission-shaped presbyters. The models of church being supported are often in conflict too – both in terms of method and in terms of self-understanding. It seems prudent to appoint missional leaders to new communities for the purposes of evangelism and community transformation using the language of the context; and to appoint presbyters who are able to speak in the language of the traditional church to local congregations. The latter example presbyter would

not be stationed to a Fresh Expression – it seems contradictory that a pioneering presbyter could still be stationed to an inherited context, even if only part-time.

Rollins argues that pioneering and missional work in the context of twenty-first century Britain needs to be done outside of the institutions,

‘more radical expressions...need to resist being drawn into the ‘inherited church’ so as to magnify rather than minimise the reality that many of these collectives do not merely have an important message for those outside the institutional church but also a message for the church itself.’³⁷⁴

Rollins’ contestation is that in order to change the status quo, leaders need to act outside of the institution rather than being bank-rolled by it. The experience of many leaders within FX, however, is that change is happening through the missional endeavours of missional leaders such as Emma, Jake and Andrew. As is demonstrated in the case studies, it is hard work, but on the whole most practitioners are keen to see the mixed economy of church work, at least for the interim. These leaders need to be outside of a circuit system in order to be subversive within the institution. The Methodist Church, if it takes seriously its history and heritage, will always be a place of protest, of social transformation and of mission. The risk of a mixed model of leadership, whereby presbyters are appointed to both mission and maintenance leadership in a mixed economy, is that both communities and leaders become confused clear about what they are called to do and be. This in turn fosters a lack of confidence in the local congregation about both the value of the denomination and the cultivation and sharing of a

³⁷⁴ Rollins, ‘Biting the Hand that Feeds’ in Nelstrop and Percy, *Evaluating*, 77

community and individual narrative. Ultimately, the risked consequence of this is a lack of confidence, or disappointment, in God.

Rather than going so far as Rollins, therefore, I wish to suggest that leaders with the discerned pioneering giftings from the church authorities, be given appointments which enable them to exercise this. The benefit of this will be leaders who are focussed solely on missional development of communities within a local context, and who can theologically reflect in such a way as to be an expert resource for the denomination. Leaders will be motivated not by belligerence but by the blessing of those in authority. They will potentially feel valued rather than, as in the case of Emma and Andrew, forcing their way into a post they had to create for themselves. The current reality is that the Methodist Church is losing leadership talent because of the expectations placed upon circuit ministers.³⁷⁵

The tension between leaders is further highlighted by the suggestion by people such as Gamble, that many leaders are seen to be reckless and childish,³⁷⁶ especially in their reaction against authority and management structures.

Consequently, there are those within the institution who feel betrayed and let down by leaders like Jake, Andrew and Emma. For some, it is a sense of jealousy as they see colleagues being granted finance, freedom and permission to do the things that they wanted to do throughout their ministry, but never found the support. For

³⁷⁵ Haley and Ward, *British Methodism*

³⁷⁶ A good example of this sense of reckless behaviour can be found in Robin Gamble's exploration of his own Manchurian ecclesial context and his paralleling tradition 'test-match cricket' church and the newer and more 'sexy' forms of 'twenty-twenty cricket' church, found in Gamble, Robin, 'Mixed Economy: Nice Slogan or Working Reality?', in Nelstrop and Percy, *Evaluating*, 17-19

others, it is a justice issue about how the limited resources of the Methodist Church are used, either for sustaining the history of the Church or for new missional endeavours. The language, exemplified by Emma as she talked about 'leading people the way Jesus would lead' is heard as a judgement about the passion and style of those who do not share the same worldview or experience. Furthermore for others it is being let down by the failure of these leaders because of ill health or personal issues.

Fx community development is viewed by some in circuit and district oversight, as an additional, extra-curricular, activity for a presbyter. Consequently appointments for presbyters are split between a more traditional circuit appointment and a commitment to begin something new. This cannot continue to be the case, if the Methodist Church in the UK is going to have any form of longevity about it. As colleagues in traditional appointments fall ill because of the stress of presbyteral ministry, those with the freedom to be practicing different disciplines of church leadership and personal discipleship can be made to feel as though they should be helping to maintain the circuit at the cost of being intentional in mission-shaped churches. This thesis suggests that leaders of fx feel vocationally torn between an obligation to the expectations of collaborative circuit leadership, and their discernment of God's call upon them. Pioneering-type leaders should be stationed and appointed to a single pioneering task for a minimum of five years. The Methodist Church has the opportunity to specifically station individuals to new appointments under the control of Conference. Leaders need to be stationed to a

specific geographic location, without pastoral charge of other churches. This stationing needs to include specialised personal development, tailor made to the individual.

Frustrated leaders are using FX as an ‘escape route.’

The sentiment is that circuit ministry on the whole is untenable, unsustainable and has the potential to cause harm to those stationed to serve the local communities. This leads to the challenge that leaders are using fx as an escape from traditional forms of church.

‘It does seem relevant here, from ‘inside’ ordination, to ask whether those of us who have been trained recently have focused more on the ideal than the real church, looking deliberately and properly towards the future.’³⁷⁷ Fx and pioneering ministry schemes offer the opportunity to escape from the structures of traditional forms of ministry.³⁷⁸ The evidence of this research suggests indeed that the ordained presbyters have been creating an ideal appointment on their own terms, paving the way for their successors to follow their well-trodden path. It remains to be seen whether the future church that those who have stepped into fx leadership is any brighter in their leadership experience in circuit.

The evidence in this thesis is that this is not the same as seeking an escape from the institution per se, although it is unclear for what reason presbyters are staying within the Methodist Church. My instinct is that they remain because they feel that

³⁷⁷ Craske, Jane, ‘Mind the Gap’, in Luscombe and Shreeve, *Minister?*, 178

³⁷⁸ This is not a situation unique to the context outlined in this thesis. Martyn Atkins argues a similar ambivalence towards entering ministerial orders in his chapter, Atkins, ‘Counting the Cost...and paying it’, in Frost et al., *Commission*, 45-54

they owe the church something, as compensation almost for their questioning of the Institution. Both Emma and Andrew are still stationed by the Methodist Church and participate at a number of strategic levels in Methodism. All three leaders in the case studies explored the relief of finding ways to exercise vocation outside of the assumed roles of property management, liturgical worship patterns and pastoral care. FX give permission for leaders to build community the frustrations and expectations and experiences of 'traditional' church, especially for younger leaders who find themselves patronised by powerbrokers within congregations. Ironically, leaders themselves become 'dechurched' as they seek to find ways of reaching the 'unchurched.' Jameison notes in relation to the emerging church that,

'when the established churches can no longer provide a place for long-term church leaders to explore their lives and Christian faith and find meaning in them, they have left and joined existing post-church groups or formed new ones.'³⁷⁹

FX enables leaders to be creative and engage with people from a variety of life experiences. Being in missional mode stretches leaders who are engaging in contemporary society, and thus make meaning in the midst of a culture that is otherwise distant from traditional congregations. FX has provided the means by which the Methodist Church can keep its talent.

The leaders in this research all express frustration with the institution, however. Jake, Emma and Andrew described their current roles in stark contrast to appointments that they had served in the past. They all talked in positive terms about fighting hard to find an opportunity to lead and to be creative in developing

³⁷⁹ Jamieson, Alan, 'Post-church', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 6:1, 72

communities for people who have no experience of Church or Christian community. For Jake, Emma and Andrew, circuit ministry was a place of pain and discontentedness. Each one of them fought against the structures and systems, with Emma and Andrew both wrestling so hard that they created their current posts themselves as a solution to the challenges and frustrations that they were experiencing. For Jake, Emma and Andrew, they used their frustration to their own benefit. The risk factor of frustrated leaders within Methodism is that leaders become self-destructive, or else destructive of the communities that they lead.

Fx and pioneer mission is an alternative to inherited church leadership. It is an escape for leaders. It is an escape from a 'palliative care' model of church oversight,³⁸⁰ and it is an escape into an adventure of unplanned and unexplored missionary opportunities. It is an escape from a Christendom model of church life into an emerging post-Christendom evolution of missional discipleship. However, by expressing frustration, presbyters in missional appointments can be, rightly or wrongly, seen to be acting recklessly, especially in their reaction against authority and management structures. Consequently, there are those within the institution who feel betrayed and let down by leaders like Jake, Andrew and Emma. The language, exemplified by Emma as she talked about 'leading people the way Jesus would lead' is heard as a judgement about the passion and style of those who do not share the same worldview or experience. For others they fear being maligned

³⁸⁰ Cox, 'Emerging Expressions', 130

or let down by leaders who fail to care for those who are already within the Methodist fold.

Despite their frustrations, it is important to reflect upon what ordination means to each of them, it is significant to note that ordination is seen in functional terms. Emma demonstrated a strategic approach to ordination insofar as it was the means by which she would be able to lead and teach a group of people. This is further highlighted by the fact that in an appointment outside of a circuit, she now talks in the past tense about being ordained. Emma's language creates the possibility that ordination could be something for a short amount of time, rather than a lifetime vocation. If this is a feature of many fx leaders, this has the potential to collapse the order of ministry irreparably. Jake mourned the fact that his ordination was not recognised by the host church, and that he was thus unable to preside at communion. Andrew offered a reflection on ordination, which resembled that of the requirements of the candidating process, although to what extent this merely demonstrated his participation in such processes was difficult to tell. What is clear from Andrew's reflections is that although ordination is more than his role, he saw presbyteral leadership being exercised solely outside of traditional circuit ministry. This should be perfectly coherent with an ecclesiology of connexionalism over circuit ministry, but the institution is not facing up to the reality of its own ecclesiology. Although Andrew is more orthodox in his understanding of ordination, the practical outworking of this brought further challenges for him.

From this functional view of ordination, I am arguing that the very nature, ontological and functional, of ordained presbyteral leadership be nationally (if not internationally) reviewed, and that circuit ministry in a UK context is reworked or reformed in order to enable the flourishing of both leaders and congregations in the missional task of a mixed economy, rather than continuing the spiral of demoralised, frustrated, or unhealthy leaders. Shier-Jones comments,

‘the church has a rather functional view of ministry, which governs its discernment processes. ... the [implication is that the] only way in which the church will recognise and train people to be able to lead or initiate a pioneer ministry is if they are already engaged in some form of pioneering ministry.’³⁸¹

This research indicates that it is also the leaders themselves who have a functional view of their role, functions that they were unable to exercise when they were engaged in full time Circuit ministry. From the case studies, I conclude that ordination and the covenant relationship to Conference that ordination initiates, brings unnecessary stress and complexity to missional leadership. The reliance upon ordained leaders to lead both fx and traditional church means that willing and able lay-leaders become apathetic towards their own vocational journey, and dependent upon ordained individuals to do mission for them, at the cheapest possible cost. Consequently leaders are treated cheaply throughout the denomination in both traditional and fx appointments. These leaders in turn become frustrated by the additional, often administrative or managerial, burdens placed upon them. Not only is there a need for the Methodist Church to be clearer about the role and responsibility of ordained presbyters, especially in light of the

³⁸¹ Shier-Jones, *Pioneer*, 16

adoption of the *MSC* report, but also a pressing need to support and train lay leaders to lead missional communities in their own context.

The suggestion from the leaders participating in this research is that the experience of ministry is not what it is intended to be, and consequently congregations have lost confidence in their leaders, leaders have lost confidence in their congregations and *fx* become an exciting alternative, or escape, both for despondent community members and for frustrated leaders. The church thereby has the opportunity to review and recast a vision for presbyteral and lay leadership, which encourages ministry and mission whilst providing the space and support for frustrated leaders to rediscover their leadership identity.

Rediscover a missiology of Central Halls

Two of the three locations within this research were located in Central Halls.

Andrew opens up the significance of this by saying,

‘I never intended really to do something in a Central Hall, simply, there was a space. Simply by accident we’ve kind of followed Methodist tradition in what we’re doing and the story of Central Halls.’

As the Superintendent working with Andrew has already been quoted as saying, Central Halls were the Fresh Expressions of their day.’ Originally designed as places of worship where people who had little or no church background could enter in confidence and comfort, the use of Central Halls for *fx* follows a significant and intentional missional method of Methodist practice.

'The symbol of a new [evangelistic] approach was the central hall, with its blend of social, evangelistic, and educational work.'³⁸²
 Central Halls were places of architectural excellence, creating a space within a city environment for people to hear the Gospel preached in a context that looked like a theatre or cinema, indeed many were used for these purposes.

Central Halls were the precursors to the contemporary debate about third spaces. This theory, first purported by Oldenburg,³⁸³ suggests that the first space is that of one's home and family, the second place is one's workplace, where one spends most of their time. The third place is the place of leisure, the place where community is formed and where friendships are developed. On this basis, Central Halls were attempting to develop third places at the turn of the last century. FX are using the third place theory to help people think contextually about where the Holy Spirit may already be at work in people's lives.

Central Halls, therefore, have the renewed potential to enable focussed and specifically contextual ministry and missional appointments for teams of Presbyters, Deacons and lay people. This need not be about buildings per se. The rediscovery of a theology and ecclesial practice of Central Halls enables flexibility within Methodist structures, as Central Halls have their own standing orders and legal status. There is also the intentionality that the context is the primary focus of mission and ministry, not necessarily the original inherited congregants. For the leaders in this research, the local context of the community is of greater

³⁸² Wellings, Martin, 'A Historian's Perspective on the Future of Methodism', in Marsh and Craske, *Methodism and the Future*, 151

³⁸³ Oldenburg, Ray, *The Great Good Place* (New York, NY: Paragon, 1989)

significance than the resources and provision of a church building. Leaders of fx of church see the context of their work in geographic and demographic terms rather than congregational terms. For some fx, the church building will still be a primary location for mission. However, there are a growing number of communities that are locally engaged and thus using facilities outside of the church premises, thereby employing the missiological practice exemplified through Central Halls, but this time outside of a Church building. I am arguing, therefore, that alongside the hospitality and evangelistic intent of Central Halls, such theological foundations may also enable effective mission in other environments within a locality.

If context is so crucial, however, it is significant that there are few examples of fx that specifically engage in an interfaith missional dialogue, despite the cultural diversity within UK cities and towns. Only Safe-Haven had people of a variety of nationalities present, the majority of these were still white professionals, albeit from across the world. This is not the vision of mixed economy and contextualisation that is indicated by the *MSC* report. This is not what one might assume a renewed example of a missional movement being refined and renewed by the Spirit of God at work in multicultural, postmodern England, might look like.

Charismatic leaders need to develop a team around them.

Narrative, in terms of the story of the community, and in terms of what stories are told and their intent in communication, play an important part in a changing

society. 'The stories that emerge from the deep resources of a culture enable people to navigate change and have regenerating potential.'³⁸⁴ Glasson also noted the significance of being a storied community.³⁸⁵ It is thus vital that the community of faith is able to articulate the story of its existence and evolution, to 'give account' as Walton suggests.³⁸⁶ This is important in the transition of community and leadership.

The evidence from this research is that it is the leader who tells the story of the community. They are the guardians and the gatekeepers for both the community as a whole, but also of the communication about the community. Andrew commented that one of his final tasks in community at Connections would be to write the account of his experiences, so that there was an 'official' record. Regardless of questions of bias, it does indicate that there is a need in communities like Connections to write and retell the story of vision, development and transition in a way that reminds the community of why they exist and to call a community to pray about next steps. This causes difficulty during a time of transition, as the whole identity and purpose of the community is shifted. Thus, communities go through a significant period of deconstruction and re-envisioning during transition to a new leader, as the community are forced to rediscover their own identity.³⁸⁷

³⁸⁴ Graham et al, *Methods*, 49

³⁸⁵ Glasson, 'Stories' in Marsh, *Unmasking*, 99f

³⁸⁶ Walton, *Reflective*, 106

³⁸⁷ Lindholm notes that 'charisma is, above all, a relationship, a mutual mingling of the inner selves of leader and follower' in Lindholm, Charles, *Charisma* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 7

In turn, the leader has to determine their own identity as suddenly distinctive and separate from their community. Hybels notes that entrepreneurial leaders will constantly be on the move for the next thing.³⁸⁸ Jake in Safe-Haven demonstrates the self-destructive risk factors involved when such leaders feel forced to conform or slow down. There is scope for further work into the psychological wellbeing of leaders, as well as an investigation of *charisma* at work in fx communities. As Lindholm concludes, 'charisma is aroused in situations where personal identity has been devalued and challenged by feelings of loss and isolation, and persons prepared to...join a movement are first plagued by a sense of incompleteness or a desire to belong.'³⁸⁹ This research demonstrates that fx communities are places where people with this sense of isolation and devalue do gather, but that the leaders themselves also feel devalued by the institution and isolated from collegueship – or else put in place where they feel dislocated from their own sense of calling and thus ordination.

Much has been said in the description of all three locations about the leader as the person who controls the messages. In WTS, individuals are invited into cell groups following an interview with the leader, and often having previously attended an alpha course. In Safe-Haven, the creativity of the leader in terms of music and graphic design meant that all the designed messages were focussed by Jake. In Connections it is a little more complicated because of the business element to community. However, it was Andrew who acted as the general manager of the

³⁸⁸ Hybels, Bill, *Courageous Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 151-153

³⁸⁹ Lindholm, *Charisma*, 184

cafe. Luminosa was a heavily individualistic expression of alternative worship, with very little opportunity for corporate reflection or questioning. All three communities had team leadership, but all looked to the named and paid leader for direction, wisdom, discipline, creativity and content. Despite speaking about empowering people to 'step up' the reality of this was very different. People were not keen to participate in public, although they were happy to offer hospitality and service in very practical ways.

Furthermore, in times of community development and stability, there is the implication in this research that the community is a means for charismatic and narcissistic personalities to develop a platform for their own benefit.³⁹⁰

Communities such as these researched require a figurehead, or someone to look up to in order to start from nothing and to attract people towards a vision of community life. Some fresh expression leaders need communities of people to look up to them in order to find their identity and self worth. One pioneer mission leader, speaking at the Greenbelt Festival in 2010, noted 'my discipleship will determine the sort of community that will develop.' In some ways this is a note of wisdom, prioritising personal discipleship over community. Taken further, however, it reveals the close link between personality profiles and pioneering ministries. This is a field open for much more detailed work and study, and offers a profound challenge to the support required by the institution to such leaders.

³⁹⁰ Lindholm, *Charisma*, 50-61

All leaders demonstrated a great deal of reflexivity when speaking of the good, the bad and the ugly parts of ministry and community leadership, both institutional and in fx. The leaders were defensive of their community, but were also keen to hear observations and initial conclusions that related to their community. However, leaders regarded those in ecclesial authority over them with distrust and disdain. Both Andrew and Jake spoke in negative terms about the people who were in oversight of them, and this was matched in language by the Superintendents of each circuit. Only Emma in WTS remained in good standing with the leadership of the wider circuit, although the pull towards inherited church models was a constant trial for her. The leaders often tried to protect the community from outside influence. There was a subtle and subversive pattern of behaviour which attempted to circumnavigate local and circuit leadership. Traditional authority structures are seen to be barriers and interferences into community missional development. In terms of this argument about the controlling of the community story, therefore, it is important to note that those in oversight are prevented from hearing or telling the story of the community for fear of interference, miscommunication, or at worst imposition of assumed authority.

Lindholm comments on the power wielded by three charismatic leaders: Hitler, Manson and Jones. Each one compelled a nation, their family and thousands of followers respectively, into actions and belief systems that in hindsight seem abhorrent and at the time ended in tragedy. Leaders in fx, therefore, need to be given the tools to be self aware about the impact that their own personality has

upon a community. Despite all the leaders researched having leadership teams in place, these teams acted more as a support group rather than as a missional team unit. For the future health of communities and their leaders, therefore, it will be increasingly important to develop teams of people who not only tell the story of the community, but who are able to shape it beyond the legacy of any one individual. Additional training and funding will be required for this at a local and national level, in order to support the continuing development of leadership teams and to build on the networks of support that are at present serendipitously achieved.

Put a succession plan in place to sustain the community for the long term

There is a lack of success criteria when it comes to fx. One means of measuring success is through succession planning. As one superintendent suggested, succession planning is crucial, otherwise “the Conference might have sent us a prat.” Communities need to be able to discern the people who can ‘inherit’ the communities, following the departure of a leader. In the Methodist context, ordained leadership is always a time-limited affair. A challenge for leaders is to discern the vocation of lay people, to equip them and to work with them during transition and take-over. Scharen notes that ‘[the community] has ebbed and flowed with the quality and commitment of the ministers assigned to it.’³⁹¹ One

³⁹¹ Scharen, Christian Batalden, ‘Judicious Narratives or Ethnography and Ecclesiology’, *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 58(2), 2005, 141

Anglican Bishop noted that ‘the success of leadership is measured in the ability to notice those who have a vocation to leadership and service.’

An interesting feature of the case studies in this thesis is that two were going through a period of transition, and thus were living out these questions of legacy towards their leaders. WTS appointed three lay leaders from within the community to succeed Emma. Connections and Luminosa sought permission from the Church of England and Methodist Churches and advertised outside of the stationing system for a new leader to take on both communities.

The evidence of this thesis is that there is significant need for greater strategic long-term oversight and training for succession planning. For some communities, such as WTS, this is about equipping lay leaders to continue the leadership of the community. In terms of Connections and Luminosa, this is about how different ecumenical partners can work within the legislation of both denominations to provide a suitable process for the stationing of an ordained leader as successor. This thesis demonstrates that there are a number of skills and qualities that are required for fx leaders, and that specialised posts require specialised leaders to fill them. Those who have been formed and shaped by the Methodist systems to date may not be the best people to serve in a new church community.³⁹² Berry takes this even further by suggesting that ‘entrepreneurs are often the voices from the

³⁹² see Hollinghurst, Steve, ‘Tomorrow’s Evangelism Bulletin’, http://www.churcharmy.org.uk/ms/sc/Evangelism/sfc_tomorrows_evangelism.aspx Spring 2011, (22nd April 2011)

margins, liminal voices.³⁹³ If this is the case, then succession planning needs to be looking to the margins of both the institution and the local community in order to find the people with the vision, gifts and graces to discern God's call to lead His Church. As has been intimated in discussions of the tension of leaders, those who are entrepreneurial and creative are also the people who are difficult to manage and form through traditional teaching methods. The question of succession planning therefore raises a subsidiary conclusion that Methodist structures need to be flexible enough to allow the discernment and deployment of people whom God is calling into leadership: be that lay, presbyteral, Diaconal, paid or voluntary. Furthermore, these leaders may not actually be Methodist at all.

Invest in leadership for the long-term

The language of 'economy' can be a little prohibitive for a discussion of longevity and success for a community.³⁹⁴ Further criteria for success will be the ongoing wellbeing and training of those in leadership. Younger leaders, often deployed in mission-shaped churches, have the potential for forty or more years of ministry ahead of them.

³⁹³ Berry, Mark, 'Fostering and Developing Entrepreneurs in Mission', <http://www.emergingchurch.info/reflection/markberry/index.htm> (5th September 2009)

³⁹⁴ See also Jethani, Skye, 'Mission and Recession', http://blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur/archives.2008/12/missiona_and_rec.html (8th January 2009) who suggests that rather than an economic system of production, finance and manufacturing, perhaps the church has a role to value the core time, places and context that people have and equip them to live out their discipleship in these areas of their experience. This is also the focus of the LICC's Imagine project, <http://www.licc.org.uk/imagine/> (16th March 2011)

Of all the leaders consulted in this research, only one is still in full time leadership of a community. One is now a district employee offering consultancy on missiology and evangelism. One has left full time Christian ministry by mutual agreement due to ‘moral failure.’ Fx are not immune from the temptations and fragilities felt by leaders in other appointments. This research demonstrates that some lessons have not always been learnt from experiences such as the Nine O’clock Service in Sheffield,³⁹⁵ or from the Catholic Church in Ireland, or even from the suspicion of leadership exhibited in some of the language from the emerging church.³⁹⁶ One challenge to leaders of fx must therefore be about how to sustain lifelong discipleship and ministry.³⁹⁷ Jake often said in conversation that, ‘everyone has a church plant in them, it is the second that is more tricky.’ Longevity of leadership may be about the sustaining practices of constantly being a pioneer. It is also about the lifelong practice of leadership and discipleship. If the western genre of movies have anything to teach us about pioneers, it is that they find it very difficult to settle in one place. True pioneers may not stay long in one place, but longevity then becomes about the legacy that they leave behind and their own personal wellbeing at the point of departure from community.

Shier-Jones notes that,

³⁹⁵ Howard, Roland, *The Rise and Fall of the Nine O’Clock Service: A Cult Within the Church?* (London: Continuum, 1996)

³⁹⁶ Belcher, *Deep Church*, 171

³⁹⁷ Walt Kalstad reflects on his own practice of ministry, and his subsequent near-fatal health issues, in an attempt to articulate a shift from an attractional model of church to a missional and sustainable model of discipleship in Kalstad, Walt, ‘Redefining Success: Moving from Entertainment to Worship’, Fuller Theological Journal, Fall, 2008, http://documents.fuller.edu/news/pubs/tnn/2008_Fall/2_entertainment_to_worship.asp (24th October 2008)

‘success has a different feel in pioneer ministry...A successful ministry is measured by the quality of the relationships that are formed between God and those being ministered to.’³⁹⁸

In order to judge success, there needs to be oversight of the long term wellbeing of the leader and of the community. This is also symbiotically linked to the issue of storytelling, for it is in the ownership of the story that the community and the individual find their own identity.

Mission-shaped leaders need the support of a combination of therapy, coaching, mentoring and spiritual direction in order to develop their own Christian discipleship.

Through the contextual work of fx, community members and leaders find ways of making sense of their local environment, drawing from scripture, tradition and reason, but do not communicate the depth of this praxis and reflection to others outside their peer group.³⁹⁹ All the leaders talked about their willingness and need to develop in their leadership and in their discipleship. Character, integrity and authenticity were all words that all three leaders used to describe significant features of leaders in fx. Furthermore, these, alongside ‘theologian in residence’ were all intimated or expressly articulated by the leadership teams in the communities. I am arguing that in order to sustain and develop leaders primarily as Christian disciples in their own right, leader need the support and empowerment of specialists outside of their network, peer group and theological persuasion.

³⁹⁸ Shier-Jones, *Pioneer*, 54

³⁹⁹ Jones, Matthew, ‘A Literary Critique on the Ecclesiology of Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost’s *The Shaping of Things to Come*’ (unpublished)

When Jake talked about Safe-Haven as being a place where people are able to 'learn the moves' of Christianity, he was not just talking about the routine choreography of worship.⁴⁰⁰ He was talking about the means and methods of daily discipleship, prayer, scripture, journaling, and worship which were all supported by the books available for the community to borrow in the library. This is similar language to that used by Wright in discussing the significance of virtues in contemporary life.⁴⁰¹ When it comes to the character of the leader, therefore, there is also the need for the leader to be the 'chief learner' within the community, the person who is able to lead but with the humility to be learning alongside the community rather than at the front as some sort of spiritual superior.

The character of the leader is also a significant thing for communities in transition, and for leaders who are trying to balance their own assessment and weaknesses with the successes and failures of the community. Jake, given his honesty about his own psychological brokenness and personal flaws, demonstrates the potential that leaders have to require professional therapy. There is the potential for further work to be done on the psychology of leaders and on the links between 'virtues', discipleship and postmodernism, none of which have been the scope of this study, although the groundwork is set for this to be taken up by another researcher.

⁴⁰⁰ Astley talks about the 'grammar of faith' in Astley, *Ordinary*, 25f

⁴⁰¹ Wright, *Virtue Reborn*,

There are a number of strategies that need to be considered when appointing and supporting pioneering leaders. The interest in new monasticism indicates that there is an desire for accountability and spiritual direction. Rules of life and covenantal promises are significant in the ongoing life of some fx. Methodism's history and heritage has a great deal to offer this conversation, from accountability bands, an annual covenant and covenant discipleship groups.⁴⁰² As Lyall concludes, 'Christian discipleship is discovered in living dialogue between the traditions we inherit and our own.'⁴⁰³ The challenge, therefore, is to promote the dialogue between the Methodist tradition and that experienced by local leaders. FX also advocate the use of coaching for leaders,⁴⁰⁴ and this is developing within the Methodist Connexional team through Creative Results Management.⁴⁰⁵ On this basis, every leader within a fresh expression or indeed Minister within the Connexion should be offered a coach,⁴⁰⁶ a mentor, and a spiritual director. Where necessary, leaders may also need the long-term support of a professional therapist. Bell furthers this need of support structures, as he notes, in another denominational context, the importance of peer networks and teams,

'What we don't need is a denomination-wide strategy to make everyone...missional. But we do need to cultivate an environment among a network of pastors in an area that can help form and nurture the practices of discerning God's future with...congregations.'⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰² Walton, *Reflective*, 179

⁴⁰³ Lyall, David, 'Review of The Reflective Disciple', *Practical Theology* 3:2, 2010, 269-270

⁴⁰⁴ Hopkins, Bob and Freddie Hedley, *Coaching for Missional Leadership* (London: Acpi, 2008) and Stoltzfus, Tony, *Leadership Coaching: The Disciplines, Skills and Heart of a Christian Coach* (TN: LaVergne, 2005)

⁴⁰⁵ <http://www.creativeresultsmanagement.com/courses/icf/icf.htm> (1st May, 2011)

⁴⁰⁶ see <http://www.creativeresultsmanagement.com/coaching/index.htm> (11th April 2011)

⁴⁰⁷ Bell, Ryan, 'From the Margins: Engaging Missional Life in the Seventh-day Adventist Church', Fuller Theological Seminary, Fall 2008, http://documents.fuller.edu/news/pubs/tnn/2008_Fall/3_from_the_margins.asp (24th October 2008)

The continuing formation of leaders not only supports them for a long-term view, but also trains and develops them with the desire to enable them to be the specialists in missional leadership to train the next generation of leaders in contextual mission. This is one way in which the wider Church can learn lesson from fx, and support all its ministers – lay and ordained – as first and foremost, disciples of Jesus.

Take more risks and learn from failures

In the statistical returns of the Methodist Church in 2010, 51% of circuits had at least one self-defined fresh expression in them. However, many of them remain undisclosed when it comes to discussions about the impact that FX is having within a local context. Two of the three contexts in this research were included in publicity for FX, and the third as an example in a Conference report. This makes them markedly different from many fx and missional leaders in Methodism who remain silent contributors to the missional agenda of the Church. There is evidence, therefore, to suggest that risks are being taken by local circuits. What is not quite so clear is the extent to which these are calculated risks based on proven record, such as Messy Church and cafe style worship; and which are intentionally contextually driven missional endeavours that entirely fit the criteria of FX as having the potential to be an ecclesial community for the benefit of the unchurched.

Atkins' rally call to Methodist people is that,

‘Risk taking obedience is required today...risk taking inevitably heightens the possibility of failure, but it also increases the chance of achievement.’⁴⁰⁸ Methodist circuits are taking these risks, albeit within the bounds of successful models. As Atkins’ notes, however, with the chances of achievement also comes the risk of failure. Adair notes, ‘organisations that fear failure...establish all sorts of controls to ensure that [they] do not happen.’⁴⁰⁹ This thesis demonstrates that there is a willingness in the senior leadership of the Methodist Church to enable creativity and innovation in contextual mission, but that there is caution and constraint throughout the Connexional structures, Conference, circuits and through grant making processes. If these risks are to continue to have an impact upon the renewal of the whole church, they require continued long-term investment in terms of leadership development and guaranteed continued financial support.

Leaders need to be given the support to be able to take risks and to be able to learn from failures. The failure of community should not be seen as an indictment on the inability of the leader, but as a learning opportunity. The mission-shaped agenda provides the ecclesial space for these risks to be calculated, taken, and theologically reflected upon.

‘The church can risk being creative in its faithfulness because we trust that in God’s providence even our failures will be gathered up and made to contribute to the final act of the drama.’⁴¹⁰ There is already evidence of the failure of a community,⁴¹¹ the failure of leaders⁴¹² and more abstractly, but no less implied by *Mission-Shaped Church* and *For The*

⁴⁰⁸ Atkins, *Renewal*, 251

⁴⁰⁹ Adair, John, *Leadership for Innovation: How to Organise Team Creativity and Harvest Ideas* (London: Kogan Page, 2007), 130

⁴¹⁰ Bader-Sayer, Scott, ‘Improvisation’, 21

Parish the failure of denominations to be the Church that God has intended them to be. The language of 'failure' is particularly loaded, and that the experience of fx and emerging churches can often be that of a short-term community rather than a long-term ecclesiology. In October 2010, the FX newsletter reflected on the 'failure' of a community, concluding that,

'There is no science which helps us know exactly when we have crossed the line between faithfully waiting for something to work and acknowledging that our much loved fresh expression is not reaching unchurched people...This is not so much a time for 'heroic failures' as for learning from previous experience and trying again, under the direction of the Holy Spirit.'⁴¹³

Leaders need to be able to theologically reflect on practice, but they also need to be people who are able to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit in order to act well, appropriately and prophetically at the opportune moment. It also means that Christian community: both fresh and inherited, needs to be open to a process of review, renewal or relinquishment. FX are consistently critiqued and challenged. In a conversation of risk and failure, it is surely time to enforce a similar pattern of reflection upon inherited churches.

All presbyters need to be given opportunity to reflect upon practice, either in terms of coaching, or professional supervision, in order to develop their ability to reflect upon 'failure' as well as to critically examine decisions. Leaders need to demonstrate being leaders, learning practitioners, theological reflectors, and

⁴¹¹ Vaux released a stark statement that it was committing 'termination of service when it stopped meeting in 2005 <http://www.vaux.net/about-vaux> (14th April 2011)

⁴¹² Of all those interviewed, Jake constantly offered a narrative of weakness, brokenness and vulnerability of the community with the intention of demonstrating that leaders are not 'mini-celebrities' or 'superheroes.' See also Ward, Pete, *Gods Behaving Badly: Media, Religion and Celebrity Culture* (London: SCM, 2011)

⁴¹³ Cray, Graham, <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/e-xpressions/oct10?newsletter-view> (11th November 2010)

disciples of Jesus Christ, in order to provide their communities the example to do the same.

Embrace Ordinary Theology

There is a current misapprehension that communities, such as those researched, are theologically silent or illiterate. There are many reasons why this might be the case. It may be that the level of theological engagement is subtle or invisible to a researcher, or else relatively privileged information, or non-verbal, or else that the group held theological conversations in the past, and do not go over the old ground in a public discourse. Although the suggestion of theological illiteracy is placed at the door of FX, not least of all in the continuing mission-shaped conversation, it is important to note that this is not a new critique. Marsh notes that

‘As a ‘doing’ movement, Methodism is prone to leave the theology by which it operates too easily unexamined because it leaves it contained within the actions or words which lie behind [it.]’⁴¹⁴

This assumption comes because the traditional language of theology is not employed within the communities.

In the case of Methodism, and in the case of the examples researched here, the ‘doing’ of theology: the daily living, values driven, small Christian unit discipleship promoted and protected by the leaders, can be easily missed. In the interviews with leaders, it was clear that there was a great deal of reflection happening, both theological and sociologically. However, this was not always communicated to the

⁴¹⁴ Marsh, *Unmasking*, 98

wider community, nor to the Circuit. The suggestion that Methodism is a pragmatic movement helps to tease out the subtlety here. Not only is it a pragmatic movement, but it is a movement which subconsciously, or privately, reflects upon practice using the tools of reason, scripture, tradition and experience, and puts into action a transformed practice. Fx communities, on the evidence of this research, are employing the same method, but without describing it. Thus actions can appear to be unconsidered or theologically weak, when in fact they have been considered in depth by the leader, often through the filter of how the community may respond.

Graham talks about theology in the vernacular. The three communities researched were all products of their cultural conditioning and context. The leaders, through all the media employed with all aspects of community life, used the language and imagery of the location. When things were 'imported' into the community that did not connect, they were treated with suspicion – such as fajitas in WTS. Connections pushed this further, becoming so inculturated that spirituality was offered in all sorts of different guises, from Buddhist meditation to 'tea and yoga.' The failure of the questionnaire is a further example of something theologically accurate and ecclesiological contained which was completely unintelligible to the community members in all three locations. Graham notes that theology in the vernacular 'utilis[es] the everyday language and symbols of ordinary people and pay[s] attention to theological motifs in popular culture.'⁴¹⁵ The leaders in the three locations did this constantly. WTS used a clip from 'Britain's got talent' not merely

⁴¹⁵ Graham, et al., *Methods*, 200

for illustrative purposes, but to promote a discussion on esteem and wellbeing. Safe-Haven's publicity all includes a local signpost, pointing people to the incarnational locatedness of the community. Connections' argument that pies and coffee were as sacramental to the city as bread and wine pushing a conversation about the nature of sacramental ministry within a developing and inculturated community. For Methodists, this is nothing new. As a growing movement, the theology of the movement was shared through hymnody, set to the contemporary music of the day. Arguably, these missional communities are using the very same method.

What is required of leaders, therefore, is the dexterity to comprehend theology and their conclusions of theological reflection, then to communicate it in a way that the community members find both accessible and stimulating, and to the denomination in ways that demonstrate the heritage to which they are a part. As one member of Connections notes,

'The results of the ... charismatic people, may be beautiful but they may be bad theologians, and you need also the reflective people who can see what's happening with the sparking of ideas and be able to interpret that to say OK what's the theology behind this.'

This requires a good knowledge of learning styles, community inculturation and theological aptitude. Not all of this can be learnt in a theological college.

Therefore, leaders of fx need both the support of a theological institution in order to test ideas and to determine orthodoxy. They also need the ground-level in-service training which provides the space for contextual listening and investigation.

Furthermore, practitioners need to be articulate in what Astley calls *ordinary*

theology: the lay theology and praxis of local communities. It is fit for fx and contextual mission because 'ordinary theology is an overtly contextual theology; it is an explicitly learned theology. It is also a learning theology.'⁴¹⁶ The Church and subsequently the Academy, need to rediscover the flexibility and ever-changing nature of God-talk, as new generations of disciples rediscover God and theology for themselves.

All three locations grappled with theological themes and dogma during the fieldwork. Luminosa held an entire evening based on the concepts of Niebuhr's *Christ in Culture* thesis: culminating in an opportunity to walk the streets to discover where Christ is in culture – an opportunity most members took to find the local bar and drink a swift pint! WTS held a community day away introducing the Bible to the members, and discussing the different genre of the books of Scripture. Safe-Haven was in the middle of series on the values, and held one evening on the nature of grace and forgiveness. These are not communities which are theologically illiterate, nor are the leaders afraid of asking big questions to the participants. The one anomaly is Connections, whereby the theological work is far more subtle and far more about community cohesion and social action than about evangelism or indoctrination. It is therefore possible to conclude that fx communities who are self-determining themselves as an ecclesial community, are able and willing to be theologically reflective, albeit in terms culturally relevant and conditioned to their own locality and ability. If, however, success is the

⁴¹⁶ Astely, *Ordinary*, 60

development of a sacramental community, there are significant questions of discipline about how communities without ordained leadership are able to fulfil this criterion.

Gibbs and Bolger argue, 'theologies given birth within modernity will not transfer to postmodern cultures.'⁴¹⁷ If the fx communities are discovering their own ways and means of communicating theological truths, it is important also to note that some of these will not appear orthodox by those preserving and maintaining order and orthodoxy within the institutions. Bell talks about the need for doctrine to be like a trampoline, on which people can bounce, and which is malleable within the elastic limit of the springs, rather than the formality and restriction of a brick wall.⁴¹⁸

Turner talks about 'the church [a]s a place where people can dance.'⁴¹⁹ What can be threatening to the denominations and to the Academy in this line of argument is that it puts into question who has the authority to decide what is 'right' or 'true' or 'accurate.' The language of trampolining and dance further the (unhelpful) critique that fx are merely playing at theology and with church, and that they will soon 'grow up' as one senior leader indicated.

One example of practical theology which may offer fruit for further study in comparison with fx is the work of Chung in Asia. According to Graham, Chung

'raises the question not only of the way in which one dominant (colonial) culture can silence another (indigenous) expression; but also how issues of

⁴¹⁷ Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 34

⁴¹⁸ Bell, Rob, *Velvet Elvis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 26-27

⁴¹⁹ Said by a participant in a consultation on Fresh Expression of Church in the EMK, Germany, held in Nuremburg, 24-25th April, 2009

power and difference within a culture can be adequately considered and addressed.⁴²⁰

Chung's sense that 'theology is a language of hope, dreams and poetry...firmly based on concrete, historical reality but points to the mystery and vision'⁴²¹ speaks in a language spoken by fx practitioners and commentators. Mellor talks about evangelism as parable and poetry.⁴²² Jake talked about the power of mystery. Emma sought to discover vision with the leadership team not only about what they could do, but about what the Spirit was calling the community too. This thesis has begun to raise the question of the language of theology within fx, and has done so from a non-conformist perspective. Chung, if correct, pushes this question a stage further and raises the question of what theological reflection and praxis might look like in a community of entirely unchurched participants and leaders. FX is not yet in this place, but the time is surely coming when the dominant denominational authority will need to listen to an indigenous expression of faith in a UK context.

Bruce remarks that, 'there is often a huge gulf between what the 'chattering classes' think and do and the lives and worldviews of ordinary people.'⁴²³ This thesis goes some way to demonstrating that the worldviews of ordinary theologians, participants in fx communities, are both contextually inculturated and theologically reflexive. However, both the Academy and the denominations remain cautious about the application of praxis based research as an adequate means of collecting and observing this. There is therefore, a responsibility on the part of the

⁴²⁰ Graham et al., *Methods*, 220

⁴²¹ Chung, Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to the Sun Again* (London: Orbis, 1990), 101

⁴²² Mellor, Howard, 'Evangelism as Parable', in *Mixed Economy Journal*
<http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/sites/default/files/mixedeconomy1.pdf> (22nd April 2011)

⁴²³ Bruce, *Dead*, 230

denominational institutions to find ways to support and sustain articulate leaders as they wrestle with theological constructs and concepts as they apply or otherwise from their experience. This includes continuing training, especially in the areas of ordinary theology and cross-cultural mission.⁴²⁴ There is a need to develop communication strategies which help the wider church engage with the thinking and practice of these communities. Both the denominations and the Academy can appropriate more widely the advantages of applied and practical theology such as this, in ways that affect change, and help the theological development of missional ecclesial communities.

Re-discover a Methodist identity

One of the surprising conclusions within this thesis is the unwillingness of leaders, senior leaders and communities to articulate their identity as uniquely Methodist. As one strategic leader of the Methodist Connexional team put it: 'I don't think that we have something that is so unique, that we can't be part of another group.' With so many resources being fed into the institutional structures, however, it seems crass not to begin to articulate what unique things that Methodists and Methodism has to offer the conversation about what a mixed economy might look like in the twenty-first century. Murray Williams notes,

'For the church to understand itself as a movement, not an institution, it needs to know its history and destiny. Movements are dynamic, people sharing history and traditions and journeying together towards a longed-for future.'⁴²⁵

⁴²⁴ See Storti, Craig, *Figuring Foreigners Out* (Boston, MA: Nicholas Brealey, 1999), and Storti, Craig, *The Art of Crossing Cultures* (Boston, MA: Nicholas Brealey, 2001)

⁴²⁵ Murray-Williams, *Post-Christendom*, 277

I want to argue that in order to give of the best to another group, denomination, or project, one must first know one's own identity. It simply cannot be enough to participate ecumenically and to be willing to be changed, without first knowing what contribution can be made to the other. Even Donovan's contextual approach with the Masai journeyed together to a new destination. It was not a hostile takeover in either party's direction.⁴²⁶

Another key leader within the Methodist Connexion pushes this further:

'if Methodism as an institution were to collapse, it would still be useful to the church.'

Once again there is the duality of existence here which says on the one hand the Methodist Church is of value and has something to say and to offer, whilst on the other hand intimating that the denomination in the UK is near breaking point. There is a mixed message in this that betrays a similar lack of confidence in the institutional model of church as it is currently exercised and experienced at every level of Methodist Church life.

Cray suggests that the notion of denominational DNA is a secondary, but nevertheless significant, conversation to be had at an organisational level of FX.⁴²⁷ I want to push this to suggest that Methodism - its history, theology and its Connexionalism - still has distinctive things to offer to fx, and to those in the local Methodist Church who have lost confidence in their own ecclesial identity. This is not intended as a shift towards sectarianism. It is not an invitation to rehearse the

⁴²⁶ Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*

⁴²⁷ Graham Cray at the FEAST National Gathering 15th October 2010, held in Sheffield.

age-old nostalgia of yesteryear, a temptation caricatured by Walker, 'most of us are happy with and pride ourselves on our own denominational traditions or customs.'⁴²⁸ In knowing the story of Methodism and by becoming confident once again in the charisms of Methodism, Methodist people gain a glimpse of what their discipleship can look like and can retrieve⁴²⁹ that sense of being called to follow a God that is bigger than the mundane debates of bureaucracy and closure.

Much of literature talks about Jesus' parable of new wineskins as its main paradigm.⁴³⁰ I argue that a better example, in light of my contestation that there are important contributions that tradition can bring to contextual missiological approaches, is the example of Isaac digging out the old wells in Genesis 26.⁴³¹ One of the outcomes of this thesis is the challenge to all those invested in discovering God's call for God's people in the twenty-first century is to both dig out the wells to let streams of renewal flow, whilst also working the wineskins of 'traditional' church community so that they are supple enough to contain what is happening. The risk is that if the wells remain blocked, then there risks a stagnation or at worst, drought, of theological insight. The risk of old wineskins is that they crack and split, a fear all too familiar for those within a Methodist denominational context, whose history is tainted by division.

⁴²⁸ Walker, 'Deep Church as Paradosis,' in Walker and Bretherton, *Remembering our Future*, 60

⁴²⁹ Walker, 'Deep Church as Paradosis,' in Walker and Bretherton, *Remembering our Future*, 59

⁴³⁰ See Williams, Rowan, 'The 'Strength of the Church is never anything other than the strength of the presence of the Risen Jesus', in *Mixed Economy Journal*,

<http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/sites/default/files/mixedeconomy1.pdf>, 12

⁴³¹ Cox, 'Emerging Expressions', 144

The relegation of denominational DNA to something that is secondary to the debate could be seen as a manoeuvre made from a position of organisational power. Denominational DNA after all does not matter if the presumed model is that which is already known, cherished and held in esteem. FX has an Anglican default setting which transfers into all parts of the organisation, often without critique or comment.⁴³² It may well be that once again, one of Methodism's inheritances is the ability to question assumed authority structures and thus giving the opportunity for other denominations and parachurch partners and associates to begin to share their codes of DNA into the theological reflection too. Although not meant to be complimentary, it is no bad thing surely that, 'our [Anglican] doctrine of the Church has leapt, not drifted, in the direction of Free Church Protestantism.'⁴³³ The DNA metaphor is useful as it also provokes the potential for shared genes and identity markers, and for offspring to evolve who resemble their parents but who have a unique identity all of their own, just as Methodism evolved out of Anglicanism and Anglicanism out of the Reformation. An unappealing alternative vision to this is that fx merely evolve from the known gene pool of theological and ecclesiological knowledge and reproduce the congenital substance of what has been before.

⁴³² It is interesting that the most significant critical commentaries are representing an Anglican view of theology and ecclesiology which ignores any other partner or voice in the conversation, see Davison and Milbank, *For the Parish* and critical voices in Nelstrom and Percy (eds.) *Evaluating*. Perhaps one method of critical engagement is by refining the role of partnership and joint theological learning.

⁴³³ Davison and Milbank, *For the Parish*, 41

Given what has already been said about the lack of theological literacy within fx communities, it is no surprise that trying to be clear about what charisms of the Methodist Church are, is difficult. Thompson has suggested that the charisms of Methodism include 'bias to the poor, singing our faith, good stewardship (even thrifty!) and living on the world map'⁴³⁴ This is in response to Atkins' Presidential address which noted that the charisms of Methodism included sharing in Jesus in word and action, prevenient grace, holiness, taking the scriptures seriously, being a movement, locally contextualised, and open to all.⁴³⁵ These markers are all present, to one degree or another in the communities studied. All three communities celebrated being open to all and inclusive, especially in terms of sexual ethics. Word and action was evidenced in WTS and Safe-Haven, as scripture was espoused and social transformation was a community priority. For Connections, community development and social action were core to the ongoing development of the community. As has already been commented upon in the conclusions, a desire for holiness can be seen in the increasing interest in monastic patterns of life and discipleship. Contextualisation underpins all of the work that Andrew, Emma, Jake and their respective communities were developing. WTS is a good example of a community with a bias towards the poor, and is the first in a small but growing number of fx projects which are located in some of the poorest parts of the UK. Even the priority of being an intentionally missional community reinforces the Methodist identity of the Mission Society, which every Methodist

⁴³⁴ Thompson, Graham, 'Whither Methodism', an unpublished response to Conference, 2007.

⁴³⁵ Atkins', Martyn, inaugural speech to Conference, 2007

<http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentogod.newsDetail&newsid=217> (27th January 2011)

member is automatically a member of. The global, networked nature of society merely comprehends what this means in a renewed way.

What is needed is a reimagining of these charisms, an exercise in apologetics for the twenty-first century which begins to unpick the important theological and doctrinal strands of fx and the Methodist Church, and weave them together. It is also possible to suggest that leaders need to be challenged by the Methodist Church to be able to make these connections within the community with the historic denomination in which they are still a part, even if in some cases the relationship is merely a financial one.

Throughout this thesis, note has been made of the unwillingness of Methodist leaders to participate in the public debate surrounding fx, or often even to promote their community. In part this is a fear of early dilution, the protecting of a fragile community of people in terms both of individuals and the group. In part this is an example of the inherent humility and pragmatism of Methodist leaders. It is a means of getting on with the job required but not being noticed or marked out for comment. In a FX symposium, I suggested that:

‘by largely failing to input the theological, missiological and ecclesiological challenges and answers, are pioneering leaders actually anaesthetising the patient of the Palliative Care model –to what extent is this compassionate and to what extent is it euthanasia, the gradual assisted suicide of inherited Church?’⁴³⁶

The unwillingness of leaders to participate in wider debates, and the seeming inability of all levels of institutional representatives themselves to be challenged

⁴³⁶ Cox, Joanne, ‘Arrogance, Pride and Vanity: Some Leadership Conclusions’ delivered at Fresh Expressions Research Symposium held at St John’s College, Durham on 17th September 2010.

and changed as well as challenging and changing bodies of influence are significant features of the current silences and stalemates in dialogue. Both positions are bad stewardship of history and experience. If, as the leadership teams of Connections and Safe-Haven note, reflective practice is in the hands of those who are ordained and trained to this occupation, then theological and denominational reflective practice is surely part of what it is to be set aside for a purpose within that denomination.

Ordained practitioners need to be self-reflexive in ethnographic research projects

One of the subsidiary and unforeseen outcomes of this thesis is the complexity of research by a fellow ordained practitioner. Self aware of the potential pitfalls of such an autobiography still failed to prepare me for the complexities of fieldwork based research. In so doing, this project demonstrates the requirement of a researcher to be self aware of the 'essential' quality of reflexivity through the whole project from question setting to thesis submission.⁴³⁷

In all three contexts, the role of researcher was blurred. I at times acted as pastor, listening to the deep challenges facing individuals or helping to process difficult situations within the community and the internal politics therein. In both WTS and Safe-Haven, I was given the role of theologian, whose opinion was actively sought

⁴³⁷ Watson, Graham, 'Make Me Reflexive, But Not Yet: Strategies for Managing Essential Reflexivity in Ethnographic Discourse', *Journal of Anthropological Research* 43(1), Spring 1987, 35

by both the leaders and the communities.⁴³⁸ In Connections, I was asked to be a consultant through a quarterly review process, specifically asking theological questions for the non-Christian staff to wrestle with as they formulated their three month plan. In all three situations it was difficult to maintain a critical distance from what was happening rather than participating and thus potentially changing the situation and the community. There are tensions between over-rapport and participant observation, to which the researcher needs to manage carefully.⁴³⁹ Thus there are potential difficulties in professional doctorates such as this for the practitioner-researcher in practical theology.

A further point of reflexivity is the challenge of the integrity of the thesis over personal career choice and a vocation to pastoral oversight. Choices had to be made throughout the analysis of the research findings in order to illustrate the interesting and unique points of learning that make this thesis of value to the wider academic and practical theological conversation. These had to be balanced with the ethics of maintaining the anonymity of the leaders involved, especially where there were further issues of pastoral concern. At what point should or could evidence be disclosed to the leadership team of the host church, in the event of safeguarding issues? What content of pastoral encounters remained the privilege of the conversation, rather than research (however interesting the content). All three leaders considered me to be an ally as they ploughed their furrows in their local contexts. Such a relationship needs to be nurtured for the welfare of the

⁴³⁸ Cameron, Helen, et al., *Talking About God*, 58

⁴³⁹ O'Reilly, *Ethnography*, 89

leaders and for the potential developments within career progression, and yet within the Academy also needs to be critically engaging and honest to the experience of research.

When a researcher enters into research from a position of vocation, gifting, and calling, the boundaries become complex and blurred. There is no easy pathway through participant observation. For other researchers entering into this field, this thesis offers a critical cautionary tale about the means and methods of research in location and through the analytical stages. The ground that this research rests on is constantly shifting, but in so doing, there is a wealth of new learning to be discovered, reflected upon and applied.

Final Words

Ordained leaders have an obligation to share their learning and practices. Fx bring great challenge and the opportunity for great celebration and change. The institutions and the individual communities need the humility to listen to the experiences of each other and the willingness to mutually be transformed through dialogue, experience, reason, scripture *and* tradition. Fx communities are now used to defending their existence and justifying their need for financial support, circuit leadership or ecclesial significance. One challenge the Methodist Church may

benefit from is the same processes, questions and bar-setting imposed upon and expected of the inherited models of church.

This research is challenging both to leaders and to the Methodist Church. It offers evidence which both supports and criticises the practice of leaders within Methodist contexts, and raises further questions about deployment, training and the oversight of those whom God has called into a pioneering leadership role within the Methodist institution. The use of three case studies grounds these conclusions and challenges in the daily experience of these leaders, and offers work that can be of significant value to the next stage of FX as well as for the strategy of the Methodist Church. By reflecting on my own experience of both leadership and research, I also invite fellow pioneers to note the complexity of research such as this, and the potential risks that being an ordained practitioner-researcher brings.

The contemporary context of post-Christendom England is one that offers many opportunities, but also demands much of its leaders, whether they are spiritual leaders or in other fields of life. This research demonstrates that the Methodist Church, FX and individual ordained presbyters have a responsibility to continue to face up to these challenges and to continue to remain faithful to their vocation, to be a means through which people to become disciples of Jesus Christ in the twenty-first century. This may include developing a new order of ministry that enables these leaders to exercise a pioneering ministry separate to the Presbyteral and Diaconal Order.

As one leader commented, 'Leaders set the tone.' There are many good and healthy things to celebrate with regards to mission-shaped leadership. As is demonstrated herein, there are also many negative and disappointing things to confront if the contextual missiology of FX is to continue to impact the British (and European) Methodist Church. This thesis outlines some significant lessons that need to be learnt in order to set the tone for leadership in churches shaped for mission, for the next decade and beyond.

Appendix 1

Participant information sheet

Thank you for agreeing to be a part of this research project. As you are aware, the project title is:

**An investigation of the role and function of Methodist Presbyteral leaders
in new forms of Christian Community in the UK.**

Broadly speaking the Church in the twenty-first century is undergoing significant change; both structurally (in how it is organised and led) and the way that it exists within contemporary society. This is not unique to Methodism. Through the course of the project it is hoped that the uniqueness of the Methodist tradition will provide some solutions and theological anchoring for the trends in the current conversations.

This project feeds into both of these streams – structural and societal - and attempts to ask critical questions about the way that leadership is exercised in some of the most exciting and cutting-edge communities. This project reflects a number of key questions that are being asked at all levels of the Church's structure.

Your help and perspectives are an invaluable contribution to the debate as well as to this project.

The overall aims of the project are:

To investigate the current practice and theology of ordained leadership of Methodist presbyters in Fresh Expressions type appointments.

To offer a critique of current practice and to feed into the wider Methodist Church debate about the nature and function of church leadership.

In order to achieve these aims, you have been asked if you are willing to be interviewed to hear some of your ideas, experiences and perspectives on the role and function of Methodist Presbyteral leadership.

The interview will be recorded, and the data stored in a password protected file on a computer and backed up on an external hard drive. The recording, transcription and any notes made during the interview will be available for both the participant, supervisors, and if requested, the examiners. Such storage will comply with the demands of the Data Protection Act.

All data (computer and audio files, computer documents and notes) will be destroyed on the successful completion of the project.

No participant details will be revealed in the end thesis. Your anonymity is assured. This complies with the regulations laid down by the University of Durham's Ethics Committee.

There will be the opportunity to hear the results of the project during the final stages of the research project. Please provide your contact details if this is something that you would be interested in also being a part of.

If you have any further questions either now or later, please take note of the following people.

Researcher – Joanne Cox joanne.cox@methodist.org.uk

Supervisors – Dr Mathew Guest m.j.guest@dur.ac.uk
Rev Dr David Wilkinson david.wilkinson@dur.ac.uk

Thank you again for agreeing to be a part of this project.
Joanne Cox
November 2008.

An investigation of the role and function of Methodist Presbyteral leaders in new forms of Christian Community in the UK.

I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to discuss the study with the student, and I have received satisfactory answers to all of my questions.

I understand that the interview will be recorded.

I consent to this data being stored on a password protected file of a laptop, backed up on an external hard drive and transcribed for use in this project only. All data will be deleted on the successful conclusion of the project. Such storage of information for this project complies with the requirements of the Data Protection Act

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study:

- * at any time and
- * without having to give a reason for withdrawing and
- * (if relevant) without affecting your position in the University.

I acknowledge that my anonymity will be preserved in the writing up of the thesis.

I, therefore, consent to being a part of this study.

Signed **Date**

NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS

Contact details (optional)

Appendix 2

Questions for senior leaders

1. There is a lot of talk these days about Fresh Expressions and Emerging Church. What do you think that these are about?

Follow up questions:

- can you give some examples of good practice of what you have experienced?
- What is your perception of what is happening theologically?

2. What skills do you think are essential for leaders of Fresh Expressions?

Follow up questions:

- what are the non-negotiable skills?
- Do you see a shift in leadership style and skills? Why/why not might this be?

3. What theology of leadership do you see emerging?

Follow up question:

- In what ways is this linked to the overriding theology of FE/EC?

4. You have a lot of contact with Fresh Expressions in your role. What are the main challenges that such leaders face?

Follow up question:

- how might the church respond to these?

5. You know that the focus of this project is in the role of the ordained minister. What difference do you think that this makes?

6. Fresh Expressions is a movement across the Anglican and Methodist Churches. Emerging Church is affecting many different denominations. What do you think is distinctively Methodist in all of this?

Follow up questions:

- how does FE sit structurally within Methodism?
- Are Fresh Expressions easily accommodated within circuits?
- What about their relationship to districts?
- What is the influence of Methodist theology and practice that is significant in these communities throughout the world?
-

7. What do you think might be in store for the future of Methodism?

Follow up question:

- Leadership in particular.

Subsidiary questions include:

- What examples of biblical leadership do you find most helpful?
- In contemporary society, we get our inspiration from many sources. Who are your heroes and why are they important to you?
- Who are your mentors?
- What books are you currently reading?
- What books would you recommend?
- Functions of ministry question from the questionnaire.

Questions for community leaders and participants

1. In your own words, describe [the community] and your role in it.

Follow up questions:

- events that brought it to fruition
- what is the leadership and management structure?
- Who is involved in this project?
- Who is it for?
- What is the mission statement and ongoing vision for this project?

2. What is your specific role and responsibility as a Methodist Minister here?
3. As a leader of a Fresh Expression, what skills do you think are essential for leadership of any sort of Fresh Expression?

Follow up question:

- what expectations do you find people have of you?

4. What theology of leadership do you see emerging?

Follow up question:

- Where do you think this theology comes from?
- Why is it attractive?
- Do you think that it works?
- Is it a new theology, do you think?
- In what ways is it linked to the overriding theology of FE?

5. How does being ordained affect your leadership here?

Follow up questions:

- in a few sentences can you sum up why you became a presbyter?
- Is it important that you are ordained?
- What is significant about being ordained and in ministry in this community?
- What would be released if you were not ordained?
- Do you think that it matters to the people in the community that you are ordained?

6. What for you is distinctly Methodist about these sort of communities?

7. Fresh expressions is an evolving project. How enduring an impact do you think communities such as this will have?

Follow up questions:

- what do you think could be the future for Fresh Expressions as an organisation
- For your community?
- What is the future place for this community in [geographic location] and in Methodism?
- What is your vision for the future of this community?

- What challenges are to be faced in the next 10 years?

Subsidiary questions include:

- What examples of biblical leadership do you find most helpful?
- In contemporary society, we get our inspiration from many sources. Who are your heroes and why are they important to you?
- Who are your mentors?
- What books are you currently reading?
- What books would you recommend?

Functions of ministry question from the questionnaire

Appendix 3

An investigation into the role of the ordained
Presbyter in new forms of Methodist Churches.

Questionnaire

Demographic Questions

These questions are optional.

Gender M/F

Occupation _____

- Age
- under 19
 - 20-24
 - 25-29
 - 30-34
 - 35-39
 - 40-44
 - 45-49
 - 50-54
 - 55-59
 - 60 or above

Would you describe yourself as

- Christian
- Non- Christian
- Agnostic
- Atheist
- Other (please specify) _____

How often do you attend Christian worship?

- More than once a week
- Once a week
- Once a fortnight
- Once a month
- Special Occasions only
- Other (please specify) _____

Please answer all the questions below.

Leadership Questions

Think about leaders in any field.

Select 3 from the list below of the most important skills you think any leader should have.

- Pastoral skills
- Flexibility
- Organisational skills
- Management skills
- Intelligence
- Academic ability
- Determination
- Sensitivity
- Authority
- Trustworthiness
- Good communication skills
- Focus
- Collaboration/team working skills
- Networking skills
- Ability to get a task done
- Discernment
- Ability to challenge
- Self awareness
- Motivational skills
- Ability to take risks
- Ability to say no
- Integrity
- Experience
- Other (Please specify_____)

Select **3** from the list below of the most important qualities or gifts you think any leader should have.

- Vision
- Empathy
- Creativity
- Compassion
- Kindness
- Humility
- Discernment
- Goodness
- Care
- Inspirer of people
- Vulnerability
- Honesty
- Patience
- Faithfulness
- Self control
- Love
- Courage
- Peace
- Prayerfulness
- Passion
- Servant heartedness
- Ruthlessness
- Other (Please specify _____)
- (_____)

For you, who is the best example of a leader and why?

(For example: 'Barack Obama is a good leader because he is charismatic and a good communicator.')

Now think about a Christian leader.

Select the **3 most important** skills you think a **Christian** leader should have.

- Pastoral skills
- Flexibility
- Organisational skills
- Management skills
- Intelligence
- Academic ability
- Determination
- Sensitivity
- Authority
- Trustworthiness
- Good communication skills
- Focus
- Collaboration/team working skills
- Networking skills
- Ability to get a task done
- Discernment
- Ability to challenge
- Self awareness
- Motivational skills
- Ability to take risks
- Ability to say no
- Integrity
- Experience
- Other (Please specify _____)

Select the **3 least important** skills you think a **Christian** leader should have

- Pastoral skills
- Flexibility
- Organisational skills
- Management skills
- Intelligence
- Academic ability
- Determination
- Sensitivity
- Authority
- Trustworthiness
- Good communication skills
- Focus
- Collaboration/team working skills
- Networking skills
- Ability to get a task done
- Discernment
- Ability to challenge
- Self awareness
- Motivational skills
- Ability to take risks
- Ability to say no
- Integrity
- Experience
- Other (Please specify _____)

Select the **3 most important** qualities or gifts you think a **Christian** leader should have

- Vision
- Empathy
- Creativity
- Compassion
- Kindness
- Humility
- Discernment
- Goodness
- Care
- Inspirer of people
- Vulnerability
- Honesty
- Patience
- Faithfulness
- Self control
- Love
- Courage
- Peace
- Prayerfulness
- Passion
- Servant heartedness
- Ruthlessness
- Other (Please specify _____)
- (_____)

Select the **3 least important** qualities or gifts you think a **Christian** leader should have

- Vision
- Empathy
- Creativity
- Compassion
- Kindness
- Humility
- Discernment
- Goodness
- Care
- Inspirer of people
- Vulnerability
- Honesty
- Patience
- Faithfulness
- Self control
- Love
- Courage
- Peace
- Prayerfulness
- Passion
- Servant heartedness
- Ruthlessness
- Other (Please specify _____)
- (_____)

Which 3 of these responsibilities of any ordained Methodist minister do you think are most important?

- Preaching
- Confession
- Baptism
- Weddings
- Funerals
- Communion/Eucharist
- Lead worship
- Lead corporate prayer
- Personal prayer
- Pastoral care
- Counselling
- Service
- Encouragement
- Bible study
- Intercession
- Visit the sick
- Evangelism
- Mission
- Social action
- Social justice
- Community representation
- Enabling others

What, if any, would you add?

Think about what happens at Sanctuary.

Community Questions

If you were asked to describe Sanctuary in one sentence, what would you say?

Do you know if the leadership of this community ordained?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Does it matter, and why?

- Yes
- No

Because...

In your opinion, the **3 most important** skills of the leadership at Sanctuary are:

- Pastoral skills
- Flexibility
- Organisational skills
- Management skills
- Intelligence
- Academic ability
- Determination
- Sensitivity
- Authority
- Trustworthiness
- Good communication skills
- Focus
- Collaboration/team working skills
- Networking skills
- Ability to get a task done
- Discernment
- Ability to challenge
- Self awareness
- Motivational skills
- Ability to take risks
- Ability to say no
- Integrity
- Experience
- Other (Please specify _____)

In your opinion, the 3 least important skills of the leadership at Sanctuary are:

- Pastoral skills
 - Flexibility
 - Organisational skills
 - Management skills
 - Intelligence
 - Academic ability
 - Determination
 - Sensitivity
 - Authority
 - Trustworthiness
 - Good communication skills
 - Focus
 - Collaboration/team working skills
 - Networking skills
 - Ability to get a task done
 - Discernment
 - Ability to challenge
 - Self awareness
 - Motivational skills
 - Ability to take risks
 - Ability to say no
 - Integrity
 - Experience
- Other (Please specify _____)

In your opinion, the 3 most important qualities or gifts of the leadership at Sanctuary are:

- Vision
- Empathy
- Creativity
- Compassion
- Kindness
- Humility
- Discernment
- Goodness
- Care
- Inspirer of people
- Vulnerability
- Honesty
- Patience
- Faithfulness
- Self control
- Love
- Courage
- Peace
- Prayerfulness
- Passion
- Servant heartedness
- Ruthlessness
- Other (Please specify _____)
- (_____)

In your opinion, the 3 least important qualities or gifts of the leadership at Sanctuary are:

- Vision
- Empathy
- Creativity
- Compassion
- Kindness
- Humility
- Discernment
- Goodness
- Care
- Inspirer of people
- Vulnerability
- Honesty
- Patience
- Faithfulness
- Self control
- Love
- Courage
- Peace
- Prayerfulness
- Passion
- Servant heartedness
- Ruthlessness
- Other (Please specify _____)
- (_____)

From 1 – 5 state the importance you place on the following responsibilities of a Christian leader in this community.

(1 being very important, 5 being not important at all)

Preaching	1	2	3	4	5
Confession	1	2	3	4	5
Baptism	1	2	3	4	5
Weddings	1	2	3	4	5
Funerals	1	2	3	4	5
Communion/Eucharist	1	2	3	4	5
Lead worship	1	2	3	4	5
Lead corporate prayer	1	2	3	4	5
Personal prayer	1	2	3	4	5
Pastoral care	1	2	3	4	5
Counselling	1	2	3	4	5
Service	1	2	3	4	5
Encouragement	1	2	3	4	5
Bible study	1	2	3	4	5
Intercession	1	2	3	4	5
Visit the sick	1	2	3	4	5
Evangelism	1	2	3	4	5
Mission	1	2	3	4	5
Social action	1	2	3	4	5
Social justice	1	2	3	4	5
Community representation	1	2	3	4	5
Enable others	1	2	3	4	5
Other (please specify _____)	1	2	3	4	5

Which of the above responsibilities do you think is the most important?

Which of the above responsibilities do you think is the least important?

Thank you for your time in answering this questionnaire.

All your answers will be anonymised in the final thesis.

All the information provided here will be stored securely.

Thank - you for your participation.

Joanne Cox

joanne.cox@methodist.org.uk

07793627652

Supervisors:

Rev Dr David Wilkinson

david.wilkinson@dur.ac.uk

Dr Mathew Guest

m.j.guest@dur.ac.uk

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