

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF ARTS, HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

EMERGING CHURCH OR RE-EMERGING CHURCH.
FRESH EXPRESSIONS OF CHURCH IN THE METHODIST CHURCH
IN GREAT BRITAIN

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis argues that Fresh Expressions of Church challenge the ecclesiology of The Methodist Church in Britain, and addresses the question ‘in what sense are fresh expressions within the Connexion discernibly Methodist expressions of church?’ This research identifies ecclesiological challenges and articulates ways that they might be overcome. Fresh Expressions of Church is a relatively new concept which has become popular amongst Methodist churches and circuits. There is little academic literature available on fresh expressions in a Methodist context; in this thesis I address this lack of attention.

The research design employed qualitative methods. Four Methodist fresh expressions are examined as case studies, using non-participatory observation and interviews with participants. This data is analysed using a thematic analysis.

The elements which form an emerging fresh expressions ecclesiology were revealed through the examination of Fresh Expressions literature and the case studies. This thesis argues that the emerging ecclesiology of fresh expressions of church brings with it challenges to Methodist ecclesiology relating to three themes: the ecclesial identity of fresh expressions, the nature of authority and leadership, and the relationship to the Connexion. The thesis explores these challenges in relation to the Methodist Church’s self-understanding as a Connexion.

This thesis argues that fresh expressions struggle to be discernibly Methodist expressions of church, but reimagining the pragmatic and evolutionary nature of contemporary Methodist ecclesiology will ensure that ecclesiology evolves and that the Connexion can be maintained. This research proposes forms of new, or reaffirmed, practice to address the challenges which fresh expressions pose to The Methodist Church in Britain.

Keywords:

Methodist, Ecclesiology, Fresh Expressions, Our Calling

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

'Fresh Expressions of Church' within The Methodist Church in Britain challenge Methodist ecclesiology and self-understanding. This research highlights these ecclesiological challenges and provides ways that Methodism can adapt or reaffirm its ecclesiology to embrace Fresh Expressions. The challenges to Methodist ecclesiology fall under three themes. First, the ecclesial identity of fresh expressions - whether fresh expressions are churches or projects (The Archbishop's Council¹ and Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes,² 2012, p.7); second, the relationship of fresh expressions to the Connexion, the interconnected structure of British Methodism (TMCP, 1999a, pp.47-50); and third the nature of authority and leadership within fresh expressions (Shier-Jones, 2009, p.9). In relation to these challenges, I also explore the aim of each fresh expression.

I will consider Methodist and Fresh Expressions ecclesiology and the inherent tensions from 2012 (this is shortly after the General Secretary (TMCP, 2011) argued that reshaping The Methodist Church in Great Britain must include the development of fresh expressions) to 2019, identifying challenges and articulating ways that they might be overcome, reflecting Methodism's pragmatic ecclesiology. I will propose that some of these challenges are wrongly constructed as problematic, as Methodist ecclesiology can already embrace them. I will also highlight those more complex challenges that are worth wrestling with because of the positive influence of fresh expressions within The Methodist Church in Great Britain.

The concept of 'Fresh Expressions of Church' can be traced to the 2004 *Mission-Shaped Church* Report, which examines the development of Fresh Expressions of Church: from the desire to plant new congregations in the 1980s, to the creation of new forms of church in the 1990s. The Report presents a number of different styles of church, such as Alternative Worship communities, Café Church and Cell Church, which it calls 'fresh expressions of church' (TAC, 2004, pp.16-44.) In 2005, the ecumenical movement Fresh Expressions of Church was initiated to connect and resource existing projects and encourage the development of new ventures (Fresh Expressions, 2011).

The phrase 'Fresh Expressions of Church' can mean both an individual project and the nationwide initiative. For clarity, throughout this work Fresh Expressions written with capital

¹ Hereafter TAC.

² Hereafter TMCP.

letters refers to the ecumenical movement, fresh expressions using lower case refers to individual initiatives.³

The website of the Fresh Expressions movement claims that 'Fresh Expressions encourages new forms of church for a fast changing world...The initiative has resulted in hundreds of new congregations' (Fresh Expressions, 2012a). The movement states that 'a fresh expression is a form of church for our changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church' (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.2). In this way, fresh expressions are intended as a point of entry into the universal Church that is noticeably different from a traditional local church.

In 2007, The Methodist Church in Britain produced *Changing Church for a Changing World* (TMCP, 2007), encouraging Methodist churches to consider fresh ways of being church, principally through developing fresh expressions. Further to this, in the 2011 Report of the General Secretary, Martyn Atkins recognised that cultural changes in the UK demanded that Methodism respond by reshaping 'our life together in faithful obedience to God' (TMCP, 2011), which included the development of fresh expressions. As the research for this thesis began, the number of fresh expressions in The Methodist Church in Britain was recorded at 838 (TMCP, 2013), recent statistics suggest that this number has increased to an estimated 1029 fresh expressions (TMCP, 2019c). In his 2011 Report, the General Secretary notes that his aim in encouraging the development of fresh ways of being church was not to provide a 'complete ecclesiology for our Connexion' (TMCP, 2011), but was consonant with the declarations of the Conference concerning the missionary nature of British Methodism. The increase in the number of fresh expressions and the lack of ecclesial attention suggested by Atkins suggests that some fresh expressions may, in developing new ways of being church, challenge Methodist ecclesiology through their differing understanding of the elements required for an initiative to be understood as a church.

The rapid growth of fresh expressions which are either freestanding or linked to a local Methodist church, and their dialogue with traditional⁴ Methodist churches, is influencing and challenging the shape of the Methodist Church. As fresh expressions are often noticeably different from a traditional Methodist church, such differences might hinder the unity of the denomination as those within fresh expressions may feel misunderstood or incompatible with

³ This follows the precedent set by the *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* Report. (TAC and TCMP, 2012, p.2).

⁴ Throughout this thesis I will use the term 'traditional Methodist churches' as a way to differentiate churches which do not engage in fresh expressions.

the typical way a Methodist church functions. As I was concluding this research in 2021, the Report *Methodism's Hidden Harvest* stated

the 'mature expression of church' that a fresh expression grows into is often quite different from church as it has traditionally been known... the conundrum of how these fresh expressions can be embedded into the life of our denomination is still unresolved.
TMCP, 2019c, p.15

My research gives attention to the ecclesial development of fresh expressions within The Methodist Church in Britain and provides a way that Methodist ecclesiology can hold both traditional churches and fresh expressions, despite the differences. This remains a live issue in the Church at the conclusion of my research.

1.1 A Personal Perspective

I have spent most of my working life within The Methodist Church in Britain. I was employed by a suburban Methodist circuit as a youth worker for six years. During this time, I was involved in developing alternative styles of worship. I moved from this employment and took up a post within a small circuit as a family worker. My role involved facilitating local community engagement, including the initiation of Messy Church⁵, and a Sunday evening discussion group for young adults. I did not believe that either of these initiatives were fresh expressions, as they were aimed at those who were already part of the Church, yet they were recorded as such in the annual 'statistics for mission' of the Church. I felt that this highlighted either an incomplete understanding of fresh expressions, or that the identification of two fresh expressions may show the circuit in a more favourable light, for example, when the time came for a new minister to be stationed. I left this post to begin training for presbyteral ministry. I have now served as a presbyter for eight years in two circuits, and continue to observe a lack of understanding of fresh expressions as part of the Connexion. For example, I have listened as individuals in the circuit in which I am stationed suggest that a church that changing a Sunday morning act of worship into a café church, for the existing congregation, is engaging in fresh expressions. It is the growth of fresh expressions and my belief that there is a lack of understanding of their place in the Connexion, that motivates me to engage in this research.

⁵ 'Messy Church is a form of church for children and adults that involves creativity, celebration and hospitality... It typically includes a welcome, a long creative time to explore the biblical theme through getting messy; a short celebration time involving story, prayer, song, games and similar; and a sit-down meal together at tables' (BRF, 2018).

1.2 Research Question

My research question for this thesis is ‘to what extent are fresh expressions within The Methodist Church in Britain discernibly “Methodist” expressions of church, and what practices within a fresh expressions context might indicate the presence of a Methodist church?’ This research question has two related areas of enquiry. First, where do (Methodist) fresh expressions stand in relation to The Methodist Church in Britain? Are fresh expressions churches in their own right, or should they be considered as projects? Second, is it possible to identify the marks of Methodist ecclesiology within Methodist fresh expressions? Is contemporary Methodist ecclesiology represented within the fresh expression in such a way that individuals can see and understand the relationship between the fresh expression and the denomination?

1.3 Research Design

To address the research question, I will examine the features of contemporary Methodist ecclesiology, highlighting how a Methodist church might be defined, and analyse the emerging ecclesiology of fresh expressions in the light of Methodist ecclesiology. I also conduct four fresh expressions case studies within The Methodist Church in Britain and draw upon an analysis of data gathered from these. This enables me to articulate the ways that fresh expressions challenge Methodist ecclesiology and either propose new practice, or reaffirm existing practice, to answer the research question.

1.3.1 Overview of the Shape of the Thesis

The second chapter explores the nature of ecclesiology and engages with Methodist and Fresh Expressions ecclesiology. I will achieve this through examining the Reports and Statements of the Methodist Conference, and literature which examines historic and contemporary Methodism. I will explore fresh expressions through the material produced by Fresh Expressions and published work which reflects upon the movement. This chapter details the current experience of fresh expressions within The Methodist Church in Britain and, therefore, offers the primary theoretical perspectives on which this research is based.

Since its formation in 1932, The Methodist Church in Britain has authorised three⁶ Reports or Statements which give an account of Methodist ecclesiology. These are: *The Nature of the Christian Church* (1937), *Called to Love and Praise* (1999) and *Our Calling* (2000). The last of these, *Our Calling*, which I understand as the outworking of *Called to Love and Praise*, states

⁶ A further document, *The Doctrine of the Christian Church* was produced under the direction of the World Methodist Council in 1964.

four areas through which the work of the Church can be observed: worship, learning and caring, service, and evangelism. Collectively, these documents form the normative ecclesial position of the Conference and, therefore, of the Methodist Church of Great Britain, and are the principal reference documents concerning contemporary Methodist ecclesiology.

There are many who contribute to formal Methodist theology. However, the work of three Methodist academics is particularly relevant to this thesis; they are Brian Beck, Angela Shier-Jones and David Carter.

Brian Beck is a Methodist presbyter, a past Secretary and President of The Methodist Conference and past Principal of Wesley House, Cambridge. Beck served as the Secretary of the Conference during the creation of *Called to Love and Praise* and *Our Calling*. His contribution to the formal theology is the publication of a series of articles which have been published in a single volume, *Methodist Heritage and Identity* (2018). His reflections upon Methodist identity and the Connexional principle will be of importance throughout this thesis.

Angela Shier-Jones was a Methodist presbyter, who was involved in Methodist theological training; she died in 2011. Her principal work was the 2005 *A Work in Progress*, which provides a comprehensive overview of British Methodist theology from 1932. The central premise for this work was that 'theology is an endless task... a work in progress' (2005, p.1).

David Carter is a Methodist Local Preacher and former Open University lecturer. His work is the 2002 *Love Bade me Welcome*, a survey of Methodist ecclesiology from Wesley to the contemporary Methodist Church. Carter devotes a significant amount of space to discussing *Called to Love and Praise*. He contends that his work demonstrates 'the complex evolution of Methodist ecclesiology' (2002, p.150).

After discussing Methodist ecclesiology, I will use the publications of the Fresh Expressions movement and the work of commentators to articulate an emerging ecclesiology of fresh expressions. A major Report which explores fresh expressions in a Methodist context was prepared by a joint Anglican and Methodist working party. This Report, *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* (TAC and TMCP, 2012), reflects upon the nature of fresh expressions in Anglican and Methodist contexts. The Report claims that the relationship between fresh expressions and traditional churches is often marred by mutual suspicion, manifest in the belief of fresh expression practitioners that their initiatives are subjected to greater scrutiny than traditional churches. This is matched by the concern of traditional churches that support for fresh expressions discourages scrutiny of the initiatives.

There are many commentators on the Fresh Expressions movement. But as yet, because of the newness of the initiative, there is no published systematic doctrinal or ecclesiological work. Indeed, I suggest that many within the movement may argue that their contextual and pragmatic approach would render such work impossible. However, there are several authors whose work is relevant.

Michael Moynagh is part of the Fresh Expressions team; he has written extensively on how the Church requires change to connect to contemporary culture. The premise of his 2012 work, *Church for Every Context*, is that churches and fresh expressions must be contextual churches to connect to the culture in which they are set.

Ian Mobsby is the leader of a fresh expression community; he has written upon fresh expressions from an Anglican perspective. In 2006, he wrote *Emerging and Fresh Expressions of Church*, in which he explores the nature of fresh expressions as authentic expressions of church. One of his conclusions was that fresh expressions are part of an ongoing process of response to cultural change throughout the history of the Church.

Bishop Graham Cray chaired the working party which wrote *Mission Shaped Church* in 2004, and was a consultant in the creation of *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* (2012). He led the Fresh Expressions team for several years. He has written chapters in, and edited, several books that deal with fresh expressions, his contribution is relevant to this work as he has been a part of the movement from its origin.

There is not a significant amount of literature which considers fresh expressions from a solely Methodist perspective; this is a difficulty in exploring the theoretical perspectives. Martyn Atkins, a Methodist presbyter, former General Secretary and President of the Methodist Conference, makes a contribution here. His 2007 work, *Resourcing Renewal*, was written as an exploration of the challenge facing the traditional Church.

Chapter Two will also analyse the emerging ecclesiology of fresh expressions in the light of contemporary Methodist ecclesiology and fresh expressions and highlight the tensions which exist between the ecclesiology of fresh expressions and traditional churches. The texts described above are the primary theoretical perspectives on which this research is based.

The third chapter offers a critical account of the methodology used in the research and write-up of the thesis. Here I will show this research as a piece of practical theology, rooted in Methodist experience, which engages in critical reflection upon the interaction of Methodist

and fresh expressions ecclesiology and practice. I will describe the purpose of practical theology, to develop a practical response to the question that has been posed. I will outline the process by which the four case studies were selected, the data collection methods and how the subsequent data was codified and analysed.

In the third chapter I also consider reflexivity: the way that this research may be affected by my own perspective. I will highlight the difficulty of achieving objectivity, but note that through the research I must be aware of my bias to construct a self-reflexive piece of work.

The fourth chapter will provide an overview of the four case studies. First, I will explore the nature, key features and the aim of the fresh expression. Second, I will provide an account of my non-participatory observation, which informed the interview process.

Chapter Five will detail the process of coding I used to generate themes to be analysed. The chapter will then give an overview of the three interrelated themes. First, the question of ecclesial identity: can a fresh expression be understood as a church in the same way as a traditional church? *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* recognises a tension as it notes that commentators believe that fresh expressions 'lack some or very many of the essential ecclesial elements that make them recognisable as churches' (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.7). *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* also states that 'some would argue that doctrinal standards formulated in previous generations should not be permitted to constrain current developments' (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.9). This stance is a cause of tension as it suggests that one is free to establish a church without reference to the way churches have been recognised throughout history, nor any reference to Methodist ecclesiology.

The second theme was the issue of the relationship to the Connexion. There was some tension apparent concerning the way that some individuals within each case study believed that the Connexion was not relevant to their community, whilst others felt that the fresh expression must remain within the Connexion.

Leadership and authority is the third theme from the coding process. Interviewees held a diversity of opinions that concerned the role of presbyters within the fresh expression and who was permitted to undertake certain acts within the fresh expression, principally, who should preside at Holy Communion.

In Chapter Five, I also identify the aim of each fresh expression as worthy of analysis. Each case study focuses on one element of *Our Calling* (TMCP, 2000c): I consider the question of how important it is for all elements of *Our Calling* to be evident in a fresh expression.

Chapters Six, Seven and Eight will analyse the themes revealed in Chapter Five to disclose the challenges that fresh expressions bring to Methodist ecclesiology. The exploration of the themes in this chapter includes issues pertinent to the research question: do fresh expressions bring a new understanding of the Church to contemporary Methodism? How is the authority of the Methodist Conference maintained within Methodist fresh expressions? How might the identity of Methodist fresh expressions be preserved, whilst recognising the Connexional nature of contemporary Methodism? How can *Our Calling* be manifest within the case studies? I analyse the themes through the lens of the Methodist ecclesiological Statement, *Called to Love and Praise* (TMCP, 1999a).

Chapter Nine will explore what new or reaffirmed practice can address the ecclesiological challenges outlined in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight. Here I will suggest adaptations to current practice, reformulation of historic practice, and new practice to enable the research question to be answered pragmatically. This will develop an ecclesiological generosity and enable The Methodist Church in Britain to reimagine its engagement with contemporary society.

Chapter Ten forms the conclusion to the research. Here I will highlight how I addressed the research question, the argument of the thesis and my contribution to knowledge. I also suggest the future direction for this research.

Throughout this thesis I contend that dialogue between fresh expressions and traditional Methodist churches provides insight into the future shape of Methodist ecclesiology. I examine the ways that fresh expressions cause Methodist self-understanding to change and ask how any change is consonant with the development of Methodist ecclesiology throughout the history of the denomination.

CHAPTER TWO

EXAMINING ECCLESIOLOGY

Methodism in Britain has evolved since 1739 and its history has resulted in the distinctive ecclesiology of the Methodist Church in Britain. Because this thesis examines how fresh expressions of church can be identified as discernibly 'Methodist', it is necessary to explore both contemporary Methodist ecclesiology and the emerging ecclesiology of Fresh Expressions.

In this chapter I will define and analyse the key elements of contemporary Methodist ecclesiology and discuss critically how the emerging fresh expressions ecclesiology may be compatible with the features of British Methodism. In order to be able to examine the case studies in the light of the research question, this chapter will highlight what might be understood by 'discernibly Methodist', and how this might apply to fresh expressions within the Connexion. This will enable the relationship between the two to be understood and reveal the potential points of resonance and tension between Methodist fresh expressions and traditional Methodist churches. This will establish a framework through which the case studies can be examined.

2.1 Ecclesiology

Ecclesiology focuses upon the requirements 'for being a church...then, deals with questions such as the ministry, the structure and the sacraments of the church' (Kärkkäinen, 2002, p.14). Ecclesiology encompasses both an exploration of the nature and purpose of the Church, and how doctrine and structures embody this nature and purpose. Kevin Giles suggests that despite many churches confessing similar elements, 'uncertainty remains as to what is meant when we speak of the "the church"' (1995, p.1). Paul Avis recognises this as he comments that "church" now carries a range of meanings, according to the context in which it is used, from the local congregation or parish to the national church and beyond to the universal church' (2010, p.7). Giles (1995, p.1) argues that a definition of the Church, agreed by every denomination, could never exist because of the differences in understanding and practice. However, the World Council of Churches⁷ Report *Towards a Common Vision* suggests that an informal understanding of the local church exists.

⁷ Hereafter WCC.

Most Christians could agree that the local church is a community of baptised believers in which the word of God is preached, the apostolic faith confessed, the sacraments are celebrated...and a ministry of episcopate exercised.

WCC, 2013, p17

The definition offered above is somewhat broad as a range of denominations participate in the WCC. There is, therefore, no attempt here to define closely the elements which constitute a church, as there will inevitably be a variance in understanding and expression throughout the denominations. The WCC further argues that 'the Church cannot be identified exclusively with one ecclesiological tradition' (WCC, 2015), but can be found within many different traditions which are part of the universal Church.

One of the difficulties evident within the ecclesiological Statements and practices of various churches is illustrated by Kärkkäinen, who states that churches 'usually fulfil... their own definitions' (2002, p.9); every denomination inevitably recognises their own ecclesial status as a Church, but may struggle to recognise other Churches as equally so. Dulles articulates this subjectivity, as he writes that 'we cannot fully objectify the church because we are involved in it; and we know it only through a kind of inter-subjectivity. Furthermore, the Church pertains to the mystery of Christ' (2002, p.10), which he believes cannot be truly understood. Thus, the Church, universal and local, is a human construct which has grown through the centuries via reflection on biblical imagery, Church Fathers and history.

As a result of this inter-subjectivity, the Church has been divided over many ecclesiological issues; Giles (1995, pp.198-201) notes this, tracing, how differing views upon the nature, purpose and practice of the Church led to a number of schisms throughout Church history. Giles (1995, p.200) also recognises that the schisms, which led to the birth of denominations, also reflect the pluralism of contemporary society. In this way, dealing with, and attempting to articulate, division and difference has always been a part of ecclesiology. Dulles suggests that although the Church cannot be fully articulated, 'the church of Christ does not exist in this world without an organisation or structure that analogously resembles the organisation of other human societies' (2002, pp.2-3). These structures are most observable in the various denominations that make up the Church.

Given the differing ecclesiological perspectives represented by the existing denominations in the UK, it is helpful to enquire as to which elements may be common across all denominations. Evans suggests that it is difficult to define the Church when each denomination holds differing views.

The inherent anomalies in usage of the highly equivocal term 'church' are evident... worshipping communities can be house, church, parish, diocese, national or ethnic or patriarchal or metropolitan church... These 'churches' in their multiplicity somehow fit within or perhaps simply are the one Church.

1994, p.120

Evans' comments reinforce the argument that it is impossible to articulate the essential elements which constitute the Church, other than to indicate that the Church, is regarded in diverse ways by individuals or groups. Indeed, Tom Greggs argues that 'Protestantism's own emphases have become proportionately more individualistic' (2019, p.xxviii) as society has changed.

The Methodist Church in Britain identifies as part of the Church Catholic: 'The Methodist Church cherishes its place in the Holy Catholic Church which is the Body of Christ' (TMCP, 2020, p.213). This statement forms the opening paragraph of clause four of the *Deed of Union*, which lays out the doctrinal position of the newly formed Methodist Church in Britain, resulting from the union in 1932 of The Wesleyan Methodist Church, The Primitive Methodist Church and the United Methodist Church. The *Deed of Union* does not offer a detailed account of what it means to have a place within the Church Catholic, but rather affirms that The Methodist Church in Britain is a part of the visible Church on earth. The 1937 Conference Statement, *The Nature of the Christian Church*, highlights that the *Deed of Union*...

indicates the position of the Methodist Church with regard to its inheritance... First, it is implied, inasmuch as the Methodist Church 'claims and cherishes its place in the Holy Catholic Church'... Secondly, it is asserted by the acceptance of the Apostolic Faith which we have inherited.

TMCP, 1937, p.31

The nature of Methodism as an integral part of the Church Catholic is a central theme of the 1937 Statement, indeed the introduction states that the aim of the Statement, in part, was 'to maintain effectively the claim made in the *Deed of Union* that the Methodist Church "cherishes its place in the Holy Catholic Church"' (TMCP, 1937, p.7). Carter suggests that this assertion was made in part due to a reunited Methodism's engagement with the ecumenical movement, in which *The Nature of the Christian Church* was 'a contribution towards the ecumenical faith and order debate... which stressed both a modern understanding of the relevant New Testament teaching and a Methodist position on key contemporary ecumenical issues' (2002, p.107). The Conference did not adopt a further Statement on the Church until *Called to Love*

and Praise in 1999, here too the traditional marks of the Church, One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic, are held to be part of a Methodist understanding of Church and serve to maintain The Methodist Church in Britain's part within the Church Catholic, expressing 'a vital aspect of its life and identity' (TMCP, 1999a, p.19). Central to Methodist self-understanding is that it is a part of a larger body of the Church, identified by traditional marks. It is, therefore, useful to explore briefly these four marks and how they enable Methodism to claim to be a part of the Church Catholic.

At the time of the Reformation, as the Western Church 'was not only divided into two great sections, but Protestantism itself was divided... it was necessary to point out some marks by which the true church could be distinguished' (Berkhof, 1939, p.576); that is, a way to identify the Church. Following the Reformation, three marks were emphasised: the true preaching of the word, the right administration of the sacraments and the faithful exercise of Church discipline (Berkhof, 1939, p.576).

The marks caused some tension as they excluded Churches that held views upon the sacraments which some did not understand as the right administration. Others held that the marks of the Church could be found in the Nicene Creed (Wainwright, 1980, pp.188-91) which stated that the Church was One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. The effect of such tensions can be seen in the Westminster Confession (Centre for Reformed Theology and Apologetics, 2014), which states that the vital element to the being of the Church is the profession of the true religion.

It is the traditional marks of the Church, found in the Nicene Creed, which The Methodist Church in Britain highlights in *The Nature of the Christian Church* and *Called to Love and Praise*. *Called to Love and Praise* (TMCP, 1999a, pp.19-21) asserts that the traditional marks of the Church are a gift from God and 'what God requires' (TMCP, 1999a, p.23) to be present in the Church; the implication here is that if the marks are not evident, there can be no Church present. It contends that the Church is *One*, as it reflects the unity of God, and as such must continually seek unity in its life. It also contends that the Church is *Holy*, in that it belongs to God. Holiness is seen in the inward, and the outward action and expression of the Church, reflecting God's holiness. The third mark, *Catholic*, acknowledges the nature of the Church as embracing all people and also universal as disparate elements are held within one Church. The final mark of the Church, *Apostolic*, recognises the continuity of the Church with the apostles. The Report implies that as these marks are required by God, their contemporary expression is found within The Methodist Church in Britain.

The traditional marks of the Church as described above are recognised by Waldenfels as 'the common creed of the Christian community' (2010, p.491), which are distinctive and characteristic of the Church. In affirming the traditional marks of the Church, The Methodist Church in Britain makes clear its self-understanding as a Church which stands as part of the Church Catholic.

The WCC Report *Towards a Common Vision* asserts that 'we have a calling as a fellowship of churches to express the unity of life that is given to us in Jesus' (WCC, 2013, p.vi), further noting that 'the goal of this calling to visible unity necessarily entails a mutual recognition of each other as churches, as true expressions of what the Creed calls the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church"' (WCC, 2013, p.vii). This suggests it is insufficient for a community, or denomination, to recognise itself as being an expression of the historic Church without recognising those communities which also carry the marks as equally true expressions of the Church. Diversity manifest in different communities' expression does not indicate that one community has a correct interpretation, while another is incorrect. Indeed, 'legitimate diversity in the life of communion is a gift from the Lord' (WCC, 2013, p.16) and recognises that the Church proclaims the gospel in 'languages, symbols and images that are relevant to particular times and contexts so as to be lived authentically in each time and place' (WCC, 2013, p.16).

Unity in the Church Catholic can thus be found in adherence to the traditional ecclesiological teaching; that the Church is present when a community manifests the marks of the Church, despite diversity in practice which may be evident. Indeed, *Towards a Common Vision* states that unity, in terms of the marks of the Church, is vital.

[T]he local church should not be seen in isolation from but in dynamic relation with other local churches... the communion of churches is thus not an optional extra. The Universal Church is the communion of all churches united in faith and worship around the world.

WCC, 2013, p.18.

A community which does not manifest the marks of the Church, and which exists in isolation from the Church Catholic would, therefore, struggle to be understood as part of the Church.

The discussion concerning the marks of the Church as the unifying feature of the Church Catholic is central to *Towards a Common Vision*. This is due to the aim of the document which is to 'offer a convergence text, that is, a text which, while not expressing full consensus on all the issues concerned, is much more than simply an instrument to stimulate further study'

(WCC, 2013, p.1). The Report, therefore, actively seeks to promote those features of ecclesiological teaching which are common throughout the Church as part of the visible unity which enables mutual recognition of 'each other as churches, as true expressions of what the Creed calls the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church"' (WCC, 2013, p.vii). While the content of the Report is intended to highlight convergence, it does note the existence of diversity. Recognising the different cultures and contexts that the Church is set in, the WCC argues that legitimate diversity is found as Churches live 'authentically' (WCC, 2013, p.16) in a context, but argues that unity must not be surrendered as Churches differ. The Report proposes that the differences which exist between Churches' ecclesiological teaching or practice stem from their differing interpretation of biblical texts and the 'implications they draw from these texts' (WCC, 2013, p.26).

In exploring legitimate diversity, *Towards a Common Vision* highlights two prominent divergences which are present in the life of the Church. First, noting that

Christian traditions have diverged as to whether baptism, eucharist and other rites should be termed 'sacraments' or 'ordinances'. The word sacrament...indicates that God's saving work is communicated in the action of the rite, whilst the term ordinance emphasises that the action of the rite is performed in obedience to Christ's word and example. These two positions have often been seen as mutually opposed.

WCC, 2013, p.25

The Report recognises the divergence, but argues that these differences are primarily concerned with emphasis, rather than doctrine and implies that this should not hinder unity.

The second significant divergence that *Towards a Common Vision* highlights is ministry. The Report notes that since the Reformation, Churches have adopted different forms of ministry reflecting their changing context, stating that 'Christians disagree...over the traditional restriction of ordination to the ministry of word and sacrament to men only' (WCC, 2013, p.26). This divergence is reflected in Methodist ecclesiological teaching and practice, as both men and women are able to be ordained. Indeed, the Bible Christians and Primitive Methodist Connexion 'accepted some women as full-time preachers' (Vickers, 2000, p.398) in the early nineteenth century, though The Methodist Church in Britain did not ordain women to the Presbyterate until 1974. The WCC asserts that 'there is still much work to be done to arrive at a convergence on this topic... the lack of agreement is not simply between certain families of churches but exists within some churches' (WCC, 2013). The WCC, in exploring ministry in

different traditions, suggests that the reader reflect upon how such divisions may be overcome to promote unity.

A further point of divergence in ecclesiological teaching is articulated by Kevin Giles, concerning an understanding of the nature of the Church. Giles states that

for the traditional Roman Catholic... the church is the world-wide family of Christians who are united in their allegiance to the pope...a congregation of Catholic Christians may rightly be called church if an ordained priest is present and the mass is celebrated, but the church is always the complete number of those obedient to the bishops – and ultimately to the Pope... Congregationalists can also answer categorically: the church is nothing other than a local congregation of believers united by their confession of Jesus Christ as Lord.

1995, p.211

He continues to note that neither the Roman Catholic, nor the congregationalist understanding of the Church would be accepted by the majority of Protestants. Certainly, the Connexional nature of Methodism would not reflect the Roman Catholic obedience to the Pope, nor the assertion that a local church does not require a connection to other churches. Greggs argues that too much ecclesiological discussion focuses upon 'considering what the church does, but those questions will only be meaningful in relation to the question of what the church is' (2019, p.xxix). In this way, the WCC's focus on the convergence of ecclesiological teaching which the marks of the Church represent within the Church Catholic is an attempt to locate any discussion on the nature of the Church within the question of what the Church is, rather than what it does. *Towards a Common Vision*, therefore, promotes unity in historic ecclesiological teaching, while recognising the legitimate diversity found in the ecclesiological practice of Churches, which changes over time as Churches interpret biblical texts in the light of their context.

While The Methodist Church in Britain holds to the traditional marks of the Church which reinforce its part within the Church Catholic, *Called to Love and Praise* notes that any attempt to define rigidly what might be called a church is a difficult task. The Report states that

many Methodists will find the Reformation view attractive, provided it emphasizes as it has not always done that conduct as well as belief helped define the church. There still, however, remains the question how is 'the word of God' to be defined?

TMCP, 1999a, p.22

The Report further argues that

boundaries are not unimportant. The church is a visible, as well as a spiritual reality as such, it needs to know...who belongs and on what grounds... But however useful, or even necessary, it may be, for a denomination to determine its own boundaries, it is a mistake to define too precisely the boundaries of the Church as a whole.

TMCP, 1999a, p.22

There is thus a recognition in the Report that articulating a Methodist model of Church does not mean that the whole Church must follow a Methodist pattern to be considered a Church, but that Methodism must continue to hold to the traditional marks to remain part of the Church Catholic. Indeed, *Called to Love and Praise* asserts that the Church in any form cannot be properly understood without an appreciation of the 'centuries which have elapsed between the New Testament era' (TMCP, 1999a, p.19). Thus, the traditional marks of the Church provide a benchmark to assess any expression of church. Davison and Millbank (2010, pp.1-2) make this point in their critique of fresh expressions from an Anglican perspective, arguing that the form and content of Church are intrinsically linked. That is, the traditional form of the Church, found in the marks, cannot be ignored in favour of new content, but must be preserved to understand and maintain the relationship of a denomination to the Church Catholic.

A brief caveat is added by *Called to Love and Praise*, noting that the marks 'of the church are both an invitation to thank and to trust God, and at the same time, reminder that the church is always in need of reform' (TMCP, 1999a, p.23). In this way, a Methodist understanding of the marks of the Church recognises the importance of holding the tradition of the Church, and its historic form, but also that in order to remain, One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic in the world, the Church may need to change. This belief can be seen in the *The Nature of the Christian Church* (TMCP, 1937, p.29), which argues that while the marks must remain in the life of the Church, forms of Church organisation are subject to change over time.

Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church contends that the principal task of ecclesiology is not concerned with the functions of the Church, nor a 'response to the perceived realities of a particular missionary context' (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.10), but with maintaining the integrity of the Church, further arguing that doctrinal standards are 'intended to preserve their belief concerning this one, holy, catholic and apostolic church' (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.10). This suggests that Fresh Expressions share a common desire with The Methodist Church in Britain to be understood as part the Church Catholic, rather than as initiatives so new that there is no link to the whole of the Church, nor connection to the Church throughout the ages.

Before moving to discuss development of contemporary Methodist ecclesiology, it is helpful to briefly note how *Called to Love and Praise* articulates a Methodist understanding of the church. The Report states that in the discussion of what Church is, the starting point must be 'the mission of God to the world' (TMCP, 1999a, p.9), arguing that the Church holds its existence to the grace of God. The Report further proposes that while the historical birth date of the Church is unknown, its creation as a new community of faith was for all, rather than a specific group of people.

The Methodist view of the Church proposed by *Called to Love and Praise*, is a community modelled on the nature of the Trinity, in which Father, Son and Spirit co-exist in harmony. The Church, therefore, in modelling this must be a 'community of mutual support and love where there is no superiority or inferiority' (TMCP, 1999a, p.10), in which individuals are in covenant with God and each other (TMCP, 1999a, p.12). *Called to Love and Praise* notes that the New Testament provides insight into models of the interdependence of churches, arguing that each individual church, while a complete entity in itself, functions and flourishes only in relationship with others (TMCP, 1999a, p.16). This interdependence of churches is key to discerning a Methodist understanding of the Church, expressed through the Connexional structures. A Methodist expression of church recognises the diversity in models of church. *Called to Love and Praise* highlights that

there is no single model of the Church which can be labelled the biblical model. Indeed, the New Testament's diversity implies that diversity...is the norm. Nevertheless, the underlying unity of the New Testament should not be overlooked.
TMCP, 1999a, p.15

A Methodist understanding of the Church, therefore, considers that unity in diversity has been vital to the Church throughout its history, and continues to be essential to any contemporary expression. An independent Church does not fit with a Methodist understanding, diverse communities must continue to demonstrate unity and connection to one another, reflecting the unity of the Trinity. This clearly links to the notion, contained in the *WCC Report Towards a Common Vision*, that the Church must be connected to other Churches. In this way, Methodism is located within the framework of historic ecclesiological teaching, and draws upon that ecclesiological teaching to inform its own ecclesiological practice. A Methodist understanding of the Church, therefore, recognises that all local churches must be connected through adherence to the marks of the Church, but also that every local Methodist church is connected to every other local Methodist church for mutual support, despite differences which

may exist, as an ecclesiological experience of the Church. Thus, Methodism's Connexionalism reflects the ecclesiological principle of unity and diversity seen through the Church Catholic.

The reflection above highlights the difficulty in attempting to define or interpret the marks of the Church and create an all-encompassing definition. I offer the brief outline of The Methodist Church in Britain's self-understanding as a starting point from which an ecclesiological discussion concerning the contemporary British Methodist Church may take place. The Methodist Church in Britain as a Church, holds to the traditional marks of the Church which enable it to be set within the Church Catholic and recognises that it is part of the continuing presence of the Church in the world. Within the Church Catholic, as much as within the denomination itself, The Methodist Church in Britain holds that the Church must be connected to one another to flourish and, therefore, Methodist structures embody the structural connections between local churches.

The following exploration of contemporary Methodist ecclesiology will examine the Methodist understanding of the nature of the Church: the way that unity, holiness, catholicity and authority find expression within contemporary British Methodist practice, Statements and Reports and how the same are articulated in fresh expressions.

2.2 Contemporary British Methodist Ecclesiology

The Methodist Church in Britain is one of many Methodist denominations throughout the world, which stem from the Methodism which emerged from the 1730s in Great Britain. This includes the worldwide United Methodist Church, which is represented in many countries of the world, it counts 'more than 12 million members in Africa, Asia, Europe and the United States' (UMC, 2020). There are also many autonomous Methodist Churches, for example the Korean Methodist Church and the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. Within Great Britain, there are also several small independent denominations which claim Methodist heritage, these include the Independent Methodist Church and The Free Methodist Church. The Methodist Church in Britain is, therefore, one Methodist denomination amongst many and, as such, much of the commentary on Methodism is written from a global perspective, particularly from those authors who are part of the United Methodist Church. The World Methodist Council is a means by which Methodist denominations throughout the world are connected. It meets every five years (WMC, 2020). Nevertheless, The Methodist Church in Britain is an independent Connexion, with its own doctrinal standards and ecclesiological Statements and, therefore, recognising the influence of global Methodism, these are the primary focus throughout this thesis.

In its *Catechism for the use of the People Called Methodist*, the Methodist Church in Britain states:

The Church is all those on earth and in heaven who have been called by God through Jesus Christ, to be his people, and who share the unity that the Spirit gives. The Spirit guides the Church and equips its members with varied gifts, so that they may support one another, encourage one another and serve their neighbours with joy. The universal Church takes the form of local congregations, where the message of Christ, received through the apostles, is preached where God is glorified in the celebration of the sacraments and other acts of worship, and Christians share the Christian life.

TMCP, n.d., p.20

Here I will explore the contemporary ecclesiology of the British Methodist Church, which recognises itself to be part of the Church Catholic (TMCP, 2020, p.213), and then move to detail how the emerging ecclesiology of fresh expressions may reflect the themes of contemporary Methodist ecclesiology. I will achieve this through the consideration of, and reflection on, literature from various sources. This will include the Conference Statements and Reports, published work upon Methodism, and also the literature published by the Fresh Expressions organisation and commentators upon the movement.

Methodist ecclesiology can be traced back to a society that Charles and John Wesley were part of at Oxford in the 1730s (Davies, 1963, p.44). This group, pejoratively referred to as 'the Holy Club' or 'The Methodists', focused on a desire for personal holiness. The Holy Club was concerned with members gathering together to encourage one another in their studies, a commitment to regular church attendance, the fostering of a concern for those less fortunate than themselves and the visitation of those in prison to share comfort and the gospel message. Davies notes, however, that 'that this was not Methodism as it later emerged in the life of England... [though] it is true that Wesley took over some of the habits and customs of the group into Methodism proper' (1963, p.44).

The Holy Club has been influential in Methodist ecclesiology, as some of their practice became part of the Methodist understanding of Church; this can be seen from the establishment of the first Methodist Societies which relied upon Wesley's development of the theology and practice of the Holy Club, to the development of *Our Calling* in 2000. The themes of personal holiness and mutual accountability are prominent throughout and continue to be developed in contemporary British Methodist ecclesiology.

[In 1784] the Deed of Declaration gave Methodism an independent legal status. The vital step had been taken to change a society within the existing Church of England into a church with its own executive body, its own doctrinal standards, its own connexional organisation and discipline, its own ministry.

Davies and Rupp, 1965, p.72

From this moment, it can be argued that Methodism began to form its own ecclesiology as a body separate from the Church of England. The Plan of Pacification in 1795 completed this by enabling the 'celebration of the sacraments in Methodist chapels and services in church hours' (Davies and Rupp, 1965, p.288), administered by preachers authorised by the Conference.

The Methodist movement originated in the Enlightenment cultural paradigm (Bevans and Schroeder, 2004, p.208). The Enlightenment can be defined by empiricism which states that anything true can be proved experimentally, and the belief that humans were autonomous individuals, who were free to reason for themselves. A major feature of the enlightenment was the emphasis on 'the power of unaided human reason' (Hill, 2003, p.213). In an attempt to protect itself from possible ideological attacks and attempts to dismiss religion in favour of reason, the Protestant Church separated religion from everyday life and located it in 'human feeling and experience' (Spencer, 2007, p.141) which stemmed from the Enlightenment's focus upon individualism.

Within the Enlightenment period, Davies (1963, p.11) argues that the dominant characteristic of Christianity was the requirement for individuals to accept the cardinal doctrines of the historic creeds. Wesley recognised the importance of accepting the creeds, but argued that the heart of Christianity lay in the 'personal commerce of a man [sic] with his Lord' (Davies, 1963, p.11). Wesley's stress on a personal assurance of faith resonated with an element of the Enlightenment worldview; a 'fascination with interior feelings and emotions' (Spencer, 2007, p.140) and contributed to the growth of early Methodism. Over time, the growth of Methodism prompted the development of the Connexional structure, in which congregations or 'societies' would receive preachers and individuals were grouped together for mutual support. At the time of Wesley's death, 'there was a well-integrated Conference and connexional framework' (Cracknell and White, 2005, p.30).

Following the death of Wesley in 1791, there were several schisms within the Methodist Church which led to the creation of new Methodist bodies. Barrie Tabraham argues that

Methodism suffered from the inevitable tendency that radical movements have to run further and faster than their leaders intend...the seeds of division were already present in the eighteenth-century revival...there was, therefore, a kind of inevitability in the emergence of breakaway groups.

1995, p.66

Alexander Killham, an itinerant Methodist preacher, who proposed changes to the structures of the Church to enable lay participation in governance, was expelled from the Connexion. He gathered a group of like-minded preachers and formed the Methodist New Connexion in 1797 (Heitzenrater, 1995, pp.316-17). Hugh Bourne and William Clowes engaged in a series of open-air evangelical camp meetings and were both expelled from the Methodist Connexion as the camp meetings were deemed to be contrary to Methodist order and discipline. They founded the Primitive Methodists in 1811 (Milburn, 2002, pp.3-4). The Independent Methodists grew from a series of 'cottage meetings in Warrington in 1796' (Tabraham, 1995, p.66) and took the name Independent Methodists at their first conference, this group continues to exist in contemporary Great Britain. The Bible Christians, though not established as the result of a schism within Methodism, was founded by an unsuccessful candidate for Methodist ministry, William O'Bryan, in 1815. 'The Bible Christians can be regarded as being part of the Methodist tradition since they were organised on similar lines and their theological emphasis and style of worship differed little from the Primitives (Tabraham, 1995, p.68). The United Methodist Free Church was created in 1857 from the amalgamation of several other bodies, the Protestant Methodists, the Arminian Methodists, the Wesleyan Methodist Association and the Wesley Reform Society (Vickers, 2002, p.361), which had seceded from the Methodist Connexion, which became known as the Wesleyan Methodists, over time.

The schisms which lead to the creation of the various Methodist breakaway groups were caused by many factors. Chiefly, the promotion of lay involvement in the Church, the desire to engage in creative methods of evangelism, and disagreements over Church governance, the power of the Conference and the role of the ordained (Tabraham, 1995, pp.66-70). I assert that the breakaways were caused by an individual or group believing that the changes they proposed were necessary for a contextually relevant expression of church. There is a similar potential for schism as Methodist churches and fresh expressions disagree over the most appropriate expression of Church within a particular context. I will return to this issue in Chapter Six.

Faced with declining membership in all of the Methodist bodies in the early twentieth century, various Methodist unions took place. The first was the formation of the United Methodists, as

the Methodist New Connexion, The Bible Christians and the United Methodist Free Church merged (Wilkinson, 1983, p.174). This was followed in 1932 by the Methodist Union, in which the United Methodists, Primitive Methodist and Wesleyan Methodists formed The Methodist Church in Britain. In this union, doctrinal issues were prominent and a balance of 'high' and 'low' forms of ministry was achieved in the *Deed of Union*. Inevitably, this resulted in compromises for each of the Methodist bodies that joined. For example, the Wesleyan principle of an ordained President of Conference was supplemented by a lay Vice President, which acknowledged the importance of lay ministry to the Primitives (Tabraham, 1995, pp.84-85). The *Deed of Union* holds the tension between differing understandings of ministry which existed prior to union, particularly in terms of the role of the ordained, and the administration of Holy Communion. These tensions continue to be present in the contemporary British Methodist Church. Indeed, they are raised by several interviewees throughout the research for this thesis and are discussed in subsequent chapters.

Andrew Hindmarsh, reflecting on the challenge of the twenty-first century for Methodism, suggests that the

form of Methodism dates back to the eighteenth century where there were already Conferences, Circuits, Districts, Superintendents, Local Preachers, Stewards and so on...there have been changes along the way... However, many of the fundamental features of eighteenth-century Methodism are still with us.

1999, pp.73-74

Hindmarsh argues that the Connexional structure is no longer relevant to contemporary models of management and serves to hinder the mission of the Church in contemporary society as it does not enable strategic planning throughout the Connexion. He reasons that it was created as a response to a different culture. The difficulty that Methodism's eighteenth-century structures pose to contemporary Methodism is articulated by Martyn Percy (2004, pp.206-09), who suggests that the denomination will struggle to adapt to the twenty-first century as it is so rooted in the culture of the eighteenth century. This presents a challenge, which I will consider later in this chapter, in terms of reconciling Methodism with fresh expressions that operate within, and respond to, a Postmodern worldview.

The Methodist Church in Britain has sparingly produced ecclesiological Statements. Since the Methodist Union in 1932, the denomination has published three documents which state their intention to detail distinctive Methodist ecclesiology. These provide a benchmark to which any exploration of Methodist ecclesiology must refer. This lack of official Statements does not

mean that there is little ecclesiology to be explored, as the entire collection of Statements and Reports of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order make a contribution to Methodist ecclesiology.

The *Deed of Union*, adopted as the three Methodist denominations combined in 1932 to form The Methodist Church in Britain, contains a series of ecclesiological Statements which have bearing upon future ecclesiological development. The *Deed of Union* makes clear that 'the Conference shall be the final authority within the Methodist Church with regard to all questions concerning the interpretation of its doctrines' (TMCP, 2020, p.214). The Conference, therefore, retains the authority to establish the Methodist understanding of the nature of the Church. This particular clause in the *Deed of Union* meant that each of the three denominations that united in 1932 could safeguard that one group would not be able to unduly influence the theology or ecclesiology of the newly formed denomination without the assent of the Conference.

There is disagreement amongst contemporary scholarship regarding the defining features of Methodism. For example, Langford, a professor of Methodist Studies in the USA, writing a brief exploration of Methodist theology from Wesley to present day, believes that contemporary Methodism is characterised by its 'distinguishable forms of worship and small group nurturing; a distinctive hymnody; ministers trained in a range of colleges and courses and participating in the life of an annual conference; and shared ethical and missionary concerns' (1998, p.95). Carter (2002, pp.149-54) suggests that throughout Methodist history, one can trace three ecclesiological principles, first the interconnectedness of the Church, embodied in Connexionalism. Second, Methodism's recognition of communities which carry the marks of the spirit as true Churches, within which Methodism recognises Churches which embrace episcopal succession and those which do not. Carter's third principle of Methodism's ecclesiology is a willingness to explore the gifts of others. This echoes Rupert Davies, former President of the British Methodist Conference and principal of Wesley College (1976, pp.105-13), who described five features which have a special emphasis within Methodism. He cites a dual tradition of liturgical alongside free worship, an emphasis on social concern, the promotion of the universal scope of the gospel, the high place of the laity and the emphasis on a personal faith as the defining features of the Church.

The differences of opinion between the scholars outlined above may highlight the particular experience within Methodism or the theological outlook of each author and, therefore, represent the practice observed or preferred by each. In an attempt to provide a contemporary Methodist ecclesiology, one must balance the opinion of various scholars and the way that a

church may self-identify with the final authority in terms of a normative ecclesiological position for the Church, which rests with the Conference. This tension between the normative, espoused and formal ecclesiology is explored in *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* which suggests that local churches maintaining connectedness is essential.

[I]t would be incorrect to regard the norms of...Methodist tradition as imposing unnecessarily restrictive rules... The ecclesial dynamic of connectivity is intended to ensure that every Christian community at each stage of its development is gathered round what is recognisably the same ministry of word and sacrament. Thus, the ecclesial dynamic of connectivity safeguards the ecclesial dynamic of intensivity.

TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.163

Intensivity concerns the features which 'create and sustain a Christian community' (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.154). In the context of this study, I propose that the features which create and sustain a Methodist church are the three distinctive emphases proposed by *Called to Love and Praise*. Rather than attempting to define the features of contemporary Methodist ecclesiology in line with various scholars' opinion, employing the normative ecclesiology provides the way to ensure that the authoritative position of the Conference is explored.

2.2.1 Statements and Reports of The Methodist Church in Britain

To examine contemporary Methodist ecclesiology, it is necessary to consider the official Statements and Reports of the Conference, which detail the normative Methodist ecclesiological position.

I use the term normative, which is seen in the work of Cameron et al. (2010, pp.53-56) who propose four theological voices that emerge through examining a particular context. The normative theological voice can be understood as the official Church teaching or theological position. The espoused theological voice represents the theology 'embedded within a group's articulation of its beliefs' (Cameron et al., 2010, p.54); the operant theological voice is the theology evident in the practices of a particular group, and the formal theological voice is the theology of the academy, 'an intellectual articulation of the faith' (Cameron et al., 2010, p.55). These four voices are not separate, but interact with one another, for example, some elements of the formal theology may be heard in the normative or espoused theological voice. As this thesis is concerned with the ecclesiological challenges of fresh expressions of church, here I refer to these as ecclesiological voices. I argue that as the official Conference Statements on the Church, *The Nature of the Christian Church* and *Called to Love and Praise*, are the normative ecclesiology of The Methodist Church in Britain, which Cameron et al. propose to

be concerned with 'what the practicing group names as its theological authority' (Cameron et al., 2010, p.54). As Conference is the final authority in the interpretation of doctrine (TMCP, 2020, p.214), and as *The Nature of the Christian Church* and *Called to Love and Praise* are agreed Conference Statements, they represent the theological authority of the Conference.

I will argue here that the Statements and Reports highlight two principal and interrelated themes within contemporary Methodist ecclesiology; first, that Methodist ecclesiology is evolutionary and secondly that it is pragmatic.

I believe that Methodist ecclesiology is evolutionary, it builds upon that which has come before and seeks to respond to culture. In 1937 *The Nature of the Christian Church* stated 'that none of the forms of organisation taken by the Apostolic Church should be determinative for the Church for all time' (TMCP, 1937, p.29). This comment refers particularly to the way no Church in existence at that time could claim to replicate the pattern of ministry exemplified in the New Testament. The Statement argued that the Church exists for the sake of Christ and that faith should be regarded as more important than Church structures. Whilst the Statement does not argue explicitly, it implies that the denomination did not believe that elements of its ecclesiology were unchangeable and was willing to accept cultural changes may affect the nature of the Church and its ministry. Indeed, I assert that the Statement is itself an example of Methodist ecclesiological evolution as it is the first statement following Methodist Union in 1932 and, therefore, represents an attempt to combine elements of the three uniting Churches.

The 1999 Statement *Called to Love and Praise* further highlights the evolutionary nature of Methodist ecclesiology as it argues that, as there have been changes in society since the publication of the 1937 Statement, it is necessary to reflect upon the nature of the Church within its contemporary context. It highlights (TMCP, 1999a, p.4) that this new document does not replace previous Methodist ecclesiology but adds to and enhances it in the light of contemporary culture. Both *The Nature of the Christian Church* and *Called to Love and Praise* highlight the importance of the marks of the Church. *The Nature of the Christian Church* (1937, p.31) affirms the continuity of Methodism with the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, while *Called to Love and Praise* reaffirms that the marks must be present for a Methodist community to be part of the Church Catholic. *Called to Love and Praise* (TMCP, 1999a, pp.4-6) states that cultural changes throughout the world, patterns of community life and technological advances have caused The Methodist Church in Britain to reconsider its ecclesiology. It further notes that since 1937, advances have been made in ecumenical cooperation and dialogue promoting the need for The Methodist Church in Britain to reflect upon how to be one denomination amongst many, and how unity in diversity may be

developed. *Called to Love and Praise* also asserts that the development in biblical scholarship and the emergence of new theological outlooks (liberation theology⁸ and feminist theology,⁹ for example) have caused The Methodist Church in Britain to ask questions of its self-identity in a changing world; as the context that The Methodist Church in Britain is set evolves, so the Church must evolve.

Thus, within The Methodist Church in Britain there is a willingness to embrace the ecclesiological and theological developments that arise as culture changes (TMCP, 1937, p.2; TMCP, 1999a, p.4). David Carter offers an example of this as he explores how Methodism has 'shown itself willing to embrace the sign of episcopal succession within the context for closer unity' (2002, p.154). Key to this is the willingness within The Methodist Church in Britain to consider its own position in relation to contextual changes; Methodist ecclesiology is, therefore, an evolutionary ecclesiology.

In a similar way to *The Nature of the Christian Church's* assertion that Methodism recognises the possibility of change in its structures (TMCP, 1937, p.29), *Called to Love and Praise* argues that 'discernment is needed in order to distinguish between those features of Methodist history and tradition which should be cherished...and those which need to be abandoned, or adapted, because they no longer contribute creatively to contemporary Christian life' (TMCP, 1999a, p.36). The argument here is that Methodist ecclesiology is pragmatic; it is flexible and able to respond to the changing context, therefore, 'Methodists should not feel the need resolutely to defend the structures of the Methodist Church' (TMCP, 1999a, p.53). An example of this is found as *Called to Love and Praise* promotes diversity as a partial explanation for the growth of Christian denominations: 'the New Testament provides ample evidence that Christian unity included diversity...Diversity, with all its consequent tensions...and unity were the pattern...these factors partly, though not wholly, explain the rise of denominations' (TMCP, 1999a, p.24). *Called to Love and Praise* devotes significant time to discussing the need for ecumenical relationships between different denominations, quoting John Wesley's sermon *Catholic Spirit* as a call to unity in diversity: 'though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike?' (1944, pp.443-44). Here a pragmatic approach is to recognise the differences between denominations, but to commit to working together despite them. *Called to Love and Praise* notes that 'from its beginnings, Methodism has always been pragmatic in its approach to questions of church structure and order' (TMCP, 1999a, p.53). Contemporary Methodist ecclesiology is, therefore, a pragmatic ecclesiology.

⁸ For example; Loades, A., 1997.

⁹ For example; Chopp, R. S., 1997.

I believe that the evolutionary and pragmatic nature of Methodist ecclesiology is also reflected in the introduction to *Called to Love and Praise*, which offers five reasons that prompted its creation.

To help the Methodist people...think clearly about the nature and purpose of the Christian community...secondly...the Statement might assist in promoting greater understanding between Methodists and Christians of other traditions. Thirdly...the Statement is intended to contribute towards the apologetic task of explaining the nature and purpose of the church. The fourth aim of the Statement is...to encourage the Methodist people to deeper discipleship. Finally, this Statement is offered as the reply of the Conference to a Memorial¹⁰ presented to Conference.

TMCP, 1999a, pp.6-7

An aim of the Statement was to enable Methodists to explore the question of how Methodist identity and ecclesiology changed since the 1937 Statement and how is it structured to offer ministry in contemporary society. *Called to Love and Praise* confirms the evolution of a pragmatic Methodist ecclesiology.

The Methodist Forward Movement is an example of the pragmatic and evolutionary emphasis of Methodist ecclesiology. The Forward Movement (Vickers, 2000, p.126) began in the 1880s as an attempt to focus on the needs of the poor, which the contemporary Church did not meet. Moss argues that the impetus for the movement was 'that the interests of Christ's Kingdom and the peril of human souls required such a modification of the church's methods as would bring sinners and the Gospel into actual contact' (1909, p.458). Whilst the language is of its time, the intention is similar to that of fresh expressions: that the gospel be shared in ways which are appropriate to contemporary culture. The link between the Forward Movement and Fresh Expressions is the call to renewal and contemporary engagement from within the denomination. Over time, the Forward Movement saw the creation of Central Halls and Missions throughout the Connexion. These Halls and Missions were initially one-church circuits.

The plan [of the movement] was to detach special areas and to build and staff mission premises for them which could include social and philanthropic work. Ultimately, they

¹⁰ The memorial from The Medway Towns Circuit asked for a review of a series of ecclesiological issues, including membership, baptism and ecumenism (TMCP, 1999a, p.7).

might be restored to circuit administration when they could again be worked effectively by circuits.

Davies, George and Rupp, 1983, p.136

The Forward Movement was concerned with interacting with those individuals whom the traditional Church did not reach, providing entertainment as an alternative to pubs and music halls, combined with Bible study and worship. Whilst the Central Halls and Missions were not held within circuits with other Methodist churches, they were not disconnected from the Connexion, but were understood as a circuit and were structurally linked to the Connexion. The Forward Movement recognised that the missional context of the Central Halls and Missions required a different, pragmatic style of church to a traditional Methodist society.

Called to Love and Praise asserts that the distinctive emphasis of Methodist ecclesiology is 'threefold: first, an emphasis on "relatedness" as essential to the concept of "church", finding expression in "the connexional principle"; second, an emphasis...on fellowship and shared discipline, and third, the conviction that the church should be structured for mission' (TMCP, 1999a, p.50). It is the intention of the Statement that the whole of Methodist ecclesiology, and the theology which underpins it, is held within these three assertions.

In its conclusion, the Statement offers criteria by which a church may be recognised; that is how the ecclesial identity of a community may be assessed. A church, therefore, is:

A community which celebrates and proclaims Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour in the power of the Holy Spirit.

A community of all ages, different races, varying backgrounds and occupations – richly diverse, but united around the Lord's Table.

A community which praises God.

A community nourished each week by great songs of faith, by prayers steeped in the wealth of the Christian tradition and contemporary experience, and by preaching which engages with contemporary life and with the Bible at depth and with integrity.

A community whose warm fellowship is matched by the warmth of its welcome, offering a home from home for all who will come.

A community bearing, but not bowed down by, particular acts of service to which it has been called in its particular time and place.

A community resilient with the hope inspired by a vision of God's kingdom.

A community committed to working for justice and peace.

A community the daily lives of whose members make it easier for others to believe in the goodness of God.

A community gentle with each other's failures, as each sustains and is sustained by others through forgiveness, love and prayer.

A community characterised by joy.

TMCP, 1999a, pp.54-55

It is important to note that even as The Methodist Church in Britain articulates this list of criteria by which one may assess the ecclesial identity of a Methodist community, Methodism recognises other Christian bodies, which do not hold the same views, as Churches. Carter articulates this as a challenge for The Methodist Church in Britain to accept and enforce its own denominational boundaries, while accepting that the Church is not 'a thing of rigid definition' (2002, p.116).

Later in this chapter I will contrast the features of Methodist ecclesiology with those of an emerging fresh expressions ecclesiology. The themes outlined above, ecclesial identity, Connexion, fellowship and shared discipline, and being structured for mission will provide the broad context for my comparative analysis.

In 2000, The Methodist Conference adopted a Report entitled *Our Calling*, which outlines the Conference's understanding of the purpose of The Methodist Church in Britain, set out in response to changes in culture, again indicating evolution and pragmatism. Whilst the Report does not explicitly state so, in my experience this document (recently revived (TMCP, 2018c), to provide criteria for the work of the Connexional Team of The Methodist Church in Britain) provides a briefer and more user-friendly summary of the characteristics listed above (TMCP, 1999a, pp.54-55). It was produced in leaflet form and promoted in the early twenty-first century within Methodist churches to encourage common discipleship in local churches. *Our Calling* states 'the calling of the Methodist church is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission. It does this through: worship, learning and caring, service, evangelism' (TMCP, 2000c). As the document explores each of the themes, it begins each with the phrase 'the church exists to...' (TMCP, 2000c), I assert that it must be treated as an ecclesiological document as it explores the nature of the Church.

In the leaflet, which was distributed to circuits and local churches, a series of discussion questions is asked concerning each element. The evolutionary nature of contemporary Methodist ecclesiology is evident within this document, as each element contains the same

final question; 'what are our plans and targets for improving our worship'¹¹ over the next year?' (TMPC, 2000c). It implies that change and development is part of the life of the Church and thus context requires evolutionary changes to continue to respond appropriately.

Exploring 'Worship', *Our Calling* (TMCP, 2000c) asks a series of questions which convey the variety of Methodist worship and encourage ecumenical dialogue to enhance worship through the sharing of resources. 'Learning and caring' explores discipleship and links faith to everyday life, asking how ecumenism can aid discipleship through shared experiences. 'Service' considers social action and care for others, suggesting a pragmatic approach for Methodism in community involvement. The final element, 'Evangelism', emphasises the evangelistic ecclesiology of Methodism. In *Our Calling*, Methodism's engagement with *Missio Dei* is acknowledged as a 'response to the gospel of God's love in Christ' (TMCP, 2000c). The four elements of *Our Calling* are understood to be interconnected. In this way, a Methodist church in should exhibit each of the four elements. This may result in one being more prominent in the life of the church, for example a church may focus its life upon the sharing of the Gospel through evangelism but must pay attention to worship, learning and caring, and service.

Our Calling features heavily throughout the Connexion. Many Methodist churches and districts highlight the elements of *Our Calling* in relation to their self-identity, this can be seen in church and district websites.¹² *Our Calling* will often feature in an 'about us' page, indicating the purpose of the church. This highlights the importance placed on *Our Calling* as key to the identity of the church and the activities in which it might engage. The prominence of *Our Calling* can also be seen on the website of The Methodist Church in Britain (TMCP, 2019b), which provides a link to a precis of the Report and offers resources which churches may use in their promotion of *Our Calling*. It is difficult to locate the *Called to Love and Praise* Statement on the Methodist Church website, one must enter the phrase in the search bar, but *Our Calling* is visible and accessible to those who use the site.

Further to this, the Methodist Council considered a discussion paper which the 2018 Conference later received, entitled *Reaffirming Our Calling*. The document is part of an ongoing conversation concerning the challenges which The Methodist Church in Britain faces, and seeks to provide a way forward. Responding to the downward trend of membership and attendance, the document proposes that 'reaffirming *Our Calling* should be the primary strategic driver for the whole church' (TMCP, 2018c, p.3). The Conference of 2019 also

¹¹ Each question inserts the relevant element of *Our Calling* here.

¹² For example, Thornbury Methodist Church, 2018. Southampton Methodist District, 2018.

received a Report entitled *Developments in Reaffirming Our Calling*, which ‘celebrated some of the ways in which this reaffirmation has shaped the life and work of the Methodist church’ (TMCP, 2019a, p.1); *Our Calling*, therefore, remains an important part of contemporary Methodism.

Due to the prominence of *Our Calling* over *Called to Love and Praise*, I contend that Methodists are more likely to articulate the elements of *Our Calling*. This does not mean that *Our Calling* is more important than *Called to Love and Praise* as an explanation of Methodist ecclesiology, but rather, I argue that due to the prominence of *Our Calling* throughout The Methodist Church in Britain, *Our Calling* is the espoused ecclesiology of the Methodist Church.

I would argue that *Our Calling* is the way Methodists articulate the nature of the Church, certainly this is true within my own role as a presbyter; *Our Calling* is more readily understood and articulated by those in the circuit to which I am stationed. Beck suggests, in a paper written in 2000, that within The Methodist Church in Britain there is a growing distance between the normative documents and the ‘reality of things in the local church’ (2018, p.113). The publication of *Our Calling* may be understood as a response to the disconnect between the normative and the local church, by providing a document to be placed at the heart of each circuit and local Methodist church. The espoused ecclesiology of *Our Calling* can be seen through the examples above of *Our Calling* being highly visible throughout the Connexion, but also through the Conference Report *Reaffirming Our Calling* which proposes that *Our Calling*, rather than *Called to Love and Praise* be highlighted throughout the Connexion as the primary way in which the nature of the Church can be articulated.

There are some elements of Methodist ecclesiology which are discussed in *Called to Love and Praise*, yet are not referred to in *Our Calling*; principally the three distinctive Methodist emphases, detailed in *Called to Love and Praise* (TMCP, 1999a, p.54). The reason for the omission may be that *Called to Love and Praise* is taken to be accepted and understood by Methodists as being part of the structure of the Church, therefore, there is no need to repeat them. As the espoused ecclesiology of The Methodist Church in Britain, *Our Calling* will feature prominently throughout this thesis alongside the normative ecclesiology of *Called to Love and Praise* as the way that Methodist ecclesiology is articulated.

The pragmatic and evolutionary nature of British Methodism makes it difficult to provide a consistent and unchanging view of Methodist ecclesiology from the moment Methodism separated from the Church of England. It is clear, however, that normative Methodist ecclesiology is held within the three emphases of *Called to Love and Praise*; the Connexional

principle, fellowship and shared discipline, and the conviction that the Church should be structured for mission. These emphases find their outworking in the criteria of *Our Calling*, which proposes that part of being a Methodist church is the engagement in worship, learning and caring, service, and evangelism. Later in this chapter, I will consider the features of contemporary Methodism and propose how a Methodist church may be defined. I will then consider the points of resonance and tension present in the relationship of Methodist ecclesiology with fresh expressions.

2.3 Fresh Expressions Ecclesiology

To explore fresh expressions ecclesiology, I will first consider how the movement self-defines. The Fresh expressions website states that

fresh expressions encourages new forms of church for a fast changing world, working with Christians from a variety of denominations and traditions. The initiative has resulted in hundreds of new congregations being formed alongside more traditional churches. It was initiated in 2005 by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York with the Methodist Council.

Fresh Expressions, 2012a

A further definition was offered in 2015a, which stated that

Fresh expressions are:

- Missional – they work mainly with people who don't attend church;
- Contextual – they fit the situation;
- Formational – they make disciples;
- Ecclesial – they encourage church to emerge among the people they serve.

Fresh Expressions, 2015

The term 'Fresh Expressions of Church' was first used in print by the Church of England Report *Mission-shaped Church* (TAC, 2004, p.34). The Report was an attempt to explore the context for mission at the beginning of the twenty-first century. It was hoped (Nelstrop and Percy, 2008, p.5) that the phrase Fresh Expressions of Church would provide a bridge between a new context for mission and the historic tradition of the Church. The Report recognised that many Anglican churches within the UK had begun exploring different models of church in order to engage with their own changing context. The Methodist Church in Britain had, in the publication of *Called to Love and Praise* noted the changes in society which had occurred

since the 1937 Statement *The Nature of the Christian Church* as a reason the Statement was created, and argued in its concluding paragraph that Church 'has a provisionality which it all too easily forgets' (TMCP, 1999a, p.55), and as such new models of church were appropriate in the light of a changing culture. In 2007, *Changing Church for a Changing World*, the result of a Report intended to be presented to Conference, recorded 143 fresh expressions (TMCP, 2007, p.7) which it argued represented a new context for mission stating 'we cannot control the changes taking place in society...for a church which has tended to standardise ways of doing things...this brings a challenge to reflect on how we do worship, what we teach and how we teach it' (TCMP, 2007, p.7). *Changing Church for a Changing World* did not attempt to give a definitive definition of fresh expressions, or a list of initiatives which would be considered as fresh expressions. Rather, it suggested that fresh expressions are new forms of church which are relevant to the changing culture of the UK, providing several examples for study (TMCP, 2007, pp.11-79). *Changing Church for a Changing World* does not qualify its assertion that the culture of the UK has changed by providing examples. Rather, it points the reader to an exploration of cultural changes provided in the first chapter of *Mission-Shaped Church*. *Mission-Shaped Church* proposes several key features of changing social trends over 30 years; housing has become more expensive and has seen a rise in owner occupancy; changes in employment which result in less free time for many people; an increase in mobility as more households private transport; an increase in divorce and changes in family life which has seen more families visiting parents during weekends; the rise of sporting activities on Sunday's; a more fragmented society as families live further away from one another and make longer journeys to socialise; and individuals interact more via networks than local social settings (2004, pp.1-9). Central to these changes in social trends is the growth of a consumer culture, representing a change as

previous generations found their identity in what they produced, we now find our identity in what we consume. We have moved from a society that shaped its members primarily as producers...to a society that shapes its members first and foremost by the need to play the role of consumer.

TAC, 2004, p.9

The notion of a consumer culture promotes the importance of individualism and choice, and is relevant to each of the features of changing social trends that *Mission-Shaped Church* articulates. Indeed, choice may be seen as a central element in the Postmodern worldview that I describe below.

As fresh expressions are intended to be culturally relevant expressions of church as a response to changing social contexts, it is helpful to consider the contemporary culture in which fresh expressions are set. Before considering the nature of contemporary culture, I will clarify the way I use the term. Bevans and Schroeder propose two ways in which culture may be understood.

From the classicist perspective, culture is normative, universal and permanent. There is really only one culture, and that is the culture of the West...A person of culture, therefore, has constructed his or her worldview out of the best of Western achievements...From an empiricist perspective, however, culture is defined by a set of meanings and values that inform a way of life.

2004, p.47

In this thesis, I particularly refer to the culture of Great Britain in which The Methodist Church in Britain is set, using the term from the empirical perspective (Bevans and Schroeder, 2004, p.47): that culture is a set of values through which the world is interpreted. Bevans notes that it is not possible to suggest that there is one all-embracing set of cultural values to which all subscribe, he notes that 'there are obviously many such sets throughout the world' (2004, p.11). This would suggest that within the culture of Great Britain there are many sets of values held by groups of people. These may be understood as sub-cultures, set within the sphere of the culture of Great Britain. Stark and Bainbridge (1987, p.63) believe that sub-cultures, or sub-societies, are the result of cleavages within society, through which clusters of people are connected together by shared interests or values. These sub-societies may be particularly evident when comparing generations.

[A] 'generation' refers to a group of people who experience and respond to specific socio-historical conditions in common ways...people growing up, living through and responding to particular historical events, political structures...form a generation with a shared world view.

Savage et al., 2006, p.5

In this way, those born between 1946 and 1963 are typically called the Boomer Generation, those born between 1964 and 1981 are classified as Generation X, and those born from 1982 to 1994¹³ are Generation Y (Savage, et al., 2006 pp.5-8). Each generation has a particular set

¹³ There is some disagreement over the precise years of birth attributed to each generation.

of values which distinguishes them from one-another, thus it is possible to regard Generation Y, for example, as a sub-culture within Great Britain.

This understanding of culture is shared by those scholars who reflect upon fresh expressions. Moynagh, defining culture, draws upon Bevans' work to highlight that there are many sets of values, and he proposes the need to develop a theology which resonates with each set (2012, p.153). Neither *Mission-Shaped Church* nor *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* offer a succinct definition of how each Report uses the term culture; I suggest that these Reports feel that the term would be understood by the majority of their readership. Through reading both Reports, I believe that the use of the term is consonant with Bevans', and subsequently Moynagh's, understanding of culture as referring to a set of beliefs.

Recognising the differences in culture in different geographical areas of Great Britain and amongst groups of people, scholars are aware that western culture is undergoing a paradigm shift, with the prevailing culture labelled 'Postmodernity'. Haight defines Postmodernity in the following way.

A historical consciousness that is deeper and more radical than that of modernity; an appreciation of pluralism that is suspicious of all absolute or universal claims; a consciousness of the social construction of the self that has completely undermined the transcendental ego of modernity and, ironically, encouraged a grasping individualism; a sense of the size, age, complexity and mystery of reality that modern science never even suspected.

2004, p.57

Postmodern culture places greater emphasis upon individual experience over reason; for a postmodern person it is not reason but experience which determines how the world is to be understood. Vanhoozer suggests that attempting to closely define Postmodernity is impossible as 'a definition of postmodernity is as likely to say more about the person offering the definition than it is of "the postmodern"...there are only postmodernities' (2003, p.3). Nevertheless, he attempts to highlight common features of the postmodern, citing four metanarratives (2003, pp.12-13) of which the postmodern are suspicious. The first metanarrative is reason, as the postmodern reject the notion of universal rationality. The second is truth; postmodern people understand truth as subjective. The third metanarrative is history as the postmodern believe that history teaches more about those who write it than the actual events. The final metanarrative is the notion of self as autonomous; postmodern people believe that the notion of self is closely linked to culture, language and gender. Vanhoozer's description of these

metanarratives is somewhat general and fails to recognise that the very nature of Postmodernism's emphasis upon individuality makes general statements redundant. Nevertheless, given this understanding of contemporary culture, one might suggest that if an individual experiences a fresh expression and it makes sense within their experience, it might become their understanding of Church. The same individual may experience another fresh expression which does not fit their experience thus they cannot understand it as Church. Here one finds context highly significant. Lakeland's 1997 exploration of Postmodernity highlights some of the challenges which fresh expressions and traditional churches face. He notes that Postmodernity is 'suspicious of notions of universal reason, and it rejects all metaphysical or religious foundations' (1997, p.xii). He further notes that as the Church no longer holds a position at the centre of society, the moral authority of the Church is 'almost non-existent' (1997, pp.59-60) to those who are not Christian. I believe that the opportunity which Postmodernity presents must be understood in the light of Lakeland's comments: creating an expression of Church will be difficult in a society which rejects metanarratives whilst embracing a variety of realities. Lakeland phrases this challenge as the Postmodern world no longer accepting 'the privileged status of the Christian narrative' (1997, p.86).

The exploration of Postmodernity highlights the primacy of individual experience and choice over reason, and the rejection of metanarratives in favour of experience. Grace Davie, in her exploration of religion in Britain, articulates the implications of a Postmodern worldview for the contemporary Church. First, she recognises a change from a culture of obligation and duty to consumption and choice, noting that individuals no longer feel obliged to attend any church, nor to 'continue [to attend] if they no longer want to' (2015, p.7). This resonates with the Postmodern emphasis on choice; individuals who choose to attend a church, will choose one which they believe meets their needs, or makes sense to them rather than one with which they have had a previous connection. Davie also asserts that in contemporary British society there are 'many and varied forms of the "spiritual"' (2015, p.8) which form a spiritual marketplace from which individuals choose elements which resonate with them. An individual in this spiritual marketplace may, therefore, choose to become part of a fresh expression, but develop no relationship with any traditional church, or may choose to explore spirituality in a way that embraces neither the traditional church nor fresh expressions. Davie's second implication of Postmodernity for the Church is increasing levels of 'secularity...which lead in turn to an inevitable decline in religious knowledge as well as religious belief' (2015, p.12). The rise of secularity also highlights the primacy of choice, as some individuals choose not to engage with the Church at any level, others engage with spirituality outside of the influence of the Church, and some choose to participate with the traditional Church, fresh expressions, or both. A response to this cultural trend is to create expressions of Church which are attractive to

individuals, who thus choose to be part of them, indeed this is an element of fresh expressions that Moynagh (2001, pp.14-16) promotes. Davie also suggests that 'believing without belonging' (2015, p.226) might have a new lease of life in relation to the growth of secularisation, in which the system of membership of traditional churches may need to be reconsidered to appeal to those who do not seek long-term commitment.

Postmodernity represents the changing social context in which the Church of the West is set. Both *Called to Love and Praise* (TMCP, 1999a, p.16) and *Changing Church for a Changing World* (TMCP, 2007, p.17) argue that diversity and changing context have been part of the life of the Church throughout history. *Changing Church for a Changing World* takes this point further to propose that fresh expressions within The Methodist Church in Britain are a natural part of the Church's response to changing culture and an attempt to create models of Church 'in the communities that we do not at present reach' (TMCP, 2007, p.17). Moynagh argues that the challenge of Postmodernity can be addressed by fresh expressions seeking to relate to a specific culture, he argues that

the more a Christian community focusses on the needs and longings of a single context...the better it will serve people in that setting...Newcomers will join the community more readily because it contains people like them.

2012, p.179

The implication of Moynagh's approach would be the creation of fresh expressions that are rooted within a particular culture or sub-culture, in which only those who share the interests of that culture are able to make sense of the experience. Moynagh shares this notion with Donald McGavran who, in proposing the Homogeneous Unit Principle, believed that people 'like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers' (1970, p.198) In essence, there is the potential that a fresh expression, designed to resonate with a Postmodern worldview, becomes a shared interest group, accessible only to a select group of people. I believe that the danger here is that the quest for contextual relevance within the Postmodern society can highlight a strategy to create churches which engage only with 'people who are like us' rather than those that are open to all. Harper and Metzger (2009, p.272) argue that breaking down cultural barriers, rather than reinforcing them, enables many people to access the Church. Indeed, one of McClintock's (1988, p.112) criticisms of the Homogeneous Unit Principle was that there appeared to be no consideration upon how the Homogenous Unit would interact with society beyond its target demographic. I believe that an approach to Postmodernity which only engages in mission to one group of people in a community would not resonate with The Methodist Church in Britain's distinctive emphasis

upon being structured for mission (TMCP, 1999a, p.50) within the context of the whole of Great Britain. It also contradicts one of the ecclesial characteristics of *Called to Love and Praise*, 'a community of all ages, different races, varying backgrounds and occupations – richly diverse, but united around the Lord's Table' (TMCP, 1999a, pp.54-55). This is not to say that culturally appropriate approaches should not be created, but rather that the creation of communities which are so concerned with their own needs that they become insular, leads to communities which are neither structured for mission, nor understood as a church according to *Called to Love and Praise*.

This brings with it a difficult question regarding the way that a church may be defined and, indeed, how a fresh expression may be understood. In a Postmodern society which is so reliant upon experience and subjectivity, can the Church be defined as such simply because those who are a part of it intend it to be so? Can a fresh expression in a Methodist context define itself as a church with no reference to the Methodist metanarrative or normative ecclesiological voice, prioritising instead the espoused or operant voice (Cameron, et al, 2010, pp.53–56)?

Postmodernity offers an opportunity for fresh expressions that are noticeably different from traditional models of church to engage with individuals outside of the sphere of the Church, but also risks the creation of interest groups which deny the variety found in the life of the Church and lack a missional imperative which flows from being structured for mission. Lakeland suggests that the key to developing a Postmodern ecclesiology is found in recognising 'many alternative visions of reality, many different ways of being in the world' (1997, p.112). There is a need for a variety of approaches to relate to Postmodern people, rather than one new approach which may appeal to a select few. Riddell (1997, pp.144-68) explores the decline of the Church in relation to the emerging Postmodern paradigm, urging his readers to develop many new models of church, noting that the criticism of Church must be tempered with suggestions for future development. In this way it is appropriate for fresh expressions and traditional churches to be active in instigating a new model of church within a Postmodern worldview.

In the mid-1980s, in the West, explorations of alternative models of Christian life, worship and church, as responses to cultural changes, have been documented. Gibbs and Bolger (2006, p.30) highlight that in 1986 new missional communities, such as Gen-X churches originating in California, became prominent. This fed into the creation of emerging churches in the early 1990s. They note that this term has applied popularly to

high-profile, youth-orientated congregations that have gained attention on the account of their rapid numerical growth; their ability to attract (or retain) twentysomethings; their contemporary worship, which draws from popular music styles; and their ability to promote themselves to the Christian sub-cultures through websites and by words of mouth.

2006, p.41

From the 1990s to the present day, the emerging church movement has grown, and cannot be understood as one model of Church. As Kimball states, 'there are hundreds and thousands of models of emerging churches...because you can't box-in the emerging church' (2003, p14). While this assertion may be true, Kimball's case studies (2003, pp.101-242) of emerging churches are all centred around a worship experience which takes many forms, including seeker services for those who are not part of a church, and worship using the creative arts. I, therefore, argue that emerging church, as a response to the changing culture of the West, particularly North America (Drane, 2008, p.91), is focused on creating and developing missional communities with an experience of worship as the central act of the community.

Similar explorations of alternative models of Christian life and worship in the United Kingdom have been documented since the late 1980s. Initially 'early experiments were being dubbed "rave worship" because they were borrowing directly from the culture of dance music' (Baker, Gay and Brown, 2003. p.viii). The exploration of new styles of worship in the 1980s highlights how individuals and communities have sought to create an experience which is relevant to their context. The attempt to contextualise worship came to be known as the Alternative Worship movement. The origin of the Alternative Worship movement can be traced to the Nine O'clock Service¹⁴ in Sheffield. Baker, Gay and Brown (2003, p.vii), exploring the origins of the movement, suggest three reasons why alternative worship became popular within the UK, citing innovation in worship, innovation in practice and the opportunity for worship to be enculturated. The Alternative Worship movement shares with the emerging church and Fresh Expressions the notion of creating a contextual experience as a response to changing culture. It can be argued that Alternative Worship in the United Kingdom is one stream which fed into the creation of the Fresh Expressions of Church movement.

The Fresh Expressions movement began with the publication of a Church of England Report, *Mission Shaped Church*, in 2004. The Report

¹⁴ The 'Nine O'clock Service' was an alternative worship service based in St Thomas' Church in Sheffield. It later became an Anglican Church. The service ran for over ten years before closing in scandal during allegations of sexual abuse.

called for new ecclesial communities, what it called fresh expressions of church... They would meet in unusual places at unusual times and help people towards transformed lives via fresh commitment to Christ...it has fanned the development of several thousand 'fresh expressions of church'.

Moynagh, 2017, p.2

As part of a response to the decline in church attendance and the desire to create relevant expressions of church, The Methodist Church in Britain became a partner in the fresh expressions initiative, and the movement that followed was regarded as 'Anglican and Methodist from day one' (Carter and Warren, 2017, p.3). Following this, other denominations and national networks joined as partners in the movement, this includes The Church of Scotland, The Salvation Army, The United Reformed Church and the Baptist Union, 24/7 Prayer, Church Army, Messy Church and others (Fresh Expressions, 2020). *Mission-Shaped Church* (TAC, 2004, pp.29-85) highlights that church planting strategies of the early to mid-1990s and the creation of cell-based churches also contributed to the birth of Fresh Expressions. The contextual approach of fresh expressions, in which an initiative is created as a response to a particular context, contrasts with the model of traditional Methodist church which intentionally seeks to be available to all within a broad context, regardless of any specific culture or sub-culture.

In the years since the Fresh Expressions movement was created, the initiative has spread to several other countries. 'Fresh Expressions is an international movement, with partnerships developing in Canada, New Zealand, Australia and other nations' (Carter and Warren, 2017, p.3). A linked movement, Fresh Expressions US, mirrors the aims of the United Kingdom and employs a team who develop fresh expressions throughout the United States. Croft recognises the impact which the Fresh Expressions movement has had throughout the West, noting that he perceives that fresh expressions vocabulary has had an 'indirect influence' (2008, p.7) upon Roman Catholicism. As a movement, both in the United Kingdom and other countries, fresh expressions continues to grow, as do the number of individual fresh expressions. Indeed, Beck and Acevedo, writing of the growth of fresh expressions, state that 'the Fresh Expressions Movement in the United States is emerging before our eyes' (2020, p.xxviii).

Whilst one can find evidence of fresh expressions linked to The Methodist Church in Britain, it is difficult to locate any initiatives within any of the independent Methodist bodies¹⁵ in the

¹⁵ Such as the Wesleyan Reform Union, The Independent Methodist Church and the Free Methodist Church.

United Kingdom. This is not to say that new initiatives which seek to resonate with contemporary culture are not growing within these denominations, but rather than they are not affiliated with Fresh Expressions and, as such, do not label any initiative as a fresh expression. However, the growth of fresh expressions within the United Methodist Church can be observed, 'Florida was the first conference to enter into a formal partnership with Fresh Expressions US [in 2016]...over three hundred fresh expressions of church have emerged' (Beck and Acevedo, 2020, p.xxviii). The Fresh Expressions US website (Fresh Expressions US, 2020) lists, at the time of writing, a further eight United Methodist Conferences as partners of the movement.

The Fresh Expressions and emerging church movements share a similar emphasis to create expressions of Church which are relevant to contemporary culture. Ruthmary Bond, Fresh Expressions and Evangelism Officer for the Uniting Church of South Australia, suggests that fresh expressions are 'new communities that are started up to specifically be church for those people who are not in church...you may use a different word to explain the same thing like Emerging Church' (2016, p14). Moynagh, however, recognises the shared impetus of both movements and the fluidity of the language used, and refers to both emerging churches and fresh expressions as 'new ecclesial communities' (2017, pp.3-4). John Drane notes the difficulty in attempting to combine fresh expressions and emerging churches in one term, highlighting that 'not every fresh expression would qualify as an emerging church, and not every emerging church would regard itself as a fresh expression' (2008, p.90). He also attempts to discern the difference between the two movements, noting that the emerging church 'is perhaps best described as a...network of networks, and certainly has no overarching organisational structure to compare with Fresh Expressions' (2008, p.90). It is the structure of Fresh Expressions that marks the biggest difference, but the definition which Fresh Expressions have articulated provides boundaries which initiatives must remain within.

In the examination of Fresh Expressions of Church, I believe it is possible to discern two inter-related key principles which run throughout fresh expressions and help in considering the definition: first, fresh expressions are pragmatic approaches to Church and second, fresh expressions are contextual approaches to Church.

Mission-shaped Church (TAC, 2004, pp.43-83) offers several models which might constitute a fresh expression, citing café church, cell church, seeker churches and alternative worship communities amongst others, offering some characteristics of fresh expressions but stopping short of providing a working definition. Thus, any pragmatic response to a perceived need and divergence from a traditional church worship service could be understood as a fresh

expression. Indeed, the parish returns survey of 2004 asked each Church of England parish if they had developed any initiatives which they deemed to be a fresh expression (Croft, 2008, p.8). The emphasis, therefore, was placed upon the parish to determine if their initiative could fit into such an undefined term, consequently fresh expressions were initially defined locally. Montgomery recognises the pragmatic nature of what he calls 'new paradigm churches' as he notes that 'market sensitivity' (2010, p.229) has always been at the heart of religious innovation. Greggs agrees with this, noting that every Church or denomination 'is always in a state of flux, leading either to a new form of church...or a new denomination' (2019, p.xlvii) as they seek to adapt to the prevailing culture. In this way, a pragmatic approach to Church would be simply to ask, 'what will work here' and move to create a fresh expression which fits the recognised need.

Pragmatism which leads to the creation of a fresh expression aimed at a target demographic risks becoming a contemporary version of McGavran's Homogenous Unit. Indeed, Martyn Percy, a Church of England priest and academic, reflecting on the relationship between accepted truths that 'order ecclesial identity, and the more hidden mellifluous and currents that shape the life of the church' (2010, p.1), reflects on fresh expressions, arguing that 'there is no deep difference between the missiology that McGavran advocates and that of the Fresh Expressions movement' (2010, pp.77-78). He further notes (2010, p.78) that one of the strongest criticisms of the Homogeneous Unit Principle was regarding its focus on pragmatism as a missionary strategy which had the potential to 'legitimise ageism, sexism, racism, classism and economic divisiveness' (Percy, 2010, p.78). Percy writes from the perspective of the Church of England asserting that while the pragmatism of fresh expressions does make a 'modest and positive contribution' (2010, p.78) to Church life, he firmly believes that parish ministry, rather than fresh expressions, is the 'cutting edge' (2010, p.78) for the contemporary Church. While Percy's critique is in relation to the Church of England parish system, it applies equally to a Methodist context. The creation of a community which caters exclusively for one group of people would not be the 'community of all ages, different races, varying backgrounds and occupations' (TMCP, 1999a, p.54) which *Called to Love and Praise* asserts is part of a Methodist understanding of the Church.

I argue that there is potential for the creation of Homogenous Units if pragmatism is a driving feature of fresh expressions, this is heightened when a group self-defines as a fresh expression. It is perhaps in the light of this ambiguity that the Fresh Expressions of Church, created as a follow-on to *Mission-shaped Church*, offered a working definition of what constituted a fresh expression which at the time of writing read, 'a fresh expression of church is a new form of church for a fast changing world that serves those outside the existing church,

listens to people and enters their culture, makes discipleship a priority and intentionally forms Christian community' (Fresh Expressions, 2012a). This definition does not offer a tight set of criteria for identifying Christian community, nor for an initiative to be considered as a fresh expression, but seeks to provide a framework within which one can assess an initiative.

This suggests that any project could be understood as church if the pragmatic intention is to form Christian community. Defining a Methodist fresh expression as a church simply because its intention is to form a Christian community would not resonate with the normative ecclesiology of the denomination. It would not fulfil the criteria of *Called to Love and Praise* (TMCP, 1999a, pp.54-5), it may lack the three distinctive Methodist emphases and may not exhibit the elements of *Our Calling* (TMCP, 2000c), and thus would not have a discernible link to the Church Catholic. The intention for any project within Methodism would be to form a Christian community within the life of The Methodist Church in Britain, as part of the Connexion: that is, a Methodist Christian community. Carter notes that a generous acceptance of communities which carry the marks of the Spirit (2002, p.152) is key to Methodism, as such the Methodist Church in Britain would recognise the formation of Christian communities, but for such a community to be understood as a Methodist Christian community it must exhibit each of the distinctive (normative) Methodist emphases of *Called to Love and Praise*, and the four elements of *Our Calling* would be seen in its life. Such a community would also need to exhibit the marks of the Church and maintain connections to other local Methodist churches. This is important as an independent entity is not representative of Methodist ecclesiology which holds that any local manifestation of the church must be linked to the Church Catholic, through both exhibiting Methodist ecclesiological teaching which stems from the marks of the church and the Methodist ecclesiological practice of Connexion.

As commentators have unpacked this definition, this perceived weakness of recognising intention has been recognised and understood as an attempt to balance completely new forms of church and renewed traditional models. 'There is a danger the term will be defined so loosely that anything fits... on the other hand, defining fresh expressions too tightly risks excluding creative forms of church' (Fresh Expressions, 2015a). *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* states that the Fresh Expressions movement suggested further classification of different kinds of fresh expressions. These classifications were pragmatic responses: 'the renewal of existing congregations... reinventing an existing "fringe" group... creating a new Christian community within a single parish or circuit... a large mission initiative spanning several parishes or circuits' (TAC and TMCP, 2012, pp.40-1). The inclusion of the renewal of existing groups as part of fresh expressions indicates that the Fresh Expressions definition does not simply refer to the creation of new churches, but of existing churches

exploring new ways of being. Pragmatism runs throughout the discussion of how to define a fresh expression.

The second theme central to fresh expressions is also linked to pragmatism, in that fresh expressions are pragmatic responses to a particular context. Throughout the literature referring to fresh expressions, a common refrain is that a Postmodern culture requires an innovative approach in order to make sense. Ward comments that 'some changes leave the church marginalised in society and dislocated from its calling... we need a new reformation to renew and refresh our church' (2002, p.1). Fresh Expressions commentators highlight Postmodern culture, with its emphasis upon experience over reason and rejection of metanarratives, as a challenge for the traditional church which is not embedded within Postmodern culture.

The loose definition provided by Fresh Expressions allows the freedom for a community to shape an expression of church which resonates within their own context. This can be understood as contextual theology (Bevans, 1992, p.15) which takes seriously human experience, context and culture as a means through which theology emerges. Thus, fresh expressions emerge out of a particular place and time, remaining rooted to their context. Mobsby recognises this, stating that fresh expressions must 'speak the cultural languages of the current culture' (2006, p.19). *Mission-shaped Church* also identifies the contextual nature of fresh expressions, noting that Fresh Expressions has developed an understanding of 'ekklesia' (TAC, 2004, p.33) to refer to a spiritual community. In this way, the community is recognised as those who hold issues and preferences in common, the fresh expression is therefore contextual to the community. A fresh expression which is truly contextual would grow and develop in line with the community, changing as the needs of the culture and community change. In defining such a fresh expression, a Postmodern or contextual approach would allow the context to define the project, and therefore ask 'what would a fresh expression look like in this community?' Fancourt argues that in his research into Postmodern approaches to church he found

no suggestion...that these leaders simply believed that they needed to be "relevant" in the sense that being popular was more important than being faithful. Rather, the faith was presented as something that existed in dialogue...the world beyond the church.

2013, p.95

This would indicate that a contextual approach to church within Postmodern culture is more than simply providing an experience which attracts individuals to faith, but that faith requires cultural engagement. Indeed, Fancourt believes that throughout history churches have engaged with contemporary culture and through this are able to locate 'the church and its faith in the public square' (2013, p.95); thus, the popularity of fresh expressions is due to engagement with Postmodernity.

Michael Moynagh writing from an evangelical, "low church" perspective, was a member of the Fresh Expressions team in 2012, when he reflected upon the need for contextualisation, believing that only what he calls 'contextual churches' (2012, p.xvi) are able to bridge the gap between everyday life and the church. He furthers his argument by stating that a church can only be involved in the transformation of a culture from within (2012, p.156), asserting 'that one of the most fruitful ways for a church to be contextual is to relate to a specific culture.' (2012, p.179) Moynagh's notion of contextualisation reflects the discussion of Postmodernity above in that it seeks only to make sense within one grouping, highlighting further the similarities between Fresh Expressions commentators and McGavran's Homogenous Unit Principle. For Moynagh, contextualisation cannot be general; a church cannot be relevant to the whole of society, only part of it. I believe that this is one of the issues of dealing with a Postmodern worldview; in seeking to create a new expression of church within one sub-culture, the remainder of society are seemingly ignored or excluded. This is criticized by Percy who suggests that this approach is too preoccupied with 'whatever seems to be new, fresh and alternative' (2010, p.71) relegating faith to a commodity to be consumed. Indeed, *Towards a Common Vision* argues that "emerging churches", which propose a new way of being church, challenge other churches to find ways of responding to today's needs and interests which are faithful to what has been received from the beginning' (WCC, 2013, p.7). However, any new way of being church must continue to be able to be located within the Church Catholic, and for a Methodist expression must exhibit the features of Methodist ecclesiological teaching and practice, to be able to be understood as part of the Church.

The notion of engaging with Postmodernity as a wholly positive approach for the church is not universally accepted. Indeed, Moynagh notes that whilst most theologians would recognise the need for some accommodation of culture; differences of opinion would be focused upon the boundaries: in seeking to be contextual, how far should a church accommodate Postmodern culture? Martyn Percy argues that Fresh Expressions 'may actually be deeply collusive with consumerism' (2010, p.75), pluralism and individualism, 'cloaked in the rhetoric of "alternative", "new" and "fresh" forms of church' (2010, p.73). Andrew Davison, a Church of England priest and tutor in doctrine and Alison Milbank, a priest and professor of literature and

theology, published a critique of Fresh Expressions in 2010. Both authors represent a “high church” position and focus their critique upon the relationship of fresh expressions to the Church of England, prioritising the parish system as the out-working of mission. They articulate a criticism of the way that Fresh Expressions advocate engaging in a contextual response within a Postmodern world:

the movement is a thoroughgoing embrace of postmodernity...their project rests upon an attempt to separate form and content... Here the Fresh Expressions literature ignores one of the more valuable insights of postmodern thought. At the same time, it accepts and even celebrates so many of the mistakes of postmodernity.

2010, pp.117-118

The point which both Percy, and Davison and Milbank, make is that as fresh expressions become immersed within Postmodern culture, seeking to draw upon experiences which will make sense and resonate, they embrace the notion of choice. Consequently, a distance grows between the Church Catholic and the fresh expression. The primacy of a contextual and pragmatic approach within a consumer culture means that the form of church presented within a fresh expression may not carry the same religious demands, or as Percy phrases it, ‘when asked by a lawyer what he had to do to inherit eternal life, Jesus did not reply “well, what works for you?”’ (2020, p.77). I suggest that this is the danger of too loose a definition of what constitutes a fresh expression; if a contextual and pragmatic approach becomes so immersed with the prevailing culture, there is potential for it to stray from the Church Catholic. The primacy of individualism and connection within the context highlights a tension with the normative ecclesiology of Methodism; the Connexional principle, in which all churches are connected to one another outside of their own context and fellowship and shared discipline are preferred to individualism.

The critique of both of the inter-related principles of fresh expressions; pragmatism and the creation of contextual responses, are all from the perspective of the Church of England. There is little critique which stems from a solely Methodist perspective, and while both principles are represented to some degree within contemporary British Methodist ecclesiology, elements of the critique are relevant to fresh expressions within methodism. Pragmatism which removes elements of historic ecclesiological teaching, or Methodist ecclesiological practice, may lead to a fresh expression to jeopardise its relation to the Church Catholic. A contextual response which leads to the creation of a community which is not diverse, would struggle both to be understood as Methodist, or connected to the Church Catholic.

As a new term, the meaning of Fresh Expressions of Church continues to develop and will be understood differently in each context. Nevertheless, defining fresh expressions is ultimately concerned with the identity of both the movement and individual fresh expressions. Percy argues that a part of this difficulty in understanding the nature of fresh expressions is that 'newness and lack of settled identity allow it to point in several directions' (2010, p.76) at the same time. If no definition can be offered which encompasses all fresh expressions and appreciates their nature as a contextual construct, one cannot state what constitutes a fresh expression and thus the movement may struggle to find its identity as a part of the Church. Percy notes that 'the official fresh expressions website is rather coy about ecclesiology. It acknowledges that definitions of the church are "difficult", and that fresh expressions are therefore not easy to define' (2008, p.36). Yet, arguing that definitions are difficult, and refraining from a definition creates a situation where fresh expressions are an unknown entity, which proves a hinderance to the recognition of fresh expressions as churches in their own right.

Successfully articulating a fresh expressions ecclesiology therefore brings several difficulties. The variety of expressions, each with different emphases, means that finding common ground can be problematic. I contend, however, that the youth of fresh expressions is the feature which makes it most difficult to discern; as fresh expressions continue to grow and develop, their ecclesiological understanding changes. Nevertheless, the themes that have been presented here offer an outline of an emerging ecclesiology of fresh expressions which will, no doubt, change as fresh expressions continue develop.

Before moving to contrast the distinctive elements of Methodist and fresh expressions ecclesiology, I note some of the points of tension which have arisen within the discussion of fresh expressions ecclesiology. These tensions arise because fresh expressions are relatively young and because of the variety of initiatives seen. Shier-Jones recognises one of the tensions:

the communities which they gather together... may feel more "holy" when... the worship offered deliberately stimulates the spiritual senses, but this should not be mistaken for the holiness that is a characteristic of the church.

2009, p.10

This tension can exist between fresh expressions and the traditional church, where those involved in fresh expressions believe the traditional church to be an inferior expression of faith; yet can also exist between different fresh expressions, where both may believe that their

particular expression is the most holy. Perhaps the issue that this tension raises is not specifically related to which expression is more holy, but more the way that many fresh expressions and those involved in them are unable to relate to the traditional understanding of church: churches which provide resources and thus effectively sustain the fresh expression. *Towards a Common Vision* suggests that the 'legitimate diversity [of the Church] is compromised whenever Christians consider their own cultural expressions of the Gospel as the only authentic ones' (WCC, 2013, p.16). In this way, fresh expressions may move away from a connection to the Church Catholic and an understanding that their community is part of the diversity of the Church.

Some commentators suggest that fresh expressions are made up of people who share interests; Williams (2007, p.28) indicates that the fresh expressions she studied within the Church of England were predominantly led and attended by Christians who were unhappy with a traditional model of Church and sought to start a church which better suited them. Should this be true of fresh expressions, the resulting fresh expressions would resemble interest groups rather than churches, only attracting those who share similar interests. This was highlighted by Frances, Clymo and Robbins (2014, pp.252–67), who suggest that fresh expressions attract a higher proportion of people with intuitive, extrovert and perceiving personality types than traditional churches. Davison and Milbank (2010, p.231), writing prior to the above suggest that fresh expressions which are based on interest groups do not represent the variety of the church, they have the capacity to become somewhat insular as they are only attractive to those who share the interest.

2.4 Methodist and Fresh Expressions Ecclesiology Analysed

I will now analyse the ecclesiological features of Fresh Expressions in the light of contemporary Methodist ecclesiology. Alongside each distinctive Methodist feature, I will explore how the same may be reflected with an emerging fresh expressions ecclesiology, to understand how the formal and normative ecclesiology of the denomination and fresh expressions are compatible. These ecclesiological features will be considered using the three distinctive Methodist emphases proposed by *Called to Love and Praise*; the Connexional principle, fellowship and shared discipline, and being structured for mission (TCMP, 1999a, p.50).

Here I will draw upon the work of a range of authors who represent the formal scholarship of Methodism and fresh expressions, to discuss the shared ecclesiological resonances and tensions.

2.4.1 The Connexional Principle

The Connexional principle expresses the nature of the whole Church, argues *Called to Love and Praise* (TMCP, 1999a, p.48). It reflects a Methodist understanding of the way that the members of the Church Catholic, relate to one another. Beck proposes that the Connexional principle is analogous to the Church Catholic, stating the following.

A claim to catholicity is a claim both to belong to the church universal, in its historic succession and its contemporary spread... it is hard to see how such a claim can be made with integrity unless 'belonging' has the implication of being bound by a network of mutual obligation and jurisdiction.

2018, p.59

I, therefore, begin the exploration of the first distinctive Methodist emphasis by comparing catholicity as an element of the ecclesiology of The Methodist Church in Britain and fresh expressions.

2.4.1.1 Catholicity

The Methodist Church in Britain regards itself as part of the Church Catholic, 'those on earth and in heaven who have been called by God, through Jesus Christ, to be his people, and who share the unity that the Spirit gives' (TMCP, n.d., p.20). This echoes the *Deed of Union*, which states that 'The Methodist Church claims and cherishes its place in the Holy Catholic Church' (TMCP, 2020, p.213). This suggests that an element of Methodist ecclesiology is embodied in the understanding of its place within the Church Catholic. The *Deed of Union* continues to identify the particular role of Methodism within the Church Catholic stating 'Methodism was raised up to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land...and declares its unfaltering resolve to be true to its divinely appointed mission' (TMCP, 2020, p.213). *Called to Love and Praise* (TMCP, 1999a, p.22) further reinforces the traditional understanding of Methodism's distinctive place within the Church Catholic. This represents an important element of Methodist ecclesiology, as Carter states: 'Methodism rejoices in its distinctiveness as a gift given precisely to be shared within the yet richer and wider fellowship of the Church Catholic' (2002, p.155). Carter explores the way that Methodism recognises many other communities as being part of the Church Catholic, illustrating that the Church accepts other traditions as valid expressions of faith and is willing to accept ordination and the ministry of the laity of other traditions which are in communion with the Methodist Church. To be in communion with the Methodist Church, the following is expected of a church.

[A Church] (a) claims to be an expression of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church...(b) recognises other Christian communities...as belonging to the body of Christ...(c) accepts the Trinitarian faith...(d) acknowledges the authority of the holy scriptures...(e) recognises and practices the two biblical sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper...(f) possesses a (presbyteral) ministry of word and sacrament to which candidates are ordained for life...(g) does not...repudiate the standards of personal and social ethics which...the Church of Jesus Christ is called to uphold...(h) is willing to receive a Methodist minister by transfer, without further ordination.¹⁶

TMCP, 1993, p.284

This recognition of ministers from other traditions stems from Methodism's understanding that the body of Christ is expressed through many traditions, in the 'legitimate diversity' (WCC, 2013, p.22) which *Towards a Common Vision* asserts is a gift from God. This can be seen in *Called to Love and Praise* which states, 'The Methodist church has always understood itself to be part of the whole Church of Christ...[and] offers its distinctive contribution to the wider church' (TMCP, 1999a, p.32).

The catholicity of The Methodist Church in Britain is presented as one of the primary features of contemporary Methodism by Methodist theologians Craske and Marsh (1999, p.182). Whilst Langford does not propose catholicity as a defining element, his work implies that The Methodist Church in Britain is part of the whole Church, by highlighting its ecumenical commitment (1998, p.96). Carter recognises The Methodist Church in Britain's catholicity as he reflects that Methodism is willing to embrace those parts of the universal Church which 'carry the marks of the Spirit' (2002, p.152). Although Langford and Carter do not articulate catholicity as a particular ecclesiological element, their work accepts this as a reality; The Methodist Church in Britain is an established Church and, as such, part of the Church Catholic. It is important to recognise Methodism's view of its place within the Church Catholic as a contemporary ecclesiological feature, whilst acknowledging that some other Churches may find difficulties with certain features of Methodist ecclesiology.¹⁷ The ecclesiological position described above would suggest that Methodism, in seeking to recognise other Churches and

¹⁶ These criteria are part of the 1993 Report on the *Criteria for the Transfer of Ministers* and concern transfers of Methodist ministers *to* other churches and the transfer of ministers *from* other churches which are in communion with The Methodist Church in Britain.

¹⁷ For example, the 2014 Joint Implementation Committee Report, *The Challenge of the Covenant*, suggested that major steps in the Anglican Methodist Covenant would be a common profession of faith, the sharing of one baptism and eucharist and the reconciling and interchangeability of ministry (TMCP, 2014a).

be recognised as a Church, follows established ecclesial patterns which can be observed in the definition offered by the WCC, which stated that

most Christians could agree that the local church is a community of baptised believers in which the word of God is preached, the apostolic faith confessed, the sacraments are celebrated, the redemptive work of Christ for the world witnessed, and a ministry of episcopate exercised by bishops or other ministers.

WCC, 2013, p.17

The above demonstrates that fundamental to Methodist ecclesiology is its belief that it is part of the diversity, and unity of the Church Catholic, and offers a unique contribution as one Church amongst many. Within this, the Church believes its structures to be pragmatic as it seeks to respond, through the Conference, to the developing needs of the whole Church.

2.4.1.2 Catholicity and Fresh Expressions

To provide a framework to consider the catholicity of fresh expressions, I first turn to *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*, which proposes criteria that must be present in any community for it to be understood as a church.

1. A community of people who are called by God to be committed disciples of Jesus Christ and to live out their discipleship in the world;
2. A community that regularly assembles for Christian worship and is then sent out into the world to engage in mission and service;
3. A community in which the Gospel is proclaimed in ways that are appropriate to the lives of its members;
4. A community in which the Scriptures are regularly preached and taught;
5. A community in which Baptism is conferred in appropriate circumstances as a rite of initiation into the church;
6. A community that celebrates the Lord's Supper;
7. A community where pastoral responsibility and presidency at the Lord's Supper is exercised by the appropriate authorised ministry;
8. A community that is united to others through: mutual commitment; spiritual communion; structures of governance, oversight and communion; and an authorised ministry in common.

TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.114

The list above is the Report's statement of the elements required for a community to be regarded as a church. It is worth noting that this fails to recognise several Christian bodies as churches, as they do not fit their criteria. For example, the Salvation Army, which does not celebrate the sacraments, cannot be understood as a church in the light of the above. Yet as the Report proposes these criteria, it does not mention the existence of these other Christian bodies, nor reflect, as Carter does, that within Methodist ecclesiology there is a 'generous recognition of all communities that clearly carry the marks of the Spirit' (2002, p.152). This raises a question regarding how far the elements which are proposed as requirements for a community to be a church are transferrable from a traditional church to a fresh expression context. My exploration of fresh expressions' contextual and pragmatic approach to a Postmodern context indicates that the imposition of a series of criteria would not be recognised as a way to engage contextually, but would represent a list of what the institution of the Church does, which is not necessarily transferable to a fresh expression context. Indeed, Andrew Dunlop, Church of England priest and tutor in pioneering makes this point, writing:

while I affirm the importance of each of the practices on the lists, they can come across as one-dimensional and can fail to capture the essence, feeling and relationship involved in the church...Christians struggle to agree on what these practices should look like.

2018, p.56

Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church implicitly reflects on this stating the following.

If a fresh expression can properly be said to be 'a church', then it must contain the fullness of the universal church and thus contain everything that is required to sustain a spiritual and sacramental life...If a fresh expression cannot properly be said to be a church, then it must lack the fullness of the universal church and thus lack some of the essential elements.

TAC and TMCP, 2012, pp.7-8

This notion resonates with Methodist ecclesiology, which holds that no local church can contain in and of itself the fullness of the Universal Church¹⁸, this is only possible through churches being connected to one another. This ecclesiological teaching is shared with the WCC, which argues that 'each local church contains the fullness of what it is to be the Church, it is wholly church, but not the whole Church' (WCC, 2013, p.18). Thus, only by being in

¹⁸ For Universal Church I will use the term Church Catholic.

Connexion with all other Methodist churches and in ecumenical relationships can catholicity be expressed. *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.160) recognises this, noting that concrete relationships with other Christian communities are essential in revealing the fullness of the Church Catholic. To follow this, no fresh expression or traditional church can contain in itself the fullness of the Church Catholic but, through its place in the Connexion and communion with other Christian churches, can take its place within the Church Catholic. I suggest that many involved in fresh expressions would be confident of their place in the Church Catholic, even without being able to fulfil all of the required criteria. Nevertheless, there is tension around the way Church is defined. Some would suggest that the Church is an institution and has certain requirements which must be met (TMCP, 1999a, pp.54-55); others believe the Church to be the communion of believers, which requires only faith (Dulles, 2002, pp.36-54); however, this belief is not held within normative Methodist ecclesiology.

Fresh expressions appear vastly different to traditional churches, yet Giles (1996, p.11) believes that there is importance in the Church being able to identify with the historic faith of which it is a part. As such, a new community should not choose elements of the historic faith which appeal whilst rejecting those which do not. It is this notion, which might be termed a selective ecclesiology, that has caused some commentators to suggest that fresh expressions lack 'many of the essential ecclesial elements that make them recognisable as churches' (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.7).

A tenet of the emerging ecclesiology of fresh expressions is the belief that fresh expressions are part of the Church Catholic through their connections to other Christian communities. These connections may be evident when the fresh expressions are within a circuit, or parish for example; this is the view presented in *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.111). Yet there are some tensions present in the discussion of the required elements for a community to be regarded as a church in its own right. This highlights a sense of friction between a contemporary Methodist understanding of the place of a Methodist church within the Church Catholic, as a community which expresses the marks of the Church and a fresh expression, which is not recognised as a church in its own right.

2.4.1.3 Ecumenism

Closely linked to Methodism's recognition of the Church Catholic, is the ecumenism prominent in its ecclesiological Statements and practice. Angela Shier-Jones (2005, p.261) highlights that Methodism's approach to 'foreign' missions changed in 1933, when the Conference recommended removing the word 'foreign', revealing the position of the Methodist Church that

all people were part of one family of God. The Methodist Church in Britain then began to receive mission partners, rather than only send them. Shier-Jones suggests that this is indicative of British Methodism's ecumenical ecclesiology which 'rejoices in the diversity of faith that such partners bring' (2005, p.261). The Methodist Missionary Society, beginning in 1813 as the Wesleyan Missionary Society was, for many years, the sending body for overseas mission. The Methodist Conference of 2013 resolved to wind up the society, with the Methodist Council taking responsibility for fulfilling its responsibilities; the Report to the Conference stated 'mission is one, whether in one's own part of the world or another' (TMCP, 2013b, p.3). This can be understood to provide a stronger emphasis upon The Methodist Church in Britain's ecumenical mission, as it is no longer a separate body but the whole Church which engages in mission.

Although Shier-Jones referred specifically to British Methodism's attitude towards overseas mission, I would suggest that this ecumenical openness can also be seen in the way that Methodism engages with other Christian traditions, reflecting The Methodist Church in Britain's understanding of itself as part of the Church Catholic. Carter believes that within Methodist ecclesiology there is an 'emphasis upon a generous recognition of all communities that clearly carry the marks of the Spirit as true churches' (2002, p.152). British Methodism's recognition of other Churches is a key facet of its ecclesiology. Carter suggests that an 'independent ecclesiology' (2002, p.152) is inadequate as other traditions are as much part of the Church Catholic as The Methodist Church in Britain. Wilson echoes this in relation to understanding faith, 'Methodism can freely look in every place and every context...with the expectation of meeting God...we need the conversation of others if we are to make sense of it' (2011, p.174). This ecumenical conversation indicates a recognition of the worth of other ecclesial traditions in interpreting faith. The implication here is that Methodist ecclesiology is limited and somewhat defective without the contribution of the Church Catholic. Given Methodism's understanding of itself as a theologically broad Church, I would suggest that this is an accurate representation of the ecumenical openness which is a part of the historical and contemporary expression of The Methodist Church in Britain. In his reflection upon contemporary trends within Methodism, Langford states that 'Methodist theology is characterised by ecumenical openness' (1998, p.78). He argues that before the union, Methodism in Britain was willing to affirm other Christian ecclesial traditions but became filled with a desire to work towards a wider unity, following Methodist Union in 1932 (1998, p.86). Langford's comments agree with the commentators above in demonstrating that ecumenical openness remains a key element of the ecclesiology of The Methodist Church in Britain.

Carter (2002, p.110) suggests that Methodism's ecumenical openness relies upon the marks of the Church being present within a Christian community for it to be understood as a church. Beck argues that *koinonia* is the key to ecumenical relationships, stating that 'the unity to which we are called is not a blending of structures...but the drawing of human beings... into the life of God' (2018, p.73). For Beck, ecumenism requires recognising differences but continuing to share in relationships because of the faith which unites. Thus, The Methodist Church in Britain recognises other Christian communities as valid expressions of Christianity. However, for a community to be recognised as a Methodist Christian community, it would need to carry not just the marks of the Church but the distinctive Methodist emphases of *Called to Love and Praise* (TMCP, 1999a, p.50) and manifest the elements of *Our Calling*. Thus, there is a difference in considering the ecclesial identity of communities which are outside of British Methodism and those which are within it.

Munsey-Turner, a Methodist presbyter and former theological tutor, suggests that Methodism's ecumenical vision must remain a part of its ecclesiology. He argues that features of the contemporary Church must be cooperation and trust, that each church must be willing to 'ensure that their own contribution is a part of a co-ordinated Christian effort' (1998, p.90). To follow this argument is to suggest that contemporary Methodist ecclesiology provides a point from which to engage in ecumenical conversation; each local church is able to work within its strengths, accepting the ministry of other traditions as part of the Church Catholic. The joint Report, *An Anglican Methodist Covenant* makes a similar claim stating, 'the church's witness to...divine harmony is distorted when it is itself divided' (TAC and TMCP, 2001, p.33), indicating that The Methodist Church in Britain understands ecumenism as a necessary dynamic in the Church.

On the basis of this literature and the normative Statement of The Methodist Church in Britain, I contend that ecumenism is fundamental to Methodist ecclesiology; Methodism, as part of the Church Catholic, seeks to be open to the possibilities which ecumenical relationships bring. Indeed, the exploration of Methodism's ecumenical ecclesiology echoes the understanding that Methodist ecclesiology is in itself defective without the contribution of, and its place within, the Church Catholic.

2.4.1.4 Ecumenism in Fresh Expressions

The Fresh Expressions of Church movement is multi-denominational, the website states that 'the Fresh Expressions organisation exists to encourage and support the fresh expressions movement, working with Christians from a variety of denominations...[which] now involves an unparalleled range of partners' (Fresh Expressions, 2015). Clearly, Fresh Expressions

recognises the value of ecumenical relations and, therefore, maintains relationships with many denominations, which are of benefit to the organisation in their ability to resource local fresh expressions through sharing of expertise from a variety of denominations. However, where *Called to Love and Praise* recognises throughout the Report the importance of local and national ecumenical relationships as part of Methodist ecclesiology, the same is not easily found within the Fresh Expressions literature. This is noted in *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* which states 'the question remains as to whether and how fresh expressions can embrace the ecumenical agenda' (2012, p.121). The implication of this is that fresh expressions struggle to embrace ecumenism. I would argue that the nature of fresh expressions as contextual approaches may lead to ecumenical relationships being overlooked as other Churches do not share the same context and, therefore, do not connect with the fresh expressions' particular community, this is particularly evident in the case study of Fresh Expression D.

In relation to outlining an emerging ecclesiology of fresh expressions, the questions that must be reflected upon are: how far the importance of ecumenical relationships is brought into each local fresh expression and to what extent fresh expressions work with other Christian communities in their ongoing mission? In providing an introduction, *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* states that 'fresh expressions are intended to be new forms of church within one of the historic churches in Britain' (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.3), rather than independent entities. Linking fresh expressions with historic churches provides an opportunity for the ecumenical relationships which already exist between established churches to be explored by fresh expressions. In this way, Fresh expressions within The Methodist Church in Britain benefit from the ecumenical relationships that are present within circuits and districts, providing a starting point for developing relationships with other churches.

A criticism of the engagement of fresh expressions with other churches was highlighted by Percy who suggests that there is a danger that fresh expressions seek to

avoid the 'C' word, with a relentless appeal to another 'C' word. Its fine to talk about Christianity: but church is boring, cumbersome, institutional...without the institution of the church, all we'll have left is multi-choice spirituality, individualism and innovation.

2008, p.39

The implication is that ecumenical relationships between fresh expressions and the institutional Church are one-sided, with the fresh expression benefiting from the resources

available yet contributing little in return. Ward states that contemporary culture must 'shift from seeing church as a gathering of people...to a notion of church as a series of relationships and communications' (2002, p.2). If one understands ecumenism as a series of relationships and communications between churches, rather than structural links, a fresh expression which understands church in such terms would be inherently ecumenical. However, the perceived negativity towards the traditional Church within fresh expressions makes relationships difficult; this can be seen in the reflections of John Walker, in his examination of Fresh Expressions from a Church of England perspective, regarding two fresh expressions practitioners.

For Ward, only liquid church has the adaptability and flexibility to respond adequately to the challenges and opportunities of communicating the Gospel...For Mobsby, only the emerging/emergent church is able to slough off the damaging inheritance of Christendom and shape itself to respond.

2014, p.217

Liquid church, as Ward describes it, is focused upon informal fellowship around spiritual activities, requiring no weekly meeting, whilst emphasising the need to live as Christians in the world. Liquid church does not remove the need for worship and meeting together, but these are decentred. Vital to liquid church is the need to move away from an understanding and practice of Church as an institution, to relationships between individuals (Ward, 2002, p.2). Emerging church, as Mobsby employs the term, is more akin to the understanding of fresh expressions presented in this chapter. He notes that 'it has a number of synonymous labels, and internationally the phrase "emerging church" is more widely understood. It approximates to a grouping of the experimental typology listed in the *Mission Shaped Church Report*' (2007, p.31). Both liquid church and emerging church, or fresh expressions, are concerned with offering a contextual response; liquid church in dispensing with the institutional Church in favour of people-based groupings, and emerging church/fresh expressions which are particularly aimed at creating a contextual response to Postmodernity. Liquid church and emerging church (fresh expressions) represent differing approaches to responding to culture. Indeed, Mobsby (2006, p.20) believes that fresh expressions and liquid church are not dissimilar. This highlights a tension between contextual responses: liquid church or fresh expressions, and traditional churches; Walker further notes that both accept the need for a mixed economy of traditional churches and contextual approaches, but as an 'interim measure' (2012, p.218). The nature of a contextual approach might also indicate that two fresh expressions would have little in common as they are embedded in particular contexts and so would not enter into ecumenical relationships as they would not make sense within another context. For The Methodist Church in Britain the mixed economy means that within a circuit,

both traditional churches and fresh expressions can stand alongside one another indefinitely, for Fresh Expressions the mixed economy will exist for a limited time as Walker (2012, p.218) notes. The different approaches evident both between different fresh expressions, and between fresh expressions and the traditional Church suggests that any relationship could be strained, and thus ecumenical relationships may be difficult to maintain.

As the Fresh Expressions organisation represents a variety of denominations, Eleanor Williams, a Church of England priest, states that 'there is nothing within the [fresh expressions] phrase that links it to a particular ecclesiology, denomination or churchmanship. Maybe this is why it has captured imaginations and given some a sense of freedom to initiate their own fresh expression' (2007, p.22). This lack of a link to any particular denomination or ecclesiology indicates that ecumenism would not be regarded as highly as the need to maintain a sense of neutrality from the influence of any Church, so as not to hinder imagination. Williams writes from a Church of England perspective, but applies her comments to the Fresh Expressions movement, rather than just those fresh expressions which are linked to Church of England parishes.

There is clearly an ecumenical dimension to the ecclesiology of fresh expressions, but this is perhaps exhibited in terms of denominations sponsoring and resourcing fresh expressions rather than mutual development. This can be seen in the Fresh Expressions local hubs and networks (Fresh Expressions, 2019) which enable practitioners who represent different denominations to meet and share resources and training.

Whilst there is an ecumenical dimension to fresh expressions, it is clear from the fresh expressions literature that ecumenism is not fundamental to an emerging ecclesiology of fresh expressions in the way that I have demonstrated it is within the ecclesiology of The Methodist Church in Britain, as a representation of the unity of the Church. Within fresh expressions there does not appear to be the same recognition of the variety of other Christian bodies as essential to the whole Church, the ethos of fresh expressions may be understood as largely post-denominational. Indeed, the provisional view of the mixed economy noted above suggests a view that other Christian bodies will, eventually, be replaced by fresh expressions. Nevertheless, fresh expressions which are within a circuit will continue to benefit from the ecumenical relationships which exist in their context.

2.4.1.5 Connexion

The most recognisable feature of The Methodist Church in Britain is its interconnected structure, the Connexion. Connexion was a term commonly used in the eighteenth century to refer to connections between people or groups.

The 'Connexion' came to be in some senses equivalent to 'denomination' and, later, to 'church', and 'connexionalism' was descriptive of a particular principle and pattern of church life which emphasised the interdependence of the constituent parts... this common principle continues to be intrinsic to Methodism.

Vickers, 2000, p.77

Connexionalism is the interdependence of local churches, formed into circuits, and districts within the Connexion. *Called to Love and Praise* asserts that Connexion 'enshrines a vital truth about the nature of the church...a mutuality and interdependence...the principle is fundamental' (TMCP, 1999a, p.48). The definition of Connexion is broad and wide-ranging, Richey, writing from the perspective of the United Methodist Church, suggests:

Connection and Connectionalism¹⁹ have had multiple, complex, interlacing, changing meanings. The terms designate Methodism's origins; relationships that existed between the preachers and peoples and between them and Mr Wesley; ordained ministerial status and conference membership; conference structures that governed; whatever the actions or measures or processes that held the movement together.

2009, p.211

Richey's belief is that the principle of Connexion is at the heart of Methodism, including the United Methodist Church and British Methodism, through which the nature of the Church can be seen. This connexional principle forms the structure of The Methodist Church in Britain, and is also reflected by the nature in which each local Methodist church is part of one Church. Therefore, the structure of the Connexion also reflects the Methodist view of the Church Catholic as many churches, which together form the one Church. Beck articulates this notion as follows.

The connexional principle that denies autonomy to the local church applies equally to the Conference in its relations to both ecumenical partners in this country and to

¹⁹ Richey uses the United Methodist spelling of Connection, rather than The Methodist Church in Britain's Connexion.

other embodiments of the church outside Great Britain...partnership is not by matter of choice but of obligation.

2018, p.63

As Methodism engages in dialogue with other Churches, as part of the Church Catholic, it can also be seen to express its desire for inter-church relationships through its own connexional structure. The *Deed of Union* states that a local church can be defined as 'the whole body of members of the Methodist Church connected with and attending one particular place of worship' (TMCP, 2020, p.209), noting the essential connection to a larger body, as a local church is constituted of members of the Methodist Church who meet locally. Methodist Standing Order²⁰ 600 also recognises that a local church is connected to the Connexion, arguing that the local church engages in all aspects of ministry 'in union with the ministry of the circuit of which it is a part' (TMCP, 2020, p.516). In defining a local church this way, The Methodist Church in Britain indicates that a part of the ecclesial identity of a Methodist church is found in its place in the Connexion: without being part of the mutual accountability and interdependence of the Connexion, a community cannot be a Methodist church. In this way the nature of each local church, sharing fellowship and accountability, mirrors the way that the Church Catholic engages in relationships whilst retaining denominational identity.

Carter, however, claims that The Methodist Church in Britain's connexionalism faces a challenge from the United Methodist Church. This perceived challenge centres upon the extent to which connexionalism should be confined to a particular nation or territory, stating, 'American Methodism practices "global" connexionalism...American Methodists can ask...why the British Methodist concept of connexionalism seems to stop at national frontiers' (2002, p.151). Carter's argument is that British Methodism does not maintain mutual accountability with Methodism outside of the Connexion. The Methodist Church in Britain's Connexion is tighter than the United Methodist Church's connection, as it is not influenced by countries other than England, Scotland and Wales, but it continues to have links with various autonomous Methodist Conferences which were formerly part of British Methodism's overseas missions. Indeed, the *Deed of Union* (TMCP, 2020, pp.203-17) states that autonomous conferences may be appointed as associate members of the Conference. In this way, British Methodism remains connected to the world-wide Methodist denomination.

The Methodist Church in Britain 'commends this [connexional] principle to other churches...acknowledging that connexionalism is compatible with the patterns of ministry

²⁰ Hereafter SO.

treasured by other traditions' (TMCP, 1999a, p.49). Richey (2009, p.212), writing from a United Methodist Church perspective, suggests that contemporary Methodists emphasise the Church's connexional nature more than their predecessors. He suggests the reason for this is that the Connexion has enabled the contemporary Methodist Church to rediscover its initial self-understanding and apply it to their own context. Whilst Richey is referring to the United Methodist Church, his comments can be understood in the context of British Methodism. The Connexion provides a structure for the Church and offers an understanding of the nature of the Church; Connexionalism expresses the interdependent nature of Methodism.

2.4.1.6 Connexion in Fresh Expressions

The Fresh Expressions organisation is not solely linked to Methodism, but to many other denominations,²¹ as such it does not hold exclusively to Methodist ecclesiology. As this thesis is focused upon fresh expressions in a Methodist context, it is important for this study to reflect upon how fresh expressions may or may not reflect Methodist structures and the principles of Connexionalism. One would expect that fresh expressions that are set within established Churches to reflect the structures of that Church, it may be that fresh expressions use a different vocabulary for Connexion, but employ similar principles.

As I have noted earlier, *Fresh Expression in the Mission of the Church* states that 'if a fresh expression can properly be said to be "a church", then it must contain the fullness of the universal Church' (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.7). This notion of a single church being able to contain the fullness of the universal Church is alien to Methodist ecclesiology, which holds that the fullness of the Church is found through being in Connexion, the 'dynamic relation with other churches' (WCC, 2013, p.18) that *Towards a Common Vision* suggests is necessary for every local church. Walker recognises this as he states that no fresh expression could contain the fullness of the Church Catholic in itself, he writes, 'none can represent the whole range of possibilities, however; only together can they do this' (2014, p.224). If the fullness of the Church Catholic concerns the representation of the whole spectrum of theological and ecclesiological ideologies in one local body, then it is clear that no single local church or fresh expression could contain such a variety. Walker (2012, p.224) clarifies this by noting the danger in attempting to classify any particular expression as 'the' rather than 'a' true expression of Christianity, which may lead to a fresh expression being seen to hold the fullness of the Church. The fullness of the Church can only be found through relationships and connections with other churches, fresh expressions or communities.

²¹ The Church of England, The Church of Scotland, The United Reformed Church, The Salvation Army and the Baptist Union.

Connections between fresh expressions is argued for by *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*, which states that 'the Fresh Expressions initiative does not intend to encourage the establishment of Christian communities that are independent...the real issue here concerns how to ensure that fresh expressions remain accountable' (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.131). The language which Fresh Expressions uses to describe this desire for connections would not be the language of Connexion. Fresh Expressions explores this concept of connectedness further on their website, 'even a tiny fresh expression can be church if it is well connected to the whole body of Christ' (Fresh Expressions, 2015a). I suggest that such connections are intended to be a feature of all fresh expressions, as the connectedness enables them to bear the marks of the Church that a separate entity would struggle to hold.

A connection to other fresh expressions or churches may also bring tension, for example, 'a fresh expression in a Methodist circuit results in a flourishing ministry to young people. Should that fresh expression be regarded as a youth work project of the circuit or as a church' (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.4). Being connected and accountable outside of one's own community means that some control over certain aspects of the life of the fresh expression may be held by others. Shared accountability and control mean that a fresh expression must share in conversation concerning theology and ecclesiology with the bodies to which it is connected. Thus, it would not be free to decide upon a theological or ecclesiological position that could exclude them from either the denomination or indeed the Church Catholic, without being aware of the consequences. The tension which shared accountability causes may be related to the way in which Postmodernity is reflected within fresh expressions; a Postmodern fresh expression may not recognise, or may reject, the metanarrative which mutual accountability brings. However, Walker (2014, p.228) understands this in terms of the need for fresh expressions and traditional churches to bring challenge and renewal to one another. I suggest that connections to other communities brings challenge and renewal but also enables one community to highlight when it is felt that another has gone astray; this is a clear link to the first and second distinctive emphases of *Called to Love and Praise* (TMCP, 1999a, p.50), the connexional principle and fellowship and shared discipline.

Connectedness is a prominent feature of emergent fresh expressions ecclesiology, and indeed is a feature of Postmodern culture as those who share a particular belief gather together; connection in this way reflects the principle of Connexion. A fresh expression in a Methodist circuit would need to be connected to the other churches of the circuit, as in

SO600²² and the *Deed of Union*. This is where some tension may become evident due to the mutual accountability as discussed above.

2.4.2 Fellowship and Shared Discipline

The second distinctive Methodist emphasis asserted by *Called to Love and Praise* is fellowship and shared discipline, which stems from Methodism's societal past in which mutual accountability and discipline were important. I begin by considering the nature of ministry within The Methodist Church in Britain.

2.4.2.1 The Priesthood of all Believers and Ministry

Called to Love and Praise devotes significant space to exploring how the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is part of the nature of Methodism. This reflects *The Deed of Union*, which states that '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' (TMCP, 2020, p.213). This doctrine stems from the Protestant Reformation. The Reformers held that each believer can be in a direct relationship with God. Therefore, the need for a priest to be the link between God and the people is erased; 'Luther broke decisively with the traditional division of the church into two classes, clergy and laity. Every Christian is a priest by virtue of his [sic] Baptism' (George, 1988, p.96). Noting that Methodism was born from the Anglican tradition, rather than directly from the Reformers, *Called to Love and Praise* notes that 'Wesley clearly espoused the general Reformation view in an Anglican form, which continued, with modifications, into the Wesleyan tradition' (TMCP, 1999a, p.45). The Report asserts that 'Methodism continues strongly to affirm the ministry of the whole people of God...it hardly ever denotes "laypeople" as distinct from "leaders" or "presbyters"' (TMCP, 1999a, p.44). Moving to explore how the ministry of the whole people of God can be reconciled with presbyteral ministry, *Called to Love and Praise* argues that

all have the same standing before God, but not all have the same office. Office is given, first, by God's call and then by the commission of the whole community. The Protestant reformers rejected the priestly style of presbyteral ministry.

TMCP, 1999a, p.45

In holding this doctrine, The Methodist Church in Britain believes that ordination 'does not confer any special priestly powers on the minister, who is neither more or less a priest than

²² SO600 sets out the nature of the local church within The Methodist Church in Britain as connected to the circuit as it engages in mission and ministry (TMCP, 2020, p.516).

any other Christian' (TMCP, 1999a, p.46). The Methodist Church in Britain, therefore, asserts that priesthood is held by the body of believers; all have direct access to God through Christ. This doctrine rejects a priestly style of ministry, as one who mediates between God and God's people, promoting the belief that all have the same standing before God. Carter suggests that the Methodist view and practice of the priesthood of all believers demonstrates that grace is not dependent upon 'the sacramental ministrations of...presbyters' (2002, p.124).

Beck, recognising that the priesthood of all believers was not a term often used in the early Methodist groups, highlights this tension in relation to some non-Wesleyan Methodist bodies of 1790 to 1850 which believed that the Wesleyans exercised

'priestly domination' ...and asserted against it the freedom and right of every member of the church to exercise whatever ministry God might from time to time call them to, and to take an equal share in decisions about the church's governance, but they did not seem to have expressed it in the theological language of universal priesthood.
2018, p.95

Thus, the priesthood of all believers was included within Doctrinal Standards in the *Deed of Union* to 'meet non-Wesleyan fears about the status of the ministry' (Beck, 2018, p.95). The Methodist understanding and articulation of this doctrine has evolved over time. Nevertheless, through its ecclesial structures, The Methodist Church in Britain makes its conviction clear, though it may also be true that The Methodist Church in Britain has not been able to express this doctrine completely in its operant ecclesiology.

The Conference Report *What is a Presbyterian?* highlights the Methodist understanding of the Presbyterate in the light of this doctrine: 'the particular ministries of presbyters...can only be understood within this context...expressing and enabling the ministry of the whole people of God...all Methodist ministers...represent God-in-Christ and the community of the church' (TMCP, 2002). The ordination of presbyters is also important when considering the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. The 1974 Report *Ordination* states 'the act of making...a minister is performed by the Methodist Conference...[not] by individuals...in their own capacity' (TMCP, 1974, p.134). Through the Conference, the whole Church ordains to a representative ministry. There are many tasks which presbyters are called to undertake: presiding at the sacraments, preaching the word, tending to the pastoral needs of individuals amongst others. As these tasks are not exclusive to the presbyteral office, it is unhelpful to attempt to reflect upon presbyteral ministry in functional terms, but rather to focus upon their representative role as 'sign of the presence and ministry of Christ in the Church, and through

the church to the world' (TMCP, 1999a, p.46). Leach recognises this as she writes 'any attempt to assign a role to our ministers other than that of the ubiquitous enabler is held to be an attack upon the priesthood of all believers' (2002, p.23).

The *Constitutional Practice and Discipline* of the Methodist Church states the following.

[A] circuit that considers that any of its churches...is deprived of reasonably frequent and regular celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper through a lack of presbyters may apply for the authorisation of persons other than presbyters to preside at that sacrament.

TMCP, 2020, p.277

Called to Love and Praise (TMCP, 1999a, p.45) explains that Methodism does, in special circumstances, authorise lay people to preside, but this is not a matter of course. Recently, The Methodist Church in Britain introduced (TMCP, 2012b, p.15) a 'missional' criterion for authorisation to preside, this is in part a response to fresh expressions seeking to celebrate communion. Explaining that authorising presbyters to administer the sacrament does not undermine the belief in the priesthood of all believers, a 1996 Report states: 'those who preside are authorised by the church to do that which, in themselves, they have no right to do. Ministers are so authorised by their ordination; others may be authorised by the act of the Conference' (TMCP, 1996, p.158). Here the doctrine of priesthood of all believers is employed; in that whilst a presbyter usually presides at communion, it is not the exclusive domain of the ordained, but set within the ministry of the whole people of God.

Ministry within Methodism is the cause of friction, Dennis Campbell, exploring Methodist ministry from the time of Wesley to present day, states that 'there has been perpetual tension within Methodism in regard to the meaning of ordination, orders of ministry, education for ministry, relationships between ordained members and lay, and the normative significance of tradition' (2009, p.262). This tension has always existed but can be understood to be a result of the union of three Methodist Churches in 1932. As such, individual Methodists hold various interpretations of the role of ordained ministry in relation to the priesthood of all believers. Many believe that the laity should be permitted to preside as a matter of course, rather than requiring an authorisation from the Conference, whilst others believe that only the ordained should preside. Raymond George, Methodist presbyter and theological educator, recognises this as he states that 'in the other branches of Methodism the administration of the sacraments had never been confined to the Travelling Preachers' (Davies, George and Rupp, 1978, p.158). These tensions are recognised by the Conference in the *Deed of Union* which declares that 'for the sake of church order and not because of any priestly virtue inherent in the office

the presbyters of the Methodist Church are set apart by ordination to the ministry of the word and sacraments' (TMCP, 2020, p.214). In this way, the default for Methodism is that presbyters preside at the sacraments unless a lay person has been granted an authorisation to preside on the grounds of deprivation or according to missional criteria.

Methodist ministry, argues Campbell, writing about ministry and itineracy from a United Methodist context, 'has always been characterised more by emphasis on practicality and results than by theology and tradition' (2009, p.262). A conflict contained within this is the suggestion that theology and ecclesiology can be overlooked in order to focus upon practice. This tension 'between theology and tradition on the one hand, and practical need and expediency on the other has thus always existed in Methodism...ministry will always be shaped by Methodism's practical theology more than by ecclesiological authority and theological tradition' (Campbell, 2009, p.277). Whilst his sentiment may be echoed by those who believe that responsiveness to needs should take precedence over an ecclesiological position, it must be noted that the *Deed of Union* makes clear the role of the Conference, comprised of lay and ordained members, as the final authority concerning the interpretation of doctrine (TMCP, 2020, p.214), though this does not mean that the response to needs is not brought before the Conference. An example of this this can be seen in a Report brought to the Conference of 2015 entitled *Holy Communion Mediated Through Social Media* (TMCP, 2015a, p.8), this is a response to contemporary culture in which social media is the means of communication for many people.

The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers in The Methodist Church in Britain can be seen in several ways: the understanding that all are equal before God; that the ministry of the whole people of God means that some are set aside in a representative ministry and the notion that there is no task which cannot be undertaken by any member of the Church. The doctrine principally concerns the way that within British Methodism there is a place for the ministry of all; within which presbyters exercise a representative ministry. Thus, within The Methodist Church in Britain, oversight and discipline are ecclesologically important, as a part of the second distinctive emphasis of *Called to Love and Praise*, though their form may vary.

2.4.2.2 The Priesthood of all Believers and Fresh Expressions

As the Fresh Expression movement has existed for less than twenty years, it is difficult to assess the way in which the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers may be held. *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* suggests that some involved in fresh expressions believe that 'doctrinal standards formulated in previous generations should not be permitted to constrain current developments that are manifestly inspired by the Holy Spirit. The situation

in which these doctrinal standards were originally formulated...was very different' (TAC and TMCP, 2012, pp.9-10).

This provides a motive for the removal of traditional ecclesiological features, but does not go as far as suggesting which doctrinal standards, or ecclesiological features, may be deemed irrelevant. *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* further argues that the notion of fresh expressions removing traditional ecclesiological features is flawed, as 'the church does not receive its identity exclusively, or even primarily, from contemporary theological reflection in response to the perceived realities of a particular missionary context' (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p10). Clark (2009, p.100) believes that a Postmodern worldview undermines the need to believe in truth or historic ecclesiology; one only needs to believe in that which makes sense to oneself or one's community. Thus, an individual or group would be able to decide which doctrinal or ecclesiological beliefs should be a part of their communal life. Such freedom to choose could place a fresh expression at risk of falling outside of the Church Catholic. Some involved in fresh expressions may believe that the tension above concerns the institutional Church seeking to maintain control by imposing conditions, such as the representative role of the presbyter, or the regular celebration of the sacraments. Others may suggest that 'what counted as an appropriate response to God in one generation and culture will be very different in another' (Burns, 2009, p.174) and that each generation should be free to decide how the sacraments should be held as part of their shared life.

The 2012 Methodist Conference additional 'missional' criterion for authorising persons other than presbyters to preside at communion states as follows.

The situation should have recognisable missionary potential...evidenced in the presence of: a new congregation or Christian community developed by an initiative or project which falls under the category of fresh expressions...the lay person to whom authorisation is granted should be able to identify with the situation, preferably as a pioneer minister or some other community leader.

TMCP, 2012b, p.15

This could be understood as a concession to fresh expressions that struggle with embracing the priesthood of all believers within their context, in terms of the celebration of the sacraments and the role of presbyteral ministry. Yet within this, the authority of the Conference is maintained as the Conference authorises, not the local community. Thus, there is an accepted tension between the Methodist normative ecclesiological position and the emerging leadership of fresh expressions in relation to presbyteral ministry.

2.4.2.3 Membership

Membership has always been a part of Methodism. The first Methodist members were admitted to Methodist societies upon their agreement to abide by the rules of united societies and their entry in a class book. Membership 'continued to depend on the earnest desire to grow in holiness, through meeting in class'²³ (Vickers, 2000, p.228). Baptism is regarded by The Methodist Church in Britain as membership of the Church Catholic and is required of those who become members of the Methodist Church. *The Deed of Union* sets out the responsibilities and the reasons for cessation of membership. Thus, membership is an important part of the life of the Church and, as such, only members are permitted to vote at the General Church Meeting or be elected to the Church Council. Only those who are members of the local church are able to stand as Church or Communion Stewards, Worship Leaders, Class Leaders or Pastoral Visitors within a church. The Church Treasurer is required to be a member of a Methodist church and local preachers are required to remain members of a local Methodist church (TMCP, 2020, pp.525-63).

A significant ecclesiological element of Methodist membership is found in the words spoken as the candidate is received into membership: 'we receive and welcome you as members of The Methodist Church and of the church²⁴ in this place' (TMCP, 1999b, p.101). Membership also expresses the Connexional nature of the Church. Each individual is a member of The Methodist Church in Britain and of the local church, the membership is transferable to any other Methodist church within the Connexion and to churches which are in communion (TMCP, 2020, pp.304-05) with The Methodist Church. In this way, members are reminded of the worldwide nature of the Church.

Whilst there is a functional element to membership, membership also represents shared accountability and fellowship. Early Methodists were placed in classes and bands to support one another as they grew in faith. The class (Tabraham, 1995, pp.46-100) was a small group from the society who met together for prayer, Bible study and worship, whilst those individuals who were deemed to be more advanced spiritually were gathered into bands. Though the notion of arranging the whole Church into classes and bands has largely been discontinued within the contemporary Methodist Church, it remains a practice (TMCP, 2021a, p.436) that when the membership of a church falls below twelve and remains at that number for a period of two years the church in question becomes a class of another local church.

²³ Classes were small groups of Methodists who met together for mutual support and accountability.

²⁴ The word society used here in the 1975 Service Book was replaced by the word 'Church' in the 1999 Methodist Worship Book.

The Deed of Union continues to reflect this aspect of membership, stating

as membership of the Methodist Church involves fellowship it is the duty of all members of the Methodist Church to seek to cultivate this...the privileges and duties of membership...are commitments by each member to Christian discipleship within the Methodist Church, to acceptance of its discipline.

TMCP, 2020, p.215

As part of membership, there is a commitment to a community of people who form the church in that place, this is expressed through mutual accountability and fellowship. Membership also expects a commitment from individuals, who are to 'avail themselves of the two sacraments, namely baptism and the Lord's Supper' (TMCP, 2020, p.215). Commitment and connectedness to others is also seen through the functional elements of membership; this may be expressed as the individual serves as a member of the Church Council or as an officer of the church. Membership, therefore, remains an important element of the contemporary ecclesiology of The Methodist Church in Britain.

Membership is also linked to the governance of the local church. Members of the Methodist Church are able to be appointed as managing trustees, the Church Council, to vote at the General Church Meeting or to fulfil the roles of Church Steward, Pastoral Visitor or Treasurer, as I have noted above. These features are central to the ecclesial identity of The Methodist Church in Britain, as without them a community cannot be understood as a Methodist church.

Methodist SO602 states that 'the Church Council is constituted to unite those who hold responsibility in the church in one working community. It has the authority to take decisions for the church' (TMCP, 2020, p.516). SO603 notes that the other committees of the church are subject to the 'authority and oversight' (TMCP, 2020, p.517) of the Church Council, in this way no course of action can be determined without the consent of the Church Council. This provides a way to ensure that the oversight of a church cannot be controlled by one leader within the community, but requires other representative members of the church to discern and make decisions on behalf of the whole church. SO621 (TMCP, 2020, p.527) states that the General Church Meeting, in which all members and ministers of the local church are able to vote, is the body which annually elects those who will serve as Church Stewards²⁵ and representative members of the Church Council. The Church Council can itself appoint up to 15 further people to serve on the committee. Thus, a leader cannot arbitrarily decide who is eligible or not to be elected, the decision is made by the membership of the council itself. The

²⁵ Church Stewards are all members of the Church Council.

Church Council is directed under SO641 to make several obligatory appointments of Pastoral Visitors, a Church Treasurer and a Pastoral Committee.²⁶

Membership and a Church Council are a requirement for every Methodist church in the Connexion irrespective of the size of the church. Indeed, without a Church Council, Church Stewards, Pastoral Visitors and a Church Treasurer, a community would not be able to stand as a Methodist church as they do not fulfil the requirements of the standing orders.

2.4.2.4 Membership in Fresh Expressions

The intensive²⁷ membership of Methodism, asserts *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*, helps to 'sustain the social and spiritual capital of the nation' (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.130). However, the Report also questions the effectiveness of both intensive and extensive²⁸ forms of church membership in largely post-Christian society. There appears to be some conflict here as Percy proposes that fresh expressions have become "church" for people who no longer join bodies or associations' (2008, p.31), whereas *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* (TAC and TMCP, 2012, pp.130-31) suggests that fresh expressions are seeking to develop forms of membership, particularly within the areas that are no longer effectively reached by institutional churches. The notion that membership is no longer relevant because individuals are no longer interested in joining societies or organisations is often heard within fresh expressions and within the institutional Church. Recent events in contemporary society indicate that this trend is reversing. 'Membership of political parties has long been in supposedly terminal decline...Since the referendum...membership of the Scottish National Party has climbed to nearly 100,000...and the Scottish Greens have quadrupled their membership' (Harris, 2015).

This resurgence in membership of political parties in recent years suggests that individuals are willing to take up membership if the cause is important to them and thus membership of fresh expressions might appeal to individuals who connect with the community.

I would argue that the issue here concerns how membership is understood within fresh expressions. Percy (2008, pp.35-39) suggests that fresh expressions are unsure of whether their membership is extensive and open to all or intensive so that individuals must join, and are, therefore, confused regarding what they offer in terms of forming a community.

²⁶ Churches with under 49 members may choose not to have a pastoral committee, the Church Council fulfilling this role instead (TMCP, 2020, p.534).

²⁷ Intensive membership – a form of membership which individuals opt in to.

²⁸ Extensive membership – a form of membership which encompasses all, unless they opt out.

Membership of a fresh expression is an opportunity for those who are involved to feel a connection to a larger body, in a similar way to how Methodists are members of both a local church and The Methodist Church in Britain. Yet, membership within fresh expressions is clearly articulated in a different way than within a local Methodist church. This difference in understanding may lead to some tension as membership of The Methodist Church in Britain is a requirement for holding office, the form of extensive membership modelled within fresh expressions does not require individuals to become a member in the same way. Thus, those who are part of a fresh expression within a circuit could not hold office within the circuit unless they were to become a member of another local church. An extensive form of membership appears to be common within fresh expressions, representing a spiritual connection, rather than a structural connection which is the normative ecclesiology for Methodist intensive membership. The difference here is that extensive membership has the potential to move a fresh expression towards a congregational ecclesiology in which the congregation, rather than the circuit or Connexion is the primary unit of the church.

In both its relation to the Connexion and the importance given to a form of membership, the value of connectedness in fresh expressions is seen. Neither the fresh expression, nor the individuals involved, are intended to be independent from the Church Catholic but connected to it. Whilst membership in an intensive form is not shared by both The Methodist Church in Britain and fresh expressions, connectedness, articulated in different ways, is a key feature of the emerging ecclesiology of fresh expressions.

Fresh expressions literature makes little mention of how a community might be governed appropriately through membership, though undoubtedly each community would have some form of governance. As I noted earlier, Methodist governance structures enable decisions to be made corporately by those who have been elected for that task. The challenge for fresh expressions is to create appropriate structures which enable the community to discern the way forward. The danger of failing to develop a governance structure would be that the fresh expression becomes, as Shier-Jones warns, an expression 'of the egos or personalities of the initiating ministers' (2009, p.9).

Clearly there is a point of tension in this discussion, as the lack of any normative Fresh Expressions ecclesiology in relation to intensive membership and governance indicates that communities should design their own governance structures. Methodist fresh expressions, however, would be obliged to follow Standing Orders, with the formation of a membership system, Church Council, Church Stewards, Pastoral Visitors, Pastoral Committee and a Church Treasurer to be understood as a Methodist church.

2.4.3 Structured for Mission

The 'conviction that the church should be structured for mission' (TMCP, 1999a, p.50) is the third distinctive Methodist emphasis, which stresses the need for the Church to be able to respond to opportunities for mission. I begin by considering the understanding of The Methodist Church in Britain as part of the *missio Dei*, the mission of God in the world.

2.4.3.1 Missio Dei

Methodism holds that the denomination was 'raised up by God in response to the needs of the world for the love of God' (Shier-Jones, 2005, p.258). Shier-Jones believes that Methodism has an ecclesiological understanding of its purpose as part of the mission of God. She argues that this ecclesiological feature was prominent until the middle of the twentieth century when Methodism grew 'reticent in proclaiming a "divine" calling or existence' (2005, p.258) in its official publications. She believes that this highlights that Methodism was uncertain of its future, in respect of failed unity schemes with other Churches, affecting its confidence to make such proclamations. Shier-Jones further notes that the 1974 publication of the Methodist Service Book removed the phrase 'within the Christian Church – One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic – the Methodist Church holds and cherishes a true place' (2005, p.259) from the liturgy for welcoming new church members. I suggest that the removal of the phrase does not indicate a lack of confidence in the divine calling of Methodism, as the *Deed of Union* continues to proclaim this, but that Methodism continues to phrase this divine calling differently. This ecclesiological feature can be seen in *Called to Love and Praise* (TMCP, 1999a, p.54) which refers to the Church Catholic's engagement with the *missio Dei*, articulating the belief that the Methodism, with the whole Church, is part of the mission of God in the world.

Throughout this thesis, the use of the term *mission* refers to the relationship between God and the world (Bosch, 1991, p.9) and the role the church has in enabling relationships between people and God. Evangelism is one of the 'essential dimensions' (Bosch, 1991, p.10) of mission and relates here particularly to the 'proclamation of salvation to those who do not believe' (Bosch, 1991, p.10).

2.4.3.2 Missio Dei and Fresh Expressions

Fresh Expressions arise 'out of a local church's participation in the *missio Dei*', argues Shier-Jones (2009, p.8). She further claims that if a fresh expression is part of the *missio Dei*, 'it will exhibit the characteristic marks of a Christian community' (2009, p.9). Atkins explores *missio Dei* in terms of people seeking to explore the way that God is leading them in mission, with new initiatives or Churches arising out of that discernment: 'if the *missio Dei* in any time and

place cannot be pursued with the church as it is, God raises up a new church' (2008, p.21). I maintain that this view is shared by those involved in fresh expressions of church, who would suggest that being a part of the mission of God does not necessarily bring with it the marks of the Church. This notion can be seen in Moynagh's work as he argues that the creation of contextual churches should not be concerned with copying existing models of church. Rather, he argues, 'it is about producing offspring that have their own unique characteristics, while retaining a family likeness' (2012, p.166).

These tensions aside, part of the emerging fresh expressions ecclesiology is the belief that a fresh expression is part of the *missio Dei* within a particular context. *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* reflects briefly upon the understanding of *Missio Dei* within fresh expressions, seeing it as potentially one-sided, in that fresh expressions seek to be the 'carrier' of God into a new context, in which they believe the traditional Church has failed to 'catch glimpses of God at work' (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.123). The Report asserts that as the Church, or fresh expression, is the visible sign of God's presence in the world it is appropriate that '*missio Dei* is church-shaped' (2012, p.126) as fresh expressions proclaim the gospel in their context. This notion is shared by Moynagh who writes that a contextual church engaging with the *missio Dei* 'will go to the places and networks where it is not already present' (Moynagh, 2012, p.133). The difference here between a Methodist view and the emerging fresh expressions understanding is that Methodism holds that its very existence is because it was raised up by God for mission; Fresh Expressions literature articulates that fresh expressions are people's response to the *missio Dei*. Nevertheless, contemporary Methodist ecclesiology and the emerging ecclesiology of fresh expressions both hold the belief that their existence is a part of the mission of God, as a response to the needs of contemporary culture.

2.4.3.3 Social Action and Evangelism

'If Methodism did not exist, it would have been invented. The dynamic combination of Christian social action and intelligent evangelism is arguably a uniquely concentrated ecclesial embodiment within a single denomination' (Percy, 2004, p.209). Percy believes that a core ecclesiological feature of Methodism, and key to its identity as a Church, is the embodiment of evangelism and social action; Methodism has historically held the two together with the belief that a commitment to the gospel requires a commitment to other people. The Holy Club (Davies, 1963, p.44) encouraged its members not only toward regular church attendance but claimed a concern for those less fortunate was an integral part of Christianity. This commitment to holding both evangelism and social action can be seen throughout Methodist history. *Called to Love and Praise* makes several references to this combination; first noting that the mission of the whole Church in the world 'involves both evangelism and social action'

(TMCP, 1999a, p.29); second that a large part of the commitment of members of Methodist societies required that they were devoted 'to a common discipline of Christian life...and acted as a task force for the Church in witness and social action' (TMCP, 1999a, p.32) and third, arguing that the ministry of the whole people of God 'is expressed in Christ-like living, in social action and in witness' (TMCP, 1999a, p.44). It is, therefore, impossible to articulate a Methodist view of the Church without recognising the combination of evangelism and social action. Indeed, to ignore these features would be to misunderstand a central part of Methodist ecclesiology; that is, the Church exists to share the gospel and to engage in social action.

The Methodist combination of social action and evangelism can be seen through the Methodist involvement in several agencies concerned with the mission of the Church and a care for people; Methodist Homes for the Aged and Action for Children are two such examples. *Called to Love and Praise* devotes little space to this issue stating that from the beginning of Methodism, Methodists believed that 'Christian experience and daily life belong inextricably together' (TMCP, 1999a, p.38). A contemporary example of Methodism's social action can be seen in its work with the Joint Public Issues Team,²⁹ the recent work of which has included the publication of reports and resources that enable individuals to understand and respond to contemporary social issues. JPIT's recent resources (JPIT, 2018) cover issues such as benefit sanctions and poverty in contemporary society. This indicates that for a Methodist, faith combines social concern and action.

The Methodist Church in Britain continues to hold within social concern an emphasis upon evangelism, as such *Called to Love and Praise* states that Methodism has a 'conviction that the church should be structured for mission' (TMCP, 1999a, p.50). The Report continues to explore the ways that Methodism's structures reflect this. The circuit structure can support both financially and in terms of providing personnel for mission work, which could be impractical for an individual church to achieve alone. Whilst an emphasis upon mission or evangelism is an ecclesiological feature of Methodism, Shier-Jones notes that 'a national commitment to evangelism thus remains a distinctive mark of the Methodist way of being Christian even if the local confidence to engage with the task is not' (2005, p.265). This opinion may be a generalisation, however, to follow Shier-Jones' reasoning suggests that this ecclesiological feature of Methodism lies in its normative and espoused, rather than operant, ecclesiology. Indeed, the 2008 *Report of the Faith and Order Committee* highlights the

²⁹ 'The Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) is a partnership between the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church, and the United Reformed Church. The purpose of JPIT is to help the Churches to work together for peace and justice through listening, learning, praying, speaking and acting on public policy issues. (JPIT, 2018).

missional nature of every circuit, asserting ‘the central role which circuits have in the development of the mission of the Church as a response to God’ (TMCP, 2008, p.6). In part, the embeddedness of mission within the circuit can be seen in the way in which all presbyters and deacons are stationed to, and deployed by, the circuit and that preaching appointments for lay and ordained are contained within the circuit preaching plan. It is thus the circuit which provides much of the resources for mission in the local church.

The combination of evangelism and social action has been part of a Methodist understating of the nature of the Church from the origins of the movement and, as such, is integral to British Methodist ecclesiology. In some cases, this may not find expression within a local church or circuit. This is perhaps a feature of Methodism which has become more prominent in recent years, particularly with the assertion made by the General Secretary that Methodism is a discipleship movement shaped for mission³⁰ (TMCP, 2011).

2.4.3.4 Social Action and Evangelism in Fresh Expressions

A commitment to social action and evangelism is not clearly articulated in the definition of fresh expressions provided by Fresh Expressions, which states:

Fresh expressions are:

- Missional – they work mainly with people who don’t attend church;
- Contextual – they fit the situation;
- Formational – they make disciples;
- Ecclesial – they encourage church to emerge.

Fresh Expressions, 2015a

The definition of fresh expressions above considers what fresh expressions are, rather than how they function. I suggest that evangelism is part of the definition of fresh expressions, seen in the creation of new ecclesial communities. Evangelism may be a necessary part of engaging in a context where the traditional Church does not reach out, drawing individuals into a new faith community. Whilst *Mission-Shaped Church* (TAC, 2004, p.44) and *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.28) offer examples of fresh expressions, there is no comment upon any other work in which a fresh expression must engage. This is perhaps representative of the variety of fresh expressions and their contextual nature; it would be impractical to seek to define the activities of a fresh expression. Croft argues that a national Church seeking to offer models of fresh expressions to a community is not the correct

³⁰ This Report was received by the Conference of 2011.

approach, 're-shaping needs to be from the local congregation outwards rather than beginning with the denomination' (2002, p.201). Moynagh agrees with this as he believes that contextual churches 'will be searching for practices that best mediate grace in their context' (2012, p.160). In this way, fresh expressions do not start by considering, for example, historic Methodist ecclesiology and then working that into their contextual approach, rather they begin with the context and develop a way of working within it. Martyn Atkins notes that 'mission-shaped ecclesiology asserts that "church" is bigger and broader than it is often presented...western ecclesiology mainly contains faith within the walls of a church and implicitly rejects the idea that being a Christian shapes the everyday behaviour and witness of the believer' (2007, pp.33-35). Whilst Atkins may be correct in his reflection, I would argue that he is incorrect in blaming western, institutional, ecclesiology for this failure as Methodist ecclesiology's combination of evangelism and social action confirms the need for Methodists to look beyond a church building. There is a danger that if fresh expressions were to base their ecclesiology on the four elements of the Fresh Expressions' definition alone, it could be understood as a form of congregationalism, which does not perceive a need to respond to anything outside of itself. Such a belief would also contradict the criteria provided by *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*, which states a church must gather for worship and be 'sent out into the world to engage in mission and service' (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.114) and would not conform to the normative ecclesiology of The Methodist Church in Britain.

Walker asserts 'churches carry a multiplicity of traditions and practices inherited from a variety of theological, liturgical and pastoral sources' (2014, p.227). Because of this multiplicity, established Churches respond from within their tradition and ecclesiology to needs in their community. This is not to say that a fresh expression may not also respond, but that an established Church with a history of social action, may be better placed to respond than a fresh expression with no such tradition. At present, it can be said that the development of ecclesial communities within fresh expressions has taken precedence over reflection upon the functions of the Church.

The combination of evangelism and social action as it is manifest in Methodism cannot be found in fresh expressions literature. A commitment to evangelism is found in the definition of Fresh Expressions; working with those who do not attend church. Social action is encouraged as part of the life of the whole Church, including fresh expressions, by *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.118) but the contextual nature of fresh expressions means that the context drives the initiative.

2.4.3.5 A Discipleship Movement

In 2011, the Methodist General Secretary suggested that Methodism should be understood as a discipleship movement shaped for mission, promoting this as a 'key ecclesial theme to be prioritised and emphasised' (TMCP, 2011, p3). Methodism began as a movement of spiritual renewal within the Anglican Church, and after the death of Wesley the movement split from the Church of England and began to develop a sense of its own ecclesial identity.

The notion of Methodism identifying itself as a movement rather than a Church was noted by Percy who wrote, 'If Methodism can recover a sense of itself as a movement...it may find that...it is able to be reflexive and proactive' (2004, p.209). He suggests this as a way that The Methodist Church in Britain could re-engage with society by offering its distinctive spirituality. I suggest that this is aspirational, as The Methodist Church in Britain is a Church: part of, the Church Catholic, retaining its own structures and constitution. I suggest that a movement so proactive that it dispenses with the need for rigorous theological and ecclesiological structures may begin to distance itself from the Church Catholic. I contend that the way in which Methodism should be regarded as a movement is in terms of its particular and distinctive contribution as one Church within the Church Catholic.

Discipleship as an ecclesiological theme within Methodism represents a whole-life commitment. The phrase 'discipleship movement shaped for mission' (TMCP, 2011, p.1), was intended to combine the elements of ecclesiology that had been discerned in the production of *Called to Love and Praise*. *Called to Love and Praise* establishes Methodist discipleship throughout its history as involving a commitment to the study of scripture, prayer, social action and accountability (TMCP, 1999a, pp.36-38) which required a more holistic approach to faith. When each of these elements are considered, they contribute to the making of Christian disciples. The General Secretary's Report of 2011 suggested that Methodism understands its

origins in terms of being a 'movement' rather than, primarily, a 'church'...We Methodists deploy our resources strategically within circuits, whose key role is to facilitate and enable the deepening discipleship and increasingly effective missional and discipleship agenda of the local churches within it.

TMCP, 2011, p.6

Through *Called to Love and Praise*, the General Secretary's Report and Methodist ecclesiology, Methodists are encouraged in a faith that is part of everyday life.

2.4.3.6 Discipleship in Fresh Expressions

The demand for attractiveness is a popular feature of writing upon the future of the Church. Writing of the decline of the institutional Church, Moynagh suggests that a fresh mission strategy is required to bring growth, asserting that 'church can be made attractive' (2001, pp.14-16). Riddell, Pierson and Kirkpatrick, writing in 2000 as the emerging church movement began to grow, reflected that 'the church is struggling with western culture...the existing structures seem remote and irrelevant' (2000, p.31). It is possible that the rise of fresh expressions is an attempt to offer a more attractive form of church to contemporary society, which no longer connects with the institutional Church. This presumes that the Church is no longer attractive to society, which I suggest is untrue as there are many for whom the institutional Church has a lasting attraction. I would also suggest that the creation of a fresh expression with the aim of being attractive before all else may lead to an initiative which is attractive but lacks depth, particularly in terms of discipleship. I would argue that the aim in discipleship is to focus upon being Christocentric, rather than being driven by a desire for attractive content. That is, discipleship concerns deepening faith, and a fresh expression which is concerned with discipleship should endeavour to create appropriate ways to enable individuals to deepen their faith and enable whole-life discipleship, rather than create an attractive experience.

One of the conditions by which a fresh expression may be a church, noted by *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*, is that the community lives 'out their discipleship in the world' (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.181). A fresh expression community must, therefore, be one of discipleship and growth in faith. Shier-Jones, reflecting upon the need for genuine discipleship within fresh expressions, states that 'there is...more to a fresh expression of church than experiments in sound, lighting, space, or even ways of being community' (2009, p.8). Her point is pertinent for those fresh expressions which believe that creating a sense of community, over discipleship, is paramount. Fresh expressions should purposely be new models of discipleship rather than new labels for the discipleship which a church already engages in (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.38). *Mission-Shaped Church* (TAC, 2004, p.33) suggests that discipleship should be at the heart of fresh expressions because of the way that ekklesia has been understood, in which discipleship is of more importance than attendance.

Whole-life discipleship is an important part of the emerging ecclesiology of fresh expressions. It may be that, although discipleship is key to their ecclesiology in theory, there are many fresh expressions which, in practice, place their emphasis on different areas, such as the building of community. This may also be true of a number of local Methodist churches; the normative

and espoused ecclesiology highlights whole-life discipleship but the operant ecclesiology focuses on a different area.

2.4.3.7 Worship

The notion that the Church gathers for worship and is then sent into the world to witness is highlighted by *Called to Love and Praise*, which asserts that 'worship is prior to mission, yet mission is the natural, even inevitable consequence of worship' (TMCP, 1999a, pp.36-37). It is for this reason that I consider worship as an element of the ecclesiology of The Methodist Church in Britain under the third distinctive emphasis of *Called to Love and Praise*: structured for mission.

Methodist worship encompasses a variety of styles, from formal liturgical, to free or extempore. In terms of ecclesiology, this represents the nature of Methodism as embracing diversity; there is no obligation upon those (lay or ordained) leading worship to follow a lectionary or set order. The level of lay involvement in worship can also be seen to flow from the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers; Munsey-Turner highlights lay involvement in leading worship as he notes that in 1995, 'out of the 410 services of worship in the 305 Methodist churches in Cornwall, 247 were led by local preachers, compared with 113 by ministers' (1998, p.58). *Called to Love and Praise* (TMCP, 1999a, pp.36-37) highlights several features of Methodist worship: the importance of hymnody, mutual accountability and an emphasis upon personal and social holiness. This Report suggests that whilst these features are not unique to Methodism, they possess a distinctive character not found in the same way within any other tradition. Langford (1998, p.95) suggests the distinctive spirituality and worship of Methodism continue to characterise a Methodist approach to worship; the Methodist dual tradition of both free and liturgical worship is, therefore, an important element of its contemporary ecclesiology.

2.4.3.8 Worship in Fresh Expressions

The variety of worship and the significance of the space in which it occurs is noted by *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*.

Fresh expressions that meet outside sacred buildings may do so partly because it is felt that architectural religious symbolism is so far removed from the everyday experience of the non-churched that it is a barrier to evangelism. On the other hand, a fresh expression meeting in a sacred building may be able to exploit the latent appreciation of Christian symbolism.

TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.138

Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church further suggests that 'it is true that the majority [of practitioners] will at least have some reservations about aspects of Christian tradition as this has been received in their particular ecclesial tradition' (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.147). I suggest that the tendency amongst practitioners to ignore ecclesial elements, would also extend to those aspects of worship with which they do not agree, this can be seen through the case studies presented later in this work. The danger of excluding elements of worship is that the fresh expression may weaken its connection to the Church Catholic. For example, if communion is not celebrated, the fresh expression could not be understood as a church in relation to the criteria of *Called to Love and Praise* which states that the Church is a: 'community...united around the Lord's table' (TMCP, 1999a, p54).

The newness of fresh expressions makes the application of labels difficult, suggests Mobsby (2004, p.20). I contend that the newness of fresh expressions also brings a difficulty in attempting to assess the worship in which a fresh expression engages. Worship is an important ecclesiological element within fresh expressions but the newness of the initiatives and their innovative approaches make the worship markedly different to that of a traditional church. However, the dual tradition of Methodist worship indicates that while the free worship of fresh expressions is compatible with the ecclesiology of The Methodist Church in Britain, the removal of elements such as communion would not be.

2.4.3.9 Pragmatism

Although I have documented earlier that pragmatism is an important feature of contemporary Methodist ecclesiology, I note that *Called to Love and Praise* states that early Methodism was based on 'a pragmatism and flexibility which developed structures to facilitate mission' (TMCP, 1999a, p.36). Pragmatism is, therefore, a part of the third distinctive emphasis of Methodist ecclesiology as asserted by *Called to Love and Praise* and it is helpful to briefly contrast pragmatism in Methodism and fresh expressions.

Within Methodism it is possible to see a pragmatic approach in the development of ecclesiology, indeed the Methodist emphasis on ecumenism discussed earlier can be understood as a response to the growth and development of other denominations. Wilson (2011, p.173) refers to a widely-held view that Wesley's theology was practical, and thus Methodist ecclesiology has retained this pragmatic dimension. The Methodist Church in Britain regards its ecclesiology as flexible and pragmatic.

Methodists...should not feel the need resolutely to defend the structures of the Methodist Church...The underlying principles...of a flexibility which enables the church to be more effectively structured for mission, will, it is hoped, be contributed by Methodism to a larger whole.

TMCP, 1999a, p.53

Within the structures of Methodism there is some degree of pragmatism and flexibility in the application of Standing Orders, but also some tension is revealed, as the ecclesiology of the Methodist Church is not pragmatic *per se* in all aspects of ecclesiology, theology and practice. The Conference is the final authority which judges any interpretation to be an appropriate expression of Methodist ecclesiology. However, it is possible to understand that the Conference responds pragmatically to the needs of the Church as they arise; the Conference Report *Holy Communion Mediated Through Social Media*, is an example of the Conference responding to contemporary needs. In this way, the Conference embodies the pragmatic nature of Methodism.

2.4.3.10 Pragmatism in Fresh Expressions

Pragmatism is central to the emergent ecclesiology of fresh expressions, this is due to what *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.1) states as the need for innovative approaches to mission in contemporary society. In this way, a pragmatic fresh expression would seek to employ those traditional ecclesiological features which they deem to work within their community, whilst discarding those that they do not believe work. This is what Greggs, Methodist local preacher and professor of theology, argues is the way that the Church must rethink itself (2019, p.xxix) to discover its God-given reason for continued existence. The development of fresh expressions has seen the creation of a variety of initiatives, represented in the case studies presented in Chapter Four. Each fresh expression was created as a pragmatic response to a perceived need and so is different to any other expression, whilst changing and developing in response to the context. Pragmatism is, therefore, an element of the ecclesiology of The Methodist Church in Britain and fresh expressions, as both seek to adapt to the needs of contemporary society.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter offers the primary theoretical perspectives on which this research is based. I have outlined the features of the contemporary ecclesiology of The Methodist Church in Britain and the emerging ecclesiology of fresh expressions, as it relates to The Methodist Church in Britain. This provides the Methodist ecclesiological position from which the fresh expression

case studies may be examined and enables the challenges, which fresh expressions bring to contemporary Methodist ecclesiology, to be revealed.

I have described the normative Methodist ecclesiological position in relation to the three emphases of *Called to Love and Praise*, which I have argued finds its outworking through the elements of *Our Calling*. The elements of British Methodist ecclesiology, therefore, are as follows.

First, a commitment to the Connexional principle in which Methodism recognises its connection to the Church Catholic and seeks to mirror those connections within the British Methodist Connexion. Second, the importance of fellowship and shared discipline which includes the understanding of the priesthood of all believers and ministry as it relates to the ministry of the whole people of God in the Methodist Church in Britain. The role of mutual accountability and governance for Methodist members also relates to shared discipline. The third distinctive Methodist emphasis is that the Church should be structured for mission; this finds expression in the belief that the Church is part of the *missio Dei*, that Methodists must hold evangelism and social action together and that the Church understands itself as a movement which enables whole-life discipleship.

There are some points of resonance between Methodist ecclesiology and that of fresh expressions.

The Methodist Church in Britain believes its structures to be pragmatic as it responds, through the Conference, to the developing needs of the Church; this is comparable to fresh expressions which articulate pragmatism as necessary to respond to contemporary culture. This pragmatism does cause some tension as fresh expressions may ignore aspects of Methodist ecclesiology which they believe redundant.

Both British Methodism and fresh expressions believe that *missio Dei* is an important part of their identity. Fresh expressions articulate their engagement with *missio Dei* as a response to people, whilst The Methodist Church in Britain asserts its very being is due to being raised by God for mission.

Whole-life discipleship is an important element of the Methodist and fresh expressions ecclesiology. However, it does not always find expression within individual fresh expressions, which in their infancy are focused upon creating the community.

In this chapter I have revealed the points of tension as I have compared Methodist and fresh expressions ecclesiology.

The understanding of the priesthood of all believers and ministry as it relates to the ministry of the whole people of God in the Methodist Church in Britain is a point of tension. I noted that the traditional understanding of presbyteral ministry and presidency at communion causes friction within fresh expressions that may believe that some aspects of ecclesiology can be ignored if they are not believed to be beneficial to the community. This links with the tension caused by fresh expressions' engagement with Postmodernity in which a community rejects metanarratives in favour of that which 'makes sense'. This is in contrast to the contemporary Methodist position which stems from the modern era (Greggs, 2019, p.xlvi) and, therefore, embraces the metanarrative. Thus, there is a tension for Methodist fresh expressions which seek to engage in a Postmodern context, but feel constrained by Methodist ecclesiology.

I highlighted a tendency amongst fresh expressions to create communities which are gathered around shared interests. This creates a tension with Methodist ecclesiology, which asserts that the Church must be a diverse community. There is, therefore, conflict between normative Methodist ecclesiology and that of fresh expressions; how can a fresh expression which exhibits a tendency towards a homogenous unit be reconciled with the variety demanded by Methodist ecclesiology? How can the contextual response of fresh expressions be reconciled with the intention of The Methodist Church in Britain to be accessible for all, regardless of context?

Ecumenical openness is also a feature of the contemporary ecclesiology of The Methodist Church in Britain; the need to be connected to the Church Catholic is a central part of the ecclesial identity of The Methodist Church in Britain. This is reflected somewhat in Fresh Expressions ecclesiology however, fresh expressions appear to be largely post-denominational entities, ecumenical relations in fresh expressions appear more focused upon resourcing the fresh expression than mutual growth.

I have discussed the structures of Methodism which provide connections to the Connexion; these are best exemplified by Methodist membership, through which individuals are members of The Methodist Church in Britain and the local church. Methodist structures also enable members to play a governance role in the local church, circuit and Connexion. These structures are not reflected in the emerging ecclesiology of fresh expressions. Indeed, there is little in Fresh Expressions literature which provides a glimpse of a normative position. Thus,

there is a tension between Methodist structures which provide connection to the wider Church and fresh expressions which appear to have an ethereal quality.

This chapter has explored the theoretical perspectives and revealed the resonances and tensions which are presented by fresh expressions within The Methodist Church in Britain. This thesis will explore these points of tension and those which may be raised in the case studies.

In examining fresh expression case studies, this thesis will, in forthcoming chapters, consider an element of the operant ecclesiological voice: the way in which fresh expressions articulate Methodist ecclesiology within their practice. I will examine the extent to which one may observe the normative and espoused ecclesiological voices as they are articulated in the practice of the fresh expression. The formal ecclesiological voice is represented in this work by those theologians who have studied and published work upon Methodist ecclesiology. Indeed, this thesis may be seen to be a contribution to the formal ecclesiological voice of The Methodist Church.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Addressing the Research Question

The research question is: 'To what extent are fresh expressions within The Methodist Church in Britain discernibly "Methodist" expressions of church, and what practices within a fresh expressions context might indicate the presence of a Methodist church?' This thesis explores the challenges that fresh expressions bring to The Methodist Church in Britain, in relation to the ecclesial identity of fresh expressions, their relationship to the Connexion, the nature of leadership and authority, and the aims of each fresh expression, and proposes practical ways in which any challenges may be addressed. I argue that this is best investigated through examining fresh expressions and The Methodist Church in Britain critically, each in the light of the other, in relation to the research question. This will be achieved through drawing on some of the research methods used in practical theology to explore four case studies within The Methodist Church in Britain. This chapter outlines and critically evaluates the methodology which I have employed throughout the research phase and write-up of this thesis.

Central to practical theology is an experience to explore and reflect upon, as Campbell-Reed notes that practical theology 'without a context will be neither practical nor theology' (2016, p.38). Beyond the need for an experience, practical theology is difficult to define; Pattison and Woodward believe that, due to the variety of contexts in which practical theologians engage, there is no 'universally accepted definition' (2000, p.4) of practical theology. Some scholars adopt positions which are somewhat imprecise, for example, Pete Ward suggests his understanding of practical theology to be 'any way of thinking that takes both practice and theology seriously' (2017, p.5); Swinton and Mowat argue that practical theology is located within 'the diversity of human experience' (2006, p.3).

Because of the variety of understandings and imprecise definitions of practical theology, one cannot define the term closely. It is, however, possible to highlight the central elements within practical theology. Practical theology involves critical examination of an experience and the context it is set within (Lartey, 2000, p.129) to gain theological insight. Pattison (2007, p.269) argues for the use of a variety of methods of social science, which enable the researcher to explore the human condition, without which he believes practical theology would be unable to properly examine an experience. The aim of practical theology is to relate an experience to theory (or doctrine) and relate the theory back to experience, creating what Don Browning describes as 'critically held theory-laden practices' (1996, p.7). These practices can be understood as an experience which continues to be examined to gain understanding into

theology; a cycle of reflection which informs theory, leading to further reflection. The aim of this cyclical reflection is articulated by Bennett et al., who propose that the 'principle of practical theology to date has been to undertake work that makes a practical difference to the life of the Church and the world' (2018, p.154).

There are various ways to approach practical theology, which have differing emphases; I will briefly explore these here before moving to highlight the approach I will take in this research. Swinton and Mowat argue that theology must be privileged, stating that 'the overarching framework within which practical theology takes place is theological. Theology offers a perspective on knowledge, truth and reality' (2006, p.76). A criticism of this approach relates to the understanding of Postmodernity, which contends that knowledge, truth and reality are subjective and contextual. The perspective that theology offers is, therefore, dependent upon the lens of the individual. Swinton and Mowat further note that 'the questions that emerge from human experience...find their answers in scripture and Christian tradition' (2006, p.78). This approach to practical theology places the experience within the theological framework of the Christian tradition. Indeed, Ward states that 'church is a key starting point for practical theology' (2017, p.11). In this way, the context is viewed through a theological lens which seeks to provide answers to the questions which may be raised through study; thus, theology is expected to challenge the experience, rather than the experience challenging Christian tradition. Ward recognises this as he suggests that 'theology should be able to help us find ways to practice faith in these changing contexts (2017, p.24). This resonates with Swinton and Mowat who argue that theology must be given a greater weighting in the research process than the experience or any other research method; they ask 'how can a system of knowledge created by humans challenge a system of knowledge that claims to be given by God?' (2006, p.83).

The practical theological method that Swinton ascribes to is summarised in his contribution to *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*. His belief is that, as practical theologians, 'we don't do our fieldwork and then reflect on it theologically. Rather, all of it is always done within a theological context' (Bennett et al., 2018, p.147). He argues that there is value in using methods from varying worldviews to aid in examining an experience, but these methods must be 'put to the purposes of the coming Kingdom' (2018, p.147) of God. These methods, he claims, are only useful to practical theologians when they are interpreted within a theological framework. In this way, Swinton's starting point for research is not an experience, but a theological viewpoint from which any investigation will flow. This methodology is reflected in an article in the *Practical Theology* journal written by Swinton in 2012, which he describes as an exercise in practical theology, using disability theology to reflect on the nature of autistic

love. He writes, 'disability theology is the attempt by disabled and non-disabled Christians to understand and interpret the Gospel of Jesus Christ, God and humanity against the backdrop of the historical and contemporary experiences of people with disabilities' (2012, p.260). Swinton continues his exploration of autistic love, suggesting that the aim of the article was to explore the question of 'what does Christian love look like when we take seriously the experiences of people with autism' (2012, p.260). To propose an answer to this question, he begins by examining biblical references to love, principally Matthew 22: 34-40 in which Jesus asserts the greatest commandment is to love God and one-another. Swinton continues, proposing that 'love is encountered and defined as we are reconciled with God in Christ' (2012, p.276). His approach to answering the question from the perspective of practical theology is clearly laid out here: in order to provide an answer to a question about Christian love, one must first seek to understand what love is, and how it is manifest in Christian history and theology. The experience is examined in the light of this understanding, as he notes

autistic people not only share in the love of God...but can reveal and act out that love in ways that previously those of us who do not claim an autistic label have been unable to understand...loving neighbour and self...requires the perspective of all people before we can understand what it might mean in all of its fullness.

2012, pp.267-77

The experience, in Swinton's example, of autistic love is able to provide new ways in which a previously established theological principle can be understood. He, therefore, values experience as a way to generate knowledge, by aiding understanding and revealing new perspectives within a theological framework.

The approach outlined above does not remove the possibility of dialogue and critical reflection upon practice, as Swinton and Mowat note, practical theology 'stays close to experience' (2006, p.26) but that theology always has a 'logical priority' (2006, p.88), as theology provides an answer to any issue discovered through the research.

A second way to approach practical theology is to give priority to experience and practice; Bennett et al. recognise that this approach differs from that above but argue that whilst some give priority to theology, 'others hold less firmly to such boundaries, affirming that the simultaneously human and divine nature of the church should challenge the research agenda and the theological tradition' (Bennett et al., 2018, p.146). They argue that in practical theology, 'everything is up for questioning and critical scrutiny, including the taken-for-granted processes, beliefs and thought patterns of human societies, religious beliefs and practices,

and theological constructions' (Bennett et al., 2018, pp.29-30). In this way, the experience may challenge an established theological position, leading to a new understanding. Woodward and Pattison articulate this as 'giving priority to the contemporary context...rather than to other situations, other times, and other places' (2000, p.14). Bennett et al. contend that 'practical theology affords priority to the "texts" of contemporary experience and practice. There is no place or time but this present from which we start, nothing more important to explore' (2018, p.29). Where the approach favoured by Swinton and Mowat views experience through a theological lens, here experience and practice are examined without imposing an existing theological framework upon them. Therefore, the insight from the experience can question existing theological principles; Bennett et al. recognise this, noting that 'our reading of Christian tradition leads us to the view that the divine calling frequently addresses us from unexpected and "unholy" places beyond church' (2018, p.147).

This method is explored in a response to Swinton's *Practical Theology* article, by Jill Harshaw who articulates a different approach to practical theological research. She argues that Swinton's assumption that life in all its fullness 'fundamentally takes shape in relationship because "relationship is love" [and] is the core of what it means to be made in the image of God' (2012, p.279) fails to recognise that 'while entering a relationship with God is unarguably a part of the experience of fullness of life...it is far from the only part' (2012, p.281). Life, she argues, is more than a series of relationships, but an experience in which relationships take place. Thus, she changes the perspective which Swinton offers by giving primacy to the experience, as the place where a relationship with God may be present within a larger framework.

She continues by offering an example of the experience of her autistic daughter Rebecca, who does not 'use words or respond to language of others...[and] is resistant to touch' (Harshaw, 2012, p.284-85). She argues that the lived experience of being with Rebecca 'has become for many within and outside her family, an opportunity to sense the presence of a love that, like its Giver, is both vulnerable and overwhelmingly powerful' (2012, p.285). She continues by retelling the story of Rebecca's time in hospital, where family members and friends stayed in shifts at the bedside, 'we...tried to comfort her in any way we could' (2012, p.285). Harshaw's story concludes with another patient's comment that the love that family and friends surrounded Rebecca with had touched the lives of others on the ward.

[O]ther patients saw what love looks like in the tenderness, diligence and sacrificial care that many offered to Rebecca...beyond this, there was a glimpse of what love looks like

that was entirely intangible...It was the very presence of Love that transcends all visible demonstrations.

2012, p.286

For Harshaw, the experience of love enabled her, and others, to understand love as a concept. The experience was thus the framework, or lens, through which theology could be understood and new understanding revealed.

The differing approaches to practical theological research, highlighted by the dialogue of Swinton and Harshaw, both value the knowledge that can be gained through examining experience. However, they differ in the starting point of their method. For Swinton, there must be an established theological principle to be investigated, which can either be enlightened by examining an experience, or can provide an answer for the questions which the experience raises. In essence, his approach shown in the example above, is to ask 'how might the theological principle of love be manifest in the experience of autistic individuals?' Harshaw's model of practical theological research does not begin with a defined theological concept to examine, but gives priority to the experience which, when examined, enables theological principles to be articulated or reformed. In the example above, this approach would be to ask, 'what theological insight might be gained through examining an experience of autistic love?' Thus, the experience remains central to both methods, but the model demonstrated by Harshaw, and Bennett et al., allows the experience to challenge theological assumptions, rather than be framed within an existing theological framework.

In this research, I will consider the challenges which fresh expressions bring to British Methodism through the exploration of four fresh expressions and whilst I recognise the need to take both practice and theology seriously, I agree with Campbell-Reed who argues that 'the most valuable knowledge is context dependent' (2016, p.47) and, therefore, favour the second model of practical theological research outlined above. In this research I give priority to the 'texts' of four fresh expressions, drawing upon existing Methodist articulations of ecclesiology as examined in Chapter Two and my own formation by Methodist theology and practice, to explore the ways in which British Methodist ecclesiology is challenged. I do not believe that the approach favoured by Swinton and Mowat, which gives theology priority over experience, would enable exploration of the ways that fresh expressions challenge Methodist ecclesiology, rather, it would only highlight divergence from Methodist ecclesiology. I argue, as Larney (2000, p.131) does, that practical theology should not separate theory and practice but is a way of doing theology by critically examining experience. In this way, the whole process of practical theological research is theological, recognising that 'tradition, context and experience...shape

us in such a way that there are many different forms of equally valid Christian faith' (Lartey, 2000, p.131). In the fieldwork and analysis of this research, I adopt the approach outlined by Bennett et al., which gives priority to the fresh expressions, rather than any existing framework, to seek to understand how the experience challenges Methodist ecclesiology and also provides the potential for Methodist ecclesiology to be reformulated in the light of new understanding.

As a piece of practical theology, rooted in the experience of fresh expressions within the Methodist tradition, this thesis engages in critical reflection upon the interaction of Methodist ecclesiology and practice with that of fresh expressions, as articulated principally through the case studies and literature. This resonates with Swinton and Mowat's provisional definition of practical theology as 'critical, theological reflection on the practices of the church as they interact with the practices of the world with a view to ensuring and enabling the faithful practices in, to and for the world' (2006, p.25). Graham, Walton and Ward contend that the lived experience of individuals, or communities in this research, is an 'enacted narrative of faith' (2005, p.198). As such, examining the experience of fresh expressions will reveal the community's narrative of faith and offer theological insight. Through examining the experience of four case studies, this research gains theological insight and discovers ways that the experience, or espoused ecclesiology, of fresh expressions may challenge normative Methodist ecclesiology. This research is a critical evaluation of theory-laden experience and practice of fresh expressions which are part of the Methodist Connexion, in relation to normative British Methodist ecclesiology.

Qualitative research is common within practical theology.

[It] is a process of careful, rigorous inquiry into the social world. It produces formal statements of conceptual frameworks that provide new ways of understanding the world...[it] takes human experience seriously and seeks to understand and interpret that experience.

Swinton and Mowat, 2006, pp.29-31

Silverman argues that defining qualitative research simply as 'non-quantitative' (2011a, p.3) is useless as it provides nothing positive. He proposes four positive characteristics of qualitative research: he argues that qualitative research first uses words and offers verbal interpretations; second, it is concerned with meaning which lies behind behaviour; third, qualitative research induces hypotheses from data analysis and fourth, uses case studies to generate data (2011, pp.4-5). 'Quantitative research is helpful in discovering broad statistical

patterns and relationships' (Osmer, 2008, p.50) but as this research is not concerned with statistical patterns, it is not appropriate to employ quantitative research methodology here. Osmer believes that qualitative research is 'better suited to studying a small number of individuals, groups or communities in depth' (2008, p.50). As my intention in this work is to consider fresh expressions within Methodism, the use of qualitative research methods will enable a rigorous study of the case study communities. Through the use of qualitative research methods, the aim of this thesis is to articulate the ecclesiological understandings that are generated from fresh expressions within the Connexion; to understand the embodied practice (Bennett et al, 2018, p.141) of fresh expressions and reveal the operant ecclesiology which can then be critically examined in line with normative British Methodist ecclesiology. My aim in this work is to produce knowledge and undertake work 'that makes a practical difference to the church' (Bennett et al, 2018, p.154) as the number and variety of fresh expressions continue to grow.

3.2 Case Studies

To reveal the challenges that fresh expressions bring to Methodist ecclesiology, this thesis will rely upon the exploration of case studies, which can be defined as 'instances of research focusing on a particular person, group, or situation over a defined period of time. They are based in a distinct set of research questions, shaped by explicit parameters and set within socio-political, historical and theological context' (Campbell-Reed, 2016, p.35). Case studies are a useful tool to examine a context, particularly when "how" or "why" questions' (Yin, 1994, p.1) are asked, especially when the researcher has little control over the context. Schipani recognises that the value of case studies is that, through the exploration of a particular experience, they have 'epistemic value, that is, the possibility of generating knowledge' (2014, p.96). Yin also explains that 'a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context... you would use the case study method because you deliberately wanted to cover contextual conditions' (1994, p.13). Schipani defines the case study method as a 'systematic way of studying and reporting various aspects of a person, family, group, or situation utilising a structured outline of subjects and questions' (2014, p.91). In this study I will employ the case study method to aid the critical examination of fresh expressions within British Methodism and the challenges which they bring to Methodist ecclesiology. Campbell-Reed argues that the most valuable knowledge is context dependent (2016, p.47). I concur with this assessment and propose that the most valuable way of revealing the way that fresh expressions may be discernibly Methodist is by examining them in their context, and observing their practice.

My interaction with the case studies will use both deductive and inductive approaches. The deductive, notes Fiddles, involves ‘working from large principles to application in particular situations’ (2012, p.18), which in my research will involve my observation of how the theoretical perspectives of Methodist ecclesiology are present in each fresh expression. Fiddles further notes that an inductive approach concerns ‘working from the details of the actual situation to theological principles’ (2012, p.19). In my research, the inductive is represented particularly in the interviews, in which I discuss the espoused and operant ecclesiology of the fresh expressions. The data generated is then analysed to reveal fresh expressions’ points of tension or resonance with Methodist ecclesiology. I believe that both deductive and inductive approaches are required to generate knowledge from the case studies. Using a solely deductive approach, in which I note the ways that the principles of Methodist ecclesiology are manifest, would deny that practice is ‘the “Alpha” and “Omega” of theological discourse’ (Bennett et al., 2018, p.66). Fiddles phrases the argument for deductive and inductive approaches thus: ‘God communicates God’s own self through actions, relationships, and symbols in daily life...so we cannot simply impose a set of revealed truths on a situation’ (2012, p.19). Ballard and Pritchard contend that ‘theory and practice are dialectically locked together, for theory or understanding arises out of action, and action relates to reflection on interpreted action’ (1996, p.54). This also relates to my model of practical theological research as giving priority to the experience to generate knowledge which may lead to the reformulation of Methodist ecclesiology. The exploration and analysis of case studies enables practice and theory to be observed and examined within a context and viewed in the light of Methodist ecclesiology.

I will conduct four case studies, the methodological framework of which is explored below. I have chosen to employ a multiple-case design rather than exploring a single case study. As this thesis considers the challenges which fresh expressions bring to contemporary British Methodist ecclesiology, it is important to consider more than one fresh expression; this is significant as Yin notes that single cases provide little base for generalisation (1994, p.10) and, therefore, will not provide results which are representative of the whole Connexion. While four case studies cannot provide a basis for generalisation through the Connexion, they do provide a wider base from which I can offer propositions that have the potential to illuminate thinking across the whole Connexion. Campbell-Reed also notes that the lack of a variety of cases in a ‘single case study can also mislead or misdirect readers to stereotypes, one-sided assessments or overamplified analysis’ (2016, p.32).

Yin notes that there is no distinction in the methodological framework for single-case and multiple-case studies but that multiple cases ‘must be carefully selected so that it either (a)

predicts similar results (a literal replication) or (b) produces contrasting results (1994, pp.45-46). The first step in choosing case studies was to establish a set of criteria. I identified two broad criteria into which the fresh expressions must fit, the first was that the initiative must be set within a Methodist circuit and receive support and funding from Methodism. The nature of this study as an exploration of the impact of fresh expressions on Methodist ecclesiology demands that the case studies should be within the Connexion, as fresh expressions within Methodism have a greater impact upon Methodist ecclesiology than those which are outside of the denomination. Using four case studies also recognises that 'the evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling, the overall study is therefore considered as more robust' (Yin, 1994, p.45).

The second criterion was that the initiatives were recognised by the Fresh Expressions movement or by The Methodist Church in Britain as fresh expressions. *Changing Church for a Changing World* (TMCP, 2007) offers a brief reflection on several fresh expressions as examples of the Church engaging with contemporary culture, this was the starting point for selecting initiatives as case studies. I then turned to the Fresh Expressions website, which listed a further group of fresh expressions from all denominations. From *Changing Church for a Changing World* and the Fresh Expressions website I compiled a list of initiatives defined as being fresh expressions and Methodist.

As the list of Methodist fresh expressions was too large to study in-depth and to ensure diversity in the initiatives chosen as case studies, I selected one fresh expression which would broadly fit into each one of the four elements of *Our Calling*: Worship, Learning and Caring, Service and Evangelism (TMCP, 2000c). However, there is a potential circularity in analysing each fresh expression solely through the lens of one element of *Our Calling*, as I would expect all elements of *Our Calling* to be present to some degree in each for a community to be a Methodist church. Therefore, I will consider how all of the elements are present in each case study. I believe that as *Our Calling* is featured heavily throughout the Connexion and is a summation of the nature and purpose of The Methodist Church in Britain; the use of *Our Calling* would also ensure that Methodist ecclesiology was central to the investigation.

Once I had arranged the list of fresh expressions into the four elements of *Our Calling*, there remained too many initiatives to study, and I had to select four to approach for permission to use as case studies. I began this process by considering the distance I would have to travel in order to be present at each fresh expression four times; it would be impractical and costly to travel more than two and a half hours from my home to each location. Limiting the travel time reduced the number of fresh expressions which I was able to consider to a smaller group

of initiatives. In 2011, as I was planning the research, there was only one fresh expression which focused on learning and caring, and one which focused on service. I, therefore, contacted those initiatives. I then selected a fresh expression which focused on worship and one which focused on evangelism because they were closest to my home. The selection of the case studies in this way has an impact on the later research in terms of providing a broad selection of fresh expressions to be examined, which can generate knowledge and lead to affirmation or reformulation of Methodist ecclesiology.

I recognise that in limiting the distance I was able to travel to each case study, I also limited the number of fresh expressions which I could examine as part of my research. To address this lack of geographical diversity, I did ensure that the case studies that I selected represented a mix of urban and semi-rural contexts, including a city centre, village and town. I also chose fresh expressions that I was not overly familiar with, to maintain a level of detachment and ensure that my research prioritised the voice of the fresh expression rather than my own³¹. However, it is possible, as context is vital to fresh expressions, that examining a context further than two hours travelling would have highlighted other ecclesiological challenges than those revealed in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight. For example, examining a fresh expression in the north of Scotland or the south of England may highlight additional challenges regarding leadership due to the differing context and the distance which ministers, lay or ordained, may travel to be present at the fresh expression. Therefore, it is possible that selecting the case studies in this way may lead to my overlooking a fresh expression which may have a significant impact on the research question. However, I argue, as Campbell-Reed does, that examining the case studies I have selected brings the potential to 'offer a pathway into larger arguments' (2016, p.35). The larger argument here is the way that fresh expressions within The Methodist Church in Britain may be discernibly 'Methodist' and what practices within them may indicate the presence of a Methodist church. The pathway to larger arguments, which the case studies provide, will enable the ecclesiological challenges highlighted to be extended to those fresh expressions which I have not selected as case studies. Thus, I argue that the critical examination of four case studies in this work can highlight the ecclesiological issues which may be represented across the Connexion and indeed any new or reformulated practice which I suggest would also be pertinent within fresh expressions in the Connexion.

In preparation for conducting the case studies, I contacted the leader each of the selected fresh expression and explained the purpose of the study and outlined how I would undertake research within their context. Each of the leaders showed interest in the research, discussed

³¹ As I explore further in section 3.6

my proposal with others involved in the fresh expression, and all four fresh expressions agreed to participate.

The first case study, Fresh Expression A, is part of X Methodist Church which engages in several fresh expressions as different approaches to worship, thus I located this fresh expression in the worship element of *Our Calling*. A monthly Café Church and a monthly alternative worship service, Air, will be explored. The story of Fresh Expression A is featured on the Fresh Expressions website, written in 2012 (Fresh Expressions, 2017b).

The second case study is Fresh Expression B. This fresh expression attempts to create a community around the baking of bread, which relates to the learning and caring element of *Our Calling*. Fresh Expression B features in a DVD of fresh expressions in the UK (Fresh Expressions, 2017b) and is found in *Changing Church for a Changing World* (TMCP, 2007, p.11).

The third case study is Fresh Expression C. The premises of Y Methodist Church have been redeveloped as a children's activity playcentre and café. This fresh expression was placed in the Service category of *Our Calling*. Fresh Expression C is featured in both *Changing Church for a Changing World* (TMCP, 2007, pp.48-49) and a DVD produced by Fresh Expressions (Fresh Expressions, 2017b).

The fourth case study explores Fresh Expression D, a project of Z Methodist Circuit. This fresh expression is based in a secondary school, takes place each Sunday evening and features a 'gospel presentation' as the focus of each session. This fresh expression falls into the Evangelism category of *Our Calling*. Fresh Expression D is included on a DVD produced by Fresh Expressions (Fresh Expressions, 2017b), Fresh Expression D also identifies itself as a fresh expression on its website (Fresh Expression D, 2013a).

I undertook the fieldwork between 2012 and 2013. At the time of writing, Fresh Expressions A and B exist in broadly the same shape, the research, therefore, continues to be relevant to those contexts. Fresh Expression C continues, but Y Methodist Church has closed, any new practice will be relevant to ensure the fresh expression can be identifiably Methodist. The website of Fresh Expression D states that the fresh expression is 'hibernating' (Fresh Expression D, 2019), thus, although the fresh expression is not currently active, it may resume in the future: my research remains relevant to the community.

3.3 Research Methods

To explore the practice and ecclesiology of each case study and to provide detailed evidence for the research, I used a mix of research methods.

I visited each case study on four occasions, lasting between 1.5 and 3 hours for each visit, observing and recording the activities of the fresh expression. Thumma notes that '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' (1998, p.203). The aim in observation was to understand the way that the fresh expression functioned, to gain a sense of the identity of the community and to understand what happened when the community met, that I might examine the ecclesiology of the fresh expression. I decided that my observation would be non-participatory, whilst recognising my position as a practising Christian in a worshipping community. Gobo states that those who use this ethnographic method 'make sure not to interfere with the subjects' actions so as not to influence their behaviour' (2011, p.17). I used this method to minimise my own influence within the context as I believed that my participation in the activities of each case study would alter the dynamic of the group, providing research data which was not true to the context. Gobo notes that 'the overriding concern [of ethnography] is always to observe actions as they are performed' (2011, p.26). As I did not want my interactions to alter the way that actions within the fresh expression were performed, I observed each fresh expression and made notes upon what I observed. I recognise that I achieved a mix of participatory and non-participatory observation, as my lack of participation would have been inappropriate during bread-making sessions at Fresh Expression B, for example. Nevertheless, my intention was primarily to experience the activity of, and discern the understanding of church implicit in, each fresh expression and I believe that my limited participation in the fresh expressions did not unduly influence the research context.

Through non-participant observation, I was able to capture the action and behaviour of the subjects. Gobo (2011, pp.26-28) believes that the presence of the researcher in the context provides a better understanding of patterns of behaviour which are more stable and dependable than opinion alone. Osmer (2008, p.59) suggests that attending to the actions of others is vital to the descriptive task of practical theology; observation enabled me to gather information which would aid in the examination of each context. This ethnographic method is criticised as being subjective as 'it is very sensitive to the researcher's attitudes and perceptions' (Gobo, 2011, p.28) and does not easily explore the opinions of the individual. Thus, as the researcher I see what I expect to see or what I am particularly looking for, and may miss some of the subtleties of the fresh expression.

During observation at each fresh expression, I used the same record sheet.³² These recorded an overview of the space in which the fresh expression met; any special circumstances on the day of my visit; the number and background of those attending; how leadership was exercised; a description of the activity I observed, and any questions which the observation raised which would inform the interviews. The principal objective of my non-participant observation was to provide an overview of the fresh expression context and the activities the initiative engaged in, to inform the interviews through raising questions which were specific to the individual fresh expression. Therefore, the non-participatory observation element of this research contributes to the analysis through the generation of informed follow-up questions concerning specific features of the case studies.

Yin notes that in case studies, biased views can influence the direction of the findings of the research (1994, p.9); I recognised that my interaction with Christian activity as a Christian and as a presbyter brought with it a bias, which I was aware of throughout the research. To address this, I maintained a degree of detachment from the case studies by choosing initiatives with which I was not overly familiar. I also chose to conduct interviews with four people at each fresh expression to enable me to understand my own ecclesiological prejudices through hearing the interviewees' perspectives and gain as full a picture as possible of each case study.

To explore the opinions and beliefs of those involved in each fresh expression, I interviewed one individual each time I observed a case study. In conversation with the leader³³ of each community, I asked for three interviewees to be selected and arranged for the times when I would be present; the fourth interview was the leader of each fresh expression. This follows the regulations of Anglia Ruskin University (ARU, 2016) which state that the initial approach to participants may need to come from someone working within that organisation. This also ensured that the interviews were prearranged, and the individuals were prepared for interview. I also believed that the leader of the fresh expression would be better placed to choose individuals for interview as they knew them. However, I recognise that it is possible that the leader of the fresh expression could have chosen interviewees who would be able to give the 'right answers' to my questions, rather than their true opinion. This choice also reveals something about me as the researcher: as a Methodist presbyter, I would expect that another person would seek my approval to interview in my context.

³² These record sheets can be found in Appendices VIII, IX, X and XI.

³³ The website of each case study identified the individual who was the leader of the fresh expression.

Interviews are useful in gathering research data as they take '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' (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, p.50). The interviews were semi-structured to enable each interviewee to develop their own perspective upon the ecclesiology³⁴ of the fresh expression and to discuss the issues I had identified during observation and the preparation of guide questions. In semi-structured interviews, the guide 'provides some format but does not constrain the interview interaction' (Mann, 2016, p.102). The questions used for each interview can be found in Appendix I. Throughout the interviews, I used open-ended questions to allow the interviewees to articulate their own perspective and used verbal and non-verbal probes to elicit further information or clarification (Mann, 2016, pp.91-128). This meant that that the interviews I conducted relied upon the set questions as a guide (Mann, 2016, p.91) and, while there was room for discussion and expansion of the themes raised, it was important that the guide was covered during each interview to be able to properly analyse the data.

The importance of power and trust within interviews is noted by Miller and Glassner. The interviewer holds some power over the interviewee, 'there must be a level of trust between the interviewer and the interviewee. Social distances that include differences in relative power can result in suspicion' (2011, p.141). The interviewer is in control of the interview, designing the questions and ensuring that the guide is covered. The interviewee has less power and is vulnerable as they have little control over how the answers they give may be used and there is a possibility that the interviewer may misrepresent their responses when the data is written up. Therefore, before commencing the interview, to enable the interviewees to feel comfortable with the process, I described the research that I was undertaking and ensured that each signed a consent form for their words to be included (they each retained a copy) with the option of withdrawing from the research at any point.³⁵ I explained that the interview would be recorded and transcribed shortly after the interview has concluded. I also ensured that each interviewee received a copy of the transcript that they could read and agree as a fair reflection of the interview. Throughout the research, the names of all interviewees have been changed to preserve their anonymity.

I believe that using the mixed methods of non-participant observation in conjunction with interviews ensured that I could understand the story of each fresh expression and the meaning

³⁴ I did not use the word 'ecclesiology' in the interviews as I felt the word may be intimidating. Rather, I phrased the guide questions to reveal the ecclesiology as the interviewees answered.

³⁵ No interviewee exercised this option.

attributed to the experience and actions in each case study (Miller and Glassner, 2011, p.133), thereby reflecting upon the ideology and ecclesiology of each fresh expression. Observation followed by interviews also enabled me to privilege the voice of the participants over my own, so that the research was based upon the participants' views rather than my perception. This mix of methods also ensured that the research question was probed in each case study. The mixed methods also provide a structure and a limit to the research which Schipani believes to be important as case studies without limits have the potential to become 'aimless or limitless' (2014, p.99) which restricts their usefulness to generate knowledge.

3.4 Analysis

A criticism of the case study method is that such a methodology will take too long to complete and result in large, unreadable documents (Yin, 1994, p.10). There was potential for the case studies in this work to result in large repetitive documents which would explore the fresh expression context and practice but not analyse the data. Whilst these documents need to be created in order to observe themes which are present throughout the case studies, they will not be included as part of this thesis. Rather, Chapter Four of this thesis contains the write-up of each case study. My intention is to offer an outline of each fresh expression in narrative form, as 'narratives are the stories that individuals tell about themselves to give order to their lives' (Fox, Martin and Green, 2007, p.12). I believe that writing the case studies in a narrative form will enable me to explore the story of the fresh expression in a way that will enable reflection upon the practice by highlighting the meaning attributed to certain aspects of the communal life of the fresh expression, without creating a document which is too long and unreadable.

Chapter Five will detail the process by which I coded the data to reveal the themes which were present in each of the case studies. The process involved becoming familiar with the data, searching for themes and patterns then naming and defining the themes (Rapley, 2011, p.275). This process was followed for each of the case studies, the themes which were identified will then inform the analysis of the case studies in Chapter Five as my 'analytic narrative is weaved together' (Mann, 2016, p.211).

Chapter Six will then analyse the case studies thematically to highlight the challenges to the ecclesiology of British Methodism. Data analysis is the 'process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the complicated mass of qualitative data...a process of breaking down the data and thematising it in ways which draw out the hidden meanings' (Swinton and Mowat, 2006, p.57). The analysis will be an iterative process, primarily informed by the interview data and theoretical perspectives. Within this process, the data will be given priority.

3.5 Ethical issues

This research had some ethical considerations to be addressed. In the initial discussions with the leader of each fresh expression, I raised the issue of confidentiality. Mann (2016, p.238) recognises the importance of confidentiality but also notes that in some research contexts the subject does not desire anonymity. Although the leaders of the fresh expression were ambivalent concerning the anonymisation of their community in this work, I decided that it would be appropriate to change the names of any individuals interviewed. Anonymisation of individuals was important in enabling all participants to feel that they could speak critically without fear of being identified. Fox, Martin and Green believe that anonymity is ethically essential to 'ensure that the physical and psychological well-being of participants is not adversely affected by the research' (2007, p.103). For similar reasons, I decided to change the name of each fresh expression. As the Methodist Church in Britain is a small denomination, using the actual names of each fresh expression may enable a reader to locate the community and identify the individuals concerned. Also, given the nature of the exploration of each case study and any tensions which may be evident within the circuit, it is appropriate to ensure that its identity is protected as far as possible. I recognise that the size of The Methodist Church in Britain and the prominence of the fresh expressions within the denomination and the Fresh Expressions organisation means that it is impossible to guarantee complete anonymity for the fresh expressions. Nevertheless, the steps I have taken make it as difficult as possible to identify the case studies.

In order to ensure that this research had an ethically sound base, informed consent was important. Silverman believes that there are various ethical goals to be achieved in research, these include voluntary participation, confidentiality, mutual trust and informed consent which is central to the research process. He writes, 'to be informed means that the potential research subject should be given a detailed but non-technical account...of the nature and aims of...[the] research' (2011a, pp.97-98). All participants, therefore, received information sheets which outlined the purposes of the research and how their data would be used and stored, each also signed a consent form allowing me to use parts of their interview transcript throughout the thesis. Silverman also notes (2011a, p.104) that informed consent is a process rather than a one-off action. To ensure that the research subjects understood the purpose, throughout the interview process I reminded the participants of the nature of the study, often this was achieved through the framing of questions and aided the building of trust, enabling the participants to feel at ease with the process.

Before, and throughout, the interview process, I ensured that all interviewees were aware that their responses to questions would be anonymous, and that their words would not lead to

repercussions should their comments deviate from normative Methodist ecclesiology. To ensure that all the interviewees were confident that I had recorded their words correctly, I sent each participant a copy of their transcribed interview for them to read and raise any issues. No participant contacted me at any point to seek clarification, to request changes or to ask for responses to be deleted from the transcripts; I am, therefore, confident that each interviewee was content with their responses.

During each visit to a fresh expression, I adopted the role of a visitor. However, many of those involved with each fresh expression knew that I was a student presbyter undertaking research within their community. I did not attempt to conceal my identity at any point, but openly explained the research I was conducting with anyone who enquired. This led to several conversations, which informed some additional interview questions.

3.6 Reflexivity

Reflexivity concerns how the research is affected by the researcher, 'reflexivity proposes that one's identity and lived reality reflect one another...they are co-constructed. In other words, the beliefs of the researcher affect the world that they research (Fox, Martin and Green, 2007, p.186). In the context of this thesis, reflexivity concerns my self-awareness throughout the research process. I prioritised this by identifying the ways that my own experience or values influenced the way in which I interpreted the data. I am currently an ordained presbyter of The Methodist Church in Britain but as I undertook the fieldwork, I was a student presbyter. I have a high regard for the place of the presbyter within the Church and I believe that it is vital for presbyters to have a 'principal and directing part' (TMCP, 2020, p.213) in the life of the Church. I recognise that my opinion may not be shared by those within the case studies, therefore, throughout the research I ensured that I did not project my views upon the data, principally through asking open-ended questions which did not lead participants to answer in a particular way.

Due to my previous experience of fresh expressions, as I began this research, I was sceptical of fresh expressions, in terms of leadership and accountability. I note this because as much as I was aware of my own subjectivity, it will have had an effect on the research. This is helpful as the 'internal dialogue offers clues about matters that may need further attention' (Osmer, 2008, p.59). In writing up this thesis, it was important that reflexivity was kept at an appropriate level, principally through the supervisory process, 'to avoid accusations that this is all a form of qualitative "navel gazing" and a narcissistic self-preoccupation...or that it privileges the researcher's voice' (Mann, 2016, p.17).

I was aware of my voice within the research, considering that ‘theological understanding is neither neutral nor universal in origin...emerging from and reflecting its interests and authors’ (Graham, Walton and Ward, 2005, p.197); I had to be self-aware that my voice did not obscure the exploration of the research question. In the interviews this meant that I had to ensure that I did not lead an interviewee to answer a question in a particular way but allow their voice to be heard. Ward argues ‘reflexivity should not, then, be seen as an attempt to find some sort of objectivity but rather it is an acknowledgement that the commitments of the writer are part of the academic process’ (2008, p.4). Objectivity is impossible to achieve in a piece of work which is not isolated from my own experience as a presbyter in The Methodist Church in Britain. Within my own denomination I cannot be outside of the research, I am not ‘an impartial observer nor a hostile outsider’ (Bretherton, 2007, p.32). This dynamic is understood by Dwyer and Buckle as researching as an insider/outsider, they note ‘qualitative research no longer allows us to remain true outsiders to the experience under study and, because of our role as researchers, it does not qualify us as complete insiders’ (2009, p.61). In her exploration of the insider/outsider research dynamic, Knott (2005, p.247) argues that those who research within their own religious community tend to be more critical than an outsider. She further claims (2005, pp.252-54) that it is difficult for an insider/outsider to compartmentalise the dual aspect of the research but that the value of the insider/outsider is found in the reflexivity which is required during the research process. In this thesis, I construct a self-reflexive account of my interaction with the four case studies and attempt to ‘see the “whole picture”’ (Fox, Martin and Green, 2007, p.64) of the case studies.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the practical theology approach that I have employed which gives priority to the experience of the case studies as a way of generating knowledge which is useful to the Church and the world, to understand the ways in which fresh expressions challenge British Methodist ecclesiology.

I have examined the advantages and the dangers of using multiple case studies as a way of generating data and I have outlined the case studies which will be used. I critically explored the usefulness of an ethnographic methodology of non-participation observation and interviews to enable the context of each fresh expression to be at the fore of the research and provide a practical outcome to the research. I have also shown that the analysis of the case studies will include an overview of my interaction with each fresh expression in Chapter Four and I have indicated how the themes which emerge will be examined in Chapter Five.

I have discussed the ethical issues which relate to this research; principally the need for anonymity for both the fresh expressions and the interviewees and the requirement for informed consent throughout the research process.

I have also detailed the reflexivity which is required of me as I undertake the research; I must be aware of my bias and not allow my beliefs to drive the research but allow the experience to generate data which can be examined.

CHAPTER FOUR

CASE STUDIES

This chapter provides a detailed overview of the case studies. I will follow the same form for each case study. First, I will explore the nature, key features and the aim of the fresh expression. Second, I will provide an account of my non-participatory observation. In order to avoid creating a long and unreadable series of write-ups, I will not provide a detailed account of the interviews I undertook in each of the case studies, though these will inform the following chapters. My aim here is not to analyse the data but to offer a rich description and outline the key features. I will note any issues related to Methodist ecclesiology which arose during my observations, which contribute to the analysis.

Each of the case studies broadly fits within one element³⁶ of *Our Calling* (TMCP, 2000c), to ensure diversity and keep Methodist ecclesiology central to the investigation. I begin, therefore, by exploring Fresh Expression A, which represents the worship element of *Our Calling*.

4.1 Fresh Expression A - Worship

Fresh Expression A is located in the centre of a small town. X Methodist Church is set back from the road by an enclosed area. A noticeboard identifies the building and provides contact details for the minister. A path leads down the side of the building to the rear doors and car park. Terraced housing surrounds the church building.

The inside of the church has been renovated to allow for moveable seating. A door leads from the sanctuary to the ancillary rooms. This suite consists of a kitchen, toilets, the church hall and an upstairs meeting room. Noticeboards in the hallway display notices for church and community groups.

Methodist Statistics for Mission (TMCP, 2013a) state that, as the fieldwork was undertaken, the church had a membership of 90 people and its average attendance at worship (at Nov 2011) was 74.

Fresh Expression A engaged in two activities that may be understood as fresh expressions. I visited each twice. These activities are Café Church and Air³⁷ which were initiated for those

³⁶ See Chapter Two of this thesis.

³⁷ The name of Air has been changed.

who were not part of the church and appealed to those who desired a different style of worship. During the fieldwork, both of these acts of worship included individuals who had not been part of the Church previously and, therefore, fit the criteria for an initiative to be a fresh expression as explored in Chapter Two.

Air occurs on the second Sunday of every month. It is an alternative worship service for those looking for a 'creative and engaging place to think about God' (Fresh Expression A, 2013). The church website declares that

Café Church is a church with a difference. Seated round tables...we drink coffee, eat croissants, discuss faith and read the Sunday papers...we sing a few songs, hear a bit of a talk, say some prayers.

Fresh Expression A, 2013

The interviewees were James, Liz, Steven, and Philip. James was involved in the worship band at Café Church and the planning team for Air. Liz was part of the planning team for Café Church, and a member of the Church Council. Steven was the leader of the worship band for Café Church and also played guitar during Air. Philip, the presbyter with pastoral charge of the church, had been stationed to the circuit for five years³⁸ initially with pastoral charge of three churches. This was changed three years ago³⁹, when he was given sole charge of X Methodist Church.

4.1.1 Aims

Philip stated the aim in creating Café Church and Air was 'to say, "what can a mixed economy look like?"' (Appendix I – Philip). '[F]ollowing a reference by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, it has become commonplace for Anglicans (and Methodists) to talk of a "mixed economy" whereby fresh expressions and Anglican parish churches (or local Methodist churches) co-exist and cooperate' (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.7). Philip referred to a mixed economy within one church, with fresh expressions of church and traditional patterns of worship operating alongside each other. This was emphasised by James, who stated that his involvement in Air came about 'through hearing something of...a comparatively conventional service but using...different music, different styles' (Appendix II – James). The mixed economy of X Methodist Church represents an understanding that creative worship can operate alongside traditional worship.

³⁸ At the time of writing.

³⁹ At the time of writing.

Philip reflected that the aims of Café Church and Air are to create 'many access points in worship...several congregations meeting...not several churches' (Appendix I – Philip). There was a recognition that many people feel unable to worship in a traditional style, and the church sought to provide different styles of worship to appeal to a different demographic. James, speaking particularly in relation to Air, echoed this point as he considered that the aim was to enable individuals to 'meet with and respond to God' (Appendix I – James). It is clear Air and Café Church aim to provide multiple access points for worship as a mixed economy model of church.

Liz believed that the aim, particularly of Café Church, was to provide a worship experience that was accessible for those who did not have a church background, who 'don't know all the Methodist hymns' (Appendix II – Liz). Steven expressed this view in terms of the church seeking to be relevant to those who have little experience of church. The aim described here was evident in my observations of Air and Café Church. In both experiences, the use of religious jargon was avoided; each element of worship was explained and those present were encouraged to engage only with the elements with which they felt comfortable. Liz commented that the aims of Air and Café Church were not easily captured in a sentence, 'it's partly worship, it's partly evangelism, it's partly pastoral' (Appendix II – Liz). It is clear from the interviews that Café Church and Air are both expressions of worship and the primary aim of both is that individuals attending are able to engage in worship.

From my informal conversations and during interviews I was made aware of a number of individuals and families who have come to be a part of the church since Air and Café Church were initiated, many of these had no previous contact with any church. This fits with the definition of Fresh Expressions as primarily for the benefit of those who are not part of a church.

Both Philip and Steven commented that Air offers a different worship experience, which enables those uncomfortable in traditional worship or Café Church to spend time in reflection and provides an opportunity to 'go deeper in faith and...think about it' (Appendix I – Philip). During my observation of Air, a great deal of time was spent encouraging reflection and stillness.

Liz, reflecting on the origins of Café Church, stated that initially a proportion of the congregation of the church were uncomfortable with the change in style of worship, '[they were] horrified initially...they don't like it...[but now] they're supporting it' (Appendix I – Liz).

4.1.2 Record of Observation: Air

Air is held monthly on a Sunday evening in the church hall. The date of each service is communicated via a mailing list, the weekly church notice sheet and website. On both evenings I attended, no signage indicated that the event was taking place or how to access the building.

The building was dimly lit as I entered. There was no one present to greet those who entered the premises. I was welcomed by the presbyter as I entered the hall; this was because I had arranged to attend rather than a greeting which was offered to all, as those who arrived after me were not greeted in the same way. The hall had chairs arranged in a semi-circle around a centrepiece facing a screen onto which words and video clips were projected. Several small lamps provided subdued lighting.

Eleven people attended Air on the first visit, seven of whom were female. The ages ranged from 30 years old to 70. On the second visit, eight individuals were in attendance, of which five were male, the ages ranging from 30 years old to 60.

During both visits to Air, the worship followed a similar order. Music played in the background as people arrived, at 7:30pm the presbyter welcomed those gathered and lit three candles. This was followed by the singing of a song leading into prayer. A short reflection upon the theme was presented which was followed by a time of discussion in small groups. Next there was the reading of scripture followed by a second thought upon the theme, with further discussion questions. My experiences differ at this point: one contained a period of reflection followed by a responsive act of taking a piece of wood from the centrepiece and a prayer; the second experience contained a creative activity, followed by a second song, a third thought and a time of reflection and prayer. Both ended with a song and a blessing which included extinguishing the candles.

4.1.3 Record of Observation: Café Church

Café Church is held on the third Sunday morning of the month. Throughout Café Church, individuals are encouraged to comment on the worship or make prayer requests using social media. During the worship, a volunteer updated Twitter detailing the scripture readings and the activities as they were occurred. This enabled participation from those who are present and able to use social media, and those who are unable to be present.

Café Church was held in the sanctuary of the church. Each time I attended Café Church I was welcomed by two people in the foyer. The sanctuary was arranged in the same way each time

I visited Café Church. This consisted of tables and chairs set around the room. On each table was a newspaper, a paper bag, the weekly notice sheet and a plate of cakes. The paper bag contained resources for use during the worship.

Drinks were served from an area towards the front of the church and all were encouraged to refill their cups at any point. Behind the communion rail was a band, consisting of a worship leader playing keyboard and leading vocals, a guitarist, two flautists and three singers.

A data projector and screen were in use throughout the worship. The words to scripture readings and songs were projected along with images designed to help people to understand what was happening.

On my first visit to Café Church there were 70 people in attendance most of whom were female. The ages ranged from two months old to over 80 years. Several young families were also present. On my second visit to Café Church, a total of 74 people were present, most of whom were female. On this visit, 17 children were present, including 3 teenagers. The majority of those present on both occasions were aged over 65 years old.

During both visits to Café Church, the worship followed a similar order. From 10:00am people arrived, spending time talking to one another and drinking tea and coffee. At 10:25am the presbyter announced that the worship would begin in five minutes. At 10:30am the worship began with a welcome from the presbyter, who encouraged everyone to engage in as much or as little of the worship as they felt comfortable with. At this point, the presbyter lit a candle and encouraged somebody on each table to light a candle from the bag on the table. As the candles were lit, a prayer was said. The band then led the singing of a song. In the second visit a child was dedicated at this point. A creative activity linked to the theme was then introduced for several minutes before the presbyter read from scripture and gave a short talk. Each table lit another candle, this was followed by another activity, scripture reading and talk. The band then led the singing of three songs after which the presbyter gave out notices.

Following the notices, the two examples of Café Church followed a different order. In the first, a reading from scripture was heard which led into a time of prayer as a final candle was lit. The second example followed the notices with a video clip, a short talk and a creative activity. The band led a final song, then the worship concluded with a blessing. On both occasions, the presbyter led the majority of the worship, apart from the songs and an activity which was introduced by a church member.

During the fieldwork I observed that Café Church and Air were led exclusively by the presbyter and occasional church members. Over the course of four acts of worship in a Methodist church, I would have expected there to have been some involvement from another circuit presbyter or a local preacher. Liz argued that both worship experiences required the presbyter to lead, as ‘you need that minister...to defer to. When you are trying to do something by committee and the rest of the committee don’t communicate with you, you can’t make a decision’ (Appendix I – Liz). I noted that the issues of leadership and of authority would need to be explored during the interviews, particularly in relation to the identity of Fresh Expression A as part of the circuit and Connexion.

Café Church and Air were different from a traditional act of worship, James noted that this was because the worship was designed to enable people to ‘meet with and respond to God’ (Appendix I – James) in appropriate ways. My previous experience of introducing new styles of worship highlighted that some people chose not to be present at worship when the style was different. This led to the question, ‘how can the Church be united when some are purposely absent?’ I chose to include conversation upon this issue during the interviews.

There was much that appeared to be discernibly Methodist during my observations at Fresh Expression A, though Philip suggested that he was ‘less keen on convincing people of Methodist doctrine, than getting them to sign up to this community of faith’ (Appendix I – Philip). I would argue that Café Church and Air could be incorporated into many Methodist churches throughout the Connexion, indeed I suggest that many Methodist churches throughout the Connexion already engage in creative worship alongside traditional worship. This is perhaps due to the way in which the mixed economy is modelled in this case study; the fresh expressions are part of an existing Methodist church and, therefore, do not need to develop systems of governance, for example, as these are already in place. While the fresh expressions focused upon the worship element of *Our Calling*, the remaining elements were part of the life of the church.

4.2 Fresh Expression B - Learning and Caring

Fresh Expression B is located in a city centre. For several years there was no visible Methodist presence within the city centre. The first Superintendent of Fresh Expression B was appointed and given a job description which she describes thus, ‘go and find if there’s a place for the Methodist Church in the city centre’.⁴⁰ She describes her attempt to understand how

⁴⁰ This reference is omitted as it would enable identification of the fresh expression.

Methodism may fit into the life of the city centre, articulating how baking bread convinced her of the bread-making project which would become Fresh Expression B.

Fresh Expression B is a one-church circuit which has two members of staff, a presbyter (who is also Superintendent of an adjacent circuit) and a part-time administrator. At the point of my contact, it had a membership (TMCP, 2013a) of 30 people, and an average weekly attendance of 44.

Fresh Expression B describes itself as 'the Methodist Church in...[the] City Centre...a faith community around the making and sharing of bread...We strive to provide a more inclusive and safer space' (Fresh Expression B, 2012).

Fresh Expression B is housed in a converted office suite above street level. The entrance is situated between a bookshop and a café. There is little signage to indicate the presence of a Methodist Church. I questioned the visibility of the site in each interview, and was informed that the lack of a prominent sign or notice was intentional, as part of providing a 'safer space' (Appendix II – Joan).

To access the building, visitors use the intercom before the door is opened. This was commented upon by interviewees, who stated that the use of the intercom and locked door is the policy of the landlord, but also allows Fresh Expression B to ensure that visitors are screened before being granted entry. As I reflected upon this, I considered how screening who may enter with a desire to be part of the fresh expression, may relate to the criteria which *Called to Love and Praise* asserts are required for a community to be a church: 'offering a home from home for all' (TMCP, 1999a, p.54).

The entrance was not well maintained, the impression was not of an active church or community project, but of a building which is not accessed regularly. With most of the building occupied by social projects, it may be that some who visit may not be aware that Fresh Expression B is part of the Methodist Church.

Inside the suite rented by Fresh Expression B, a corridor links all of the rooms. At the far end of the corridor was the Cloud Room. The Cloud Room is the location for a time of prayer and reflection which is held each Tuesday and Thursday as an optional part of bread-making sessions, worship is also held in the Cloud Room on the third Sunday of each month. A table in the centre of the room is set as a focus for the worship.

At the opposite end of the corridor is the bread-making room. This is a large room with long tables in the middle with chairs arranged around them. At the far end of the room are cupboards, a fridge, a freezer and a sink. A further area contains the proving and baking ovens.

There was little in the room which indicated the presence of a Methodist church. One poster had the Methodist logo upon and the name of the circuit on it. Apart from this, there was no mention of Methodism, Church or faith. I commented upon this and was informed that this was intentional to allow those who enter to feel comfortable. Joan also noted that 'the essential part of being here is not about being a Methodist, it's about being a Christian' (Appendix II – Joan). The room has many posters which relate to the bread-making process, but little to indicate the ethos which lies behind the community making bread together. Here I considered how the fresh expression might be a community 'which celebrates and proclaims Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour' (TMCP, 1999a, p.54), if there is little to highlight the reason for its existence?

The interviewees at Fresh Expression B were Joan, a volunteer facilitator and Church Council member, Paul, who worships at the Catholic Cathedral and attends the Church Council, Anne, the Fresh Expression B administrator, and John, the Superintendent presbyter. All the interviewees were aged over 40 years. I believe that those interviewed provided a broad range of experience as some had been present since the bread-making began, and others had only recently been appointed.

4.2.1 Aims

The interviewees believed that the aim of Fresh Expression B was to be 'a practical expression of Christianity...to experience the love of God' (Appendix III – Joan). Paul agreed with this sentiment, suggesting that the primary aim of Fresh Expression B will always be to make bread as it is seen by the community as the 'principal form of worship...we will in essence be a church who [sic] makes bread' (Appendix III – Paul). All of the interviewees believed that the core of Fresh Expression B is bread-making as a practical expression of Christianity; the metaphor of bread-making expressing the concept of combining ingredients to form a loaf as the individuals who attend the fresh expression make up the community. Anne and John both vocalised their belief that the building of an inclusive community was paramount. Anne suggested that the aim of Fresh Expression B was 'to provide a place of Christian friendship and fellowship where people who really wouldn't go to church...they will come here for the friendship, the fellowship and the food, the ambience' (Appendix III – Anne). John expressed a similar idea as he stated that the aim was 'to provide a place where people...can experience

a place of welcome'. (Appendix III – John). Joan continued this theme as she noted that that lack of a large sign outside the fresh expression was intentional, so as not to deter people who are 'living on the streets who maybe...[have] low self-esteem...it helps keep the safer space'. (Appendix III – Joan). These responses indicate the desire for Fresh Expression B to be a place in which faith can be explored in a comfortable environment, particularly for those on the margins of society. This case study falls within the learning and caring element of *Our Calling*, which is concerned with how the church might 'help people to grow and learn as Christians through mutual support and care' (TMCP, 2000c, p.2). The aims described above resonate with this as all interviewees placed importance upon the creation of a caring community in which people could grow spiritually as they engaged in the activities of the fresh expression.

4.2.2 Record of Observation: Bread-making

On bread-making days, the facilitators⁴¹ arrive between 9:00am and 10:00am, the doors open to those seeking to make bread at 10:30am. There was no formal welcome at the door, nor any instructions on the process of bread-making, on each day several people entered the room looking confused as how to begin. On the days I visited, the tables were set out for twenty people to make bread. When anyone entered the room, they were shown to the presbyter who provided them with the ingredients.

A facilitator was assigned to a group of bread-makers, to guide them through the stages of making the dough and baking it. During this time, some facilitators made drinks for the individuals they were assigned to, others left the room. After twenty minutes, the dough was removed from the proving oven and kneaded, before being baked.

At 12:30pm each bread-making day, an announcement was made that prayers would be held in the Cloud Room, stating 'nobody has to join us to pray, but all are welcome to'. The prayers consisted of gathering around a table, sitting in silence, listening to a portion of scripture read aloud and sharing any personal reflections from the reading. At this point, the presbyter reminded the group that when an individual shares a thought, the others should not comment on it. This was an attempt to create a space in which all felt comfortable to share; however, I considered if the purposeful absence of dialogue could indicate a tacit acceptance of a statement which was contrary to Methodist doctrine.

⁴¹ Facilitators are volunteers who assist in the bread-making process.

Following the period of reflection, prayers were offered. Those present were invited to light a candle for a situation which they wished to offer to God. After the prayers, the candles were brought into the bread-making room and placed on the tables during lunch. On the days I observed the worship after bread-making, only two facilitators were present in the Cloud Room. It was clear to me that there are many who make bread but do not have any involvement in the worship.

Those who remained in the bread-making room assisted in preparing the room for lunch. Once all were seated, soup was served. Bread which was baked during the morning session was placed on the table. A prayer was offered by the presbyter, after which all were invited to eat. During the meal I observed that facilitators sat together and spoke to each other. Although this implies a good team relationship, those who had made bread were not usually intentionally engaged in conversation by facilitators.

The role of the facilitator was not explained to me until the interviews, which were undertaken once bread-making was finished. John stated that facilitators were 'to provide assistance to people who need help with the bread-making process...you could view facilitators in the same light as, perhaps, stewards' (Appendix II – John). From my observations and informal conversations, I believe that some facilitators view their role as solely to enable individuals to make bread; they, therefore, focus their attention on ensuring the steps of the bread-making are followed. On each of the days I visited Fresh Expression B, the facilitator assigned to those near to me did not engage in conversation, only speaking to give instructions. Other facilitators spent time speaking about personal issues, along with giving instructions, with those who had come to make bread.

I visited Fresh Expression B for bread-making on three occasions, on the first visit there were 23 people, of which 17 were female. On the second visit, 21 people were present of which 16 were female. On the third session, 24 people were present, including 19 females. The ages of those present during my observations varied from a 3-month-old to a 72-year-old, although the majority of those present each day were aged between 18 and 40 years.

4.2.3 Record of Observation: Worship

On the third Sunday of each month, worship is held at Fresh Expression B. I attended this worship once. The worship followed the same pattern as worship on bread-making days: with silence, scripture, reflection and intercessory prayer. The service was recognisably Christian in nature, but did not represent a traditional Methodist act of worship. John asserted that 'this

church does not consider Sunday to be its primary day of worship' (Appendix II – John), but that the principal worship was on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

During the fieldwork I was unable to observe the relationship of the fresh expression to Methodism, this was particularly evident by a lack of Methodist publicity on the premises and the lack of comment upon Methodist doctrine during prayers or worship. I, therefore, felt it important that the interviews discussed the nature of membership, the role of facilitators and adherence to Standing Orders with a view to enabling me to understand how the fresh expression was accountable as part of the Connexion.

I recognised that the creation of a caring community was a manifestation of learning and caring and that the fresh expression engaged in worship in several ways. I struggled to observe how the community might engage with the service element of *Our Calling*, or how evangelism was manifest, especially when many of the bread-makers and facilitators did not appear to engage with others apart from making bread.

4.3 Fresh Expression C - Service

Y⁴² Methodist Church had declined numerically for many years and was facing closure when it began Fresh Expression C as a project in 2005. Fresh Expression C is located in a village with a significant number of low-income families. The business plan (Appendix XII) for the creation of Fresh Expression C states that the decline of the worshipping congregation led the members to consider the viability of the church. The website continues, 'the church needed to re-think how it served its local community, [following this, a proposal was made to] make the church into a Christian version of a "wacky warehouse"⁴³' (Fresh Expression C, 2012). The church continued to worship each Sunday morning in a small hall on the premises.

Fresh Expression C's website states that 'we wish to attract parents and children into a living (not a closed) church building' (Fresh Expression C, 2012). The vision statement asserts that the fresh expression exists to:

demonstrate a 'new way of being church'...[to] reach out to the local community with a service in demand...offer an affordable play area for single parents/carers...[and] look to provide activities that local people need.

Appendix XII

⁴² The name of the church has been changed.

⁴³ This is a children's soft-play activity centre.

The statements above suggest two important elements to Fresh Expression C: service to the community and the continuance of a worshipping presence on the site.

The Fresh Expression C business plan makes clear that the original vision for the project, refurbishment and subsequent use of the building is also a prominent feature throughout the business plan and project proposal. The business plan states the scheme would 'offer a more attractive, better fitted, option to new users. Provide a new lease of life to a tired rundown building...[and] increase the range of community service the church is able to provide' (Appendix XII). The use of the building also features heavily in the anticipated achievements of the project. It is possible to view the emphasis placed on the restoration of the building as an integral part of the project, within which all the activities of Fresh Expression C will be situated.

Y Methodist Church is on a residential street. The architecture is ecclesial, and the building is set on a large plot of land. Three large windows face the road, the central one of which has been bricked up and a new window in the shape of a cross set within it.

On the days I visited the site, there was no obvious sign to indicate the presence of a church; there was, however, a millennium church sign attached to the wall of the church, which reads 'The Millennium is Christ's 2000th Birthday, Worship Him Here – Now'. Without this sign, there was no information indicating that the building remains a place of worship. There was also no information outside the building to indicate the Methodist Circuit of which the church was part.

At the front of the building, there was a large sign highlighting the presence of 'Fresh Expression C'. The sign displays the opening times, the website, and the direction of the entrance. In smaller print at the bottom of the sign, was the logo of the Methodist Church. Placing the logo in this way could lead individuals to interpret the contribution of Methodism to the project as a sponsor. The appearance presented from the outside is that the building was once a church but is now Fresh Expression C.

The building has been reordered to allow for the creation of Fresh Expression C. It is arranged in a traditional cruciform shape; one transept contains the kitchen, the other an area designated for parties. Part of the main floor-space is taken up with a café area and an area for very young children to play. The largest feature of the space is the multi-level, soft play area. Above the kitchen, an office and a meeting room have been created.

Several features inside the building highlight its ecclesial heritage, the most prominent being the baptismal roll which is displayed on the wall. Alongside the baptismal roll, there were several pictures of the church. The display of the baptismal roll and the pictures indicate that the members of the church believe these to be important for those who use the fresh expression to see.

A folder entitled 'From a Vision to a Reality' was available for users of the fresh expression to view, detailing the origins of the fresh expression. The folder contains an overview of the process of creating the fresh expression.

On the wall, near to the entrance, was a large notice board. Half of the board had notices which are aimed at those who use the facilities. These notices include community, church, circuit and Connexional information. There were also several large Methodist posters on the board and recent Circuit Meeting minutes.

The interviewees at Fresh Expression C were Jane,⁴⁴ a volunteer who attended a local Anglican church. Sharon, the catering manager, Nora, the only member of Y Methodist Church still able to volunteer and Susan the project manager. All the interviewees were female but, as all of the staff and volunteers were female, this was unavoidable.

4.3.1 Aims

All four interviewees believed that without the project, the church would have closed. Jane stated that the development 'was initially seen as a way of keeping the church open' (Appendix IV – Jane). This was echoed by Nora who suggested that the idea to open Fresh Expression C was an answer to prayer, 'I'd been praying for a long time that God would guide us in what to do' (Appendix IV – Nora). The implication is that otherwise, the church would continue until it became too small to be viable and then close. I suggest that the members and some volunteers understand part of their own identity to be linked to the building; it is the place where they have attended worship, where marriages and baptisms have been conducted and the place where loved ones have been commended to God. As such, a concern was that the church continue to exist in the current building.

After the stated need to avoid closing the building, the aim of Fresh Expression C can be understood as a response to a perceived need in the community for a meeting place for parents and carers and a safe area for children. Susan spoke of how her experience of secular

⁴⁴ Names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

play-gym projects convinced her of the potential for a church to be involved in offering such a service, which she believed was 'being church in the twenty-first century' (Appendix III – Susan). Sharon understood the aim of Fresh Expression C to be concerned with service to those who use the facility: 'customers that come in, making sure they are happy, keeping them coming in, making sure they have what they need' (Appendix IV – Sharon). Service is a recurrent theme throughout each interview, with Jane and Sharon focusing upon the necessity of ensuring that the needs of customers are met. Susan viewed service in a different way; she commented that Fresh Expression C provides 'an opportunity to come and be family' (Appendix IV – Susan). Nora and Susan also recognise that a service that the Fresh Expression C offers is making individuals available to talk, listen and pray with those in need.

Our Calling asks churches to reflect on how they might identify the needs of their community and become involved within them, it also asks churches to consider if they are making the best use of their 'premises...for service to the community' (TMCP, 2000c, p.3). This question links to those explored in the original vision of Fresh Expression C, to increase the level of community involvement and to the views expressed throughout the interviews.

Serving the community is a primary aim of Fresh Expression C; it fills a need within the community for a safe space for families. My research suggests that this aim cannot easily be separated from the desire of the members to continue to worship in that place. The aim of Fresh Expression C may be to provide a service to the community, whilst ensuring that the members of the church are able to continue to worship in the building.

4.3.2 Record of Observation: Weekdays

On the days that the fresh expression is open, music is played in the background. The music was from a collection of instrumental hymns. I recognised the music as Christian in origin, but I do not believe that many others would. During two of the interviews, the subject of the background music was commented upon: Sharon (Appendix IV – Sharon) commented that several customers had complained that the music was not to their taste. She believed that those who complained about the music were people who did not attend the fresh expression because it is a church but came because it was a play-gym and had never heard that type of music. She also noted that the ethos of Fresh Expression C was different to a secular play-gym: 'with a lot of places like that, it's just a business to them. This is run differently' (Appendix III – Sharon).

On the menu on each table, there is a reminder that Fresh Expression C remains a project of the Methodist Church and staff are willing to speak with any customer about issues of faith or arrange for a minister to visit. There was also a bookshelf which contains Christian literature.

As the church was built on a hill, there are several rooms underneath the space which is now the fresh expression. These rooms were refurbished at the same time as the fresh expression was created. Although those who visit the fresh expression do not have access to the rooms underneath the hall, their refurbishment indicates the importance which was placed upon the provision of a place for the members of the church to worship.

I spent three mornings in the fresh expression observing normal activities. To achieve this, I sat at a table and watched the interaction between the staff and customers. During this time, I was unable to see a difference between the weekday operation of the fresh expression and a secular play-gym. The fresh expression staff were friendly and helpful, it was clear that some customers were regular attenders and had developed relationships with the staff. There was no obvious prayer or discussion of faith, although several people did examine some of the posters and the baptismal roll.

My observations suggest that a great deal of the ecclesiology of the present church is vested in the building. It appears important to the church members that those using the building were able to recognise it as a church. From a distance, it is difficult to identify the baptismal roll and the photographs of the church, the music playing in the background is not easily identifiable. At first glance, it would be possible for a customer to mistake the fresh expression for a former church.

Each family was welcomed as they arrived, staff spent time outside of the kitchen speaking with the families and the manager spent a large amount of time with the customers. This is the most pronounced difference that I was able to discern between the fresh expression and a secular setting.

4.3.3 Record of Observation: Village Praise⁴⁵

Each month an all-age worship service is held called Village Praise. The Village Praise I observed was led by the presbyter who chairs the management committee and the project manager who is a local preacher. The service began with craft activities. Following this, the manager introduced the theme for the service. After this, a craft linked to the theme was

⁴⁵ This name has been changed.

undertaken by the children. The presbyter then gave a short interactive address, followed by a song and a prayer. Once the prayer had been said, the children were free to play on the equipment whilst the adults had refreshments. At the Village Praise which I attended, 25 children and 15 adults were present. Sharon recognised the way that Village Praise is supported by the community, stating 'people come in and they do have a bit of a service...and everyone is made welcome' (Appendix III -Sharon). Village Praise was similar to a Messy Church session, it was clearly recognisable as an activity in which a church might engage.

The only time that I observed a presbyter in the fresh expression was during Village Praise; during the week, the leadership was entirely lay. I decided to ensure that the interviews included discussion of the role of the presbyter and the way that the authority of Conference is maintained within the fresh expression; could the fresh expression be discernibly Methodist if a presbyter was not present?

During my observation I was not able to clearly discern the difference between a secular soft-play centre and Fresh Expression C, as the weekday sessions were similar to my experience of such an attraction. I, therefore, ensured that the interviews covered the issue of the identity of the fresh expression as a church and its relationship to Methodism. Fresh Expression C was created as a pragmatic response to a need in the community and, as such, reflects the nature of Methodist ecclesiology described in Chapter Two. However, while I observed the *Our Calling* elements of service through the weekday activities and worship during Village Praise, I did not see how evangelism or learning and caring played a part in the fresh expression. My observation, therefore, leads me to question how far Fresh Expression C can be understood as discernibly Methodist.

4.4 Fresh Expression D - Evangelism

Fresh Expression D is located in a large village. The 'Methodist circuit planted a new congregation in the 1990s...[Fresh Expression D] as it is known' (Crippen and Wood, p.132). Fresh Expression D is a part of Z Methodist Circuit, it is included on the circuit plan and website. It defines itself as 'community activities...communicating the Christian message...We look to welcome non-church-going people into the Christian community' (Fresh Expression D, 2013). The circuit (Superintendent Minister, personal communication, 2013) understand Fresh Expression D to be a project, rather than a church, although this was disputed by various leaders and attendees of Fresh Expression D. The disagreement concerning whether Fresh Expression D was a church, or a project was a crucial element in the strained relationship of the fresh expression and the circuit, which I will explore further in subsequent chapters.

Fresh Expression D rents space in the village High School. On Sunday evenings, a large banner is attached to the school gate which advertises the presence of Fresh Expression D. The school notice board has a permanent sign which gives the time at which Fresh Expression D meets and contact details. Both the banner on the gate and the sign carry the words '[Fresh Expression D] – because church can be relevant'.

Access to the building is through the main entrance, an individual is present in the foyer to greet those who attend and give directions to the hall. Double doors lead into a large hall, a side door leads to the school sports hall which is used for work with children and young people. The hall has a stage at one end of the room, on which a projection screen was used in conjunction with a data projector.

The leader of Fresh Expression D is a part-time lay employee of Z Methodist Circuit and a local preacher. There is also a paid part-time assistant leader and youth worker. The circuit receives grants from the Connexion and district to support the paid employees.

Although the circuit does not recognise Fresh Expression D as a church, it is recorded in the Methodist Statistics for Mission (TMCP, 2013a), which states that the average attendance (counted Oct 2012) at Sunday worship was 34 people.

I observed the weekly Sunday 'presentation'. The circuit website does not give details of those leading worship but instead it states that it is a 'presentation of the gospel and community building activities...conducted by [the leader] and an all-age group' (Z Methodist Circuit, 2013). The website of Fresh Expression D describes the presentation in this way: 'it happens every Sunday...It is a time of worship with singing, praying, community news, some thoughts on a particular issue... We try to share the Gospel in a language that is accessible' (Fresh Expression D, 2013).

Other activities were advertised during my observation, these included social events for young people, cell groups, a women's coffee and discussion group, a men's discussion group, and a prayer meeting held each Sunday before the presentation.

The interviewees were Alan who was employed by the Z Methodist Circuit as the leader of Fresh Expression D; he was a local preacher with an authorisation to preside at communion by the Conference. Ellie, the employed part-time youth worker. Jenny, the assistant leader and Roy, a member of a local Methodist church and part of the team working in Fresh Expression D.

4.4.1 Aims

When discussing the aim of Fresh Expression D, three of the interviewees highlighted the mission statement which had recently been agreed, although two variants of the statements emerged. Alan stated that the 'aim is to make, grow and mature disciples of Jesus Christ' (Appendix V – Alan). Ellie and Jenny suggested that the aim was 'reaching, discipling and maturing all people for Jesus Christ' (Appendix V – Ellie). As the statements quoted above are broadly similar, it is possible to understand the difference as each individual choosing to emphasise their own preference. Roy felt that the aim of Fresh Expression D was to 'get in people who are unchurched' (Appendix V – Roy). He recalled the origins of Fresh Expression D in terms of the vision of a former circuit Superintendent to discover a way for those individuals who were not part of the circuit's churches to be able to engage with Church.

Ellie commented that the aim of Fresh Expression D was 'in amongst everything we do...we try and mature those who are already disciples, we try to disciple them and teach them to disciple each other and also to reach others' (Appendix V – Ellie). She also believed that hospitality was central to Fresh Expression D, stating 'hospitality is right up there in there in terms of priority of us [sic]' (Appendix V – Ellie).

The comments above concerning the aim alluded to evangelism having an important place in the ethos of Fresh Expression D. Alan noted that evangelism is the most fulfilling part of his role, 'the best part is when people come to faith...encouraging people to become people of faith' (Appendix V – Alan). Roy shared the views expressed above as he stated that Fresh Expression D was started as a piece of evangelism. This appears to be linked to the theme of hospitality which was mentioned earlier, that those who attend are welcomed and enabled to feel comfortable in the context. This can be understood in several ways. Initially, that all are welcomed to Fresh Expression D and enabled to participate fully in the community without any ulterior motive. Alternatively, it could also be interpreted that the welcome and hospitality is only given in order that those who attend may be led to faith. The second of these interpretations can be seen, perhaps unintentionally, in the words of Alan: 'we bounce everything up against making, growing and discipling disciples of Jesus' (Appendix V – Alan). This could be understood as a suggestion that if offering a welcome to all and developing hospitality did not lead to evangelism, then Fresh Expression D would cease to welcome and be hospitable, which would place it outside of the criteria of *Called to Love and Praise* (TMCP, 1999a, p.54) which asserts that a church must be a place of welcome for all who come.

4.4.2 Record of Observation: Sunday Presentation

On my first visit I was guided to the hall and introduced to several of those who were present. As I awaited the start of the presentation, I observed several other people being guided into the hall and introduced.

On each occasion I visited Fresh Expression D, several features of the hall remained the same. The worship band occupied the space at the front of the hall. The seats in the hall were laid out in groups of eight around small tables on three of the visits I made to Fresh Expression D. On the remaining visit the chairs were arranged in rows with a central aisle. When I asked about this arrangement, I was informed that the chairs are arranged in a way that is helpful to the programme being followed during the presentation. On the first visit I made, a total of 30 (of which 8 were male) people were present. The ages ranged from a young baby to over 65 years. In conversation following the presentation I discovered that several of those in attendance are members of local Methodist churches, who worshipped additionally at Fresh Expression D. A total of 39 people attended the second presentation which I observed, of which 21 were male. On the third occasion the total number of attendees was 21. Of this total, 6 were male. At the final presentation which I observed there were 36 people of which 12 were male.

The presentations I observed were similar in the routine they followed, although there were some differences. Notably on my third visit, the presentation was all-age and, therefore, the children and young people stayed in the hall for the whole presentation; this presentation will be described separately.

The presentation began on each occasion with a welcome from the individual who was leading. At this point, those attending were reminded that a meal would be shared after the presentation and all were encouraged to engage with as much of the presentation as they felt comfortable. Following the welcome, singing was led by the band. An interactive activity followed the song. After this activity, the leader of the presentation gave out any notices, after which the young people left the room with leaders for their own groups. The Bible passage for the evening was read at this point. A talk based around the theme followed the reading, lasting around thirty minutes; on two occasions a second song was also used in-between two short talks. The band then led another song, after which a prayer was said by the leader of the presentation. It was then announced that it was time to share a meal.

The all-age presentation began in the way described above, however, several rounds of a team game were used to provide light relief. The first round of this game formed the first

interactive slot as above, it was followed by a short talk, a video clip and a prayer. The band led the singing of a second song. A second round of the team game was followed by the reading of a Bible passage, after which the leader gave a second talk, a prayer was then said. The singing of a third song was then led by the band, after which a final round of the team game was played. The notices for the week were then given and followed by a prayer and the announcement that the meal was ready.

During each presentation, there were no distinct prayers of adoration, confession, thanksgiving or intercession; indeed, on the first visit the leader did not mention God until 40 minutes into the presentation. Alan stated that some elements common to traditional worship may not be present each week, as 'the whole idea of fresh expressions is that you create something which is different' (Appendix II – Alan).

At the close of the presentation, those in attendance shared a meal provided by regular attendees. After 30 minutes, a team of people began to pack away and tidy the room, by 7:30pm the room was cleared, and all had left the school.

On three of my visits to Fresh Expression D, the same individual led the entire presentation; on one occasion the leading was shared by two people. Several other people had roles such as greeters and young people's leaders.

During my observations of Fresh Expression D, I did not see any ordained minister or a local preacher (other than the leader of the fresh expression) present, I did not hear the circuit or Methodism mentioned at any point, there was no literature or signage that indicated Fresh Expression D was in any way connected to the Methodist Church. Indeed, Jenny noted that 'our presentation isn't the same as a traditional Methodist service...[there has] never been the intention that we would be like a Methodist church' (Appendix V – Jenny). The fresh expression appeared to be an independent entity rather than a Methodist project. whilst I recognised the pragmatic nature of Fresh Expression D as a response to culture, I struggled to recognise it as discernibly Methodist. I observed evangelism as a focus of the activities set within a context of worship, but I could not see the outworking of learning and caring or service in the fresh expression, though I recognised that the interviews would explore the nature of the fresh expression as discernibly Methodist.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided an outline of the case studies. The observations revealed several points of tension which will help to generate the themes to be included as part of the analysis of the data.

The issue of ecclesial identity was prominent throughout my observations; could each fresh expression be recognised as a church by those within and outside of it? This is linked to the relationship of each fresh expression to the Connexion. The relationship to The Methodist Church in Britain was difficult to discern in Fresh Expressions B, C and D and it often appeared that The Methodist Church in Britain was a sponsor rather than an essential part of the identity of the fresh expressions.

Leadership and authority within the fresh expressions is an issue to be explored and analysed. This issue concerns the role of the presbyter as one who has a principal and directing part in the life of the Church and how that role is manifest within fresh expressions. My observations of Fresh Expression A highlighted that the presbyter led the fresh expression, whilst Fresh Expression D was entirely lay led. A further issue was evident in Fresh Expressions B and D, concerning the way that individuals are able to take up positions of leadership in the fresh expressions and how these may fit with patterns of Methodist leadership and governance.

As I have noted, each case study was selected because it fit within one of the categories of *Our Calling* (TMCP, 2000c). During the observations, I was able to identify the aim of each case study in relation to *Our Calling*. My observation of Fresh Expression A highlighted that each element was present within the life of the church, even if not specifically part of the fresh expressions which principally concerned worship. However, in the remaining three case studies I was unable to observe all four elements of *Our Calling*. In Fresh Expression B, I observed learning and caring in the building of a community and a limited view of worship, but could not observe service or evangelism easily. Fresh Expression C exhibited service during the weekdays, and worship during Village Praise, but I did not observe learning and caring or evangelism as part of the fresh expression. Fresh Expression D was concerned with evangelism set in the context of worship, but during observation I could not see how service, or learning and caring was manifest in the fresh expression. The issue that must be analysed concerns the way in which the case studies are formed through a Methodist understanding of Church, in which all four elements of *Our Calling* must be present for a community to be discernibly Methodist. If a fresh expression does not exhibit all four elements, can it be regarded as discernibly Methodist?

The following chapter will detail the coding process by which the themes present in the case studies were generated, this process used the data from my observations and the interviews which followed. I will then provide an overview of the themes as they were manifest in the case studies, this will inform Chapter Six, which is an analysis of the themes and the challenges which may be presented to British Methodist ecclesiology.

CHAPTER FIVE

GENERATING THEMES

Chapter Four presented an outline of the case study data in context. This chapter has two aims; first, I will detail the process by which I have generated themes for analysis. Second, I will provide a summary of the key themes which are relevant to the research question and those which I will not pursue as they do not further the examination of the research question.

The guide questions for each interview were determined through the examination of the literature, and covered several broad areas in the life of each fresh expression; this ensured that each interview covered the same topics for analysis. My observations of each fresh expression provided additional areas for discussion and analysis. The process of deriving and analysing themes from the data was an iterative process, which involved dialogue between the insights from my interviews, observations and the theoretical perspectives of the literature.

5.1 Thematic Analysis

It is important to have a strategy to analyse case study data, as Yin argues that 'potential analytic difficulties' (1994, p.125), such as the time taken deciding what is worth analysing and how to analyse, can be reduced by deciding upon a strategy prior to beginning analysis. I, therefore, employed a thematic analysis. This is a process that involves the researcher becoming familiar with the data, engaging in a process of generating initial codes, then searching the codes for patterns and themes (Rapley, 1996, p.333). The themes are then reviewed and refined; those which are relevant are interrogated to gain insight.

Coding is a process of working with the data 'to arrange things in a systematic order...a process that permits data to be divided, grasped, reorganised and linked in order to consolidate meaning and develop explanation' (Saldaña, 2016, p.9). Saldaña states that 'a code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or a short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language or visual data' (2016, p.4). He further suggests that coding is vital to the research process as it provides a critical link between data collection and exploring the meaning (2016, p.4) of the words or actions of the subjects.

To generate codes in this research, I examined the interview transcripts, highlighting and naming portions of text that were relevant to the research question; this resulted in a code list for each case study. I then compared the codes from each case study to find repetition. Rapley states that repetition is important as 'when you've seen the same thing again and again, you

may be on to something' (2016, p.340). Thus, the repetition which became apparent as I compared the codes enabled me to discern patterns, which is vital to the research, as 'creating a list of key verbatim descriptions is not the end stage of analysis, it is the start' (Rapley, 2016, p.338).

My aim in coding was to draw from the data the issues which were relevant to answering the research question. The overall framework for the first cycle of coding was 'In Vivo' coding, which creates codes 'from the actual language found in the qualitative data' (Saldaña, 2016, p.105). This is in line with the inductive approach I outlined in Chapter Three and will ensure that I prioritise the voices of the participants to generate knowledge. Within the framework of In Vivo coding, I employed two further types of code. Saldaña notes that it is not always necessary to use one type of code to generate themes as this can 'limit your ability to transcend to more conceptual and theoretical levels of analysis' (2016, p.110), therefore the use of several types of code enabled a fuller analysis of the transcripts. The first type of code I employed was concept coding (Saldaña, 2016, p.119), which takes words or phrases that represent a broader meaning and enables part of the interview data to be grouped together, representing an idea. An example of a concept code from the interview data is the word *leadership*. The second type of code which I used was value coding, which 'represents the participant's values, attitudes and beliefs' (Saldaña, 2016, p.131). This type of code enabled me to identify interviewees' responses as they related to issues of identity, trust and ownership, for example. The use of concept and value coding enabled me to highlight the ecclesiological concepts and the feelings and values attributed to them.

The coding process enables the repetition of the codes to be organised into themes, which can then be analysed. The generation of themes has the advantage of avoiding anecdotalism (Mann, 2016, p.217), in which one code is presented as typical. A thematic analysis ensures that each theme is represented in multiple codes. The code notebook, which details all codes identified, their case study location and any codes which were also present in my observations, and a table showing which codes contributed to the generation of each theme, can be found in Appendices VI and VII.

Within the coding and subsequent generation of themes, there was some overlap of issues; some codes applied to more than one theme. For example, catholicity can apply to ecclesial identity and to leadership and authority. The themes generated through the coding of the case studies demonstrate that the ecclesiological challenges are found in more than one case study and thus the evidence is more compelling as I offer propositions that can illuminate the ways in which fresh expressions can be discernibly Methodist.

5.2 Themes for Analysis

In Vivo coding produced 44 codes⁴⁶ from the words and phrases of the interviewees. Saldaña proposes that theoretical coding, 'which like an umbrella...covers and accounts for all other codes' (2016, p.250) is appropriate for a second coding cycle and represents the deductive approach to generating knowledge through the case studies. The process of theoretical coding 'moves the analytic story in a theoretical direction' (Saldaña, 2016, p.251), which, in the case of my research, is the way that fresh expressions are discernibly Methodist expressions of church. The process of theoretical coding words and phrases from the data, resulted in four inter-related themes. Saldaña describes this process as codeweaving, in which the key words and phrases, or codes are integrated into a narrative form to 'see how the puzzle fits together' (2016, p.276). In the process of theoretical coding and codeweaving, I examined the codes and, in the light of my observations, created a detailed write-up of each case study which, when compared revealed the four inter-related themes. The analysis of these themes will reveal the way in which contemporary Methodist ecclesiology is challenged and the extent to which the fresh expressions studied can be discernibly Methodist. It is not my intention here to discuss in depth each of the themes but rather to highlight the issues which each theme raises.

5.2.1 Ecclesial Identity

The first theme raises the issue of the elements required by The Methodist Church in Britain for an initiative to be a church. Fresh Expression A was concerned with creating a mixed economy in one church community. There was, however, an issue concerning how identity may be maintained if some people are only present for Café Church or Air. The interviews at Fresh Expression B highlighted the differences between the fresh expression and the majority of Methodist churches, emphasising the features which are common but also some features which seem to contradict Methodist understandings of Church. Fresh Expressions A and B are recognised as Methodist churches but were regarded as projects by some outside of the fresh expressions. Interviewees at Fresh Expression D shared the desire to be regarded as a church but lacked a Church Council or a system of membership, which caused tension between the fresh expression and the circuit. Similarly, the interviewees at Fresh Expressions C understood their fresh expression to be a church, but it also lacked a Church Council, and membership. Thus, neither Fresh Expression C or Fresh Expression D could be recognised as a Methodist church⁴⁷ under Methodist Standing Orders. It is, therefore, important to discuss the way in which ecclesial identity is articulated and manifest in those case studies which are

⁴⁶ See Appendix VI.

⁴⁷ Y Methodist Church had a Church Council and members, but Fresh Expression C as the fresh expression did not.

not regarded as Methodist churches. This theme includes the issues of the catholicity of fresh expressions, evolution, identity and ecumenical relationships.

5.2.2 The Relationship to the Connexion

The second theme concerns the way that each fresh expression exhibited structural links to circuit and Connexion and were, therefore, discernibly Methodist. Fresh Expressions A, B and D, expressed a desire to remain separate from the denomination. At Fresh Expression A this was manifest in the desire to control those who lead worship and ensure that local leadership was in control of the fresh expressions if the presbyter was replaced. The interviewees at Fresh Expression B suggested that the difference between the fresh expression and traditional Methodist churches may imply that the two are incompatible and should remain separate, but I noted that the fresh expression relied on the resources of the traditional Church. The relationship of Fresh Expression C to the circuit was documented as weak by three of the interviewees, due to the nature of the fresh expression as a project of Y Methodist Church. The most difficult relationship was found in Fresh Expression D, revealing tensions caused by the difference in the understanding of the nature of the fresh expression by those who are part of it and the rest of the circuit. This friction revealed that the perceived differences between Fresh Expression D and the circuit led interviewees to suggest that the two were incompatible. This led to several interviewees, principally from Fresh Expression D, articulating their ownership of the fresh expression, rather than that of the circuit or Connexion and exhibiting a congregational ecclesiology. This was also represented in responses from Fresh Expressions A and B. The theme of the relationship to the Connexion contains reflection on the desire of fresh expressions for theological and practical freedom from the metanarrative of Methodist ecclesiology as they respond to culture; this was most prominent in the interviews at Fresh Expressions B and D. The interviewees from all of the case studies also reflected that their fresh expression represented the diversity found within British Methodism. Interviewees from Fresh Expression A highlighted the mixed economy as a model in which diversity can be held. It will be important to analyse this theme as structural links to the Connexion are discernibly Methodist and those fresh expressions which dismiss the link to Connexion risk damaging their discernibly Methodist identity.

5.2.3 Leadership and Authority

The third theme emerging from the fieldwork concerns the nature of leadership and authority. Several codes which were relevant to the relationship to the Connexion were also pertinent to leadership and authority; the desire to control who should exercise leadership, preside at communion and how leadership should be expressed was exhibited in Fresh Expressions A,

B and D. The issue of ownership also relates to leadership and authority; interviewees from Fresh Expression D intimated that it was inappropriate for a presbyter to be placed in a position of oversight of the fresh expression as they would have no connection to the community and would not understand it.

Fresh Expressions C and D were predominantly led by lay people, with little day-to-day involvement from presbyters. Fresh Expression A was led by a presbyter but neither Café Church nor Air had sustained input from the other circuit presbyters or local preachers. Fresh Expression B had a presbyter in a day-to-day leadership position, but many lay people undertook the role of facilitator. As lay leadership was prominent in all of the case studies, it will be important to reflect upon how the leadership of the fresh expression represents the authority of, and accountability to, the Conference. This is particularly relevant when the fresh expressions believe that local, lay leadership is more important than the presence of a presbyter. The issues above all contributed to the manifestation of the priesthood of all believers. A further issue regarding leadership and authority concerned the way that all could have a leadership role through membership, and serve as Church Steward and other roles; this led to the question of how governance was maintained.

5.2.4 The Long-term Future

A theme that emerged from the answers to the first of my lead out questions⁴⁸, was that no interviewee could clearly articulate a long-term future for their fresh expression. The codes for this theme were *the future* and *vision*; *the future* does not relate to any of the other themes and thus was not carried over to the themes generated from the codes in Appendix VI. While *vision* is related to the aims of each fresh expression and will be discussed later, it also related to the lack of long-term vision that was evident throughout the case studies.

Interviewees from Fresh Expressions B, C and D believed that their long-term future relied upon trusting God. Those who felt this way believed that each fresh expression would continue to grow and evolve. Other issues such as the provision of sufficient finance, the need for different premises and an impending circuit review were identified by several individuals as having an impact upon the long-term viability of the fresh expression. However, the overwhelming sentiment expressed was that the future was unclear. Each interviewee felt comfortable with this lack of long-term vision. Graham Cray (Fresh Expressions, 2014), Archbishops' Missioner and Fresh Expressions Team Leader, suggested that the long-term future is not the primary aim of fresh expressions as they are concerned with their present

⁴⁸ See Appendix I.

mission and desire to be relevant to their context. It was clear that each case study examined here exhibited a feature common amongst fresh expressions and articulated by those who offer commentary upon them. I initially believed that the long-term future of the case studies would be relevant to the research question, however, analysing the data alongside my experience as a presbyter suggests that fresh expressions and traditional churches both share a lack of long-term vision. A lack of long-term vision indicates that both traditional churches and fresh expressions share the desire to be relevant, and to be part of the *missio Dei*, this was highlighted in Chapter Two. After spending time examining the interviewees' responses in the light of my observations, experience, and the theoretical perspectives, I concluded that this theme was not substantive enough in relation to answering my research question to merit further analysis. Saldaña offers a perspective which is relevant to my decision not to interrogate further the theme of long-term vision. He states that 'once you have a word or a phrase that you believe captures the conceptual or theoretical in your study, think again' (2016, p.277), to ensure that the themes which are interrogated bring insight, rather than cloud the question that the study seeks to answer. I did not believe that exploring the theme of long-term presence would illuminate or develop the answer to the research question, therefore, I chose not to analyse this theme in the following chapters. I contend that as the lack of long-term vision also reflects the understanding of many traditional churches, it does not challenge contemporary Methodist ecclesiology to the same extent as the themes outlined above and thus does not merit analysis here. The brief exploration of this theme is presented in this chapter to ensure transparency in the research process.

5.3 Aim of the Case Studies

To confirm my perception of the purpose of each case study from the selection process, I asked each interviewee to articulate the aim of the fresh expression. The responses confirmed that each fresh expression focused on one element of *Our Calling* (TMCP, 2000c). The aims of the fresh expressions do not represent a theme which was represented in several codes throughout the data but rather was an answer to the same question in each interview. Nevertheless, the aim is an important part of the analysis in Chapter Eight as this will reveal the way that focusing upon one element of *Our Calling* may hinder a fresh expression from being discernibly Methodist. This is important as in Chapter Two I argued that the summation of the normative ecclesiology of British Methodism is contained in *Our Calling* and that all elements must be present within a Methodist church.

5.4 Analysis

The process of analysing the data meant that a detailed write-up of each case study was created in order to highlight and compare the ecclesiological themes that emerged. Each write-up contained an exploration of the context in which the fresh expression was set, a record of my observations over four visits and a detailed account of the responses of the interviewees. The write-up for each case study will not be presented as part of this thesis; as I noted in Chapter Three, case study methodology can 'result in large unreadable documents' (Yin, 1994, p.10) which add little to the argument of the thesis.⁴⁹ Rather, the following chapters are informed by, and bring order to, the data contained in the write-ups by critically examining the themes which were common.

As an iterative process, informed primarily by the interview data and theoretical perspectives, and illuminated by my non-participatory observation, Chapters Six, Seven and Eight will analyse the themes generated from the data. Saldaña argues that once a series of codes and themes have been generated from the data, it is important to explore how codes or themes 'can be reworded and transformed into more abstract meanings' (2016, p.277) which leads to higher-level concepts that provide insight into the focus of the study. Because this thesis is concerned with the relationship of fresh expressions to Methodist ecclesiology, I explored how the themes may be reworded and transformed to be considered as they relate to normative Methodist ecclesiology, particularly the distinctive emphases of *Called to Love and Praise*. Therefore, the themes which have been generated through the coding and thematic analysis process of the case study data will be analysed under the Connexional principle, fellowship and shared discipline, and being structured for mission (TCMP, 1999a, p.50). This will ensure that the discussion remains rooted within Methodist ecclesiology and that the analysis will reveal the challenges which the fresh expression case studies pose to Methodist ecclesiology, and the way that fresh expressions may be discernibly Methodist expressions of church.

The data generated through the case studies will be central to the analysis, this represents the model of practical theological research that I favour, that gives priority to the 'texts' of the case studies. The research I conducted was not undertaken with a view to fit the data generated into a pre-determined set of themes, but rather to ask, 'what ecclesiological insights might be gained through an examination of this fresh expression?' The use of the distinctive emphases of *Called to Love and Praise* as a structure for the following three chapters enables the analysis to stay close to Methodist ecclesiology, and address the research question, rather

⁴⁹ The record of observation and transcripts from each case study can be found in the Appendices of this thesis.

than impose an existing ecclesiological framework onto the data. For example, Chapter Six will analyse how fresh expressions' understanding of ecclesial identity and their relationship to the Connexion challenge the normative Methodist ecclesiology of the Connexional principle, rather than articulate how fresh expressions may stray from a normative Methodist ecclesiological position.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has described the process of coding which has enabled themes to be generated from the interview data for analysis. The three major themes generated from the coding of the case study data are: ecclesial identity; the relationship to the Connexion and leadership and authority. I also noted that while the aims of each fresh expression did not constitute a theme formed through multiple codes, it represents an important element in this research in relation to *Our Calling*. The analysis of these themes through the lens of *Called to Love and Praise* will enable an understanding of how this research enables an answer to the research question: 'to what extent are fresh expressions within The Methodist Church in Britain discernibly "Methodist" expressions of church, and what practices within a fresh expressions context might indicate the presence of a Methodist church?'

CHAPTER SIX

THE CONNEXIONAL PRINCIPLE

This chapter will analyse the data from case studies to address the research question; this analysis is primarily informed by the interviews and supplemented by the non-participatory observations at each case study, in line with the themes revealed in Chapter Five. In this chapter I will analyse the first two themes from the data; first, the ecclesial identity of fresh expressions and second the relationship of fresh expressions to the Connexion.

6.1 Ecclesial Identity

The Connexional principle, asserts *Called to Love and Praise* (TMCP, 1999a, p.50), is essential to a Methodist understanding of Church. It is through the lens of the Connexional principle that I will analyse the first of the themes from the data, ecclesial identity. The analysis of this theme covers several related issues, but begins by exploring the understanding of each fresh expression as a church.

6.1.1 Church

The interviewees from all of the case studies believed that their fresh expression was a church, but this view was not shared by all who came into contact with the fresh expression. For example, my communication with the Superintendent of the Z Circuit indicated that Fresh Expression D was considered a circuit project, not a church. This was revealed during interviews to be a source of tension. A similar conflict was highlighted between Fresh Expression B and parts of the Methodist District, where various circuits and individuals felt that the fresh expression was not a church as 'all they do is make bread' (Appendix III – Anne). My observation of the weekday activities at Fresh Expression C suggested that those who used the facilities perceived themselves to be attending a play-centre, not a church. My observation was confirmed by Sharon who stated that the fresh expression was seen as 'the ball pool place' (Appendix III - Sharon). The interviewees at Fresh Expression A all recognised that Café Church and Air were only regarded as church as part of the mixed economy of X Methodist Church. The beliefs of the fresh expressions that they were churches draws attention to the elements required for a community to be recognised as a church in its own right. Three of the case studies were missing various elements which are common amongst Methodist churches. At no point during the interview process at Fresh Expressions B, C or D was catechism discussed as important in the fresh expression. Nor was there any intercession at any of the presentations at Fresh Expression D; this is significant because the third criterion of *Called to Love and Praise* states that a church is 'a community nourished...by prayers

steeped in the wealth of the Christian tradition' (TMCP, 1999a, p.55). The question that flows from this asks if a community can be considered to be a church if it seeks to choose which elements of church life it deems suitable, but rejects those which are believed to be incompatible. The case study that contained all of these elements was Fresh Expression A, which modelled a mixed economy, engaging in fresh expressions alongside traditional worship. Thus, those elements which may have not been expressed as part of the fresh expressions would be present within the wider life of the church. This issue principally concerns Fresh Expressions C and D, which articulated the belief that their community was a church, but they did not fit within Methodist normative ecclesiology and could not be recognised as such.

A common refrain throughout the interview process was that each fresh expression was different from a traditional view of the church and was, therefore, misunderstood by those who looked in from the outside. Joan noted that Fresh Expression B regularly had visitors who 'come to experience a different way of being church' (Appendix III – Joan). Alan highlighted his belief that fresh expressions are not understood by the traditional Church, stating 'we are just doing things differently...[the] language which is talked about in fresh expressions and is out there and is understood within the fresh expression's movement, I'm not sure that is understood...within the Methodist Church' (Appendix V – Alan).

In Chapter Two, I noted that the perceived differences may be due to the contextual approach of fresh expressions as a specific response to Postmodernity, which is not compatible with British Methodism's intention to be accessible to all contexts, or its eighteenth-century structures. In interview, Joan argued that Fresh Expression B was 'a different way of being church' (Appendix II - Joan), Ellie believed that in Fresh Expression D she saw the features of church: 'the elements that I would deem to make up church, they're in there' (Appendix IV - Ellie). It was from this perspective that interviewees felt that the fresh expressions of which they were part should be understood as churches rather than projects, because of their intention to be church. This raises the question of whether it is sufficient to believe that a fresh expression could be a Methodist church simply because of an intention to be so, or if the differences between a traditional church and a fresh expression are so great that it is difficult for an understanding of church to be broad enough to encompass both. The notion that each fresh expression was different from the way people might perceive church makes a link to the concept of fresh expressions as pragmatic and contextual developments, which make sense only within a specific context. This was one of the tensions between fresh expressions and traditional Methodist churches revealed in Chapter Two, and is a significant issue in this analysis.

In order to reflect upon how the understanding of ecclesial identity presents an ecclesiological challenge to the discernibly Methodist nature of fresh expressions, I turn to explore early Methodist history.

Following his conversion, John Wesley's personal assurance of faith fostered a concern that the Church of England required renewal. Abraham (2005, p.11) believes that from the time he felt a personal assurance, Wesley's vocation became focused upon evangelism and spiritual direction. In this way, it is possible to regard Methodism as a movement of renewal within the Church of England. The aim of the movement was to promote the Gospel in ways which were appropriate to the context.

Those who responded to Wesley's call to personal faith were encouraged to attend a parish church and a Methodist society. Religious societies were prominent features of the culture and the Methodist societies were 'not a substitute for the parish church, but a supplement' (TMCP, 1999a, p.32). Wesley's intention was that Methodism remain a movement within the Church of England. Indeed, in the mid-1770s Wesley rejected a plan (Heitzenrater, 2009, p.44) which would have seen Methodism regarded as a daughter church of the Church of England. Davies (1963, p.105) asserts that Methodism's societies and values were not inherently disruptive within the Church of England; the offense caused was due to the methods that Wesley and others used to promote the movement. Wesley preached in 'other men's parishes' (Davies, 1963, p.106), his approaches were considered a challenge to Church order. It is possible to discern a link to normative British Methodist ecclesiology here, particularly the commitment that the Church is structured for mission and the fourth element of *Our Calling*: evangelism. The desire to find culturally appropriate ways to communicate the gospel has been a part of Methodism from its origins.

The 1937 Statement, *The Nature of the Christian Church*, argues that 'Wesley regarded the movement which he led as raised up by God' (TMCP, 1984, p.37). This belief echoes the *Deed of Union* which states 'that in the providence of God Methodism was raised up to spread scriptural holiness' (TMCP, 2020, p.213). In this way, Methodism regards its creation as a providential act of God, to address the needs of contemporary society. As such Methodism was concerned with engagement amongst the contemporary culture that Wesley felt the established Church was unable to reach. Following this, one might suggest that fresh expressions are part of God's providential action. Indeed, this is intimated in *Changing Church for a Changing World* which calls upon its reader to 'remember that we [Methodism] emerged as a fresh expression' (TMCP, 2007, p.6). The notion that fresh expressions share a desire with early Methodism to make connections with culture resonates with the Fresh Expressions

website which describes the desire for connection to contemporary culture as creating 'new congregations...designed to reach a different group of people than those already attending the original church' (Fresh Expressions, 2017a). The similarity of the origin of Methodism and fresh expressions as culturally appropriate approaches to church suggests that fresh expressions within the Methodist tradition are intrinsically Methodist, as they reflect how Methodism was formed and the way that the *Deed of Union* recalls the origin of the Church.

It is possible to understand early Methodism and Fresh Expressions as spiritual renewal movements within the life of the Church. Methodism, in its appreciation of the personal assurance of salvation and a relevant way of expressing faith; Fresh Expressions in its attempt to explore spirituality in a contextually relevant way. In this way, early Methodism and Fresh Expressions contend that the shape of the Church in each context should enable individuals to connect with the Church. The data highlighted the aim of each case study to respond to the context in which it was set. Fresh Expression B aimed to build a community around bread-making. Fresh Expression C was born from a desire to provide a service for parents/carers and children in the creation of a play-centre.

From the moment Methodism emerged as a movement within the Church of England, individuals and groups were opposed to it. An example of this was that Methodists were condemned for their enthusiasm. Hempton claims that the disapproval shown towards Methodists was concerned with a perceived lack of tolerance for ecclesiastical tradition, but also for the way that Methodists manifested the outpouring of the Holy Spirit with 'agonies, roarings and screamings' (2005, p.33). The opposition to fresh expressions is perhaps not as easily accessible in print, but does exist. Davison and Milbank (2010, pp.1-27) criticise the way in which fresh expressions ignore Christian tradition, using ancient ecclesial practice without appreciating its original context. In this way, both early Methodism and Fresh Expressions share an accusation of ignoring the tradition of the Church.

Following Wesley's death, 'Methodism was virtually an independent denomination' (TMCP, 1999a, p.34) and it became apparent that Methodism and the Church of England would separate. The 1795 Plan of Pacification 'represented an acknowledgement of British Methodism's final ecclesiological separation from the Church of England' (Heitzenrater, 1995, p.316) as societies were permitted to celebrate the sacraments and meet during church hours. Between 1795 and 1815 the Methodists 'abandoned the notion...[that Methodism] could somehow become a permitted society within the framework of the Church of England' (Davies, George and Rupp, 1978, p.216). 'Over the years, Methodism changed from a connexion of United Societies to...an independent organisation' (TMCP, 1999a, p.33).

There are many similarities in the origins of Methodism and fresh expressions, with themes of renewal and spirituality at the forefront. The desire for a contextual response to faith is also a key element in the origins of Methodism and fresh expressions. Recognising that the origins of both the Methodism and fresh expressions are remarkably similar, two ecclesiological challenges emerge in relation to the ecclesial identity of fresh expressions.

The first challenge to contemporary Methodist ecclesiology from the data concerns the way in which Methodist societies grew to be understood as churches rather than gatherings of like-minded individuals. The data highlighted the way in which the fresh expressions were not regarded as churches by those outside of them. This was seen in Fresh Expression B which was not regarded as church by those outside of it even though it was a Methodist church and Fresh Expression D, which lacked some of the elements that enable it to be regarded as a church. For Fresh Expression D, this is reflected in the eighth criteria which *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* presents as the requirements for a community to be regarded as a church: 'a community that is united to others through: mutual commitment; spiritual communion; structures of governance, oversight and communion; and an authorised ministry in common' (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.114). The missing elements for Fresh Expression D were the appropriate structures of governance, oversight and authorised ministry. Without these, the fresh expression could not be recognised as a church. The issue of governance and ministry will be explored in Chapter Seven.

This challenge is related to the way that the early Methodist societies were perceived as different from the traditional Church, which resonates with how fresh expressions may emerge from traditional Methodist churches or circuits. Air, Café Church and Fresh Expression C are examples of a traditional Methodist Church developing fresh expressions and Fresh Expression D is an example of a circuit developing a fresh expression. Methodist history demonstrates that the formation of the denomination, stemming from the desire for renewal, contextual relevance and as a providential act of God, developed its own ecclesial identity over time. During each interview, I asked about ongoing changes within the fresh expression, each interviewee recognised that there would be some development over the ensuing five-year period. James anticipated that changes would be made to Air and Café Church: 'I would not expect it to look as it does' (Appendix II – James). Anne (Appendix III – Anne) believed that as the vision of Fresh Expression B was linked to the city-centre context, the fresh expression would change as the context of the city centre developed. Susan recognised that Fresh Expression C would develop: 'it will evolve' (Appendix IV – Susan). Every interviewee at Fresh Expression D recognised the need to change, 'to be doing what God wants' (Appendix V – Jenny). My interpretation of these responses highlighted a common belief that

each fresh expression would develop over time. This is similar to Methodism's development from communities within the Church of England to a separate denomination with its own ecclesial identity. Therefore, a challenge for The Methodist Church in Britain is to recognise the journey by which a fresh expression might come to be regarded as a church rather than a project.

A further challenge is concerned with the nature of the breakaway which occurred as Methodism split from the Church of England and those which occurred later as various Methodist denominations arose. Milburn (2002, pp.3-7) suggests that the rupture which led to the creation of the Primitive Methodists was due to the founders engaging in practices that were not accepted by the Methodist Connexion. One of the recurring assertions throughout the data was that fresh expressions are vastly different from the contemporary Methodist Church and engage in a different practice. This is highlighted in the interviews at Fresh Expression B as Paul suggested that the fresh expression would not have a 'closeness with the majority of traditional Methodists' (Appendix II – Paul) and D, in which Ellie described the relationship between the fresh expression and the circuit as 'disjointed' (Appendix V – Ellie) due to differences in understanding and practice. The challenge which this brings to Methodist ecclesiology is that if British Methodism and fresh expressions hold a different understanding of how ecclesial identity is manifest within a community, then a schism may occur.

6.1.2 Evolution

Above, I have highlighted how Methodist ecclesial identity developed over time and how the case studies exhibit a similar development. In Chapter Two, I argued that Methodist ecclesiology is evolutionary and pragmatic; from its inception as a movement to becoming a Church. Campbell (2007, pp.223-24) highlights how evolution has always been part of Methodism, tempered by a commitment to historic Christian doctrine, but changing alongside culture. In this way, one can trace the evolution of Methodist ecclesiology and practice. An example is the ordination of women as presbyters in 1974 (Munsey-Turner, 1998, p.21) which allowed men and women to participate in all areas of church life. Murray recognises the need for evolution within the Church Catholic noting that

traditional services may still nurture those for whom Christendom persists...these forms of church may not thrive in post-Christendom...hope burns brightly that many inherited churches can evolve to meet the challenges of a changing culture.

2004a, p.102

The question which Methodism's evolution poses is encapsulated in Murray's work: will contemporary Methodism continue to evolve and are fresh expressions a part of this evolution? I propose that the data indicates that fresh expressions are a natural part of Methodism's evolutionary process. Indeed, I contend that the origin of Fresh Expression B as described by the initial Superintendent presbyter is an example of such evolution. Several years before Fresh Expression B was created, she described her role thus, 'find if there's a place for the Methodist Church in the city centre...[and] do something different'.⁵⁰ This task suggests that a traditional Methodist church with its adapted eighteenth-century structures would not be relevant to the context. The former Superintendent recognised that the process of walking around the city and reflecting upon the needs was the precursor to the creation of Fresh Expression B; this reflects a Methodist emphasis upon social action through caring for individuals. During the interviews at Fresh Expression B, each interviewee acknowledged that the fresh expression did not look or operate in the same way as it did when it was created; it had evolved as the needs of the community became apparent. In this way, the evolution of the ecclesial identity of Fresh Expression B can be seen to reflect evolution of Methodism.

An issue here concerns the way in which the case studies identify their own expression as a new model of church. Percy suggests that 'British evangelicalism...has an established tradition of continually re-inventing modish associational models of the church' (2010, p.69). The case studies can be interpreted in this way. The interviewees in each case study articulated their belief that their fresh expression was a new instance of church that was particularly relevant to their context; 'the whole idea of fresh expressions is to create something which is different' (Appendix IV - Alan). In this way, the case studies intended to fulfil a need, ensuring that the church connects with individuals within the culture. Percy (2010, p.71) suggests that, rather than enabling connections with culture, fresh expressions have a tendency to collude with a culture of consumerism by providing an experience which follows the fashion of contemporary culture. Percy continues, 'what binds the members of such groups together is the sense that they are participating in something that is simultaneously fresh, new, original and culturally relevant on the one hand; on the other securely located in the past' (2010, p.70). To follow this is to suggest that fresh expressions are a response to changing culture, which remains faithful to Christianity. Indeed, this desire to associate with the past is seen in the interview at Fresh Expression A, where Steven compared the informality of Café Church to early house churches and Fresh Expression B, where Paul linked the fresh expression to his understanding of the early church; 'going back to the early church...we're simply revisiting old territories' (Appendix III – Paul). Each fresh expression believed that part

⁵⁰ This reference is omitted as it would enable identification of the fresh expression.

of the evolution of the church meant that they provided a repackaged, culturally appropriate version of Christianity.

I do not argue here that the evolutionary journey of traditional Methodist churches will see them transformed into fresh expressions, although Murray suggests that ‘many books and resources assume that the way forward into post-Christendom is for inherited churches to evolve’ (2004, p.103). Fresh expressions are a culturally appropriate exploration of faith, but represent a part of the evolution of the church. I argue this because the data and the fresh expressions literature indicate that fresh expressions do not cater for all, but for cultural sub-groups. The traditional Church remains an appropriate expression of faith for many; there is a place for the evolutionary journey of the traditional Church to be explored but that work would not further the research question here.

Chapter Two highlighted the evolution of Methodism from a Connexion of societies to a separate denomination with an ecclesial identity. A challenge for British Methodism might be to consider if the evolutionary journey of traditional Methodist churches has stalled. That is, if it no longer connects with contemporary culture, if development has become slow and limited and it has become difficult to recognise the stages of growth that fresh expressions exhibit: in their case, towards becoming a church. This concerns the way in which fresh expressions are regarded; is the evolution of Methodism mirrored in the growth and development of fresh expressions?

6.1.3 Self-identity

Throughout the research, several issues arose concerning the self-identification of the case studies as churches. The first of these concerns the understanding of the requirements for a community to be a Methodist Church. The interviewees from Fresh Expressions B, C and, D recognised that most of Methodism would regard them as a project, not a church. For example, Paul believed that a challenge for Fresh Expression B was that ‘a lot [of people] will look at us and say that you’re not church you’re just a project’ (Appendix III – Paul), Sharon recognised that although she understood Fresh Expression C to be a church, others ‘call it the “ball pool place”’ (Appendix IV – Sharon), and Ellie stated that some view Fresh Expression D as a project rather than a church and ‘those of us who worship here would say Fresh Expression D is church’ (Appendix V – Ellie). This tension between differing understandings was highlighted in the comments made by Alan concerning the refusal of Fresh Expression D to have a Church Council or membership, both of which are required by Standing Orders for every Methodist church. He stated ‘we are not interested in doing some of those things because they just don’t work for us’ (Appendix V – Alan). As those who lead the community

believe that membership will never be a part of the fresh expression, it is clear that the current Standing Orders and ecclesiological Statements of The Methodist Church in Britain do not enable Fresh Expression D to be regarded as a Methodist church.

The interviews at Fresh Expression B highlighted a belief that adherence to a 'set of doctrines and ideologies' (Appendix II – Paul) was felt to be of lesser importance than building a community. This implies that the members of Fresh Expression B were prepared to ignore some doctrinal or ecclesiological issues which they believed hindered the community. During the interview process, each fresh expression referred to their desire to place their aim of service, evangelism, worship or learning and caring in a higher position than the adherence to ecclesiological principles. It is clear from my research that ecclesiological issues prevent two of the fresh expressions (Fresh Expressions C and D) from being understood as Methodist churches and as a result there is tension within each. Whilst it is currently a constitutional impossibility for either Fresh Expressions C or D to be regarded as Methodist churches due to the lack of membership and a Church Council, this does not remove the discontent felt within each community.

In each case study there was evidence of tension concerning the ecclesial identity of the fresh expression with the circuit, or, for Fresh Expression B, nearby circuits. Watts, Nye and Savage suggest that conflict within a church is considered to be taboo and, therefore, individuals 'feel the need to be "nice" to one another when a more open exploration of conflicts would be helpful' (2002, p.232). Some of the tension evident in the case studies may have been resolved if an open discussion had been held. I have noted the refrain throughout the interviews that the fresh expressions feel that they are different from traditional Methodist churches and are not understood. Savage and Boyd-Macmillan believe that the 'first hurdle [to overcome] is often language' (2007, p.55) and I contend that this may be true in the case studies examined here; articulated as a lack of understanding between the fresh expression and the circuit. Where the fresh expressions' notion of ecclesial identity is different from the other churches in their circuit or district, then the principal contributing factor to the friction may be issues of communication. It is important to note that Savage and Boyd-Macmillan also argue that 'conflict is a necessary stage in learning, growing and changing' (2007, p.54). The tension and conflict which I observed, to varying degrees, during the fieldwork could thus be viewed as part of the development of the ecclesial identity of each fresh expression as they mature.

6.1.4 Ecumenism

Chapter Two discussed ecumenism as central to Methodist ecclesial identity and I highlighted the limited ecumenical dimension of fresh expressions presented within the literature. The case studies did not devote a great deal of time to ecumenical relationships. Indeed, in the process of coding, only three responses were coded with the word ecumenical and I did not observe the ecumenical dimension of any case study. Anne and John in Fresh Expression B believed that the fresh expression may become an ecumenical venture, though this has not occurred in the time since I undertook the fieldwork. The interviews at Fresh Expression B indicated that the extent of the ecumenical relationships at the time the research was undertaken was limited to the use of the Cathedral for baptisms. Fresh Expression C had several volunteers and observers who were from other denominations. The research at Fresh Expressions A and D did not highlight strong ecumenical links. Indeed, interviews at Fresh Expression D focused upon the difference of Fresh Expression D from any church within the circuit and the subsequent lack of relationships. Interactions outside of Methodism were not mentioned during observation or interview.

My research indicated that ecumenical relationships in the case studies were limited to allowing observers to engage with the fresh expression and the use of resources provided by the circuit or district. It is possible that the lack of ecumenical engagement may be due to the perceived lack of understanding between fresh expressions and traditional churches. Murray notes the propensity of emerging churches to dismiss the contribution of traditional churches, whilst suggesting that the 'majority of Christians still belong to inherited churches, so dismissing their contribution and abandoning hope for them seems premature' (2004, p.103). Each of the case studies exhibited what I term a pragmatic ecumenism; those involved in the fresh expression did not view ecumenical relationships as part of the ecclesial identity of the fresh expression but would consider entering such relationships in order to access resources that would otherwise be unavailable.

The creation of networks for mutual support is suggested by Moynagh (2012, pp.445). In relation to the case studies, Fresh Expression C would look to join a network of other fresh expressions that have created children's activity centres. Moynagh (2012, p.445) also notes the danger of this approach, that as the fresh expressions within a network grow closer, their ties to a parent denomination would weaken and thus their ecclesial identity within that denomination would be jeopardised. A further danger here is that such networks may serve to create insular communities that withdraw from the denomination and ecumenical relationships which provide a necessary challenge and thus do not adhere to the criteria of *Called to Love and praise* to offer 'a home for all' (TMCP, 1999a, p.55).

As most of the case studies were grant-dependent, as are many throughout the Connexion, I would argue that currently fresh expressions are not large or strong enough to break away from the parent denomination, which provides the majority of their resources, nor that the creation of networks would hasten any schism, as many networks already exist within British Methodism. The primary issue with the creation of networks of this type is the withdrawal from ecumenical dialogue which a denomination facilitates. Thus, should Fresh Expression D at a future date become separate from the circuit, it would not benefit from the ecumenical relationships which have been developed by the circuit. Moynagh (2012, p.446) recognises the necessity of the mixed economy which enables churches to cooperate within denominations, suggesting a future where local and regional churches over a given geographical area enable and resource one another in mission. I assert that Moynagh is describing a Methodist circuit, in which churches of varying size and theology are enabled to cooperate.

In Chapter Two, I indicated that ecumenism is a vital aspect of contemporary Methodist ecclesiology. If fresh expressions are to be discernibly Methodist, then ecumenism cannot be overlooked. The challenge for The Methodist Church in Britain and fresh expressions concerns the way in which fresh expressions are able to develop and retain meaningful ecumenical relationships.

6.2 The Relationship to the Connexion

I turn now to consider the second theme from the data, the relationship of fresh expressions to the Connexion; continuing this analysis through the lens of the first distinctive emphasis of *Called to Love and Praise* (TMCP, 1999a, p.50), the Connexional principle.

6.2.1 Ownership

Each of the case studies were resourced by Methodism through grants, the allocation of staff and the use of buildings, yet those who were interviewed in each place did not articulate a strong connection to Methodism. In part, this can be understood as the fresh expressions I observed believed themselves to be different to a traditional Methodist church and felt that the attempt to be relevant to their context should not be constrained by normative Methodist ecclesiology. The interviewees at Fresh Expression D indicated that the fresh expression did not believe itself to be strongly connected to the Z Circuit or Methodism. For example, Ellie believed that the relationship between the fresh expression and the circuit was 'disjointed' and

that she understood Fresh Expression D as 'a separate entity to the circuit' (Appendix V – Elle).

The interviewees at Fresh Expression A revealed a desire that the church should not contribute to circuit funds, but use such funds to further the mission of the X Methodist Church. The identity of Fresh Expression A was also described as different and misunderstood by the circuit churches, implying that the church was, or should be, set apart from other churches of the circuit. Similarly, the interviewees at Fresh Expression B believed that the fresh expression would, in the future, cease to be a Methodist initiative, to become an ecumenical venture. The feelings described here represent a difference between the fresh expressions and most Methodist churches. Whilst it is not unusual for a Methodist church to work somewhat independently, it is unusual, in my experience and not represented in the literature, for a Methodist church to articulate a desire to be set apart from circuit and Connexional structures in this way.

True power is determined by material factors, argues Chambers (2005, p.199). I interpret the desire to be separated from the circuit, articulated by the interviewees from Fresh Expressions A and D and implied by interviewees from Fresh Expressions B and C, as an attempt to be released from the power of the circuit and thus have complete control of the fresh expression. Some of the interviewee's responses indicated that this desire to be released from the power of a circuit is driven by the desire to be contextually relevant, as the circuit did not understand the context of the fresh expression and so should not be in a position of power. This can be seen in the words of Roy who noted the need for the community to 'get our own mind together and know which way we want to go' (Appendix V - Roy) in seeking a replacement for the leader of the fresh expression, rather than allow the circuit to appoint an individual who may not fit the context. The challenge of this desire to be separate would be that although each fresh expression would hold power over their own affairs, it would also no longer have access to the resources of the circuit, district and Connexion.

It is possible that the issue of the ownership of the fresh expression has some bearing upon the desire to remain separated from the circuit or Connexion. Throughout my research, the interviewees from each case study believed that the ownership of the fresh expressions was held by either an individual or a small group, who had created each initiative, rather than the circuit or Connexion. For example, this can be seen in the transcript of my interviews with Nora and Sharon, who referenced Susan as the individual who initiated the project and whose presence was vital to Fresh Expression D. Nora noted that the fresh expression was Susan's 'baby' (Appendix IV – Nora) and she is regarded by the community as the one who has

authority in the context, with little reference to the circuit. As the ownership was thought to reside primarily with those who created the fresh expression rather than the circuit, it may be that the loyalty of those who attend or lead was not to Methodism but to those individuals who have been present in leadership roles for a long time. This is more complicated when the individual who created the fresh expression is a presbyter, as in Fresh Expressions A, B and D, as part of their vocation is being called to be a representative of the Methodist Church.

Social identity theory suggests that individuals will favour the group in which they belong. In a fresh expression, this can be seen in a belief that 'my' fresh expression has a 'better grasp of the truth, a more authentic experience of God, a more genuine faith' (Watts, Nye and Savage, 2002, p.215). Social identity theory also highlights a 'subtle denigration of those who are not "like us"' (Watts, Nye and Savage, 2002, p.215). I believe that this was demonstrated in the case studies in which the circuit was regarded with suspicion and the fresh expression viewed as more important. This fails to account for the nature of the circuit as a stakeholder (Chambers, 2005, p.214) with a particular interest in the life of the fresh expression. This was clear in Fresh Expressions B and D as the interviewees articulated their belief that the fresh expression was greatly different from traditional churches, and that 'this is my church, this comes first' (Appendix V – Roy).

Each interviewee stated that a relationship between Methodism and the fresh expression existed through the circuit of which it was a part. The relationship varied in each case, however, the responses included evidence of good relationships but also of difficult and damaging dealings with the circuit. During these conversations several issues arose, but the most common issue concerned the tension present in the relationship of the fresh expression to the circuit.

6.2.2 Tensions

During the interviews at Fresh Expression C, tension was evident as a distrust of the circuit. Susan believed that the circuit's initial support for the project was motivated by the profile which having a successful fresh expression brought, 'it's the flagship of Methodism here' (Appendix III – Susan), rather than support for the project itself. At Fresh Expression A, the interviewees did not trust the circuit to continue to provide the current level of resource. It was clear that the interviewees felt that the circuit did not have a great concern for the interests of Fresh Expression A and that should the church no longer have a full-time presbyter, the initiatives would suffer. Philip commented on this, noting that if his appointment was changed to include responsibility for more churches, there would be an impact on the fresh expressions. He stated,

I just won't be around as much...I think in terms of my finger on the pulse...of the pastoral engagement that I have with them....yes, that will have an effect...and I worry that, the fact that, ministry in smaller churches is so kind of presbyter centric, that I will end up doing so much to maintain them.

Appendix II – Philip

The issue of trust was also reflected in the interviews at Fresh Expression B with regard to finances. The fresh expression receives grants at both a district and Connexional level. Joan articulated her belief that local Methodist circuits were suspicious concerning the level of support given from the district. In the interviews at Fresh Expression C, Susan explained the tension which was present during the formation of the fresh expression. The primary cause of this tension concerned funding the conversion of the Y Methodist Church premises. The issue of trust was also implied in Susan's earlier comments, explaining her own lack of trust with regards to the circuit initially seeking to close and sell Y Methodist Church due to the declining membership and attendance.

A further tension evident was that of circuit oversight. Those who attended Fresh Expression D implied that it was inappropriate for the circuit to have oversight of the community and felt that the fresh expression should exercise oversight itself. Jenny asserted that Fresh Expression D was 'almost self-contained' (Appendix V – Jenny). Ellie believed that the differences between the circuit and the fresh expression made communication difficult and 'we often have to justify our existence' further noting her belief that when ministers from the circuit had led parts of the Sunday presentation, 'it almost felt like they were there for...an ulterior motive' (Appendix V - Ellie). As I stated in Chapter Two, part of the interrelated nature of Methodism is that of oversight. Indeed, *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* asserts that for a community to be a church it must be united to others through shared oversight (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.114). This attitude reflected the feeling of those who were part of the fresh expression that the circuit 'did not understand' how the community worked because of the specific contextual nature of the fresh expressions as opposed to the broader response to culture of The Methodist Church in Britain. In correspondence with the Superintendent, I was informed that the leader of Fresh Expression D was line managed by the Superintendent and was ultimately accountable to the circuit but that there was no presbyter in the circuit who had pastoral responsibility for Fresh Expression D. During interviews, several examples were given as to how presbyters who had led worship or presided at Holy Communion at Fresh Expression D had not grasped the nature of the fresh expression and, therefore, had not been sensitive to the context. In this way, Jenny notes that communion was 'always difficult'

(Appendix IV – Jenny). Such examples were used by the interviewees to reinforce their belief that the circuit did not understand the community and could not be allowed to exercise oversight. Tension concerning oversight was also evident in the interviews at Fresh Expressions A and B. The interviewees at Fresh Expression B spoke briefly of a concern that joining with an adjacent circuit would cause tension. This approach would be greatly different from the current model in which Fresh Expression B operated as both a circuit and a local church, making all the decisions that a Church Council and a circuit would make. Fresh Expression B was, therefore, concerned with ensuring that any amalgamation would be with a circuit that understood how they operate and would exercise oversight in a way which was deemed acceptable to its leadership. The tension concerning Fresh Expression A and the circuit concerned both the stationing procedure and the circuit review. The interviewees believed that for the fresh expressions to flourish when the current presbyter was replaced, a presbyter with 'a similar outlook' (Appendix II – Liz) should be appointed. This tension related both to the circuit and to the Connexion in the stationing process, that the oversight would be sensitive to the needs of the fresh expressions.

It was clear that some of the tensions in the relationships between the case studies and the Connexion stemmed from a lack of understanding of Methodist structures and patterns of ministry. This may be due to many involved in the fresh expressions having little experience of Methodism. This is true of Fresh Expression B where various members have not been part of a Methodist church and, therefore, lack the experience of how a circuit operates. This is a similar situation to those who worship in Fresh Expression D, although several members of the leadership team at Fresh Expression D are members at other Methodist churches in the circuit and have some understanding of Methodism. Nevertheless, each fresh expression experienced tension in its relationship with Methodism.

It is possible to suggest reasons for much of the conflict, such as the nature of power and conformity. Watts, Nye and Savage (2002, p.207) argue that due primarily to social influences, individuals will conform to the beliefs of the majority in a group setting and thus the group shares similar beliefs, marginalising those who dissent. Stark and Bainbridge recognise that when an organisation experiences a great deal of tension and difference between its members, 'schism is its likely fate' (1987, p.239). The danger, therefore, of unresolved tension between the specific contextual nature of fresh expressions and circuits is that the two may seek to split.

Adherence to Methodist doctrine and ecclesiology was mentioned by several interviewees who believed that strict obedience was not necessary. This issue was raised as a source of

tension in the relationship of Fresh Expression B and the Connexion. In interview, Paul suggested that Fresh Expression B is not close to any other Methodist church because it does not strictly adhere to Methodist doctrine. During interview at Fresh Expression A, Philip also referred to Methodist doctrine, he commented that his interest was not 'convincing people of Methodist doctrine [but] getting them to sign up to this community of faith' (Appendix I – Philip). Comments during the interviews at Fresh Expression D reflected a desire to fulfil the evangelistic aim as the priority. This could mean ignoring or sidestepping doctrinal or ecclesiological issues that were perceived to hinder evangelism. Adherence to strict theological formulae or ecclesiological practice was of less importance to the fresh expression than the building of community. This is a further example of the conformity found within the data, as all interviewees articulated the same desire to ignore doctrinal issues which might not resonate with the contextual approach of the fresh expression.

My interpretation of the data from each case study highlighted leanings toward a congregational rather than Connexional ecclesiology as they were concerned with the furtherance of their own community over links to circuit. Congregational ecclesiology can be broadly understood as the local church as an independent entity which makes all decisions which affect the life of the church; whereas a Connexional ecclesiology holds that local churches are connected to each other and decisions have an impact on other churches. The difference between the two is that in a congregational ecclesiology, the power is held in the local church, in a Connexional ecclesiology the local church has some power but the circuit and ultimately the Conference exercise oversight over the local church.

6.2.3 Congregationalism

A tendency towards congregational ecclesiology was particularly evident in Fresh Expressions B and D, which both believed that as their way of being was so different from the churches in the circuit that it was prudent to be 'set apart'. A similar desire was evident at Fresh Expressions A and C, but to a lesser degree. Although the presbyter in pastoral charge of Fresh Expression B was Superintendent of an adjacent circuit, the community were keen to point out in interview that they had made some 'very strict provisos about what we were prepared to allow him to do' (Appendix II – Joan). The implication of this statement is that the fresh expression must be protected from the influence another circuit may have. These feelings were echoed during the interviews at Fresh Expression D, in which the interviewees believed that as Z Circuit did not understand their way of being, Fresh Expression D should be separate from the circuit. Several comments made during the interview process also suggested a congregational understanding, in relation to the appointment of a new leader of

Fresh Expression D. The interviewees stated the need for the community to 'get our own mind together' (Appendix IV – Roy), rather than allowing the circuit to appoint a suitable leader.

The interviewees at each fresh expression also highlighted a desire to control all aspects of their common life to protect their contextual identity, rather than recognise mutual accountability. This desire was manifest in several ways. At Fresh Expression A, the leaders of Café Church did not invite local preachers or other presbyters to take part in the act of worship. Rather, each Café Church was led by individuals who were members of Fresh Expression A. The reason given for this was that those who attended the church better understood the context than those from other churches. It could also be interpreted as an attempt to maintain control. Similarly, Fresh Expression C did not invite other presbyters or local preachers to lead Village Praise. Interviewees at Fresh Expressions A and B also spoke of a desire to control the stationing process to ensure that any new presbyter would fit into their established patterns. Whilst this attitude may not be common to all fresh expressions, it was represented to a varying degree in each of the case studies. My research highlighted a desire in the fresh expressions to control aspects of their life which are typically the responsibility of the Superintendent or the Circuit Meeting, appearing to operate in a congregational rather than a Connexional mode.

The congregational dynamic revealed in the case studies is an example of individuals joining what Stark and Bainbridge (1987, p.256) call high-tension societies. High-tension societies are joined by individuals who seek the reward of being part of that group, but find little reward outside the group. I would argue that the congregational nature of the case studies suggests that those involved are interested in the rewards that the fresh expressions give to them but are less interested in the connection to Methodism.

I have highlighted my interpretation of the desire of each fresh expression to control aspects of its life which, in Methodist ecclesiology and practice, related to the oversight of the circuit. This was in relation to three aspects of the relationship of the fresh expression to the Connexion. First, the ownership of the fresh expressions; interviewees did not articulate a strong connection to the circuit or Connexion, but maintained that the ownership was held by the community. Second, the tension which was evident in the relationship between the fresh expression and the circuit, manifest as a lack of trust in the oversight of the circuit. The third desire to control was found in the comments of interviewees which suggested that as the circuit and the fresh expression were so different, the fresh expressions should control all aspects of its common life rather than recognise their accountability to the circuit and Connexion. Each of these instances of the desire for control and power over the life of the

fresh expression could also be interpreted as the desire to ensure that the contextual nature of the fresh expression is protected from the influence of those who are unfamiliar with the context. Chambers (2005, pp.202-03) suggests that power can become embedded in individuals and sub-groups, and that careful attention should be paid to the power that develops as the identity of the sub-group is formed, further noting that when the developing identity is threatened, tension can arise.

The data revealed several points of tension, which I have explored above. For example, the interviewees at Fresh Expression D believed that the circuit did not understand the fresh expression, this led Roy to suggest that the community needed to decide how to deal with replacing the leader who had resigned, rather than allow the circuit to control the process and challenge the identity of the fresh expression by appointing a candidate who may not suit the context. The interviewees at Fresh Expression A did not trust the circuit to continue to provide the current level of resource to the fresh expression in a full-time presbyter which would damage the identity of the fresh expression. The interviewees at Fresh Expression B believed that the stationing of the presbyter as Superintendent of an adjacent circuit had the potential to affect the identity of the fresh expression and made 'strict provisos' (Appendix II - Joan) concerning what he would be allowed to do to protect the identity of the fresh expression. In this way, each fresh expression protects their identity as a contextual response by seeking to maintain control over the life of the community. This resonates with Harris' work on conflict in local churches. She suggests that 'conflicts often find their deep roots in organisational structures, systems and cultures' (2005, p.216). In the examples above and those earlier in this chapter, I propose that the fresh expressions find their specific contextual approach is not compatible with Methodist ecclesiology which seeks to be relevant to a broad context and, therefore, seek control in order to preserve their contextual relevance. The desire for control in fresh expressions may also reflect a belief that adherence to Methodist structures, which gives some control to bodies outside of the community, may hinder the growth of the fresh expression. The issues of power and control in the research data are thus intricately linked with the nature of fresh expressions as a contextual response; in order to maintain the identity of the community, the community must control its life. This control challenges Methodist ecclesiology as it highlights the difference between the broad approach to context and culture of normative Methodist ecclesiology, and the specific contextual approach of fresh expressions.

6.2.4 Theological and Practical Freedom

As noted above, those involved in the case studies had a tendency to seek freedom from the traditional Church in terms of theology, ecclesiology and practice. This resonates with the

rejection of metanarratives as a feature of a Postmodernity. Percy suggests that ‘many individual fresh expressions are made up of Christians who are weary of the church as an institution’ (2010, p.72). This sentiment was often tacitly expressed during interviews at all of the case studies, as many of those involved in the fresh expressions were former members of other churches who understood themselves as post-institutional, who do not join bodies as they find them irrelevant. The lack of membership at Fresh Expression D also serves as evidence of this. Jeff Astley suggests that ordinary theology, the theology of those without formal theological training, is more ‘concerned with the perceived meaningfulness of the speaker’s own life than is much of the theology of the academy’ (2002, p.70). I suggest that this extends to the way in which a community forms their own ecclesiology; the theology and ecclesiology of the institutional Church has less appeal than that which is perceived to be meaningful within the life of a fresh expression. This was expressed by the interviewees in all of the case studies as the need to prioritise the community of which they were a part. Jenny, referring to Fresh Expression D, stated, ‘I see it almost as a separate entity to the circuit’ (Appendix V – Jenny). This challenge concerns how a fresh expression, which is part of the Connexion, may appear to be isolated due to consciously withdrawing from the Church as an institution. This is particularly relevant as within British Methodism, any autonomous fresh expression would not be discernibly Methodist.

The Connexional nature of Methodism has been explored in Chapter Two, I have also proposed above that the case studies tended towards a congregational understanding. Astley (2002, p.65) suggests that individuals only engage with theology that seems significant to their own context. This could lead to those who share similar theological views or practice gathering together but refusing to engage with, or excluding, views which they do not deem to be significant. This is not simply an issue found in the relationships between fresh expressions and traditional churches, but a Connexional one linked to the diversity of theological viewpoints found within British Methodism. The challenge to consider is how a fresh expression which excludes contrasting theological viewpoints, or individuals who hold them, can remain part of the Connexion. The danger of such a model is that it enables the creation of homogenous units. It also contradicts the criteria of *Called to Love and Praise* which asserts that a church is ‘a community of all ages, different races, varying backgrounds and occupations’ (TMCP, 1999a, p.55).

A refrain of fresh expressions is contained in the words of Burns, who writes that ‘an appropriate response to God in one generation and culture will be very different in another’ (2009, p.174). The desire for freedom from theological views deemed to hinder the fresh expression was seen at Fresh Expression D, concerning the creation of a Church Council and

membership, 'they just don't work for us' (Appendix IV – Alan). Goodhew, Roberts and Volland make a case for this as they argue that 'it is not possible to develop a vision for a fresh expression...from the outside looking in' (2012, p.163). This implies that the theological or ecclesiological views or practice of a traditional church should not be imposed upon a fresh expression. This places the fresh expression in danger of 'standing at the margins of being identifiably Christian' (Nieman and Haight, 2012, p.9). The challenge to Methodist ecclesiology is found in the attempt to maintain a relationship in Connexion which is of benefit to both the traditional church and to the fresh expression, as Murray reflects 'cherry-picking interesting practices...will damage inherited and emerging churches' (2004, p.111). There is also a challenge to fresh expressions which seek to 'cherry-pick' practices: can a fresh expression which dismisses some Methodist practice continue to be recognisably Methodist? How can a fresh expression be enabled to connect with culture, whilst understanding the mutual accountability of the Connexion?

6.2.5 Connectedness

In Chapter Two, I outlined the interdependence of the Connexional principle. Percy articulates a challenge to the Connexion, suggesting that fresh expressions 'collude with pluralism and individualism' (2010, p.73). This argument is furthered by considering Giles' words; 'variants of congregational ecclesiology appeal to...evangelical Christians, because their ideas "feel" right to the modern mind imbued with the prevailing popular philosophy of individualism' (1995, p.14). If fresh expressions tend towards both individualism and congregationalism, then a Connexional church and fresh expression would be difficult to reconcile. Indeed, Gray-Reeves and Perham recognise a feature of Postmodern thinking is the 'understanding that one is free to choose one's spiritual path and not required to "buy" into a particular faith expression' (2011, p.65). A Postmodern ideology would suggest that there is no requirement to be part of the Connexion and remain part of a larger whole. The interviewees at Fresh Expression D exhibited the desire to be separate from the circuit, but also contained a number of people who were former members of churches, for whom Fresh Expression D 'felt right'. Fresh Expression B also exhibited a similar desire for gathering with others who share their views. Percy believes that fresh expressions of this type are 'contemporary versions of the homogenous unit principle for church growth that...were subsequently widely discredited' (2010, p.78) and should be discouraged. I suggest that many Methodist congregations are gathered from a wide area as individuals attend a church which they feel 'fits' them. Those who share particular preferences may gather at the church which offers that style rather than attending another, but these churches remain connected as part of the circuit despite the differences. Indeed, Grace Davie believes that a feature of what she terms 'new age or self-spiritualities' (2015, p.159) but can be understood as Postmodern spirituality, is the desire to

connect to oneself and to the world. She describes the desire for connection as one of three themes of self-spirituality; 'an emphasis on self, self-discovery and a desire to "connect"' (2015, p.159). This echoes the notion above that the desire for connection is with those who share beliefs or values which resonate with them.

The connexional principle does not seek to ensure that all are the same, but that all are held together as part of the whole Church. *Issues of Connexionalism in the Twenty-first Century* shares this stance, noting that 'connexionalism is still fundamental...Methodists speak of the value of belonging to something larger than their local church' (TMCP, 2015b, pp.88-89). Fresh expressions which are different from other circuit churches can, therefore, remain part of the Connexion. During Interviews at Fresh Expression B, Paul stated that the fresh expression was so different that it would not 'have a closeness with the majority of traditional Methodists' (Appendix III – Paul). The interviews at Fresh Expression D reinforced the view that the fresh expression was different from the churches of the circuit. I argue that such differences are not insurmountable and are part of being in the Connexion, but the relationship between fresh expressions and traditional Methodist churches requires dedication from both parties. The relationship can be beneficial in which each party is enabled to grow but the case studies highlighted the difficulties which arise when different communities meet. *The Gift of Connexionalism in the Twenty-first Century* emphasises the difficulties, stating that being connected involved hard work but could be beneficial.

Methodism also rejoices in the increasing range of fresh expressions...it is vital to enable and support those working in new ways, to maintain the principles of connexionalism which facilitate a sense of belonging, accountability and interdependence.

TMCP, 2017c, p.388

The challenge is not that fresh expressions are primarily concerned with separation, nor that the Connexion is unable to hold disparate communities but that communities are encouraged to develop relationships despite the differences. This will involve reflection upon the nature of power within a fresh expression, as within a Connexional church a community is unable to control every aspect of their communal life.

The analysis of the case study data, in the light of Methodist history, indicates the possibility that a schism may occur if the challenge is deemed to be too great for the Connexion to hold traditional churches and fresh expressions. To avoid such a division, there is a need to

reinforce the Connexional nature of The Methodist Church in Britain, that different communities are able to be held together within one Connexional body.

6.2.6 Diversity

The aim of church planting is to create diverse churches suggests *Mission-Shaped Church* (TAC, 2004, p.23). The case studies highlight a variety of culturally appropriate expressions of faith; I suggest that fresh expressions are a way in which diversity of practice and contextual relevance can be expressed in British Methodism. Vincent explores diversity, stating 'what fresh expressions means is that...we need to be less and less like each other... that some of the multitudes of people in our growing diverse cultures can find a culture-appropriate form of a church' (2015, p.100).

To follow Vincent's argument, a greater diversity of churches is to be celebrated as it has the potential to connect to a wider group of individuals from different cultures or sub-cultures. The interviewees from each case study articulated the belief that their fresh expression was a culturally appropriate response to the needs of their community. Fresh Expression C is an example of this desire to fulfil the needs of the community by creating a children's activity centre. A similar approach may not have worked in a community which already caters for the needs of families. Hull suggests that 'diversity...is problematic because it undermines denominational plausibility' (2006, p.12). This argument can be understood in two ways, the first being that churches which all belong to one denomination are all perceived to be relevant to a specific context; this is highlighted in the Connexional structures which are identical in every context. In this way, one might suggest that Methodism does not represent a diverse Church because each church is a part of the denomination. I would not subscribe to this as my experience and my research highlighted the diverse nature of Methodism. The second understanding of Hull's comments would suggest that a denomination which encourages diversity lacks a valid denominational identity as there is no uniformity. I believe that the risk of diversity is concerned with maintaining the connection between fresh expressions and the Connexion. *Starting a Fresh Expression* argues that 'diversity without connection is a recipe for division' (TAC, 2006, p.12). Diverse communities require a connection to other communities in order to provide mutual support and challenge. The case studies highlighted the challenge which diversity brings to the Connexion. The interviewees at Fresh Expression D all noted the strained relations with the circuit and the requirement for both parties to work at the relationship. At Fresh Expression B the difficulty was partly due to the fresh expression being a one-church circuit which has to work at maintaining connections to other circuits.

The WCC advocated full visible unity for many years, but Giles (1995, pp.201-202) notes that it has recently called upon the Church to pursue unity in diversity. I believe that this is a challenge for The Methodist Church in Britain; to ensure that fresh expressions and traditional churches are able to maintain a union, despite their differences. The case studies offered a wide variety of fresh expressions and further diversity is found throughout the Connexion. The challenge here may relate more to fresh expressions than traditional Methodist churches, to recognise diversity within the broad contextual approach of British methodism. Since the union which led to the formation of The Methodist Church in Britain, there has been diversity within the Connexion, local churches and circuits have learned over time to accept the differences which exist. Since fresh expressions are a relatively new phenomenon, I believe that they have not yet had sufficient time to appreciate unity in diversity and cope with difference. Thus, the challenge for fresh expressions concerns how a community may appreciate the diversity of the Connexion as recognisably Methodist.

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed two of the themes from the data through the lens of the Connexional principle. First, I examined issues of how ecclesial identity is determined in fresh expressions by an intention to be church, rather than fulfilling the requirements of Methodist ecclesiology. I also noted that Methodist history highlights Methodism's evolutionary journey towards ecclesial identity and suggested fresh expressions may mirror this. I explored the question of how Methodist churches and fresh expressions may be able to maintain relationships which are of benefit, despite diversity in their understanding of church. I also discussed how the nature of ecumenism as central to contemporary Methodism was not exhibited in the data and the issue of how fresh expressions may be able to be truly ecumenical as part of the Church Catholic. The substantial issues which I discussed in relation to this theme were: the perceived difference of a fresh expression from a traditional church, the criteria which a community must meet to be a Methodist church, the intention of a fresh expression to be a church and the ecumenical dimension of fresh expressions.

The second theme which was analysed was the relationship of the fresh expressions to the Connexion. As the interrelated nature of the Connexion is a discernibly Methodist feature, how the relationship to the Connexion was manifest in the case studies highlights the extent to which they can be discernibly Methodist expressions of church. The analysis of this theme explored several interrelated issues; the understanding of ownership within the case studies which highlighted the belief that the fresh expression community should be set apart from the Connexion. I considered several tensions which were manifest in the relationships of the case studies to the circuit or district in which they were set; these tensions included issues of finance

and a desire to be free from Connexional oversight as Methodist structures were deemed inappropriate. I explored the tendency towards congregational ecclesiology, which was present in all of the case studies, and the resultant desire of the fresh expressions to be free from the Methodist metanarrative as the interviewees believe that these were irrelevant because of the difference between the fresh expressions and other circuit churches. I also analysed the way in which connectedness is manifest in the case studies; that the Connexion is not uniform but diverse and must hold together churches despite their differences. From the discussion of this theme, the substantive issues which I will take forward to Chapter Nine are: issues of ownership and accountability as part of the Connexion and the nature of connectedness.

Throughout this chapter, the belief surfaced several times that each fresh expression, as a contextually relevant response, was different to the broad approach of The Methodist Church in Britain as a Connexion. The interviewees of each case study believed that Connexional structures, which were designed for the eighteenth century, and the broad contextual approach were not appropriate for their specific contextual approach. This reflects Grace Davie's concept of new age spirituality, which embraces a 'variety of beliefs and practices guided by internal motivation rather than external constraint' (2015, pp.158-59). She further notes that when organised religion and new age spirituality interact, there is the potential for 'flash points' (2015, p.159) of tension to occur. This chapter has demonstrated that the interaction of fresh expressions with the connexional principle creates flash points of tension which challenge Methodist ecclesiology.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FELLOWSHIP AND SHARED DISCIPLINE

The second distinctive Methodist emphasis asserted by *Called to Love and Praise* is fellowship and shared discipline. This is the lens through which this chapter will analyse the third theme from the data: leadership and authority. I begin by considering the sacraments; this could be considered as part of an investigation of the ecclesial identity of fresh expressions, under the criteria suggested by *Called to Love and Praise* as recognisable features of a church: 'a community...united around the Lord's table' (TMCP, 1999a, p.55). However, I include it here because the discussion of the sacraments feeds into the understanding of the priesthood of all believers.

7.1 Sacraments

During my research, I did not observe the sacraments celebrated at any case study, though all of the interviewees stated that baptism and Holy Communion were celebrated regularly in each fresh expression.

During each interview, I asked if the sacraments were important in the life of the fresh expression. The responses from each of the case studies indicated that the sacraments were not central to the fresh expressions. At Fresh Expression A, all of the interviewees felt that the sacraments were important and were celebrated during traditional Sunday worship. Baptism had taken place during Café Church and each interviewee felt that it would be possible to celebrate communion during Café Church. Neither communion nor baptism had been celebrated at Air. Philip, the presbyter in pastoral charge of the church, was not concerned by the lack of sacrament in either of the initiatives as they were 'covered in the life of our church' (Appendix I – Philip).

The interviewees from Fresh Expression B stated that communion is shared in the community 'twice each week in the sharing of a meal' (Appendix II – Joan), following bread-making and, therefore, was important to the fresh expression. Each interviewee also noted that this was not a traditional understanding of communion and that communion with bread and wine occurs during Sunday afternoon worship. Traditional communion was not felt to be central to the life of the fresh expression; each interviewee believed that the meal following bread-making was the central eucharistic act of the fresh expression. Whilst this understanding of the sacrament may not be common throughout the Connexion, the occasional celebration of communion falls within the free worship pattern of British Methodism. The interviewees from Fresh Expression C also stated that communion was important to the fresh expression as a part of Village Praise,

but that it should be celebrated in a manner which was appropriate to the context, with individuals who were known to the community presiding.

Several interviewees from Fresh Expression D implied that communion was not an important part of Fresh Expression D (Appendix IV – Roy) and was, therefore, not celebrated frequently, despite Alan having been granted an authorisation to preside by the Conference. The aim of Fresh Expression D; to prioritise evangelism, may mean that celebrating communion is secondary to evangelism.

Communion was present in each fresh expression and thus the sixth criterion of the list presented in *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*, 'a community that celebrates the Lord's Supper' (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.114) and the second criterion of *Called to Love and Praise*, 'a community...united around the Lord's table' (TMCP, 1999a, p.54) were fulfilled.

In the process of coding, comments upon sacrament were always linked to the issue of presidency; that is, who was permitted to preside. It is as a result of the interviewees linking sacrament with presidency that this issue is contained within the theme of leadership and authority, rather than ecclesial identity.

Opinion varied as to who should preside; some felt it important that an ordained individual preside, whilst others felt that lay people should be permitted to preside. These feelings are similar to those one would expect to find in any Methodist church. It is significant that interviewees from each case study believed that those who preside at communion, whether lay or ordained, must understand the context. The implication of this is that each fresh expression maintains a level of control over the presidency of communion. This desire for control was evident in each of the fresh expressions and reflects a congregational emphasis, where those who are seen as the leaders of the church or initiative are permitted to preside in order to preserve the contextual identity of the fresh expression.

Each community articulated the belief that the ecclesiology of the sacraments caused tension, due to the different understandings of the circuit and the fresh expression. This resonates with Jenkins' argument that in a Postmodern context, communities are 'rethinking our doctrines of faith' (1999, p.102) to ensure they are relevant to the context of the community. As I examined in Chapter Two, presidency at the sacrament relates to the unity of the church in terms of church order, the catholicity of the church, the holiness of the church as it exercises a properly authorised ministry and the apostolicity of the church as it engages in mission in the world.

Tension was most clearly seen through the interviews at Fresh Expression D, relating not to frequency, or approved liturgy but always to presidency.

Baptism was less contentious during the interviews, as various individuals had been baptised in each case study context. No interviewee believed that presidency at baptism had caused tension between the circuit and the fresh expression. However, one example of the desire to control presidency was cited in the interviews at Fresh Expression D. This concerned a baptism at which the leader presided, in the presence of a presbyter from the circuit who was speaking at the presentation.

The data indicates that each fresh expression was keen to control which individuals were permitted to preside at the sacraments. The issue of controlling those who preside can be understood as an attempt by each fresh expression to preserve their identity as contextual responses which might be threatened by the presidency of one outside of the community. Chambers argues that the 'exercise of power includes the ability of certain individuals and groups to protect and advance their interests by imposing their will on the less powerful' (2005, p.198). The leaders of the fresh expression may believe that if a presbyter unfamiliar with the context were to preside in way that was unfamiliar to those present, some may react by choosing not to attend. Thus, the power to control the presidency enables the preservation of the identity of the fresh expression. In relation to the case studies, this issue poses a question of how the fresh expression can hold sufficient power within a circuit to control the presidency at the sacraments, when traditional churches are unable to do so.

7.2 Leadership

The leadership and authority of the fresh expressions was represented by codes in every interview and throughout my observations, it is, therefore, an important element to the analysis of this theme. Fresh Expressions A and B were led by presbyters who were heavily involved in the leadership of the fresh expressions. Fresh Expressions C and D were led by lay employees and had little day-to-day input from presbyters, although the chair of the trustees for Fresh Expression C was a presbyter. The leadership structure of Fresh Expression D had no input from a presbyter. All of the fresh expressions also had a leadership team. For Fresh Expression B, the leadership team was the Church Council, a second team of volunteers called facilitators also shared some leadership in the bread-making sessions. Fresh Expression A had a team who shared the leadership for Café Church and Air. This team was separate from the Church Council, which acts as the managing trustees for the church. It is not unusual within Methodism for lay leaders to play a significant role in leadership. It is,

however, unusual for leadership within Methodism to lack the oversight of a presbyter; exhibited at Fresh Expression D.

During the interviews at Fresh Expression D, patterns of Methodist ministry and leadership were discussed. Several interviewees asserted that a presbyter being given pastoral charge or oversight would be seen as an attempt by the circuit to exert control over the fresh expression. There appeared to be a lack of trust between the circuit and Fresh Expression D that contributed to the lack of oversight which was apparent. This was articulated by interviewees as the circuit having an inadequate understanding of the fresh expression because of its specific context and so, therefore, should not be involved in the oversight of it. This was also apparent during the interview process at both Fresh Expressions A and C. Susan referred to this in relation to Fresh Expression C; she felt that the ordained presbyters of the circuit did not attend often as they did not understand their role within the fresh expression, noting that presbyters are

centred around church...they are so spiritually minded that they are no earthly use, because they don't know what's going on in the world...and there is [sic] huge issues in people's lives...what they want is someone relevant.

Appendix IV – Susan

Several interviewees at Fresh Expression A identified tension, relating to how leadership from another presbyter would alter the dynamic of both Café Church and Air. For example, Steven suggested that if Philip was replaced by another presbyter, before leaving he would develop the fresh expressions so they 'ran with the people who are there, and he would make very clear to who was coming next that he had done that on purpose' (Appendix II – Steven). This comment implies that those involved value their contextual approach and would seek to limit any changes made by a new presbyter if they were unfamiliar with the context.

In his reflection on power, Chambers notes that congregations can apply meaning in subjective ways and understand the use of power. He also writes of the need to consider a congregation's internal factors to understand the distribution of power (2005, p.201). The way that presbyters were regarded suggests that an internal factor may affect the perception of their role within the case studies. Chambers (2005, p.202) suggests that the presence of a paid religious professional brings with it an ordering of power. The tensions which were articulated concerning presbyters could be seen as changing the balance of power in favour of the circuit, which could have a detrimental impact on the identity of the fresh expressions as specific contextual responses. In relation to this tension, Ellie recalled that when presbyters

from the circuit had been part of the presentation, the community felt 'they were there for...an ulterior motive' (Appendix IV – Ellie), seeking to report an account of their visit. In this way, the tension is due to the fresh expression wishing to maintain control of its own life. Davie recognises that this tension results from the interaction of a Postmodern context with the primarily modern context of the traditional Church, arguing that in new age spirituality, individuals are 'guided by internal motivation rather than external constraint' (2005, p.149). Methodist structures, particularly stationing and deployment, are designed to ensure that power is held corporately in the Church Council and Circuit Meeting rather than an individual community, as was demonstrated at Fresh Expression D.

Each fresh expression community exhibited some misunderstanding concerning the role of ordained leadership in relation to the fresh expression. In his interview, Roy believed that a presbyter could not have pastoral charge of Fresh Expression D as the community needed a full-time leader: 'if you're going to do [Fresh Expression D] then...you've got to do [Fresh Expression D] and that's it' (Appendix IV - Roy). This sentiment was echoed by Jenny and Ellie, although the leader of the community worked half-time and thereby perhaps devoted less time to Fresh Expression D than a full-time presbyter could. In this fresh expression, I sensed throughout the interviews that ordained leadership did not fit into the pattern of leadership which they had developed.

It was clear from the data that each fresh expression struggled with presbyteral leadership. The interviewees at Fresh Expressions A and B believed that many presbyters within the Connexion lacked the skills necessary to effectively minister within the fresh expressions. The interviewees at Fresh Expression C felt that there was a role for presbyters within the fresh expression but not a traditional one. Susan (Appendix III – Susan) suggested that presbyters should be available throughout the week to engage in conversation with customers. The tension regarding presbyteral ministry proposes an ecclesiological question: are there fresh expressions in the Connexion which are inappropriate for presbyters, those who are set apart to be in leadership roles, to lead?

The issue of ownership, in relation to leadership, emerged in interviews in each case study. Each fresh expression was primarily envisioned by one individual, who subsequently became the driving force behind its creation. In Fresh Expression A, Philip had initiated both Café Church and Air and remained the leader of both. During the interview process, Liz commented that if Philip was stationed elsewhere, 'we would want to appoint someone with a similar outlook' who would continue to develop the fresh expressions. At Fresh Expression C, Susan was recognised by each interviewee as the individual who had developed the vision for the

project and that her continuing presence was vital. Susan rejected this notion, but each interviewee indicated that staff and community members recognised her as the one by whom all decisions would be made, although this is not entirely correct as the trustees would make policy decisions. Fresh Expression B was created by a previous minister, and it was clear during the interviews that she designed the pattern of bread-making days and worship. John explained the evolution of Fresh Expression B, that it would not continue to rely upon the original vision, noting 'we are always trying to vision our way forward' (Appendix III – John). Fresh Expression D was different as it had been several years since the original leader moved away and a leadership team had been developed. This, along with the struggle over its identity with the circuit, had forced Fresh Expression D to become less dependent on its original shape. Each fresh expression, however, was centred on the vision of one individual and seen to belong to that individual, even when new leadership was in place.

The danger of communities relying on a charismatic leader for inspiration, argue Watts, Nye and Savage, is 'chaos... when the great leader is not around' (2002, p.226). This is one of the risks of relying on such leadership, that the community becomes so reliant upon a vision being provided that they are unable to develop once the leader has left. This was seen in Fresh Expression C as the interviewees believed that without the leadership of Susan, the project would not be viable. Similarly, interviewees at Fresh Expression A indicated that the development of a mixed economy was primarily due to Philip being deployed to work with only that church.

Analysing the data highlighted several issues in relation to the leadership teams. First, there is a question of how individuals join the teams of leaders. This was particularly evident at Fresh Expression D where each interviewee was a part of the leadership team of six people, yet it was unclear from my interviews how one becomes a member of the leadership team or for how long one serves. Nor was any comment made upon the accountability of the leadership either to the circuit or to the fresh expression community. A similar issue was evident at Fresh Expression B with regards to those who are members of the Church Council. The facilitators were not a part of the Church Council or involved in leadership and the nature of their appointment was also unclear; John suggested that facilitators should be viewed in the 'same light as...stewards' (Appendix III – John). This comparison fails as stewards are 'corporately responsible with the presbyter...for giving leadership and help over the whole range of the church's life' (TMCP, 2020, p.530), and are members of the Church Council, whereas facilitators were concerned with the process of bread-making. The lack of clarity regarding how appointments are made, or the following of a locally devised process rather

than that laid out in Standing Orders, could hinder fresh expressions from being discernibly Methodist expressions of church.

The second issue concerns the authority of the leadership team within the fresh expression. The leadership teams for Fresh Expressions B and D held some power in the decision-making process of the fresh expression, whilst Fresh Expressions A and C had a body of trustees who were removed from the day-to-day operations of the fresh expressions. During the interviews at Fresh Expressions B and D, several interviewees commented upon the desire of the leadership team to control the way leadership was deployed. In the case of Fresh Expression D this was observed in relation to the resignation of the leader and the need to find a replacement. Roy stated, 'it's important we get our own mind together' (Appendix IV – Roy). This implied that the leadership of Fresh Expression D felt it important to promote a particular agenda in order to receive leadership of the style they deemed necessary within their context. The leadership of Fresh Expression B reacted by imposing guidelines regarding how the presbyter would spend his time when stationed as the Superintendent of an adjacent circuit. It was clear from the interviews that the Church Council felt that the power in the relationship was theirs and they could impose any condition they desired. A similar issue was highlighted at Fresh Expression A. The leaders of Café Church felt it was important that any new appointment of a presbyter followed a pattern which they prescribed. The primary issue was concerned with accountability, particularly how power, or perceived power, is used within the fresh expression and how those in positions of power are accountable to circuit and Connexion.

This issue of power and control over the stationing of presbyters is similar to the way in which the case studies attempted to control who presided at the sacraments. During the research process, I felt that the fresh expressions were attempting to use the power they had to influence the circuit, yet this may only be my perception. As I have noted earlier, Chambers (2005, p.199) contends that true power is determined by material factors, I would argue that as each case study relied upon other sources for funding and personnel, the true power in each context was in the circuit, or the district in the case of Fresh Expression B. It is, therefore, possible that the desire to control the process by which a presbyter may be stationed is their response to feeling powerlessness and an attempt to take control of a situation which is, in Methodist ecclesiology, the responsibility of the circuit and the Conference.

A further issue relevant to the way that the case studies sought to control the stationing of presbyters relates to conformity. Watts, Nye and Savage argue that when the majority of a group share the same beliefs, it becomes easier to marginalise those who dissent (2002,

p.209). This conformity is revealed in the comment made by Roy in his interview 'I think it's important we get our own mind together' (Appendix IV – Roy), and by the way in which Joan suggested that Fresh Expression B controlled the appointment of John as Superintendent of an adjacent circuit, stating, 'we made some very strict provisos...that it didn't impact detrimentally on the work here' (Appendix III – Joan). These comments imply that the communities ensure conformity, in order that those who dissent are excluded, including an incoming presbyter. The conformity found in the case studies echoes Davie's (2015, pp.158-59) belief that a Postmodern ideology focuses on internal motivation, rejecting external constraints which are not deemed to be relevant.

Issues of power within the case studies cannot be divorced from the issue of trusteeship, the Church Council as managing trustees holds power concerning the governance of the local church; I will consider governance later in this chapter. As I have noted in Chapter Six, the issue of power is connected to the protection of the fresh expressions' identity. In this way, the conformity which I have noted and have interpreted as the collective desire to ensure that the fresh expression remains a specific contextual response. Thus, a community ensuring that a presbyter understands the context in which they would be stationed, is an attempt to preserve its contextual identity. My research highlighted that the fresh expression that struggled most with issues of power was Fresh Expression D, which had no Church Council and thus did not have the necessary trustee body in which power might be exercised. My interpretation of the issues related to power is also a reflection of my role as a presbyter; I understand that a Methodist church must be connected to the circuit, rather than a separate entity, and that the presbyter represents that connection. My interpretation as a presbyter is, therefore, rooted in British Methodism's broad cultural response, and how I would expect to work in a particular context. The Methodist Church in Britain's broad approach to culture and context means a presbyter can be in pastoral charge of any Methodist church or fresh expression throughout the Connexion. The question which the analysis of the research data raises is whether it is appropriate for any presbyter, rather than those immersed in the context, to be in pastoral charge of a fresh expression, due to their specific contextual nature. The interviewees' desire for power over the deployment of presbyters reflects a desire to protect a specific contextual response and so is a plausible interpretation of the data.

7.3 The Priesthood of all Believers

As the discussion of presidency and leadership within the case studies concerns individuals and their role, this leads to reflection on the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. In which 'all believers...members of the church [have]...the opportunity to participate in all kinds of service' (Kärkkäinen, 2002, pp.65-66). The *Deed of Union* states that presbyters 'hold no

priesthood differing in kind from that which is common to all the Lord's people' (TMCP, 2020, p.213). Methodist ecclesiology thus holds that the ordination of presbyters is for the sake of Church order. Moynagh states:

limited research...suggests that most fresh expressions are small, have significant proportion of people who already go to church, and where they are reaching out are connecting with people on the fringe of church.

2013, p.71

I suggest that those who are part of a traditional church as well as a fresh expression may feel better placed to explore priesthood and ministry within a fresh expression than a traditional church, as they find freedom to experiment in a different context. This may include discerning a call to leadership, to preaching, the leading of worship, evangelism or a call to preside at the sacraments which they feel unable to exercise within a traditional church. This was seen at Fresh Expression B where one interviewee (Appendix III – Paul) implied that on several occasions those who were not ordained, nor authorised by Conference, were permitted to preside at communion. He noted that the previous superintendent 'wouldn't have been bothered...who presided' (Appendix III – Paul). Indeed, the desire for only those who were intimately familiar with the context at Fresh Expression D to be permitted to preside was highlighted several times, because of the tension created when an unfamiliar minister presided.

The challenge that this brings to Methodist ecclesiology is twofold. As noted earlier, Methodism ordains 'for the sake of church order and not because of any priestly virtue inherent in the office. The presbyters...are set apart by ordination' (TMCP, 2020, pp.213-14). There is a sense of confusion created when those who are not ordained or permitted to preside by the Conference do so, which could lead to disorder, as others might ask 'why can't I preside?' In Methodist polity, the ability to authorise is held by the Conference. In this way, Fresh Expression B has no authority to permit individuals to preside, nor should Fresh Expression D hold power over who presides at Communion.

A second challenge to contemporary British Methodist ecclesiology concerns the danger of a contractual ecclesiology as articulated by Grenz (2003, p.257), who notes that the Church is a group of individuals who contract with one another in a spiritual and practical sense. He states that such a community can easily become a 'society formed by persons united by their shared interest in certain religious practices' (Grenz, 2003, p.257); a version of McGavran's homogenous unit (1970, p.198). If Moynagh is correct in his assertion that fresh expressions

are primarily populated by those who are already part of a church, and if those same individuals choose to engage with fresh expressions in an attempt to explore priesthood or ministry one might find fresh expressions filled with those who seek the same opportunity. This would oppose the Methodist understanding explored by *Called to Love and Praise* (TMCP, 1999a, p.44), which contends that the priesthood of all believers refers primarily to the corporate body of believers, who have differing gifts, rather than the priesthood of every believer. The priesthood of all believers thus embraces the ministry of every believer according to their gifts, rather than seeking to ensure that each believer engages in the same ministry.

Throughout the case studies a suspicion, and to an extent a rejection, of presbyteral ministry was exhibited, due in part to the link to the Connexion which presbyters represent. This was clearly seen in Fresh Expression D, as interviewees referred to presbyters who had presided at communion stating, 'it almost felt like maybe they were there for...an ulterior motive...of watching what we did' (Appendix V - Ellie). This tension, caused by the connection of different communities within the Connexion is not unique to the fresh expressions studied here; Campbell notes that 'there has been a perpetual tension within Methodism in regard to the meaning of ordination, orders of ministry, education for ministry, relationships between ordained members and lay' (2009, p.262). Recognising this inherent tension, I note that the interviewees of all of fresh expressions studied here believed that to preserve their contextual identity only presbyters immersed in the context should exercise presbyteral ministry in their context, otherwise the leadership should be local and lay. For example, Steven believed that it would only be appropriate for presbyters, other than Philip, to preside at communion, 'as long as they're sympathetic to the scene they find themselves in' (Appendix II – Steven).

The priesthood of all believers is concerned with enabling the ministry of the whole Church, whilst maintaining the integrity of ordination (Kärkkäinen, 2002, pp.42-44). To seek to dismiss the ministry of presbyters or authorised ministry, in favour of local leadership, would bring with it a great challenge. This challenge is noted in *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* which argues that

authorised ministers have an important role...linking individual churches and fresh expressions to...the universal church. This is why it would be problematic for a fresh expression to seek to appoint its own ministers...such a move would represent a rejection of the catholicity and cause a serious breach with the universal church.

TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.144

The issues which the priesthood of all believers raises are concerned with leadership and authority within fresh expressions. Issues of control were common to the case studies, each fresh expression was keen to express a level of autonomy in terms of oversight, particularly regarding the sacraments. However, Methodist ecclesiology asserts that authority and oversight is held by the circuit and Conference, manifest in presbyters, rather than a local church. Thus, the challenge for The Methodist Church in Britain and for fresh expressions to be discernibly Methodist is to ensure that the priesthood of all believers is celebrated, whilst order and unity are maintained in the life of a fresh expression.

7.4 Membership and Governance

Fresh Expressions A and B had a membership roll; Fresh Expression C did not have a membership roll, though Y Methodist Church did. My research at Fresh Expression D revealed that there was no membership roll and the community was 'not interested' (Appendix V – Alan) in creating such a roll. This presents a challenge that the fresh expression would need to solve in order to be discernibly Methodist. There is also a challenge for The Methodist Church in Britain to consider how membership may be held in fresh expressions such as Fresh Expression D which do not believe that it would benefit their community.

Fresh expressions of church are largely post-denominational asserts *Mission-Shaped Church* (2004, p.43), it also recognises that the leaders of individual fresh expressions are often part of a denomination. A lack of allegiance to a particular denomination was a common theme throughout the case studies. This is reflected in the lack of membership at Fresh Expressions C and D, where several⁵¹ interviewees asserted they were Christian, rather than Methodist. Heath and Kisker suggest that a new breed of Methodists 'recognise the club for what it is' (2010, p.42), implying that membership can be regarded as joining a society rather than any spiritual commitment. I contend that such feelings concerning membership are not unique to fresh expressions, indeed my own experience as a presbyter, discussing membership with individuals, confirms this. However, it would not be fair to suggest, as *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* (2012, p.130) does, that membership of a national denomination is no longer relevant in contemporary society because, as I indicated in Chapter Two, contemporary society has seen an increase in the membership of political parties due to individuals' interest in issues which affect them. A lack of interest in membership in fresh expressions may be due to the way in which the leadership understands the nature of intensive membership or how membership is articulated. The challenge to Methodist ecclesiology here

⁵¹ Fresh Expression A -Steven, James. Fresh Expression B – Joan. Fresh Expression D – Jenny, Roy, Ellie.

is related to the way in which Methodist fresh expressions are part of the Connexion and connected to a larger body, with responsibility for mutual accountability and governance, rather than an independent community.

The lack of membership within fresh expressions is alluded to by Percy who believes that they are 'forms of faith that are sufficiently fluid and light to catch the attention of individuals, but at the same time ensure that no-one is overly burdened with commitments' (2010, p.76). This lack of commitment can be seen throughout the case studies. Philip noted, in relation to Fresh Expression A, that 'those who are involved in Air or Café are very new to faith, have strong ideas on church, but as yet haven't made a commitment...it's about establishing them into the life of the church' (Appendix II – Philip). At Fresh Expression B, those who attended bread-making sessions were not required to attend weekly, nor to attend worship. Air and Café Church did not seek commitment from those who attended; individuals were encouraged to participate as they felt appropriate. The nature of the service which Fresh Expression C provides on weekdays allows those who attend to forgo commitment as they are treated as customers. The weekly presentations at Fresh Expression D enabled individuals to explore faith without commitment. This lack of commitment could be due to an increase in 'episodic modes of existence' (Davie, 2015, p.225) which do not require long-term commitment, that Davie suggests are a feature of a new style of religion. This contrasts with the commitment expected of Methodist members. The *Deed of Union* states that

it is the privilege and duty of members of the Methodist Church to avail themselves of the two sacraments...membership of the Methodist Church also involves fellowship it is the duty of all members to seek to cultivate this.

TMCP, 2020, p.215

Can a fresh expression which does not actively promote membership as commitment be understood as discernibly Methodist?

A lack of commitment was expressed in every case study. With a lack of opportunities for commitment, one must ask how individuals can express opinions and how their voice might be heard within the fresh expression. Within Methodism, membership enables an individual to have a governance role in the Church by having a vote at the General Church Meeting; to serve as a member of the Church Council, as a Church Steward and in various circuit roles. Thus, the commitment enables individuals to have a role within the Church and the Connexion. Without the option of membership, there is no clear way in which individuals can serve in leadership or other governance roles within the fresh expression. Membership also enables a

mutual accountability amongst the members of the church, which *Called to Love and Praise* describes as 'a web of interdependence in which gifts, decisions and responsibilities are shared' (TMCP, 1999a, p.41). This challenge demands reflection upon whether membership of The Methodist Church in Britain is the appropriate way for fresh expressions, rooted in Postmodern culture, to express commitment and how mutual accountability may be best expressed within a community.

One of the issues which was revealed, particularly at Fresh Expression D, was the lack of a Church Council; this is one of the reasons that the fresh expression was understood as a project rather than a church. The Church Council is vital to the identity of a Methodist church, it enables a group of Methodists to balance autonomy, governing their own affairs whilst recognising connectedness and accountability to the circuit and district. I do not believe that this presents a significant challenge as the interviewees mentioned their leadership team as the group which oversees the fresh expression. This group fulfils a similar role to a Church Council and could, without the need to rename the group, act as the managing trustees of the fresh expression, thus fulfilling the requirements of SO603 (TMCP, 2020, p.517) which directs that the Church Council has oversight over the local church. In order to ensure that the leadership team was representative of the community and connected to the circuit, it may be necessary for some reflection upon the membership of the team, including how the process laid down in Standing Orders may be incorporated into the fresh expression. Without a system of membership, the leadership team could not fulfil the function of a Church Council and the fresh expression cannot be understood as discernibly Methodist.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter analysed the third theme, leadership and authority, through the lens of fellowship and shared discipline. Several issues were analysed; I explored issues of presidency at Communion, and the desire of fresh expressions to hold power over who was permitted to preside. I analysed expressions of leadership, issues of power, ownership and authority within the fresh expressions. This analysis led to a reflection on the priesthood of all believers as part fellowship and shared discipline, highlighting the apparent lack of presbyteral oversight in some of the case studies. As in Chapter Six, these issues and subsequent tensions are heightened by the interaction of the contextual approach of fresh expressions and the broad cultural approach of British Methodism. The challenge concerns how to ensure that order is preserved, that the growth of homogenous units is halted, and the priesthood of all believers maintained, while remaining discernibly Methodist. I also explored the issue which a lack of membership brings to a fresh expression within The Methodist Church in Britain, in terms of accountability and governance responsibilities. This issue concerned how membership and

ensuing governance responsibility may be incorporated into a Methodist fresh expression for the community to be discernibly Methodist. The substantive issues which will be taken forward to Chapter Nine from this exploration are: presidency at Holy Communion, the priesthood of all believers, and the connected issue of membership and governance.

CHAPTER EIGHT

STRUCTURED FOR MISSION

The 'conviction that the church should be structured for mission' (TMCP, 1999a, p.50) is the third distinctive emphasis of *Called to Love and Praise*, which stresses the need for the church to respond to opportunities for mission. Each interviewee believed that their fresh expression was a part of the *missio Dei* and that its aim and structure enabled it to engage in mission within the context. This chapter will analyse the aim of each case study in relation to being structured for mission, and how all four elements of *Our Calling* must be present in a fresh expression for it to be discernibly Methodist.

8.1 Aims

Throughout the process of selecting case studies, observing and conducting interviews, it was apparent that the aim of each fresh expression was specific to its context and provided the impetus for the activities of the fresh expression. For example, the website of Fresh Expression B states that the fresh expression is 'gathering as a community around the making and sharing of bread' (Fresh Expression B, 2012). One can thus recognise a specific aim or mission which each fresh expression is structured to fulfil.

8.1.1 Fresh Expression A

Fresh Expression A is a Methodist church that engages in two fresh expressions. The presbyter in pastoral charge of the church commented that the aim was to create 'many access points in worship...several congregations...of [X Methodist Church]' (Appendix II – Philip). Fresh Expression A fell into the worship category of *Our Calling*, as it was concerned with the provision of worship opportunities. This was articulated by each interviewee and shown to be correct in the observation stage as both fresh expressions are concerned with worship. Liz (Appendix II – Liz) noted that the aim was always to provide an experience of worship which was accessible for both those who had a church background and those who did not.

The *Our Calling* discussion paper states that 'the Church exists to increase awareness of God's presence and to celebrate God's love' (TMCP, 2000c, p.2). Air and Café Church were concerned with enhancing the worship life of the church and thus centred upon the worship element of *Our Calling*. The Fresh Expressions definition suggests that discipleship and, by extension, worship is a priority within fresh expressions.

The worship which took place during Café Church or Air was different from traditional worship, yet followed a similar pattern on each occasion. Cray recognises this continuity as he suggests that ‘if people who are not used to church never know what is going to happen next, they cannot be expected to engage with the content’ (2013, p.28). Alongside recognising the value of continuity, Cray believes that a fresh expression should not seek to ‘create an environment so comfortable that it gives no hint of the cost of discipleship’ (2013, p.17). Mobsby suggests that within the majority of fresh expressions, ‘discipleship replaces attendance’ (2006, p.23). In terms of worship, this is reflected in the unpredictable attendance at Air and Café Church. If Mobsby is correct, attendance at the fresh expressions for worship is viewed with less importance than ongoing discipleship. However, *Our Calling* (TMCP, 2000c) recognises that worship is a way in which a community lives out its discipleship; thus, my research indicates that Fresh Expression A structured its mission around worship and created a mixed economy of fresh expressions and a traditional worshipping congregation.

8.1.2 Fresh Expression B

During the interviews at Fresh Expression B, Joan, Paul and John commented on the aim of the fresh expression as a practical expression of Christianity; using the metaphor of bread to express a sense of ingredients being combined to form a loaf as the individuals who make up the community; ‘the bread metaphor...for the community is still vitally important and we will in essence be a church who makes bread’ (Appendix II – Paul). Anne and John shared their belief that the building of an inclusive community was paramount. The aim was to ‘provide a place of Christian friendship and fellowship where people...feel welcome’ (Appendix III – Anne). This case study fell within the learning and caring element of *Our Calling*, which is concerned with how the Church might ‘help people to grow and learn as Christians through mutual support and care’ (TMCP, 2000c, p.2).

The *Our Calling* (TMCP, 2000c, p.3) discussion paper suggests churches consider which activities enable others to join them; the expectations of the community in supporting and caring for each other and plans for developing their shared life. My research at highlighted the desire to create a community which cared for one another: ‘a place where people can...experience a place of welcome and acceptance’ (Appendix III – John). The working definition of Fresh Expressions (Fresh Expressions, 2011) proposes that such initiatives ‘listen to people and enter their culture’, seeking to form Christian communities. Mobsby highlights an emphasis within fresh expressions, which he articulates as a change ‘from congregation to spiritual community...community replaces membership’ (2006, p.23). *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* reflects Mobsby’s belief; ‘fresh expressions seek to provide a welcoming space for gathering and sharing together in activities that help form and build up

community' (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.155). The building of community was a key element in the aim and structure of Fresh Expression B. Anne believed that central to the community was a practical expression of 'love and understanding' (Appendix III – Anne). *Our Calling* and Fresh Expressions agree upon the need for communities to be concerned with learning and caring, such a community is clearly exhibited in the structure of Fresh Expression B.

8.1.3 Fresh Expression C

Fresh Expression C, a project of Y Methodist Church, represented the service element of *Our Calling*; this was reflected in each of the interviews. Susan and Nora, members of Y Methodist Church, believed that the provision of service stemmed from a Christian desire to provide the community with a play-centre, whilst also providing the opportunity to discuss faith and attend Village Praise; 'the aim is...to get people into the church with the aim of...them becoming Christians' (Appendix IV – Nora), 'it's not just in an hour of hymns, prayers and a sermon...it's the everyday faith, talking about it.' (Appendix IV -Susan). Jane and Sharon felt that the aim of providing the service to the community was primarily because it was needed by local residents. It was clear from my observation that the majority of the users of the facility did not perceive the Christian dimension to be important in their decision to attend.

The *Our Calling* discussion paper states that 'the church exists to be a good neighbour to people in need and to challenge injustice' (TMCP, 2000c, p.3). It encourages churches to consider and respond to the needs of their community, to explore ways in which the church building could be used for community purposes. The working definition of Fresh Expressions suggests that fresh expressions are a 'form of church...that serves those outside the existing church' (Fresh Expressions, 2012a). Fresh Expression C was chosen as a case study because of the service which it offered to the community; it was structured to engage in mission through service. Goodhew, Roberts and Volland highlight a tendency within fresh expressions which they articulate as 'open hearted-ness and a readiness to serve' (2012, p.71), this service-based structure was seen throughout the research process as the contextual response of Fresh Expression C.

8.1.4 Fresh Expression D

Fresh Expression D had an aim of engaging in evangelism and fell into the evangelism category of *Our Calling*. Each interviewee explained the aim of the fresh expression as being centred on evangelism. Ellie commented that 'in amongst everything we do...we try to teach them to disciple each other and also to reach others' (Appendix V – Ellie). Alan agreed with Ellie, stating, 'we bounce everything up against making, growing and discipling disciples of

Jesus' (Appendix V – Alan). The circuit plan also reflected this aim as it stated that each meeting was a 'presentation of the gospel' (Z Methodist Circuit, 2013). During the interview process, it was articulated that such was the strength of the desire to ensure that evangelism remained the central act of Fresh Expression D that any activities which did not engage in evangelism would be given a lower priority than those which were evangelistic.

Under evangelism, *Our Calling* states 'the Church exists to make more followers of Jesus Christ' (TMCP, 2000c, p.3). Churches are encouraged by the discussion paper to reflect upon how the Church becomes an effective witness, to consider how church premises can appear welcoming and if there is a need to plant a new congregation within their context. The working definition of Fresh Expressions states that a fresh expression 'intentionally forms Christian community' (Fresh Expressions, 2012a). The formation of Christian communities can be interpreted as evangelism; *Our Calling* and Fresh Expressions thus understand evangelism to be an important part of the life of the Church and fresh expressions. Martyn Percy suggests that 'the identity of the movement is very much caught up in the sense of being centred on evangelism' (2010, p.76). I contend that the research at Fresh Expression D confirms Percy's reflection as it places evangelism at the centre of its missional structure.

8.2 Called to Love and Praise and Our Calling

The interviewees from each case study believed a contextual response to the gospel was best expressed through the specific aim and mission of their fresh expression. For example, the aim of gathering a diverse community is reflected in the use of the bread metaphor as the community of Fresh Expression B. Indeed, I argue that these aims reflect the third distinctive emphasis of the normative Methodist ecclesiology of *Called to Love and Praise*; that the Church be structured for mission (TMCP, 1999a, p.50). That is, the fresh expressions were created as pragmatic and contextual responses to identified needs, that the creation of a traditional church would not fulfil. In Chapter Two, I argued that normative Methodist ecclesiology is found in *Called to Love and Praise* but that the espoused ecclesiology of Contemporary British Methodism is *Our Calling*. I further argued that the elements of *Called to Love and Praise* (TMCP, 1999a, p.54), which reflect the manner of community that a church might develop, are summarised within *Our Calling*. I contend that as *Our Calling* is the document which is 'on the ground' in British Methodism, it is the ecclesiological document which is identifiably Methodist in a circuit or local church context.

The working definition of Fresh Expressions states that

a fresh expression of church is a new form of church for a fast changing world that serves those outside the existing church, listens to people and enters their culture, makes discipleship a priority and intentionally forms Christian community.

Fresh Expressions, 2012a

I contend that that the themes of this definition above are reflected in the four elements of *Our Calling*. In this way, the fresh expressions definition holds within it the Methodist ecclesiological position articulated in *Our Calling*, that in turn reflects the normative ecclesiology of *Called to Love and Praise*.

The Fresh Expressions working definition and *Our Calling* express similar priorities which should be evident within both fresh expressions and the traditional Church. *Our Calling* does not suggest that a church must only engage in one element; a church must engage in more than worship, for example. Each element of *Our Calling* must be present in the life of a church. *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* argues that 'fresh expressions practitioners may need to give greater attention to the fact that making Christian disciples and working for justice belong together' (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.119). Clearly, there is some recognition in the report of the interrelated elements of the life of the Church and fresh expressions; in this case evangelism and social justice. I would argue that for a fresh expression to fit with the working definition and *Our Calling* (containing the elements of *Called to Love and Praise*), the four themes of both must be present even if not initially obvious.

8.3 Oscillation

To explore the way in which the elements of the Fresh Expressions working definition and *Our Calling* can be manifest in a fresh expression, I briefly turn to Niebuhr's 1951 work, *Christ and Culture*. Niebuhr explores the relationship between Christ and culture; the dialogue of the Church and Christians with the world in which they are set. He argues that the question of how to respond to culture cannot be answered easily or definitively but proposes a typology of ways that the issue may be addressed. One of his types is *Christ and Culture in Paradox* (1951, pp.149-89), which proposes a form of dualism as an approach that recognises the need for the Church to accommodate culture and also withdraw from it. He states 'in culture men [sic] are dealing with the transitory and the dying. However important cultural duties are for Christians their life is not in them; it is hidden with Christ in God' (1951, p.189). In this type there is a constant oscillation between two states of being part of, but also set apart from, culture. John Walker (2012, pp.223-27) draws on Niebuhr's typology, arguing that fresh expressions reflect *Christ and Culture in Paradox* in the way that they oscillate between the promotion of the gospel and accommodation to cultural factors. He contends that 'the

oscillation which Niebuhr describes as defining this type is quite unconsciously built into ecclesiological models' (p.226) of fresh expressions as they offer a contextual response.

I argue that oscillation typology is similar to the way in which a fresh expression may engage with the elements of *Our Calling* and the aspects of the Fresh Expressions working definition. In this way, a fresh expression may focus upon one aspect of *Our Calling* whilst oscillating through the remaining elements at times, each element would, therefore, be present within each fresh expression. Fresh expressions can be created when an individual or group believes that the Church is deficient in one or more elements of *Our Calling* or that the context demands a specific response. For example, Fresh Expression D was created as an evangelistic tool for the circuit and focuses upon that part of *Our Calling*, whilst oscillating through the remaining elements. This is reflected in the comments of Ellie, concerning Fresh Expression D as a church, who stated that 'the elements that I would deem to make up church they're there in there somewhere even though they might take on a different form each week' (Appendix V – Ellie).

Figures 1-4 below show, from the data, the ways that *Our Calling* and oscillation typology may be exhibited in the case studies. In each, the central aim represents one element of *Our Calling*, whilst the remaining three elements are related to the central aim. For example, Figure 4 highlights the way in which *Our Calling* may be seen in Fresh Expression D. Evangelism is the primary aim, worship relates to evangelism as the presentation of the gospel, service is exhibited through the hospitality, through which all might hear the gospel. Learning and caring can be seen in the desire to create a community through which the gospel is shared. This highlights how the oscillation typology (Walker, 2012, pp.223-27), which I have indicated, applies to the case studies and demonstrates the way that all four elements of *Our Calling* may be manifest.

Figure.1 – Fresh Expression A

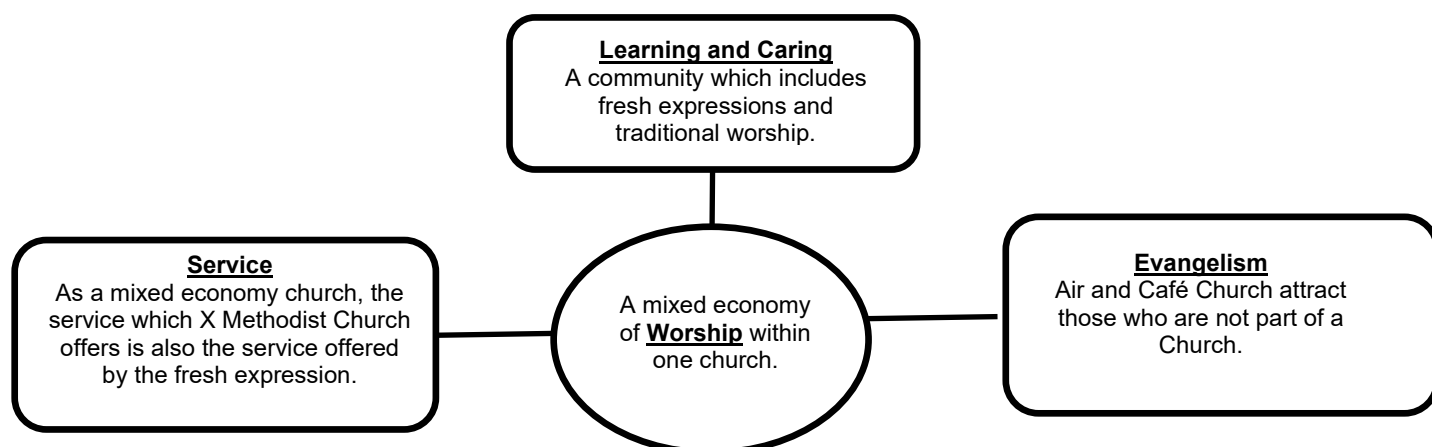


Figure.2 – Fresh Expression B

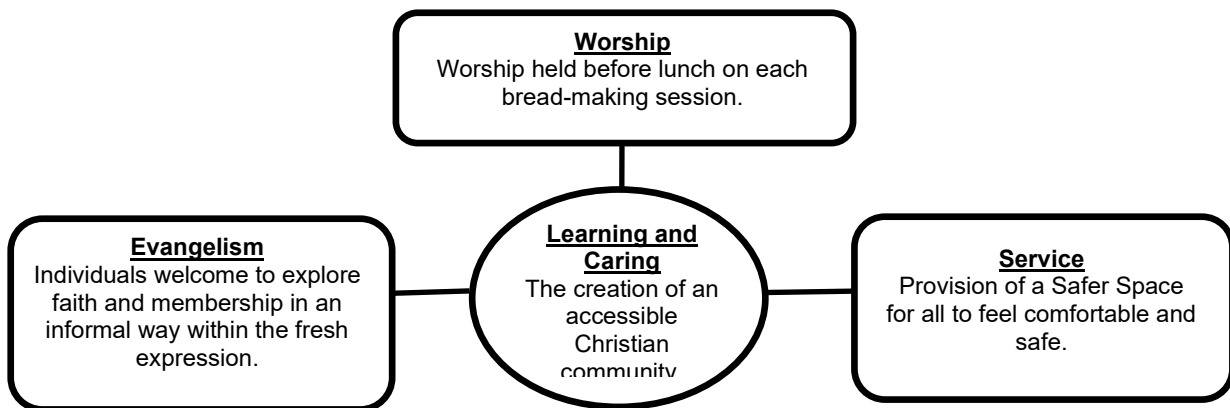


Figure.3 – Fresh Expression C

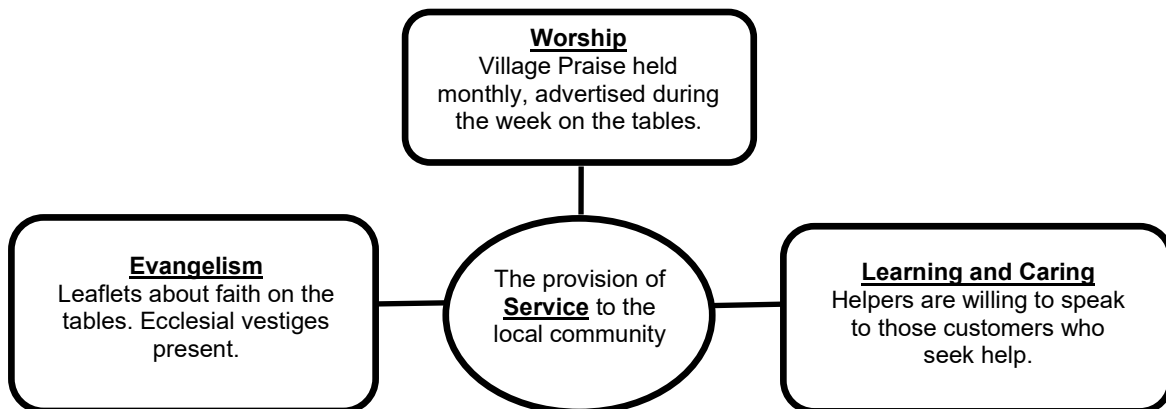
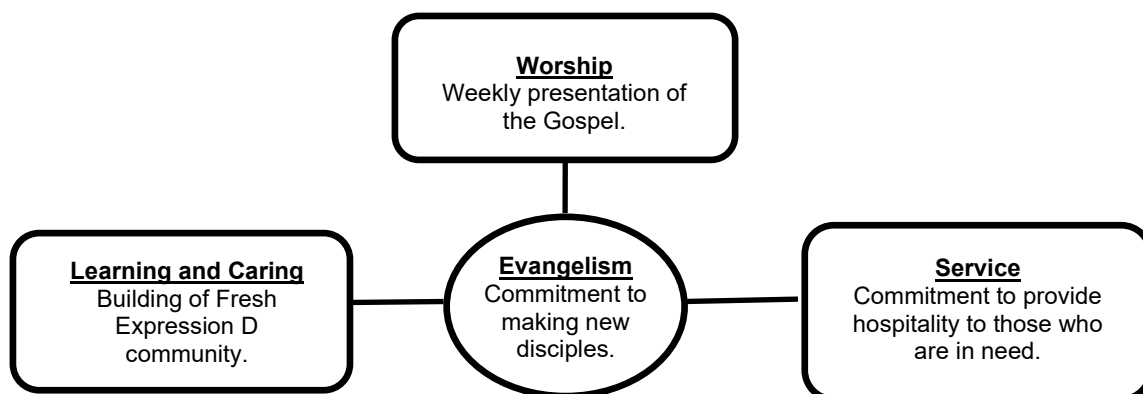


Figure.4 – Fresh Expression D



I contend that the criteria which the normative ecclesiology, *Called to Love and Praise* (TMCP, 1999a, pp.54-55), argues constitute a church are encapsulated within the espoused ecclesiology of *Our Calling*. Therefore, when a fresh expression exhibits all of the elements of *Our Calling*, I argue that the elements of normative ecclesiology are also present. The figures above, therefore, demonstrate how Methodist ecclesiology is present in each case study. The ecclesiology is interlinked in that the central aim affects the way in which the elements of *Our Calling* are manifest in the life of the fresh expression, but each element is clearly present as the fresh expressions oscillate through all four.

It is impossible to generalise from data generated by four case studies; therefore, it does not necessarily follow that all fresh expressions within the Connexion will exhibit all of the elements of *Our Calling*, nor that they operate in a way similar to the oscillation I describe. The analysis of the data indicates that the four elements of *Our Calling* are present in each case study, as such the figures above and model of oscillation could be used as a tool to enable a fresh expression to examine their own life.

This model of oscillation highlights the need for The Methodist Church in Britain to ensure that a fresh expression is sufficiently broad to include *Our Calling*. Oscillation also presents a challenge to fresh expressions; in order to be identifiably Methodist, all four elements of *Our Calling* must be present. This is not to suggest that every fresh expression should be a perfect microcosm of the denomination but that each should exhibit the four elements to some degree, noting that within the circuit or Connexion other churches and fresh expressions will give greater emphasis to one or more of the elements of *Our Calling*.

It would follow that the Connexion would not be able to regard fresh expressions that decline to exhibit all of the elements of *Our Calling* as churches, or as discernibly Methodist. However, it is useful to note at this point that Wesley found difficulty in defining the Church and that he would not 'exclude from the Church Catholic all those congregations in which any unscriptural doctrines...are sometimes, yea, frequently preached. Neither all those congregations in which the sacraments are not "duly administered"' (Collins, 2007, p.239). I suggest that Wesley exhibited an ecclesiological generosity by which he declined to de-church individuals or groups even if he disagreed with their practice. Similarly, the contemporary Methodist Church does not refuse to accept Churches which do not hold a Connexional understanding, nor does the Methodist Church refuse to accept Churches that do not celebrate the sacraments: the Salvation Army and the Society of Friends noted as examples by *Called to Love and Praise* (TMCP, 1999a, p.26). Indeed, the Connexional website clearly states that 'the Methodist Church commits itself to worshipping, learning and working with other Christians wherever

and whenever possible' (TMCP, 2017b). *Called to Love and Praise* promotes a generous ecclesiology, a desire to recognise other communities as churches. The ecclesiological generosity of *Called to Love and Praise* raises a question: why are fresh expressions within the Connexion that do not meet certain criteria regarded as projects or initiatives, whilst similar bodies within other denominations which also do not meet the criteria are recognised as churches?

8.4 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the relationship between the case studies and *Our Calling* through the lens of the third emphasis of *Called to Love and Praise*: structured for mission. I explored each case study's aim, linked to one element of *Our Calling* as a contextual response. This focus on one element provided structure by which the aim could be achieved. I proposed that fresh expressions exhibited each element of *Our Calling* through a version of oscillation typology. I highlighted a challenge for The Methodist Church in Britain to reflect upon how being structured for mission may be understood in relation to the elements of *Our Calling*.

Through Chapters Six, Seven and Eight, I have used the three distinctive emphases of *Called to Love and Praise* as a means of analysis, to ensure that the focus remains on contemporary British Methodist ecclesiology. The analysis of the ecclesial identity of fresh expressions; the relationship to the Connexion; leadership and authority and the aim of each fresh expression has revealed that fresh expressions within British Methodism create several points of tension, or ecclesiological challenges, concerning the way that fresh expressions may be discernibly Methodist expressions of church. Analysis of the themes enables one to consider the challenges to contemporary Methodist ecclesiology, the way that the case studies are identifiably Methodist and if new ecclesiological practice is required to overcome the challenges that have been posed. The following chapter will, therefore, address the challenges revealed here, drawing on my engagement with the data and the literature to suggest new or reformulated Methodist practice within fresh expressions to enable them to be discernibly Methodist.

CHAPTER NINE

NEW PRACTICE

Throughout Chapters Six, Seven and Eight, I have indicated where the points of tension between fresh expressions and Methodist ecclesiology create ecclesiological challenges which must be overcome for fresh expressions to be discernibly Methodist. This chapter will address the ecclesiological challenges and offer a way, through new or renewed practice, that fresh expressions can be discernibly Methodist expressions of church. I will address the ecclesiological challenges in line with the three distinctive emphases of *Called to Love and Praise* (TMCP, 1999a, p.54); the Connexional principle, fellowship and shared discipline, and the conviction that the Church be structured for mission. Because of the interconnected nature of The Methodist Church in Britain, there will be some overlap as my proposed practice may address more than one ecclesiological challenge.

Throughout this research, I have demonstrated the nature of fresh expressions as specific contextual responses. The understanding of ecclesiology that was evident throughout the research in the views of the interviewees, was that ecclesiology must be contextual as a broad ecclesiological approach to context and culture was not able to respond to specific contextual needs of a community. Jeff Astley argues that ordinary ecclesiology is a contextual construct.

[O]rdinary theology in some sense ‘works’ for those who own it. It fits with their life experience and gives meaning to, and expresses the meaning they find within, their own lives. It is highly significant for them because it articulates a faith and a spirituality.

2013, p.2

Ordinary theology, as I noted in Chapter Six, is concerned with the theology of those without formal theological training. To follow this, ordinary ecclesiology can be understood as the ecclesiology of those who do not have formal training. In relation to my research, ordinary ecclesiology also represents the ecclesiological understanding of those who are part of fresh expressions as specific contextual responses. This is reflected in Astley’s exploration of ordinary theology, he argues that ‘the content, and perhaps sometimes the form, of ordinary theology are likely to vary across cultures, churches, congregations and individuals’ (2013, p.3).

In this way, my research highlighted that ordinary ecclesiology varies according to the context of fresh expression. This can be seen in the comments of the participants. For example,

Steven (Appendix II – Steven) implied that he believed the current minister of Fresh Expression A would limit any changes a future minister would be able to make in order to protect the contextual approach. The interviewees at Fresh Expression D all believed that the fresh expression was different to the other churches of the circuit, this led Ellie to state that when ministers from the circuit had taken part in the Sunday presentation, ‘it almost felt like they were there for...an ulterior motive’ (Appendix V - Ellie) which was to evaluate the fresh expression.

Nevertheless, my research has highlighted some common features of the ordinary ecclesiology of the case studies, which I have articulated as ecclesiological challenges through Chapters Six, Seven and Eight. These features are; the ecclesial identity of church as a specific contextual response, the particular focus on local lay leadership which is linked to the context, the focus on connection within the community rather than outside of the context, an emphasis on membership as contractual and extensive, and the notion of the mission of the church as specific to its context. The data highlighted the importance to the participants of their specific contextual response; the ordinary ecclesiology of each fresh expression. This chapter will provide suggestions for new, or reaffirmed practice in response to the ecclesiological challenges presented by the specific contextual approaches of fresh expressions highlighted in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight. My suggestions for new, or reaffirmed practice, which arise from the exploration of the ordinary ecclesiology of the participants, will enable British Methodism to reimagine its engagement with and response to the contemporary context. Percy, however, highlights the difficulty of proposing new practice which will apply to all fresh expressions, noting that it is ‘only by immersing oneself...that one can begin to understand the complex range of implicit dynamics that make and shape a congregation’ (2013, p.62). In this way, it is problematic to assume that all of the new practice outlined in this chapter will apply equally to all of the case studies, or indeed all of the fresh expressions throughout the Connexion, as a broad approach to culture and context is not compatible with the specific approach of fresh expressions. Percy explores this in relation to an ‘unspoken assumption that most of the churches in which clergy will serve are essentially similar in character...thus, principles, ideas and visions...are offered as though what might work in one place can be easily transferred to another’ (2013, p.55). It is, therefore, impossible to presume that any new practice relating to the case studies can be replicated throughout the Connexion, though the suggestions here do have a wider bearing as the proposed practice may illuminate thinking throughout the Connexion. Further, as each new practice is intended to address issues which have arisen from the case studies’ specific contextual approaches, some of my suggested new practice to address one challenge may not appear to be consistent with another suggestion. This acknowledges that broad

approaches to culture and context are not appropriate within fresh expressions, or as Astley notes, 'content cannot easily be separated from context' (2013, p.7). In her exploration of lived religion, Meredith McGuire argues that religion is 'an ever-changing, multifaceted, often messy – even contradictory – amalgam of beliefs and practices...what people understand to be "religion" changes' (2008, pp.4-5). She continues, 'to understand modern religious lives, we need to try to grasp the complexity, diversity and fluidity of real individuals' religion-as-practiced' (2008, p.213). McGuire's notion of lived religion is similar to that of ordinary ecclesiology, in the way that ecclesiology within fresh expressions reflects a specific contextual response of the individuals who form the community. In this way, the new practice I outline in this chapter addresses the complex, diverse and fluid ecclesiology of fresh expressions. This will enable the ecclesiology of The Methodist Church in Great Britain to hold fresh expressions within the Connexion by embracing differing approaches for different initiatives. I will note the differences in proposed practice as they arise in this chapter.

9.1 The Connexional Principle

Chapter Two demonstrated that the Connexional principle is central to a Methodist understanding of the Church. Chapter Six analysed two themes in relation to this: the ecclesial identity of fresh expressions, and the relationship of fresh expressions to the Connexion. Here, I will address these two themes.

9.1.1 Ecclesial Identity

In Chapter Six I highlighted the similarities between the origins of Methodism and fresh expressions as a contextual response to the gospel and spiritual renewal movements, as part of the providential action of God. If, as I noted in Chapter Five, fresh expressions are to be considered a providential act of God within British Methodism, as some early Methodists understood themselves to be within the Church of England, it may be that reorganisation would be required. Heitzenrater asserts that Wesley 'was a staunch advocate for loyalty to the established order, [but] if current forms and regulations interfered...he was willing to consider certain options to deviate, innovate, or otherwise press the limits' (1995, p.319). My research demonstrates that fresh expressions press the limits in this way as they seek to develop culturally appropriate expressions of church. Reflection on the differences between fresh expressions and traditional Methodist churches suggests, as Atkins notes, that 'it is a time of transition' (2007, p.2). The development of the ecclesial identity of fresh expressions may, therefore, be seen as a part of the transition to which Atkins refers, in that fresh expressions sit on the boundary of the present and the future, and require innovative approaches as contextual responses.

As I noted in Chapter Six, there is a difficulty regarding the ecclesial identity of fresh expressions that do not fit the criteria that *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.114) requires for an initiative to be considered a Methodist church, rather than a project. I suggest a new practice to recognise a time of transition in which fresh expressions may develop: that Methodism consider fresh expressions to be stages on the way to becoming a church, similar to how Methodist societies evolved into churches, whilst recognising that some may not develop in such a way. Gwang (2008, p.165) suggests that Wesley, often reluctantly, was willing to accept a response to a move of the Spirit, even if that response was not to his liking. Similarly, the new practice I propose is that Methodism recognise the providence of God in the creation of fresh expressions, accepting them as churches within the Connexion, whilst recognising their continual evolution and journey towards fulfilling the criteria of *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.114). The Fresh Expressions website highlights this journey, proposing that 'the definition is not dependent on the outcome, but the intention' (Fresh Expressions, 2013). My research demonstrated the intention of Fresh Expression D to be a church, although it did not fulfil the criteria presented by *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*, and highlighted the tension this caused. Fresh Expression C was part of Y Methodist Church, but the community which constituted Village Praise could not be regarded as a church in its own right; this issue is particularly relevant following the closure of Y Methodist Church after my research had been completed. Recognising that the development of fresh expressions shares common themes with the growth of Methodism, this new practice for The Methodist Church in Britain is to accept the intention of fresh expressions to form contextual churches, rather than focus upon their lack of ecclesiological elements. Thus, a fresh expression which has an intention to form a church could be regarded as such, in order that unity might enable beneficial ecumenical relationships with the Church Catholic to be developed. This would recognise the intention of Fresh Expressions C and D to become a church, which, as indicated in Chapter Six, do not currently meet the criteria to be regarded as a church. The lack of some ecclesiological elements in the fresh expression would be recognised and a time of transition and growth be encouraged. A great deal of the tension between Fresh Expression D and the circuit stemmed from the circuit's refusal to recognise the fresh expression as a church; a similar tension existed between Fresh Expression B and the district. This practice would ease the tension, allowing beneficial relationships to develop.

9.1.2 Ecumenism and Ecclesial Identity

In Chapter Two, I contended that Methodist ecclesiology and ecclesial identity is defective without recognising Methodism's contribution to, and place within, the Church Catholic. I also suggested that ecumenical relationships are not given priority within emerging fresh

expressions ecclesiology, this was found to be correct in my research. This is a point of tension between Methodist and fresh expressions ecclesiology. The challenge to Methodist ecclesiology concerned how fresh expressions may be enabled to develop and retain meaningful ecumenical relationships. I argue that this is an issue of unity: should a fresh expression seek unity with the Connexion or ecumenical bodies?

Ecumenical relationships within Methodism are maintained through the Connexion, primarily articulated locally through local church involvement in a Churches Together group, for example. My research highlighted that in each case study, the fresh expression community was prioritised over the development of any other relationships. This is highlighted in Roy's words, as he commented on the importance of Fresh Expression D, 'this is my church, this comes first' (Appendix V – Roy); he further notes that his belief that it was impossible to be part of another church alongside Fresh Expression D. This reflects the nature of fresh expressions as contextual responses, which address the needs of a specific context, rather than a broad context into which ecumenical relationships might fall.

Promoting the primacy of an individual fresh expression in this way can mean that relationships with other communities are given less attention than building one's own community. I contend that the Connexion offers an opportunity for ecumenism, by providing a point from which a relationship can begin. When a fresh expression is understood by those outside as Methodist, the denominational relationships provide a benchmark. Williams articulates a difficulty which fresh expressions may experience, stating 'there is nothing in the phrase that links...[fresh expressions] to any particular ecclesiology' (2007, p.22). As such, there can appear little for an ecumenical partner to link with as the contextual response of the fresh expression can be perceived as too dissimilar to develop a relationship. Fresh expressions which are part of the Connexion benefit from the connection to other Methodist churches and, through the Connexion, to the Church Catholic.

I propose a new practice to reaffirm the place of fresh expressions within the Connexion. This involves Methodism affirming and celebrating unity in diversity within the Connexion, which has been the direction for the ecumenical movement in recent years. De Roest, referring to what he named marginal ecclesial groups,⁵² states that 'these ecclesial groups...define themselves in contrast to the mainline churches, challenging them' (2010, p.260). Reaffirming unity will require that fresh expressions and Methodist churches consider those elements which are common, rather than those which divide, bringing the challenge that De Roest

⁵² Understood here as fresh expressions.

articulates. In this way, 'the underlying principles...of interdependence and relatedness...will, it is hoped, be contributed by Methodism to a larger whole (TMCP, 1999a, p.33). Indeed, Beck notes that a church can only be a church when 'it is linked by the bonds of reciprocal support' (2018, p.171). Both fresh expressions and traditional Methodist churches would recognise that neither diversity, nor the lack of communication exhibited in Fresh Expression D and to a lesser extent, Fresh Expression B, are reasons for division. This practice would require the affirmation of a belief in, and the outworking of, unity. This could be expressed by circuits ensuring that fresh expressions are represented in circuit governance structures and at local ecumenical bodies. Indeed, the unity modelled throughout the Connexion in this way may then be a contribution to the Church Catholic as an example of unity in diversity, which is an identifiably Methodist trait and affirm the desire for connection that is part of a Postmodern spirituality (Davie, 2015, p.159). The diverse nature of Methodist churches throughout the Connexion has always been a feature of Methodist ecclesiology, it can be seen in the Forward Movement as Central Halls, Missions and traditional churches were held together in Connexion. The Forward Movement recognised that the Church had to 'address itself to the modern world, present circumstances and contemporary insights' (Standing, 2015, p.75), without seeking to replace traditional churches, but maintain unity in the Connexion. Unity in diversity is recognisably Methodist and fresh expressions can play a part within a diverse connexion. In this way, the connection of fresh expressions to a larger body enables relationships which exist nationally to be developed locally.

The practice outlined above highlights the value of the Connexion holding together communities which are different. *Called to Love and Praise* recognises that the Connexional principle 'expresses the interdependence of all churches...alongside...the greatest possible degree of autonomy' (TMCP, 1999a, p.48). Thus, Connexion is not principally concerned with uniformity, but connectedness. This practice would affirm all Methodist fresh expressions as equally part of the Connexion and recognise that the diversity they example is part of a Methodist contribution to the Church Catholic.

This practice is consistent with my previous suggestion that The Methodist Church in Britain regard fresh expressions as churches within the Connexion if their intent is to form a church. In this way, Fresh Expression D would be able to engage in ecumenical relationships which would recognise the specific contextual response of the fresh expression as a church within a diverse connexion.

9.1.3 Relationship to the Connexion

The Methodist Church in Britain declares that ‘connexionalism is still fundamental to how Methodists understand the church’ (TMCP, 2015b, p.89). It is, therefore, important that those fresh expressions which are considered to be Methodist express the understanding of Connexion of which they are a part, in order to remain discernibly Methodist. Here I will address the ecclesiological challenges which stem from the second research theme: the relationship of fresh expressions to the Connexion.

9.1.3.1 Ownership and Accountability

Methodist churches are accountable to the Conference through the circuit of which they are a part. The data demonstrated that in the case studies, accountability was not clear, or was felt to be inappropriate, as those who were part of the fresh expression believed that the ownership was held by the community rather than the circuit or Connexion. For example, the refrain throughout the interviews at Fresh Expression D was that the relationship between the circuit and the fresh expression was strained due to the circuit not understanding the contextual nature of the fresh expression. Interviewees implied that Fresh Expression D should be ‘a separate entity’ (Appendix v - Jenny) to protect the contextual identity of the fresh expression. A similar lack of understanding was expressed in the case studies at Fresh Expressions A, B⁵³ and C. The implication of these comments is that the perceived lack of understanding between the fresh expressions and the circuit makes mutual accountability unrealistic. Considering the nature of Connexionalism as unity in diversity, any new practice proposed, therefore, must ensure that fresh expressions remain a part of the Connexion rather than becoming separate, congregational entities.

In Chapter Six, I outlined the challenges concerning the authority of the Conference within fresh expressions; how fresh expressions can be enabled to understand their part within a diverse connexion and also ensure that they are appropriately accountable to the Connexion. *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* notes that ‘fresh expressions are intended to be new forms of church within one of the historic churches’ (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.3). The Report emphasises this, stating that ‘Fresh Expressions does not encourage establishing Christian communities that are independent...The real issue here concerns how to ensure that fresh expressions remain accountable’ (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.131). The primary concern of *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* here is that fresh expressions should not become congregational entities and lose the mutual support and interdependence of the

⁵³ A one-church circuit; it was the other circuits of the Methodist District that interviewees believed lacked an understanding of Fresh Expression B.

Connexion but remain part of, and accountable to, the Connexion regardless of the differences that may exist.

I propose a new practice concerning the difficulties of accountability: to consider a model which, recognising the shared motivation of both movements, is similar to the Forward Movement. Fresh expressions could be 'detached' from the circuit in which they are currently based, to become one-church circuits recognising that the context in which they operate requires a different approach to a traditional church. The Forward Movement acknowledged that the new churches, Central halls or Missions would be different from those churches which existed, as they were to 'win glory for Christ from amongst people who were outside the range of the influence of ordinary church life' (Moss, 1909, p.459). Beck describes this as 'a new form of outreach, based on central halls, large, seemingly secular buildings' (2018, p.39), which engaged in a mix of activities unlike traditional Methodist churches. The literature which explores the Forward Movement does not indicate that the new churches and halls were created as completely separate entities, but rather they were always part of the (then Wesleyan) Connexion. The Forward Movement was always a vehicle for Methodists to 'bridge the widening gap' (Vickers, 2000, p.126) between Methodism and contemporary society, rather than create separate contextual churches. In the new practice I propose, the new fresh expression circuits would continue to be a part of the Connexion, as all other one-church Circuits⁵⁴ are, would be under Methodist discipline, would have a Superintendent presbyter and would retain the structural link to the Connexion, continuing to be accountable to other local circuits and the district. In time this proposal could be enlarged so that fresh expressions within a given area, or indeed throughout the Connexion, could be arranged into a circuit.

While this proposal would bring further challenges to be overcome, such as ensuring that the Superintendent was comfortable working in this way; the experience of Fresh Expression B provides a model by which a presbyter can have oversight of a fresh expression and traditional churches in adjacent circuits. This practice would enable fresh expressions that find their contextual approach causes tension in relationships within an existing circuit to remain part of, and accountable to, the Connexion. Indeed, I suggest that this new practice must operate alongside that of the representative presence of a presbyter. As I have indicated in Chapter Two, the presence of a presbyter in a leadership role ensures the community is connected to the Connexion, this addresses the challenge of ensuring that leadership of fresh expressions recognise their part within the Connexion.

⁵⁴ Such as Fresh Expression B.

In relation to the case studies, this would not affect Fresh Expression B as a one-church circuit, with a Superintendent presbyter, indeed Fresh Expression B is an example of how this practice might work. This would also not apply to Fresh Expression A as it operates as a mixed economy within one church. As Fresh Expression C, which was directly connected to Y Methodist Church has closed since I conducted my research; this practice may be an appropriate way forward for that community. This system would also apply to Fresh Expression D, as my research highlighted the difficulties that existed between the circuit and the fresh expression, and thus using the principle of the Forward Movement to create a separate, yet connected, circuit provides a way forward for the contextual approach of the fresh expression.

9.1.3.2 Connectedness

In Chapter Six, I noted the divisions which followed as Methodist societies split from the Church of England, and those which occurred later within Methodism, due to differences of theology and practice. The literature of Chapter Two, and my research, demonstrated the differences that exist between fresh expressions and traditional Methodist Churches. I noted in Chapter Six that if the differences are perceived to be too great, Methodist history suggests that a rupture may occur which would damage the sustainability of fresh expressions. I contend that the differences between fresh expressions and traditional Methodist churches stem from their different understanding of the nature and emphasis of the elements of the church, and their differing approaches to culture and context. Particularly, I argue that neither the Church Catholic nor Connexion requires that all Methodist churches are identical. The suggestion that fresh expressions and traditional Methodist churches are unable to remain in Connexion because of their differences is a failure to understand the nature of the Church Catholic and Connexion as interconnection and accountability, rather than conformity, in which all think and act in the same way.

The Forward Movement offers a Methodist example of how different churches can remain connected. Central Halls and Missions were created to minister to different contexts from traditional Methodist churches, yet no break-away took place. Fresh expressions similarly cater for a particular context, rather than attempting to be relevant to all. Walker notes that 'fresh expressions cannot embody the total response to contemporary culture carried by the Christian tradition...they have the capacity not to replace traditional churches but to contribute to the reinvigoration of the greater whole' (2014, p.226). The implication of this for British Methodism is that traditional Methodist churches and fresh expressions respond to culture in different ways and are, therefore, both required and able to remain in Connexion. The case studies reflect this, as they offered a variety of fresh expressions which are both Methodist

and connected though the circuit and Connexion. In Chapter Six, I articulated a challenge that remaining connected posed, which was seen in the difficulties experienced in Fresh Expression D's relationship with the circuit, and how the creation of Fresh Expression C was opposed because it was different to a traditional church outreach project. I noted the tension that was caused by the strained relationship, particularly in Fresh Expression D, as Alan asserted during interview that the different understandings of the nature of the fresh expression as a church or a project had, at times 'been destructive' (Appendix V – Alan). Therefore, a new practice is required to ease the tension which could lead to schism if not addressed.

A new practice here is better articulated as a renewed understanding for those involved in fresh expressions and traditional Methodist churches. I propose that the Connexion recognise that shared learning and experience occurs between fresh expressions and traditional Methodist churches within the Connexion. In his reflection upon the decline of the traditional church, Walker argues that those commentators who criticise fresh expressions fail to consider the

effectiveness of strategies by which churches have increased attendance by taking closer account of their local context...by becoming more competitive in the emerging spiritual market. Much of this innovation in parish churches appears to have been inspired by *Mission-Shaped Church* and the fresh expressions debate.

2014, p.227

Should the Connexion take seriously the way in which The Methodist Church in Britain can learn from fresh expressions rather than dismissing them as immature churches, traditional Methodist churches may begin to address their decline by 'becoming more competitive in the emerging spiritual market' (Walker, 2014, p.227) and attract individuals to become part of the Church. Fresh expressions may be able to learn how to become self-financing and the nature of being a long-term presence in a community. This shared learning and symbiotic relationship is at the centre of a Connexional understanding of the Church and will mean that Methodist ecclesiology must embrace the possibility of circuits which are shaped differently because of the presence of fresh expressions. Recognition of shared learning and an acceptance of unity in diversity will help to alleviate the prospect of a schism as the benefits of the mixed economy would be felt by both traditional and fresh expression churches.

I also contend that a culture of shared learning would address a challenge which emerged from the literature and my research. This challenge was that in seeking theological and

ecclesiological freedom, communities might 'cherry-pick' practices or theological emphases which appeal, whilst dismissing those which are deemed irrelevant and thus distance themselves from the normative Methodist ecclesiological position. Identifying, and engaging in, a culture of shared learning would enable conversations between fresh expressions and traditional churches in which a departure from Methodist practice might be identified and amended.

The Forward Movement created a number of single-church circuits, with central halls being detached from existing circuits because of the differences in approach to culture between the Forward Movement halls and traditional churches. Earlier in this Chapter, I proposed that fresh expressions could be detached in a similar way to address the tension present in the case study data. That practice may appear to remove the possibility of shared learning between fresh expressions and traditional churches as they are no longer within the same circuit. However, I propose that shared learning is possible and appropriate between circuits and does not rely upon fresh expressions remaining in a circuit, especially if this generates tension which makes shared learning difficult. For example, SO400A states that 'the primary purpose for which the District is constituted is to advance the mission of the Church in a region, by providing opportunities for Circuits to work together' (TMCP, 2020, p.420). In this way, the district has a responsibility to provide opportunities for fresh expressions and traditional churches to engage in shared learning and experience appropriate ways. A further example of shared learning and experience, which could be employed as part of this practice, can be found in the minutes of Conference up to 1989, which indicates that where there is a single-church circuit, the presbyter stationed therein will 'change on one Sunday in every quarter with the ministers of [an adjacent] circuit' (TMCP, 1989, p.99, p.102, p.109). This practice could be employed and developed for those fresh expressions circuits which are separated and those set within a larger circuit to enable the leadership of both traditional churches and fresh expressions to experience each other's context and engage in conversation from which both would benefit.

This new practice of shared learning acknowledges that fresh expressions, as contextual responses, are immersed within Postmodern culture and their local context and, therefore, differ in their approaches to connecting with society than traditional Methodist churches. Throughout the research, interviewees argued that traditional Methodist churches were not able to respond effectively to Postmodern culture as they were rooted in a modern worldview. I identified that the different responses to culture were a contributing factor to the tensions in the data. Developing a culture of shared learning, which recognises the inculturation of traditional churches and fresh expressions would enable a greater understanding of both

approaches. Shared learning might enable a fresh expression to assist a traditional church to reflect upon its practice in the light of contemporary culture and thus enable better connections to be made with the community. Jenkins notes that Postmodern churches challenge traditional churches to re-evaluate their structures; 'it is just conceivable that such systems do not serve the church well and that Postmodern thought, here, plays its most crucial role' (1999, p.103). Shared learning and unity in diversity is modelled by Fresh Expression A offering diverse worship experiences through traditional worship, Café Church and Air. These learn from one-another and develop their practice together. This model recognises, for example, that Fresh Expression C might share with the circuit how to make connections with the local community, whilst it may learn from the circuit churches of ways to improve Village Praise. Fresh Expression D, which may become a separated circuit per my earlier proposed practice, would be able to engage in shared learning regarding appropriate evangelism, but would be able to do so without the current tensions which were evident throughout the data. In this way, such learning can apply throughout the Connexion.

9.2 Fellowship and shared discipline

The third theme from the data, leadership and authority, was analysed through the lens of fellowship and shared discipline. Several points of tension leading to ecclesiological challenges were revealed.

9.2.1 Sacraments

The issue of presidency at communion arose during my research, particularly in relation to Fresh Expression D. In 2012 Conference added a 'missional' criterion by which a lay person may be authorised to preside at communion; the Report indicates that the missional criterion is relevant to fresh expressions, stating 'missionary potential is evidenced in the presence of: a...project which falls under the category of fresh expressions' (TMCP, 2012b, p.15). As The Methodist Church in Britain has already made this change to its practice and holds the tension between the Methodist normative ecclesiological position and the emerging leadership of fresh expressions, I do not intend to propose a new practice concerning communion as I believe that this challenge can be addressed through current Standing Orders. While I do not intend to propose a new practice in terms of presidency at the sacraments, the analysis of the issue led to the investigation of the role of lay and ordained leadership within fresh expressions, and the manifestation of the priesthood of all believers.

9.2.2 The Priesthood of all Believers

Several interviewees explored the presence of a presbyter within the fresh expression. The analysis of Chapter Seven highlighted a suspicion and, to some degree, a rejection of presbyteral ministry, revealing a tension with Methodist ecclesiology in terms of the interpretation of the priesthood of all believers. This challenge was related to maintaining the 'principal and directing part' (TMCP, 2020, p.213) presbyters play in the life of the Connexion, while not diminishing the role of lay leadership in fresh expressions. It is not my intention here to further discuss the function of the presbyter, but reflect upon the office and authority of the presbyter in relation to case studies.

The Conference Report *What is a Presbyter?* states that presbyteral ministry 'is a ministry of pastoral responsibility. This includes oversight, direction, order and pastoral care' (TMCP, 2002b, p.4). This reflects the way that the Presbyterate is regarded throughout the Connexion and echoes a 1988 Conference Report which notes that 'significant and distinctive leadership is provided by ordained ministers who have a "principal and directing part"' (TMCP, 1988, p.248) in the Connexion. The Connexional understanding, contained within the Conference Reports, is that the Presbyterate offers significant leadership and that the authority of the presbyter is due to their being representative of the Conference in a local context (Howcroft, 2002, p.148).

The challenge my research identified concerning the priesthood of all believers, is a lack of understanding of the place of the Presbyterate within the Connexion, particularly within fresh expressions. Throughout the research, a concern of the interviewees was the activity of presbyters within the fresh expression. The interviewees at Fresh Expressions B and D were anxious that a presbyter, who was not immersed in the context, could engage in practice inappropriate to the context; all interviewees reflected Liz's comment that if a new minister was appointed, the church would 'appoint someone with a similar outlook' (Appendix II – Liz). This led, in Chapter Seven, to my question of whether the views of the participants indicate that there are fresh expressions in the Connexion in which it would be inappropriate for presbyters to be involved in leadership. The 1988 Conference Report, *The Ministry of the People of God* asserted that the ordained are 'the sign of the presence and ministry of Christ in the church and through the church to the world' (TMCP, 1988, p.251). As such, the Conference recognises the place of the Presbyterate within the leadership of every fresh expression in the Connexion due to the representative ministry of presbyters. This is not to say that the presbyter must always be the day-to-day leader, but should chair the management committee or equivalent, as was the case at Fresh Expression C. Indeed, 'fresh expressions need a core team with a mix of gifts' (Savage and Boyd-Macmillan, 2007, p.78). Thus, it is

possible that a fresh expression may be led by a team of lay people, a pioneer minister or a deacon.⁵⁵ It is clear that in Methodist ecclesiology, however, that a presbyter must have oversight of each fresh expression as 'authorised ministers are the link to the universal church' (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.144).

I propose that Methodism assert its position regarding the Presbyterate in the life of fresh expressions; that the identifiably Methodist Connexional nature of the Church is upheld by the representative presence of a presbyter in the life of every fresh expression. This need not be that a presbyter be named as the leader of the initiative but rather those who are a part of the fresh expression are able to recognise the way in which the presbyter physically represents the authority and discipline of the Conference, thus reinforcing the Connexional nature of the Church, maintaining the link to the Church Catholic and ensuring Methodist identifiability. Fresh expressions would need to accept that the presence of the ordained working alongside the lay is central to the priesthood of all believers and is a feature of a discernibly Methodist community. For Fresh Expression D, this would mean that a presbyter would be in pastoral charge of the fresh expression; this would ensure both that the fresh expression was discernibly Methodist, and that the Connexional nature of the Church was upheld by the representative presence of a presbyter. The lack of a presbyter at Fresh Expression D was noted throughout the research as a source of tension. Ensuring that a presbyter was in pastoral charge of the fresh expression would also ensure that shared learning could be encouraged between the circuit and the fresh expression, as indicated in my previous proposed practice.

As the priesthood of all believers concerns the way that lay and ordained participate in the life of the Church, I propose that long-term leadership within fresh expressions should be explored. Boyd-Macmillan and Savage suggest the need for long-term leadership which enables a fresh expression to grow and mature, asserting that 'no mature fresh expression...does not have its own full-time leader' (2007, p.78). There is a need to recognise that, whilst the presence of the Presbyterate is vital, the presbyter may not be able to lead the fresh expression full-time, nor often for longer than a five-year appointment. One of the key elements of the Forward Movement was long-term leadership, as Davies, George and Rupp stated; 'the basis of the Forward Movement was...a minister at the head of the enterprise who could remain long enough to be a social (and often political) force in the neighbourhood' (1983, p.311). In relation to fresh expressions, the engagement of local leadership would bring an

⁵⁵ A Methodist Deacon is an ordained minister who 'work[s] with people in church and community. They exercise caring, pastoral, evangelistic and outreach ministries.' (TMCP, 2004, p.17)

appreciation of the context in which the fresh expression is set. Montgomery writes of the necessity for churches to alleviate cultural alienation by 'ensuring that the practices and expressed theology of the church are reshaped with an eye to fitting the religious needs (and bias) of the local population' (2010, p.229). This practice ensures that a fresh expression aimed at connecting with a particular culture is empowered to do so by the circuit enabling leadership that is identifiably Methodist, long-term to enable the development of relationships and local, that the leader understands the context in which they minister. This is similar to a proposal made by Jeffrey Harris in 1986 (1986, pp.66-69) who suggested that once trained, presbyters should return to the context from which they offered for ministry and minister therein. I propose that lay people should be enabled to minister alongside a presbyter, within the context with which they are familiar. I am not proposing that fresh expressions be encouraged to develop candidates for ordination to be returned to minister in the fresh expressions, rather, that leadership of fresh expressions should be a collaboration of local lay people and the ordained. This protects fresh expressions from losing a sense of belonging to the Connexion which is inherent with solely lay leadership, and evident in Fresh Expression D. The Methodist Church in Britain advocates the development of pioneer ministers, who are 'able to connect with those who are not currently relating to the church...a pioneer will then be intentionally developing...[a] fresh expression' (TMCP, 2018a). As pioneers can be lay or ordained, the new practice above may engage a pioneer minister to work in a fresh expression with, if appropriate, a presbyter. This proposed practice, therefore, recognises and maintains the representative presence of the presbyter in leadership across the Connexion, but also the nature of the specific contextual response of fresh expressions.

New styles of leadership which account for the changes in society are encouraged by the Report *The Ministry of the People of God* (TMCP, 1988, p.253). My proposal above is a continuance of this theme, a new style of leadership and accountability structure may be the most beneficial way to ensure fresh expressions are properly accountable and led. *The Gift of Connexionalism in the 21st Century* reflects this, stating 'it is vital to embrace and support those working in new ways' (TMCP, 2017c, p.388). This proposal, therefore, reflects a new way in which the Connexion could work with fresh expressions; ensuring that each fresh expression is led by presbyters and local lay people would address the ongoing tension in regard to the priesthood of all believers. It would offer a way in which the danger of contractual ecclesiology, which may lead to the formation of a homogenous unit, can be addressed. The presence of a presbyter in leadership, appointed by the circuit rather than the fresh expression, would also offer a broader perspective upon the issues which the fresh expression encounters and reinforce the distinctively Methodist Connexional nature of the Church.

This practice was partially observed in Fresh Expressions A and B; both were led by a presbyter and a team of local lay volunteers, although the presbyter was the day-to-day leader in both. Fresh Expression C employed local lay day-to-day leadership and oversight was provided by a presbyter who chaired the management committee. If this practice was applied to Fresh Expression D, where my research indicated a strained relationship with the circuit and Connexion, a presbyter would be appointed by the circuit to Fresh Expression D. This would ensure the representative presence of a presbyter and would also enable Fresh Expression D to develop and maintain a connection to the Connexion.

This proposed practice would apply to Fresh Expression D whether it remained within a circuit, or was separated to form a single-church fresh expression circuit. The combination of lay and ordained in leadership would provide a link to the Connexion and acknowledge the need for leaders who are immersed in the context. These leaders would also be able to engage in shared learning with other churches and circuits, through district opportunities or through quarterly exchanges as per my proposed practice.

9.2.3 Membership and Governance

Chapter Seven explored the challenge posed by the lack of membership systems, particularly within Fresh Expressions C and D. The membership of Fresh Expression B was held by Y Methodist Church, but there was little overlap between the church and the fresh expression, as such membership was not part of Fresh Expression C. Fresh Expression D did not have a membership system as the community was 'not interested' (Appendix V – Alan) in membership. The discussion of membership in Chapter Seven highlighted the differences in a spiritual 'contract' (Grenz, 2003, p.257) in which individuals within a community contract informally with one another and the nature of Methodist membership as the commitment to local society, Connexion and Church Catholic. The interviewees at Fresh Expression D believed that Methodist membership was not appropriate for the community as the contractual membership of the fresh expression was felt to be sufficient for the community to be a church. Giles recognises this, stating that a strand of protestant theology believes that 'the congregation is the church manifested in a local setting, and no other structured group of believers on earth should rightly be called the church' (1995, p.13). I argue that this notion represents a failure to appreciate the nature of Methodist membership as wider than the local church. This can be understood to represent a 'tension in the understanding of church, on the one hand primarily as a community of faith...and on the other hand, primarily as a hierarchically ordered institution' (Giles, 1995, p.218). The leadership of Fresh Expression D felt that membership of a hierarchical institution was not appropriate but failed to appreciate

that membership enabled a connection to a larger community of Methodists as part of the Connexion and Church Catholic.

The issue of membership is difficult to address as it raises the question of whether or not membership is an essential element of Methodist ecclesiology. Certainly, membership has been part of Methodism from its origin as a society within the Church of England. The *Deed of Union* (TMCP, 2020, pp.214-15) continues to assert that membership is important to express commitment to God and also represents shared accountability and fellowship which is part of Methodist ecclesiology, as I indicated in Chapter Two. As I also noted in Chapter Two, membership is an important part of the governance structure of a Methodist church. The difficulties of implementing changes to Methodist membership are highlighted by a 1992, Report to Conference which discusses possible changes to the *Deed of Union* regarding membership. The Report states that a potential way forward for the Church would be

to dispense with the concept of 'membership' entirely, perhaps in favour of a system akin to the Anglican electoral roll...[But] such a development would require not only major changes to the *Deed of Union* and Standing Orders, but also an abandonment of a significant part of Methodism's societary heritage. There is no evidence to suggest that there would be support for such a momentous change of policy throughout the Connexion.

TMCP, 1992, p.115

The Report does not suggest any changes to the way a Church Council may be elected if a system of membership was dispensed with, as it did not recommend replacing the current membership system. The notion that any move from the current understanding would not be supported throughout the Connexion, and the framework of membership contained in the *Deed of Union*, highlights the tension which is caused by the intensive membership of British Methodism and the extensive and transient membership favoured by fresh expressions, as evidenced in Fresh Expression D. My research has highlighted several issues within the case studies regarding membership which cannot be easily solved. However, I will propose some ways that the lack of connection to circuit and Connexion may be addressed to ease tension and enable relationships.

A new practice to address the lack of connection demonstrated in the data reflects the way in which individuals who were part of early Methodist societies were arranged into classes and bands, and of the way churches which are unable to fulfil some of the roles and responsibilities required of them can be understood as a class of another local Methodist church. The

Membership of individuals in a class is held by the local Methodist church. In terms of a fresh expression, the process would be similar, each fresh expression could be understood as a class within the circuit. Such a fresh expression class could also be named as a church. In my experience as the presbyter in pastoral charge of a class connected to a larger church, the class retained its name as a Methodist church. This would apply to a fresh expression class as the elements required for a community to be a church, such as a system of membership, would be present as it is held by the larger church. In this practice, Fresh Expression D would become a class of a local Methodist church, and could be regarded as a church. This would enable individuals who are part of fresh expressions to become members of The Methodist Church without the need to attend another church. In this new practice, the local church and the fresh expression would be required to come to an understanding regarding governance, representation of the fresh expression on the Church Council and the finances of the fresh expression as the Church Council would be responsible for oversight including finance.⁵⁶ As I have noted in Chapter Seven, membership is a requirement for individuals to serve on a Church Council. In the practice above, those who were part of the fresh expression class and were members would be able to serve in this way and share in oversight of the fresh expression with a presbyter. This does not preclude the creation of a leadership team which would deal with day-to-day management but would ensure that discernibly Methodist models of membership and governance are maintained within the fresh expression. This practice would, however, not apply to those fresh expressions which would be separated from a circuit to form a single-church fresh expression circuit which would need to be constituted under Standing Orders as a separate circuit with a system of membership, but would apply to those which remain in a circuit with traditional churches.

A second option for new practice concerning membership resembles the official Methodist Fellowship Groups described as 'language and/or ethnically configured Methodist...fellowships' (TMCP, 2015d, pp.354-55). The Ghanaian Fellowship describes its formation thus: 'the desire to identify with their traditional way of doing things brought some individuals in some local churches together to form Fellowships (GMF UK, 2011). The Fellowships are not churches, but are a way to build and reinforce connections, those who are part of the fellowship are expected to remain members of The Methodist Church and attend a local Methodist church.

The 2015 Conference Report on Fellowship Groups (TMCP, 2015d, pp.354-62) made several proposals considering the allocation of representatives to Conference and the creation of a

⁵⁶ As noted in Standing Order 605 (TMCP, 2020, pp.517-18).

support group to facilitate communication. Such practice would create a structure by which Fellowship Groups would be accountable to Conference whilst enabling the Fellowships to play a part in the governance of the Connexion. I propose a practice which is similar to the Fellowship Groups, by which Methodist fresh expressions would be able to exist within the Connexion as a Fellowship Group. Methodist membership would continue to be held through a local Methodist church, or through a fresh expression as a class of a local church. This practice reflects the transient approach to belonging, which is prevalent within contemporary society and evidenced in the case studies, allowing individuals the opportunity to opt in or out of the fresh expression at any time. Davie recognises this trend within 'new style religion...[which] moves away from membership to more episodic existence' she also notes that traditional Church and new styles of 'religion run alongside each other' (2015, p.225). The proposal ensures that the fresh expression remains connected to, and resourced by, the circuit as the 'primary unit in which local churches express and experience their interconnexion' (TMCP, 2020, p.464). SO510 currently permits a circuit to appoint additional people to the circuit meeting to ensure that 'all areas of the life of the circuit are adequately represented' (TMCP, 2020, p.469), providing a way that fresh expressions may engage with circuit governance that would apply if fresh expressions were understood in the same way as Fellowship Groups.

In this practice, all fresh expressions throughout the Connexion could be invited to form a Fellowship and engage in conversations with those who share a similar outlook, whilst remaining connected to the Connexion. In this way, Fresh Expression D, which articulated a disconnect from the circuit, would be able to share in a Fellowship which enables development and growth, whilst also remaining part of the Connexion. This new practice is similar to the Methodist City Centre Network which aims to:

- Promote the work of the City Centre Ministries across the Connexion...
- Present and develop the role of city centre ministry.
- Provide continuing training and mutual support...
- Encourage good practice...

TMCP, 2018b

The creation of a fresh expressions Fellowship Group would ensure that a Connexional understanding and sense of unity is maintained as the fresh expressions Fellowship Group would be part of the Connexion, via the circuit, as are the current Fellowship Groups. Indeed, the 2015d Report on Fellowship Groups highlights the 'desire for the British Methodist Church and Fellowship Groups to be flexible...to be one Connexion' (TMCP, 2105, p.357). Davie

(2015, p.159) recognises the desire for connection is a feature of Postmodern spirituality, this new practice would ensure that unity between fresh expressions and traditional churches in the Connexion can be maintained but also generate a sense of connection among fresh expressions with those who share a similar outlook.

I noted earlier the difficulties that the issue of membership raises, and my research highlighted the tension which existed in the case studies concerning membership. My suggested practice above is intended to ease the tension whilst allowing individuals who are part of fresh expressions to become members, and encourage a sense of connection for those who are not, or who decline membership. I have not proposed a system whereby fresh expressions may admit members without fulfilling the necessary criteria as a church, as this would create more tension as the difference between fresh expressions and traditional churches would be highlighted. The issue of membership emphasises the tension which is part of the developing ecclesiology of fresh expressions demonstrated through my research; my suggested practice holds this tension and recognises that the developing ecclesiology will mean that membership is an issue which will be revisited.

9.3 Structured for Mission

In Chapter Eight, I considered the aims of each fresh expression, focusing on one element of *Our Calling*, as a structure for mission. This raised a tension concerning how structuring a fresh expression for mission, to focus on one element of *Our Calling*, may exclude the remaining three.

9.3.1 Oscillation

Figures 1-4 in Chapter Eight highlighted that although each of the case studies focused on one element of *Our Calling*, they exhibited all of the elements as they oscillated through them. An ecclesiological challenge concerned how a fresh expression must exhibit each of these elements to be understood as a church in its own right.

I have argued that the espoused ecclesiology of *Our Calling* encapsulates the normative ecclesiology of British Methodism found in *Called to Love and Praise*. Consequently, when a fresh expression exhibits all of the elements of *Our Calling*, I contend that the elements of normative ecclesiology are also present. I, therefore, propose that new practice for The Methodist Church in Britain is to recognise the diversity of practice within the Connexion and that those fresh expressions which exhibit all the elements of *Our Calling* may be understood as churches in their own right. This would apply to Fresh Expression D, the aim of which Alan

stated was to 'bounce everything up against making, growing and discipling, disciples of Jesus' (Appendix V – Alan), yet I noted in Figure 4 in Chapter Eight that Fresh Expression D oscillates through the four elements of *Our Calling* while focusing upon evangelism. Exploring the nature of oscillation in relation to *Our Calling*, as I have presented in Chapter Eight, may be a useful tool to assess the mission of a particular expression and either recognise it as a church or enable steps to be taken to ensure that all four elements are visible. This practice would not remove the need for a fresh expression to develop a system of membership, ensure that a group of managing trustees is constituted or work towards fulfilling the criteria of *Called to Love and Praise* (TMCP, 1999a, pp.54-55); these could be developed in line with the new practice suggested earlier in this chapter as part of the evolution of the fresh expression.

9.3.2 *Our Calling* and Ecclesiological Generosity

Throughout my research, each of the case studies were presented to me by the participants as the form of church that is appropriate for contemporary society. Susan alluded to this as she commented upon the future of Fresh Expression C, 'I actually only ever saw it as a five-year programme' (Appendix IV – Susan). A similar sentiment was expressed by Philip at Fresh Expression A, who felt that the aim was to create 'many access points in worship...several congregations...not several churches' (Appendix I – Philip). The implication of this is the belief that each case study offered what was required to be relevant to the needs of its context. Marsh maintains that Christianity is in a state of continual renewal, 'to say the same thing in a new age you have to say it differently' (2002, p.121). Alan reflected this in relation to the Sunday presentation of Fresh Expression D, noting that 'the model we use...has changed over time' (Appendix V – Alan) as the context changed. I contend that early Methodism shared a similar belief, that the creation of societies, classes and bands were the way in which the Church could be understood as part of the mission of God for that time. I propose that a common trait within fresh expressions is a belief that what has been created is an experience of church for the present: this is a recognisably Methodist trait.

During the interview at Fresh Expression B, Paul shared his belief that the fresh expression was not a wholly new initiative but was revisiting early Church practice; 'going back to the early church...we're simply revisiting old territories' (Appendix III – Paul). Anderson notes that this trait is common, 'emerging churches affirm their place within the history of the church...from the very beginning' (2007, p.199). The desire of fresh expressions to be a church for 'now' whilst reinforcing a link with the early church can be viewed as an attempt to provide legitimacy to a fresh expression in the face of criticism. The notion of creating a fresh expression which is linked to the early Church can be seen as an attempt to create an expression of church which is connected to the local context whilst also authentically Christian.

The desire of a fresh expression to be a church 'now' and to state its intention to return to a primitive faith is not excluded in the words of *Our Calling*. Indeed, *Our Calling* prescribes very little concerning the practice of the Church. A follow-up pamphlet, *Our Calling...Moving On*, suggests that '*Our Calling* can be used as a check-up. What is God doing among us? Are we using our resources properly? Are there things which we should stop doing? What new initiatives can be taken to fulfil *Our Calling*' (TMCP, 2002a, p.2). This can be interpreted as an encouragement to develop fresh expressions as part of a missional review and as a contextual response. I contend that the lack of prescription in terms of ecclesiology reflects the notion that the practice and ecclesiology of The Methodist Church in Britain can be understood as pragmatic and evolutionary, as I argued in Chapter Two. This can also be seen in the General Secretary's Report of 2011 (TMCP, 2011) which proposed that Methodism understood itself to be a movement shaped for mission and was prepared to change rules pragmatically in response to God's leading. In this way, fresh expressions are a result of the evolving practice and ecclesiology of a discipleship movement, shaped for mission.

Chapter Two explored Methodist ecclesiology as fundamentally pragmatic. *Our Calling*, and its follow-on pamphlet, do not seek to prescribe closely the nature of the Church, implying the importance of pragmatism. The Methodist Church in Britain recognises this requirement for pragmatism in *Called to Love and Praise*, highlighting the need for the Church to adapt to new missional situations, 'Methodists should not feel the need resolutely to defend the structures of the church' (TMCP, 1999a, p.53). Gwang, writing of the early Methodist societies, notes that those who were welcomed as members could be of any church background; 'Wesley held "in order to their union with us we require no unity in opinions, or in modes of worship, but barely that they 'fear God and work righteousness'"' (2008, p.168). I contend that the broad nature of *Our Calling* and its lack of prescription reflects the sentiments of Wesley above and grants permission for a variety of churches and fresh expressions within the Connexion.

My research indicates that nomenclature is important to fresh expressions and, therefore, should The Methodist Church in Britain react pragmatically and name those fresh expressions which do not develop membership or trusteeship as churches, much of the tension highlighted in my research could be eased. This would be particularly relevant for Fresh Expression D and Fresh Expression C, following Y Methodist Church's closure, and fresh expressions which do not intend to develop a system of membership. The interviewees at Fresh Expression D all believed that the fresh expression was 'their' church, but the circuit continued to understand it to be a project. This was noted as a cause of tension in the ongoing relationships. Should the circuit be able to name Fresh Expression D as a church, even without membership or a Church

Council, this would enable the relationship between the fresh expression and the circuit to be more beneficial. As part of this recognition, there would need to be an agreement to share in conversation about how missing elements may be incorporated into the fresh expression as part of its development.

I noted in Chapter Six that The Methodist Church in Britain recognises a variety of Churches and denominations which do not meet the criteria proposed in *Called to Love and Praise* (TMCP, 1999a, pp.54-55) to be Churches. Indeed, this generosity may be considered a distinctly Methodist ecclesiological feature. I propose a new practice for The Methodist Church in Britain to regard fresh expressions within the Connexion with the same ecclesiological generosity with which other denominations are regarded. That is, even those fresh expressions which do not exhibit all four elements of *Our Calling* and may not be able to fulfil the criteria provided by *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.114) or *Called to Love and Praise* (TMCP, 1999a, p.54) could yet be regarded as Methodist churches and part of the Connexion.

The practice represents a different approach for a different context as I suggest that even those fresh expressions which would not adopt my proposed new practice could be understood as churches within the Connexion, albeit churches which are constituted differently than traditional Methodist churches. This would ease the existing tensions which surround the identity of fresh expressions and would enable shared learning to be encouraged which may lead to further developments within fresh expressions. In the same way as recognising fresh expressions' journey towards ecclesial identity, this practice accepts the liminality of many fresh expressions. For example, should Fresh Expression C be regarded as a church in its own right following the closure of Y Methodist Church, recognising the liminality of Village Praise may enable growth towards my proposed practice.

Throughout my research it was clear that there are several different understandings of how a church may be defined, from the fulfilment of the normative criteria detailed in *Called to Love and Praise* and *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* to the intention of Fresh Expression D, despite not fulfilling the criteria. This was evident as I considered ecclesial identity, in which all interviewees believed that their fresh expression was a church regardless of any criteria which may not be manifest. Differences in understanding were also evident in the relationships of the case studies to the Connexion, as the interviewees highlighted the differences between traditional churches and fresh expressions. Shier-Jones, noting differing understandings of church, argues that 'fresh expressions of church should still be church...recognisably "one, holy, catholic and apostolic"' (2009, p.8). She clarified these

marks (2009, pp.8-14) as being a sense of unity in Christ, a sense of holiness, seeking to offer all the opportunity to be part of the Church Catholic and a willingness to engage in the *missio Dei*. I contend that these may be better criteria upon which to judge fresh expressions, recognising the ecclesiological generosity which is required, the variety of fresh expressions and the pragmatic nature of Methodist ecclesiology.

In Chapter Two, I introduced the work of Cameron et al., (2010, pp.53-56) who propose that four theological voices emerge as one studies a particular context. I also indicated that in this thesis I would refer to this principle as ecclesiological voices. I noted that the normative voice is found in the Conference Statements. *Our Calling*, whilst still an official teaching of the Church, represents the espoused voice: the way a group articulates ecclesiology, as Methodists are likely to be able to articulate the elements of *Our Calling*. The operant voice is the way that a group works out ecclesiology in tangible ways. This thesis has investigated the way that the normative voice may be represented in the espoused and operant ecclesiology of four case studies and has identified several ways that normative Methodist ecclesiology is challenged by fresh expressions. I propose that the pragmatic, evolutionary nature of Methodist ecclesiology and the desire to be structured for mission indicates that it may be appropriate for a fifth element to be recognised in relation to Methodist fresh expressions, that each voice be treated with ecclesiological generosity. This generosity would recognise that a pragmatic, contextual approach to mission by a fresh expression may result in a journey towards fulfilling the criteria of normative Methodist ecclesiology. This practice would also enable Fresh Expressions C, D and fresh expressions which do not yet meet the criteria, to be regarded as churches in their current forms, recognising the sense of unity, holiness, welcome to all and willingness to engage in the *missio Dei*. It would take account of Feeney's words and allow time for fresh expressions to grow and develop toward their 'true place within the wider economy of the church' (2012, p.139). Ecclesiological generosity would also recognise that the ordinary ecclesiology which is part of the specific cultural response of fresh expressions may not result in their development of the criteria of normative Methodist ecclesiology, or my proposed new practice as outlined above, but would enable them to be named as churches within the Connexion, which are constituted differently than traditional Methodist churches. Ecclesiological generosity would recognise that the liminal nature of many fresh expressions, such as Fresh Expression C (including Village Praise) and D, may be a permanent state, and would name the initiatives as a church in the Connexion regardless. For example, fresh expressions which do not become classes as per my earlier practice (such as Fresh Expression D) and, therefore, do not meet the criteria of normative Methodist ecclesiology could be named as churches, rather than projects. Naming a fresh expression as a church would ease the tension that being regarded as a project causes and could provide a

platform to engage in shared learning and conversation, which may lead to development of the elements of *Called to Love and Praise* as contained in *Our Calling*. Indeed, my proposed practice of this chapter could be employed once the tension is resolved.

In several places through this research, I have employed the phrase ‘in their own right’ in reference to churches which are constituted in accordance with Methodist Standing Orders and fulfil the criteria of *Called to Love and Praise*. The use of this phrase can be seen in *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*, which asks of a ministry to young people, ‘should that fresh expression be regarded as a youth work project of the circuit or as a church in its own right?’ (TAC and TMCP, 2012, p.4). In the context of an ecclesiological generous approach to fresh expressions, this phrase is unhelpful as it implies that a church in its own right is a superior entity to any other community which may be named a church. I, therefore, propose that a more helpful way to describe the differences between a church which is constituted according to Methodist Standing Orders and fulfils the criteria of *Called to Love and Praise*, and fresh expressions communities which do not fulfil the criteria, is to understand them as churches which are constituted differently. The use of this phrase recognises that there are differences between the two, but does not imply that one is superior. I believe that the use of this phrase would reflect the ecclesiological generosity which I have proposed as a fifth ecclesiological voice.

Ecclesiological generosity will enable The Methodist Church in Britain and fresh expressions to hold some of the tensions which exist in the different responses to culture and context, by regarding traditional churches and fresh expressions as churches which are constituted differently. Ecclesiological generosity reflects the nature of Methodist ecclesiology as pragmatic and evolutionary, it enables The Methodist Church in Britain to respond differently to different contexts and cultures. Adopting ecclesiological generosity as a fifth ecclesiological voice in relation to fresh expressions can be regarded as part of the evolution of Methodist ecclesiology as the Church seeks to maintain the unity in diversity of the Connexion.

9.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have addressed the points of tension or ecclesiological challenges which were revealed through Chapters Six, Seven and Eight. These challenges related to the way in which the case studies did not exhibit discernibly Methodist ecclesiology, I addressed the challenges under the distinctive emphases of the normative Methodist ecclesiology of *Called to Love and Praise* (TMCP, 1999a, p.54).

Under the Connexional principle, I considered the challenges from two of the themes of the research. The first theme was the ecclesial identity of fresh expressions. I proposed that The Methodist Church in Britain recognise the evolutionary journey towards, and the intention of, fresh expressions to be churches, rather than projects. In addressing the challenge of a lack of ecumenical relationships in fresh expressions, I proposed that The Methodist Church in Britain reaffirm the place of fresh expressions within the Connexion, recognising unity in diversity and enabling fresh expressions to benefit from existing ecumenical relationships in circuits and districts. The second theme was the relationship of the case studies to the Connexion. In response to the tensions of ownership and accountability which were manifest in the relationship between the fresh expressions and the circuits they were part of, I proposed detaching fresh expressions to form one-church circuits. This would alleviate the existing tensions, but retain the structural link to the Connexion. I also proposed that The Methodist Church in Britain recognise that the relationship between fresh expressions and traditional churches can enable shared learning, which recognises the inculturation of both whilst appreciating that different responses to culture can benefit both parties.

Under fellowship and shared discipline, I addressed the ecclesiological issues concerned with leadership and authority. To address the confusion evident in the case studies regarding the manifestation of the priesthood of all believers, I offered two connected models of practice. I proposed that The Methodist Church in Britain reaffirm that a presbyter should be in a position of oversight in every fresh expression. Linked to this, I argued that long-term lay leadership should also be encouraged in fresh expressions. This would ensure a connection to The Methodist Church in Britain and encourage leadership that is, or becomes, intimately familiar with the context of the fresh expression. In addressing the lack of membership systems, I proposed that fresh expressions could be understood as classes of local Methodist churches, allowing a fresh expression to be connected to Methodism and enabling structures of Methodist governance to be employed. I also suggested that fresh expressions could form a Fellowship for mutual support and to encourage sharing among peers, while remaining part of the Connexion.

As part of being structured for mission, I highlighted that the case studies exhibit a diversity of practice focused around one element of *Our Calling* but oscillating through the remainder. I, therefore, proposed that those fresh expressions which do exhibit all of the elements of *Our Calling* should be regarded as churches. I also proposed that the ordinary ecclesiology of Methodist pragmatism and evolution leads to a generous ecclesiology. This generous ecclesiology accepts both fresh expressions which do not yet exhibit the elements of *Our*

Calling and fresh expressions which may not develop in the same way as churches which are constituted differently.

The new or reaffirmed practice detailed in this chapter requires The Methodist Church in Britain to model a mixed economy. Murray writes that 'the symbiotic relationship...will require patient two-way listening...listening may enable post-Christendom churches to both evolve and emerge' (2004a, p.112). Whilst Murray writes of the relationship of post-Christendom churches with institutional churches, I suggest that the same symbiotic relationship should be developed between fresh expressions and traditional Methodist churches within the Connexion, through affirmation of both as valid Methodist expressions of faith.

The new practice is not simply a collection of changes which the Conference must implement to allow fresh expressions to be called church. It will also require work from those in fresh expressions to maintain connections that are vital to the church. Appreciating and accepting the mixed economy within the Connexion will require an ecclesiological generosity which seeks to pragmatically embrace the variety which *Our Calling* and *Called to Love and Praise* encourage.

CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have argued that fresh expressions struggle to be discernibly Methodist expressions of church but reimagining the pragmatic and evolutionary nature of contemporary Methodist ecclesiology will ensure that both the fresh expressions and the Connexion can be maintained in a mixed economy.

As I began this research the number of fresh expressions in the Connexion was recorded at 838 (TMCP, 2013a). A recent Report, *Methodism's Hidden Harvest* drew upon a sample of 116 circuits in 2016-17, estimating that the number of fresh expressions has increased to 1029 (TMCP, 2019c, p.8), throughout the Connexion. The Report asserts that 'fresh expressions practice is influencing the life and mission of existing church communities' (TMCP, 2019c, p.7). The continued growth of fresh expressions highlights that the phenomenon which this thesis examines is active within contemporary British Methodism. *Methodism's Hidden Harvest* also highlighted that only 0.5 per cent of the fresh expressions throughout the Connexion have taken steps to become recognised as Methodist churches; the Report notes that the

'mature expression of church' that a fresh expression grows into is often quite different from church as it has traditionally been known...the conundrum of how these fresh expressions can be embedded into the life of our denomination is still unresolved.

TMCP, 2019c, p.15

This unresolved issue resonates with the question of how fresh expressions can be discernibly Methodist expressions of church. I, therefore, contend that my research remains relevant to the contemporary context of The Methodist Church in Britain.

10.1 The Research Question

The question that I have sought to answer was 'to what extent are fresh expressions within The Methodist Church in Britain discernibly "Methodist" expressions of church, and what practices within a fresh expressions context might indicate the presence of a Methodist church?'

To answer this question, I began by examining the available literature and reports, highlighting the distinctive features of Methodist ecclesiology as pragmatic and evolutionary. I also provided an emerging ecclesiology of fresh expressions and offered a comparison of the two

to provide the theoretical perspectives and a broad context for this thesis. I selected four fresh expressions as case studies, spending time in each community, engaging in non-participatory observation and interviews. Once the fieldwork was complete and the detailed write-up of each case study produced, I engaged in a process of coding the interview data which provided themes for analysis. The thematic analysis enabled me to identify the points of tension between normative Methodist ecclesiology and fresh expressions ecclesiology in the data, which hinder fresh expressions from being discernibly Methodist. I then moved to suggest ways that new, or reaffirmed practice within contemporary British Methodism could enable fresh expressions to be identified as discernibly Methodist churches.

10.2 Argument

In this thesis, I have argued that fresh expressions challenge normative Methodist ecclesiology as they do not follow the pattern of traditional churches. All of the case studies demonstrated tensions between the fresh expression and Methodism and highlighted difficulties in demonstrating a discernible Methodist identity. I explored these tensions, which I termed ecclesiological challenges, through a series of interconnected themes.

I explored the ecclesial identity of the case studies, asking where fresh expressions stand in relation to The Methodist Church in Britain. Are fresh expressions churches in their own right, or should they be considered as projects? Although Fresh Expressions A and B were Methodist churches, each of the case studies exposed the tension and pain which being understood as a project generated in their community. This led relationships to become strained and, in the case of Fresh Expression D, which did not meet the current criteria to be regarded as a Methodist church, caused the fresh expression to express a desire to move away from its connection to the circuit. Recognising Methodism's pragmatic and evolutionary ecclesiology, and the provisionality which *Called to Love and Praise* (TMCP, 1999a, p.55) proposes, I argued that The Methodist Church in Britain could ease tension by recognising the journey of fresh expressions towards a discernibly Methodist ecclesial identity and regarding the fresh expression as a church rather than a project.

It was clear from the case studies and literature that fresh expressions, as specific responses to culture which create contextually relevant expressions of church, are markedly different to the broad approach to culture and context of traditional Methodist churches. This diversity can lead to tension within circuits and districts, but I have claimed that within a broad and generous ecclesiology, Methodist ecclesiology is not undermined by diversity; diversity is identifiably Methodist. *Called to Love and Praise*, the normative ecclesiology of The Methodist Church in Britain, encourages diversity. I have demonstrated that the diversity evident in fresh

expressions follows the pattern of *Our Calling* and, therefore, represents a clear link to Methodist ecclesiology. I argued that The Methodist Church in Britain should reaffirm the unity in diversity found within the Connexion, embracing the presence of fresh expressions. I contended that as ecumenism is a key feature of contemporary Methodism's ecclesial identity, reaffirming unity in diversity will enable fresh expressions to remain connected to the Church Catholic, through appropriate ecumenical relationships, and maintain their ecclesial identity

Each case study revealed that the relationship of the fresh expression with The Methodist Church in Britain was unclear. I noted that each fresh expression believed that the differences between the specific contextual response of their community and the broad approach of traditional churches made mutual accountability unrealistic, as the fresh expression was 'owned' by the community rather than Methodism. This led to each case study exhibiting elements of congregational ecclesiology, which endangered their identifiably Methodist nature. I concluded that this could be addressed by detaching fresh expressions to form one-church fresh expression circuits which would ensure that the structural link to the Connexion was maintained whilst alleviating the tension. I also noted that unity in diversity was a feature of Methodist identity and that the connectedness of fresh expressions and traditional churches within the Connexion should be maintained as it enables a shared learning, in which both parties benefit. I noted that shared learning was possible between fresh expressions and traditional churches even if fresh expressions are in detached circuits, through existing Methodist structures and Standing Orders.

I explored the challenges of a community seeking to control leadership within a fresh expression by resisting the ministry of presbyters in favour of local leadership. In discussing the priesthood of all believers, I demonstrated that diminishing the role of presbyters who collectively represent the authority of the Conference challenges the discernibly Methodist nature of fresh expressions. I discussed how the authority of Conference can be maintained within fresh expressions which are principally lay led. I also argued that the outworking of the priesthood of all believers should be maintained and the presence of a presbyter in each fresh expression must be ensured to reinforce the Connexional nature of the Church, maintain the link to the Church Catholic, and ensure Methodist identifiability. I also proposed that long-term lay leadership be enabled to work alongside presbyters in fresh expressions, recognising the importance of leaders who are immersed in the context.

I examined how shared responsibility and the authority of Conference was manifest within the case studies, principally through a membership roll, and the ways that members share in the appropriate governance model, a Church Council. Membership systems and Church Councils

did not feature in two case studies, as they were not believed to be appropriate or desirable as part of their response to culture. I highlighted that the challenge of membership is difficult to resolve, and proposed ways that the tension which a lack of membership causes may be eased, whilst maintaining connections between fresh expressions and traditional churches. I suggested that a model to enable membership within fresh expressions could see them become classes of a local Methodist church, this would ensure that the community was identifiably Methodist, enable individuals to become members and to serve in governance roles. I also suggested that Methodist fresh expressions could form a Connexional Fellowship Group which would encourage mutual support across the Connexion.

My research highlighted the pragmatic nature of Methodist ecclesiology from its origins; 'the conviction that the church should be structured for mission, and able to respond pragmatically' (TMCP, 1999a, p.50). I have asserted that pragmatism is central to Methodist ecclesiology, as Methodism seeks, in both a local context and through the Conference, to respond to needs. My research demonstrated the understanding that each fresh expression was created as a pragmatic, missional approach to their context. Each case study had a central aim which was linked to this pragmatic approach and reflected one element of *Our Calling*. I noted that *Called to Love and Praise* (TMCP, 1999a, pp.54-55) emphasises the elements which are common to Methodist churches and have argued that these are contained within the four elements of *Our Calling*. I argued that a fresh expression which exhibits all four elements should be regarded as a Methodist church.

I proposed that contemporary Methodism is reluctant to de-church other communities outside the denomination, offering ecclesiological generosity, and have suggested that even those fresh expressions which do not exhibit all four elements of *Our Calling* should be regarded with the same ecclesiological generosity as they evolve and be recognised as Methodist churches. I argued that this represents an extension of Methodism's pragmatic and evolutionary ecclesiology in recognising the journey of fresh expressions towards a discernible Methodist identity, whilst also acknowledging the need for different approaches for different contexts. The new practice I suggest will lead to an even more generous ecclesiology, which will benefit the church by enabling flexible models of church that are able to focus upon one aspect of *Our Calling*, whilst retaining an identifiably Methodist identity.

I have argued that an ecclesologically generous approach to fresh expressions would recognise that the ordinary ecclesiology of fresh expressions may not result in the development of the normative criteria of Methodist ecclesiology, but would enable fresh expressions to be named as churches which are constituted differently. This would ease

tension and provide a platform to engage in shared learning and conversation which may lead to the development of the criteria of *Called to Love and Praise*.

The new practice which I have proposed throughout the final chapter is principally concerned with the identity of fresh expressions as Methodist churches, ensuring that the fresh expressions are appropriately accountable and reinforcing the Methodist identity of the case studies. The new, or reaffirmed practice will enable those who are involved in fresh expressions to understand and be able to articulate the relationship of the fresh expression to The Methodist Church in Britain.

10.3 Contribution to Knowledge

I have argued that the ecclesiology of The Methodist Church in Britain is pragmatic and evolutionary and is able to adapt to embrace fresh expressions to maintain these alongside traditional churches in a mixed economy within the Connexion. The growth of fresh expressions will continue to challenge the normative ecclesiology of British Methodism as traditional churches and fresh expressions remain part of the Connexion. Unless they are addressed, the challenges I have identified will remain, and may be magnified over time as the numbers of fresh expressions increase.

This thesis is a contribution to knowledge as it articulates ecclesiological challenges which have not been articulated previously in the life of The Methodist Church in Britain. My proposals for new, or reaffirmed practice also represent a contribution to knowledge in that I offer ways in which fresh expressions may become embedded and identifiable Methodist churches, which the 2019 Report *Methodism's Hidden Harvest* suggested was a 'conundrum...still unresolved' (TMCP, 2019c, p.15).

The new practice makes demands for change, both from those who are part of fresh expressions and traditional churches in terms of ecclesial identity, relationship to the Connexion and leadership and accountability. This new practice reflects the pragmatic nature of Methodism, enabling it to reimagine its engagement with contemporary culture, by ensuring that its ecclesiology is flexible enough to adapt Connexionalism to a new context. A recognisably Methodist pragmatic and evolutionary approach will ensure that those fresh expressions within the Connexion are discernibly Methodist as part of a mixed economy that benefits the whole of the Church.

10.4 Limitations of Research and Future Direction

I believe that the methodology I have employed in this research has enabled me to carefully study the context and understand the life of each fresh expression. The mix of methods meant that I was able to gather the data from three perspectives: my non-participant observations at each case study, the interviews which were informed by my observation, and the perspective which literature brings. The use of three perspectives enabled me to see the 'whole picture' (Fox, Martin and Green, 2007, p.64) of each fresh expression and its relationship to The Methodist Church in Britain. The research is limited by the sample of fresh expressions. As I have noted in Chapter Two, I am unable to make generalisations from four case studies, but I have offered new practice which has the potential to illuminate thinking throughout the Connexion. I propose that a future piece of research which takes a larger sample of the estimated 1029 fresh expressions would be beneficial, particularly if those fresh expressions are drawn from a larger geographical area than the case studies presented in my research. This future research would explore the themes and ecclesiological challenges which I have demonstrated through this thesis in relation to a wider selection of fresh expressions. This would enable my new practice to be tested throughout the Connexion, rather than just in relation to the geographically limited case studies presented here, as a further attempt to resolve the 'conundrum' (TMCP, 2019c, p.15) of how to embed fresh expressions as churches within The Methodist Church in Britain.

10.5 Concluding Remarks

As I began this research, I was sceptical about the place of fresh expressions within The Methodist Church in Britain. This was due to my previous experience of fresh expressions being used to raise the profile of a circuit and attract funding or staff. However, throughout the research process I have come to appreciate fresh expressions as contextually relevant expressions of faith which are accessible to those for whom the broad approach to culture and context of The Methodist Church in Britain does not appeal.

Through this thesis I have argued that the new practice I have suggested will enable a mixed economy of fresh expressions and traditional churches. *The Gift of Connexionalism in the 21st Century* states that Methodism

rejoices in the increasing range of fresh expressions of church and recognises the need to embrace different ways of being church within our structures. It is vital to enable and support those working in new ways, to maintain the principles of connexionalism which facilitate a sense of belonging, accountability and interdependence.

Connexionalism is at the heart of the challenges that have been presented but is also the way in which these challenges can be addressed. In maintaining relationships within the Connexion, embracing the mixed economy and with appropriate presbyteral and lay leadership, fresh expressions are able to remain connected to Methodism and to the Church Catholic. They continue to develop as pragmatic responses to the needs of a community whilst benefiting from two-way learning with traditional churches. The challenge will continue for the Connexional church as new initiatives grow alongside more established churches, but through reimagining the pragmatic and evolutionary nature of contemporary Methodist ecclesiology the Connexion can be maintained.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Bands

Methodists who were deemed to be more advanced spiritually were gathered into bands.

Church Council

The managing trustees of the church building and finances, the Church Council has oversight of the ministry of the local church.

Circuit

A group of Methodist Churches, to which **presbyters** and **deacons** are stationed and in which Local Preachers lead worship and preach.

Circuit Plan

A quarterly list of the preachers for each church in a circuit.

Class Meeting

Originally small groups of Methodists who met together for mutual support and accountability. Every contemporary Methodist member belongs to a class which may or may not meet.

Connexion

The interconnected structure of Methodist churches, **circuits** and **districts**.

Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church (CPD)

Volume 1 contains the fixed texts, including Acts of Parliament and other legislation, and historic documents. Volume 2 contains the Deed of Union, Model Trusts, and the Standing Orders, updated annually after amendments by Conference

Deacon

An ordained minister who works with people in church and community. They exercise caring, pastoral, evangelistic and outreach ministries.

District

Several **circuits** grouped together.

Ecclesiology

The branch of theology that looks at the Church's self-understanding.

Fresh Expressions of Church

This phrase can be understood to refer to the ecumenical movement and local initiatives intended as contextual forms of church.

Local Preacher

A lay person who is trained and authorised to lead worship and preach within The Methodist Church.

Membership

Individuals become members of The Methodist Church via a local church as an act of commitment to God and the Church. Membership enables the individual to serve in various roles in a **Methodist church** and **circuit**.

Methodist Church

A local church, under the pastoral charge of a **presbyter**. A Methodist Church has a membership roll and a **Church Council**.

Methodist Conference

The governing body of The Methodist Church in Great Britain which meets annually.

Methodist Ecclesiology

The way in which The Methodist Church of Great Britain understands its identity in terms of theology and practice as a Church.

Stationing

The process by which **presbyters** and **deacons** are stationed to **circuits**, initially for a five-year period.

Superintendent Minister (presbyter)

The senior presbyter in a **Circuit**.

Presbyter

An ordained minister who has pastoral charge of one or more **Methodist churches**.

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APPENDIX I
INTERVIEW GUIDE QUESTIONS

Interview Guide Questions

Introductory

- How long have you been a part of / attending this FX?
- What was it that attracted you?
- How often do you attend?
- Is there usually a mix of people attending?
- Was today's experience typical?
- What do you think FX's are?

Main

- What are the aims of this FX?
- What do you believe is the best part of the FX?
- Do you believe that the aim of this FX and the way it attempts to achieve it could change?

- What relationship is there to the Methodist circuit?
- Do people who belong to other local Methodist churches visit?
- Have you been to any events or meetings held in the circuit?
- Would you call yourself a Methodist?
- Do you see this FX as part of the (universal) Church?
- What is different in this FX than any other church you have been to?

- Is prayer offered here?
- Is scripture read here?
- Does preaching happen here?
- Is Communion celebrated here? How often?
- Is Communion an important part of what happens here?
- Have there been any Baptisms in this FX?
- Who presides at Baptisms or Communion? Who do you think should preside?

- Who is in charge of this FX?
- Is there a team of people who lead the FX?
- Do you have/have you been offered a leadership role?
- Do local ministers visit or have input often? What do they do when they visit?
- Is it important for a minister to be present? Why?
- What do you feel is the role of the Ordained in this FX?

- Any context specific questions...

Lead out

- If I returned in 5 years time, what would this FX look like?
- Is there anything that you would like to add?

APPENDIX II

TRANSCRIPTS OF INTERVIEWS AT FRESH EXPRESSION A

Transcript of conversation between
Simon Edwards and 'James'
16th April 2013 at Fresh Expression A.

SE – I've got lots of questions, some of them you may be able to answer, and some you might not, it's not a problem if you can't, all I'm trying to do is explore what's going on and some of the reasons behind it. A good place to start is if you tell me a little bit how you came to be involved.

J – Through hearing something of... not alternative worship in this sense, simply a service... a comparatively conventional service but using different... different material, different music, different styles. There were things about it which were different, striking to me and effective to me... meaningful to me and it was a service broadcast from ... greenbelt ... in what must have been in august 2010... It was not totally far out, it was like ready for morning worship Sunday, and it was very striking and that led... and so in response to that I emailed [name] the minister and said 'hey have you heard this' and that really struck a chord with him 'cos not only had he heard it, well in fact I don't think he had heard it, but he's heard those sorts of things and it was right up his street. And the sort of thing he'd been involved in and had very much a heart and wanted to develop here and so that meant my being involved with [name] and to our bringing about what you've attended tonight.

SE – Ok and are you here pretty much every month?

J – Yes.

SE - Good, ok so in that case, was tonight's experience typical?

J – Yes it was, it was... we have... probably like a conventional church service, the bones are there what with; in the centre of the service itself has a core element of ...liturgy, sorry I don't know all the right names, but the ...initial recognising the presence of the trinity, of elements of the word and reflection and prayer and an act of ...and there are some words which have escaped me at the moment but a definite act of response and in addition we have the... any consistent style after the service which is important, which is at the heart of the conception which is one of the stillness and contemplation and to that end we set the room up in the way we saw tonight, and we do so... each week with minor variations... each month.

SE - What would you say, you touched on this little bit, is the aim of the service?

J - It's to... to meet with and respond to God.

SE - Ok are the people who attend... are they all members and adherents of this church?

J - No they are others in lots of different place, the majority are naturally... a few are members of, of other congregations and there are a few who come who are members of another congregation who are simply interested, and the service is... well.... I struggle with that words service, perhaps it's because it's too traditional. But Air is very much for them because it's there for all who have got questions really, which their interested in exploring, and yeah so there, yes and err we are particularly conscious of those who did not find the ... to their satisfaction in a regular service. Which most definitely includes the very many out there who are who find it such that they don't come to a regular service at all.

SE – Ok.

J - And actually further to that, we don't, we never have particularly advertised Air within this church, within our congregation... yes, it's certainly there for those who want it, those who are interested and you've spoken to some others here but were more interested, more concerned to reach those outside.

SE - I'm going to jump back a second... was there an evening service, a traditional evening service here before Air came along.

J – No there wasn't... I knew... an evening service which was occasional, I think it might have been monthly, it was some years ago, it was in the time of the previous minister... and... the idea, the idea was small, relatively informal, modern, open to modern forms of worship... though interpreted in a quiet way, reflective both who we were, who were gonna take part in it and who were gonna come to it and... that that wasn't particularly successful, it was a little bit hard work. The minister found it particularly hard work because, partly because it wasn't his thing, but actually that wasn't really it, he was relatively relaxed and at home with it I think, but his health was declining and it was quite a serious problem for him and he couldn't do everything and there were so few others who naturally didn't continue. Further back, I'm sure that there were some evening services, but I do not know about it.

SE - I was curious because I wanted to hear if Air came along and took over the space, do you know what I mean?

J - It there was nothing, it didn't displace anything at all. There was darkness and locked doors.

SE – So it's a completely new thing.

J - Yes completely.

SE–Ok. Would you call yourself a Methodist?

J – Yes, I would... yes, I would, I'd call myself a Christian first.

SE - Are you a member of the church here?

J – I am yes.

SE - How long have you been a member? Or how long have you been connected with this church?

J – Ah that's a more realistic answer... oh approximately... approximately 8, 9 years, yeah. Probably about 9 years, I can't exactly remember, although I had... through to a point about... 6,7 or more, 8,9 years earlier, I was here for another period, a substantial number of years... in the meantime, I've... been a member of a different congregation.

SE - So since in the past nine or so years then, do you have much dealing with the circuit?

J – No I don't, I've not had a lot of dealings with circuit, I've have had a moderate amount of dealings in, within this church, mainly a vestry steward. But no, I haven't had any circuit responsibility, I've attended a few things and other, and a few services, and other things going on in other churches in the circuit, but not a lot.

SE – Ok, so you've not, you've not been to circuit meetings, and that kind of thing?

J – No.

SE - Ok, thinking a bit about Air specifically, is communion celebrated in Air at all?

J - I'm just trying to check my memory, no... Am I mistaken, have I forgotten something in the past? No I don't think so, I don't think so, I don't think we have done that no.

SE - Ok, do you think it would be an appropriate thing to do in that context?

J – Yes, I think it would be appropriate

SE - These questions are general, so my next question would have been about baptism, but I presume that there's not been baptisms either?

J – No.

SE – Although I guess that if someone who comes just to Air asked for that then that wouldn't be a problem?

J - Oh certainly not... you're thinking of the Baptism taking place within Air, aren't you?

SE - Yeah, I think so.

J - Yes ... I don't, I don't see a problem, because, because... there's nothing at all to prevent a person making the most wholehearted commitment, and there's absolutely nothing to deny sincerities that there would be in the – to use the conventional word – congregation, as a whole responding with... a kind really in welcoming the person and committing themselves to... loving and holding that person as part of that congregation.

SE – Ok, if Air was separate, so if taken away from this church, would it continue to be church?

J – I mean, you mean taking it away from any established church?

SE - Yeah, I think so, if it was in a community hall for instance, if exactly what went on, went on in a community bit in a rented community building, would it still be church?

J – To my mind yes, because... it would still be people coming together to... erm worship, to explore, to build faith and life together in the love of Christ

SE - So if we could just talk a bit about leadership for a couple of minutes. Who would you say was in charge of Air?

J - It is [name]

SE - Ok and is there a team of people who... assist him?

J - Yes there is, and it's not defined, it doesn't need to be defined, err because its err, the more who are involved, err, the more we're reaching and opening up both questions and gifts and visions and creativity

SE - Is it [name] then who takes... who is the figure head, for want of a better word, each week, each month?

J - Yes, it is, I mean, it may not be that way... forever. We haven't said. But I, but (I'm trying to answer your question as fully as possible) I do not, and I could be persuaded otherwise, but at the moment I could say that it doesn't need to be [name]. It needs someone to do it, it needs someone to do it, erm... broadly it erm... in the style within the parameters that we have set ourselves, and with that with prayer and planning, but ultimately better if its, if it doesn't have to be [name]. He'd still be... he'd still be the leader in the sense, the ordained minister.

SE - So, is it important to have an ordained presence at some point, somehow within Air do you think?

J - No, it's important to have ordained erm oversight and direction, but that need not be controlling. But so long as that person is sufficiently aware of and happy with what's going on, then that would be sufficient. And there's absolutely... not there's anything wrong with that person, with that rule with the ordained minister leading it... it can envisage that with the right people, it could be, it could work very successfully, it could work more, it could work better at times erm with others leading it. we are lucky that in the person of [name] and the ideas he's got, and this has proven to be a sort of... very...inspiring outlet for him, well, inspiring in what we receive through the outlet he's getting for his ideas.

SE - Has there ever been a time when other circuit ministers or local preachers have been involved?

J - No, no... there are, oh I'm not quite right in that there's a local preacher in training, who comes to some of the Airs... I'd would never expect her tonight or last month for instance because she's looking after her husband... but, she's been along to it as opposed to leading it. It's being open to her, there's another one as well, and indeed others in other congregations and other ministers too... it's open to each one of them to come along, and open to them to take part in the same way as everyone else. Take part in the leadership.

SE - Ok. We're reaching the end of my questions. Erm this is perhaps a tricky question, because of its nature, but if I was to come back in 5 years' time, what do you think Air would look like?

J - Well I've often given that thought. I would not expect it to look like exactly as it does tonight... we all change, we all develop...and so will Air.

SE - I guess that different people bring different strengths and gifts don't they to things and so, what is to do with [name]'s strength now, might be that another minister might have different strengths, and they might be highlighted through it.

J - Yes, and the, and the particular questions that are in people minds may take on a different slant.

SE - And unless there's anything else you fancy adding or saying, I have no more questions for you.

J - The thing I'd add is that I find Air As a form of worship, as a form of reaching out, questioning and erm... receiving God...For me, traditional services can do that, and they can do that very effectively, but they by no means always do and I've become frustrated, somewhat frustrated, with the feeling of limitations because even when, for me the previous minister was very effective, very talented and uplifting, inspiring, and in others think in a big way. In his sermons, as you know, in more of a science in the way he learnt singing in, and some of his prayers, we used to have in a way that most don't, but while that was really good, that was really good, that was very affective for me, in my Christianity, none of that, I was aware that that was me, and that was a certain number of others, and that was a limited number and that was a decreasing number, and it was within these four walls, and it was so affective and yet it wasn't going any further. That was frustrating and that's not enough. There's... it wasn't, it wasn't going to go far enough without somehow developing the way we were and...our whole means of communication... not just ourselves as people to reach out there... but, but the way we were reaching God and in our worship. That was known, and inadequate clearly for many people out there. So, when you add in the fact, I don't find services led by all local preachers, all ministers, by any means as effective, by any means as worthwhile, so I am... I've got doubts as to quite where I'd have been with the church in the long term. I'm not at all sure that I would still continue somehow to be within the church as we know it. Well with this, with the sort of inspiration and opening up I get from Air, I am, and I see a positive future.

SE - Thank you very much for your time

Transcript of conversation between
Simon Edwards and 'Liz'
21st April 2013 at Fresh Expression A.

SE – Tell me a little bit about how you became involved in this church and then how that, how you became involved in Café Church as well

L – Ok, historically I'm an Anglican, confirmed in the Anglican Church. I came to live in a village just outside ..., in my early twenties, and in my late, and I drifted away from church. In my late twenties, I had two children and I just felt I wanted them christened. The vicar in the village I lived in at the time didn't particularly care very much for children, and my husband's family are long standing Methodists, so I went to the Methodist chapel in the village where I live, and the children were christened. And ... the christening service really made me think, you know, I promised to bring my children up in the Christian faith, and I thought I can't just jump through this hoop and never darken their doors again, so I started going regularly to the very small chapel in our village, the village where I live and got involved there with the children's work and the youth group... basically because there was no one else to do it.... And eventually... there was just myself and my two girls sat in Sunday school which wasn't going to work, so the minister here at the time said come over to ..., where we had a huge Sunday school, and I came in 1989 and have been doing the children's work here ever since. And I had... we had a huge Sunday school, and when they were all about 13, everyone sort of said to me that they weren't hanging around, but they did and they hung around until they were 18, but I couldn't actually get them into church, they were very happy to be there youth group up here, and go to MAYC weekends and have a jolly good time, but they've all, bless them, they're all now 30, they've all gone off, they're wonderful young people, they're doctors and lawyers and they're delightful. But we had it was really evident back then that there was no transition, there was no transition between youth club and Sunday school as we then called it and formal worship... and in some ways, there was a lot of us here running that youth group and youth club, and I'm the only one left. I believe they call me the remnant church. They've all moved on for the best of reasons, they've moved to a new house, they've you know, one of our numbers now became a Methodist minister, but I'm all that's left and erm we had a very very lean time in the early 2000's to 2008. We had a minister here who your path might well have crossed. His name is Before he was a Methodist minister, he was principal baritone at Covent Garden. Have you heard of him? Delightful man, wonderful singer, didn't need an organ, but he really struggled with any sort of youth work, or any sort of fresh expression of church and far be it from me to criticise anybody... because people can only be the people they are, but he was what this church wanted, it's not what they needed and we lost virtually every single young person who ever crossed our threshold. Which, and partly I blame myself, but Hugh was physically and emotionally and intellectually a colossus, and there was no way I could, there was no way I could change him erm and you know, I love the man, we invited him back, but he was of a kind and we didn't move anywhere, in fact we went backwards and [name] arrived, like and when we sort of sat down and what do we want of a new minister, you know, we want someone young, we want someone who will fill the church with young people, but while they're doing that we don't want to change anything. Does that ring bells? So yes, we've got this wonderful young minister, and I thank God for [name] every single day. But we had to do the children's work differently. There was no way me bringing the Sunday school up here on a Sunday morning was going to work because life has moved on. What worked for us in the late 1980's, the early 1990's, isn't going to work now. Not only has church changed, lives changed. As a young mum when I was 30, we didn't go back to work; we stayed at home and looked after our children. Now, I'm not saying that's right or wrong, that's just how it was, so we spent our time, there was a whole group of us who were early 30's, and we spent our time running that Sunday school. That isn't going to happen now, women are back at work, the women who were in the children's choir this morning, they all work full time. They actually come because they need that space, they can't come and run it, which is, and sitting down with [name], we wanted to try something different, and so we have that children's corner. We don't even attempt Sunday school. The children's corner is not for children, it's for young families, it's a space where families can come and we've started café church, which you could see today there were families. We still do get the odd family coming on a traditional worship Sunday, but families tend to gravitate to café, because they can bring the baby, they can sit at the back, the baby needs feeding, they can you know sort of, sleep on the sofa at the back and it really doesn't matter. And that's kind of how we've got to where we are today. Yes. That's... yes, we had a very lean time in the early 2003 to 2008 time, a very lean time where families were concerned, and I actually did some, racked my brains and got out some old data, and did some research and we lost 27 families. Not completely to faith, but from this church and yeh, so that's where we are at the moment.

SE - Ok would you say then that this morning was typical of a Café Church here?

L – Yes, yes... there are a few, there are a couple of families missing who we might see regularly...yeh, I would have said it was fairly typical. I mean my youngest daughter was married here... I mean, she's usually here with her family, but they were doing something else this... so slightly numbers slightly less than usual

SE – What would you say was the aim, particularly of Café Church?

L – I think there's more than one aim, and I think this is kind of where we cross boundaries, I think it's partly worship, it's partly evangelism, it's partly pastoral, erm, those families that come, it's a chance for me and [name] to say to them how are you, you know, are you ok. Not necessarily is there anything you could do, but families really

struggling, there's so much pressure for families, so it's a really good pastoral point. Its evangelism because we have people coming who have never crossed a church threshold before in their lives, erm... and its worship, but not as we know it Jim! Ha ha! I mean its worship because that's where those people are, they don't know all the Methodist hymns, they don't know all the Methodist harmonies, they don't know when to stand up and sit down and...and they don't know how to pass the peace, and there's nothing worse than having a new Christian whose made to feel that you don't belong because you don't understand. So, it's all those, it's all those things I think

SE - Ok, the people who attend, I guess there's a core of people who are regular weekly attenders, and they would tend to be slightly older perhaps. Are they quite local?

L - Yes, they tend..., I would say the core of our congregation are over sixty and live in [Name] There's a few like myself who come from the outlying villages. Back in the 80's, I think three outlying churches were closed... and then in 2004/5 we amalgamated two circuits, the St Neots circuit and the Huntingdon circuit and two churches in the St Neots circuit closed. So, we have another big church in Huntingdon, and one at ... so basically, we draw our congregation from ... and surrounding villages. But we do tend to be... sort of basic core of the congregation is now over 60. Before [name] came, and I, and I would look round the congregation and I was one of the youngest people, which is ridiculous!

SE - Ok, thinking again about the core congregation, how, what was there attitude to Café Church.

L – Horrified initially. Yeh horrified initially... because they all wanted... they all wanted a lovely young minister with a young family, and they wanted him to fill the church with young people! But they didn't want to change anything and [name] is very personable young man and has kind of won them over. And to be fair they, they have come, they haven't all walked, voted with their feet, and not come on the third Sunday of the month, to their eternal credit, they still roll up every third Sunday. We've been doing it now for three years, four years, and I think they are beginning to see that its, it's making progress. You know the fact that we have two new babies; it's physically evident that it's working. They don't like it but as I say, to their credit, they're supporting it.

SE - Ok what do you think is the biggest difference? This is looking at this morning...that in terms of a good all age worship and Café Church

L- Not a lot, but in the thirty years I've been in this circuit, I have never experienced good all age worship because even back in Hilton, get me back on my soap box, even back in Hilton, we would have a monthly all age worship and the people, even the people who actually ran the Sunday school would say, well when we come into all age worship we want a proper service. We want a proper service because we don't get a proper service every other week and what really shocked me and it could, it still shocks me (are you recording this?) what really shocked me then and what really shocked me now, even shocks me now, is the selfishness of people. They want the service they want, and the hymns they want, and if it isn't what they want, it's wrong. And I was really shocked at Hilton, at the un-Christian-ness of people's attitudes to church... and I continue to be shocked by it. I'm still doing it thirty years later, and I'm still fighting the same battles. I'm fighting that battle, that it's not proper church. The fact that our great mission is to spread the good news, almost doesn't seem to impinge on people's consciousness's. Erm the fact that... one of, one of the women who come to café, she has a, you know, a strong faith, and she has three children, and she confessed to me at a café service that she and her partner weren't married, and she wasn't sure that she should carry on coming to chapel, and you know, I sort of felt so sad that she should even think that she would be judged, you know and every single thing that Jesus teaches us is you accept people as they are, and you know, God's grace is there for them, you know, whether they, whether they know the Methodist hymns, or whether they're married or not, or whether, erm, yeah, it's kind of, I find it really hard sometimes, to, to see what happens in the church, and not just this church, to see what happens in the church, and relate it to teachings of Christ because it seems to be poles apart at times. So, what, so what was your first question sorry? Sorry I rambled...

It's good all age worship. Actually, it's what we should have been doing for thirty years. We've always had one slot on the plan in a month for all age worship and what absolutely incenses me is that people say to me "we've been doing café for 4 years, Café Church isn't moving on" and when I think about a Methodist hymn sandwich, it hasn't moved on for 200 years and in [name]'s sabbatical, during [name]'s sabbatical, and I have talked to him about this, there was definitely a move of "while he's away" and I kind of kept café going during his sabbatical, and it was really hard, and I had to really put my foot down and having been the fluffy bunny in this circuit, I had, I had to be something I'm not really, and say no, you know, you're not changing this, and this, it wasn't a question of, you know, we want to contribute to café, it was you're going to do café differently, and I said, I said, no, if you want... it was can we have a meeting, can we have a meeting about café service... no, [name]'s on sabbatical. But we don't think it's moving on, we think it should move on, so I put a note in the notices, and I said, anybody wants to make a constructive contribution to café, the planning meeting is going to be on that day, nobody turned up. Erm so I, not me personally, but the team did three café services without [name], but in the same format, but it was, I felt it was kind of a crucial point, that if we didn't stick to our guns, it would, it would be, it would be rolled back.

SE – Ok this ties to what you've just said a little bit... do you think it will change and evolve as the time goes on?

L – Yes, I think, yes, I think it will... I, I mean, I'm hopeful that other people will want to get involved, and it, I think it will change in that its, its put together by a team of people who have different ideas, who come from different back grounds, who have erm different needs to be met. And I also think that some of the families who have started coming regularly, will want a bit more because they are beginning to learn about faith, and they're beginning to learn about erm the bible and it's been quite interesting because some of the people who, who come and help have really very little knowledge of to start with Methodism, which isn't necessary, but of Christian teaching and the bible but they are learning as we go along, and [name] is very good at, he knows his stuff, I know some of his stuff, but he is very good at not making himself sound clever. Does that make sense? Because very early on in my Christian journey, I said something about having my child christened, and I was told, erm I think you mean baptised, and you know someone less secure in themselves, that could have shut me out of church forever. You know... but [name]'s very good at drawing people in to learn, rather than pushing people away because they don't know and I think that's what café does.

SE – For me it seemed that the way it was, with tables and coffee and various bits and pieces and newspapers, it was... it was far more relaxed than attempting to do all age worship in rows, and people actually seemed to be more engaged with the post-its and the shepherds and things, and I think that actually helped that they could look someone else in the eye while they were doing it

L – Yes and the other thing it does is you can come for a church for years on end, and you're sitting in your pew or chair, and you don't talk to anybody else, and you get so you always sit in that chair, and then people don't sit in that chair because they think oh that's so and so's chair and erm, it breaks down a lot of barriers and we started getting, we started getting more new people coming to our church, and all said well we think we ought to have a social evening so we can get to know the new people, and I said, this is so false, so actually café, we sort of said, well if you want to get to know the new people sit with them in café service and I keep saying to people, not many people do it, I've put it in the AGM again, at the end of the service, come and see what the children have done. Very few do but I really feel that's the way forward, rather than trying, well we'll all have tea, and something was suggested that you know, we all wear name badges, like a social evening. Noooo!

SE – Do you find then that still some people will claim their usual table in Café Church

L – It's not too bad. I think some people do tend to gravitate to people they know, erm, but it is definitely getting better. I think the initial, I think the initial shock was hard to, and I can understand that, people don't like change, I don't like change, erm.

SE - So initially I guess people would sit near to where their normal seat was because at least the view was the same

L - Yes, yes. And the one thing that erm, the one thing that's an issue, and I wouldn't even dream of commenting on it because I'm tone deaf is the music. We've got all those people who for them, they want to express their faith in their music. For me, whether the music's good bad or indifferent doesn't matter but that's their way of expressing their faith, but congregations can be very picky (oh dear I'm coming across as a very judgemental person), they can be very picky, that's not a proper hymn, that's too loud we don't want that... we have a little boy who is a drummer who's there occasionally which is just wonderful, and he's a good drummer, he's a good drummer. And we have a dear man who is with the band who has learning difficulties and that's wonderful, that's absolutely wonderful. Whether he's musical or not is irrelevant, but people do get a bit picky about the music. But, then I think, then I think it's partly because they are new songs, and partly because some of the new songs don't have very obvious tunes, people like obvious tunes and we can, it can become that the congregation are just listening to the band rather than joining in the singing, but how we resolve that I don't know, I'm not musical enough to pass comment, and I won't criticise.

SE – What would you say the rest of the circuit thinks about what goes on here?

L – Do you know what's happened in the circuit about [name]'s position? He only has one church, they hate it! Sorry, they really don't like it and it is hard because at the moment I'm doing ministerial development for one of the other ministers in this circuit so I can see both sides of it and [name]'s reappointment it was really hard because I'm not a circuit steward but I was part of the team. We have a duty of care to all our ministers, and where is this here was a wonderful opportunity for [name] and I think it was the right decision and it's a real opportunity to witness and evangelise and to do mission in a community without putting pressures on all the other ministers in the circuit and... it's really hard on those other ministers, it's really hard for someone with five churches to meet everybody's needs and whereas those, the ministers can see the need for it and have agreed to it, and the circuit stewards have agreed to it, you know, the people in the pews kind of think well why isn't it our church that's got one minister, and actually, and this is, this is where I think Methodism has got to change and change radically, is that we are keeping village churches open with four members who can't produce a safeguarding officer amongst them, who can't meet their circuit assessment. You need people parachuted in from other churches to be on their church councils and we should be closing them and using our resources for God's work. It's so difficult, it's so hard, and I'm sure those people whose churches had closed would be devastated, but none of those villages, those villages all have other churches and as Christians we should be standing together celebrating what we share and showing

a united front to the rest of the world and that what we believe in is Christ, and Christ's teaching, and Christ's doctrine and at the moment were not, as Christians we are failing miserably. Is this ok? This is far more than Café Church ...

SE - The point of what I'm looking at is the ecclesiology of it, what it says about church and what we think about church and how we do and be church, so all sorts of bits come into that rather than just what goes on, and a little bit later on there are some bits to do with leadership which will come in

L – And if you, I mean I shouldn't do it and I, I, it's really foolish, but if you go on the internet and look at discussions, we get slated not Methodists, but Christians, we're all hypocrites and they have a point. You know, if we can't agree amongst ourselves, and if we can't share our resources, if we can't share our churches and if we can't, and I don't like, and in a way, I don't like the word evangelism because it sounds too fundamental, but if we can't reach out in a united fashion, why would anyone want to join us, why would anyone want to cross our threshold? And you know, and sometimes I ask myself the same question!

SE – Ok, do you get from, particularly from the circuit, other people coming to visit what goes on here, or are they still quite bitter about it?

L – Yes, we do. People who can actually who actually see what we are trying to do...will come and visit and take it elsewhere. Other people kind of... free church here in you know, oh that's a good idea they thought, so they had a service and one of our members went and it was only different in that they sat round tables and drank coffee, there was no engaging, there was no... [name]'s very good at doing things physically...you know sort of people learn differently and this physical thing, the pictures of the shepherds, and doing something so yes some people have come and really taken it on board, some people who've come have just thought oh well we'll just have a cup of coffee in the middle of the service. The bigger churches I think that because they've got a bigger congregation than some of the other people they've kind of taken it on board more than the village churches. The village churches still want a local preacher to come out, sing Wesley hymns and do a sermon that they don't necessarily listen to...

SE – Which is wrong isn't it because actually you find café church can work so much more effectively than little village churches

L – Yes. I mean it's almost; our Café Church is almost a messy church.... The other thing is not so much, not so much in the circuit, but erm it's all on our website and we get a lot of enquires from the rest of the country from all sorts of people and we've got a package that they can download and use our ideas. And I've talked to various, I've emailed and talked to various Anglican clergy about it. So where is... I think its Huntingdon circuit that's quite sort of inward looking, fresh expressions and not just [name], fresh expressions is already reaching out...the lady I know from Tasmania came a year last September and she came and spent a year in Cambridge and went to a fresh expressions conference and has taken that back to Tasmania, so I think, you know I think whereas maybe the people in pews in Huntingdon circuit are a bit wary of it all, globally, you know I think people are really taking an interest

SE - So cafes been going on for around 4 years. Do you often have or ever have communion as part of Café Church?

L – That's a very good question, we haven't ever done it but what I talked to an Anglican clergy about was actually that issue, could we have, erm and, erm she was going to write a thesis on it and from my perspective, there's absolutely no reason why not...the last supper, people gathered round a table, they shared, you know, even if it was like an agape meal, I don't see any reason why communion shouldn't be part of the café service... in fact, I personally think it would be really moving. Whether it would be a step too far for the clergy, I don't know. That's a purely personal opinion. When I think back to the very first, looking back to the last supper, it was people gathered round a table.

SE – How about baptism.

L – Oh we've done that. We've done baptisms and we've done thanksgivings and that's worked really well. That's worked really well because baptisms can be difficult. They can be difficult in that particularly for... in that a whole family arrive who haven't got a clue about church and they bring all these children and they will come into the children's corner and I'm tearing my hair out and there's a load of noise and the people in the pews still expect it to be a nice quiet Methodist service but it isn't and the last thing I want is for any of the people who've come in to feel uncomfortable, so it can be really comfortable to have a baptism in café. It's crowded but it works, and a thanksgiving is absolutely lovely. I don't know about a wedding; I suppose that's possible.

SE – Has it always been [name] who's presided at baptisms

L – In café, yes yes. It hasn't always been [name] who has presided in café because on his sabbatical... [name] was a star; I don't know what we would have done without [name]...I mean he and I managed. Having said that, we were absolutely fine. You're going to talk to a lady called [name] whose a local preacher and initially felt a bit

aggrieved because I was sort of told well you've got to have a local preacher involved because you know we don't want any heresy and I thought surely, surely the circuit knows me well enough to know I know what's right and what's wrong and then my husband said to me, and my husband who doesn't share my faith, said to me, well that's a good thing because it means you've got, you know you've got that cover, and [name] was fantastic, she did the prayers of intercession and she did the prayer bit... and people were quite happy with that, they accepted that...well, apart from one local preacher who didn't think we really should have done it because we hadn't done all the exams!!!

SE - You often get a LA on the plan, don't you?

L – Yes, we do. But what, what I really find difficult is we should be building each other up in crust, not knocking each other down. And you know criticism is excellent as long as its constructive and measured you know sort of unkind comments don't help.

SE – We're going to just think about leadership for a little while...who would you say was in charge of café?

L – [Name]

SE – And has he always been in charge since the very beginning?

L – Yes, yes.

SE – And there's a team of people who help?

L – Yes

SE - And when [name] is here, is he the one who will generally lead from the front, or do other people come in and do bits and pieces?

L – Yes yes other people come in and do bits and pieces and what's been really... because [...] does, but as I say he's used to that, you know, he knows what he's doing. But other people have you know, done bits. The man who was taking the photographs, his done, he's a really good presenter, and he's not a local preacher, and he's very good at coming to our church since [name] arrived and it's like a breath of fresh air and he's very good at it... and so that's been really good, perhaps it's the start of something, perhaps it won't go anywhere else but its involved somebody else in our church life

SE - Do you get other circuit ministers involved in café or not?

L – No, no not at [Name] I know other circuit ministers do do café, but I don't know how they do them.

SE - Ok do you think, and I guess this is a personal opinion, that it is important that [name] is here for Café?

L – Well we managed for three months without him, but having said that I found that really tough, I really did. And it's part of one of the problems of Methodism at the moment. And this is really personal I've come up with something for the children's corner, every Sunday now for five years. After 25 years of doing it with other help. I'm safeguarding officer, I'm a steward, I'm a pastoral visitor, I do ministerial development, I'm manse visitor, I'm rep to circuit meeting... [name]'s on sabbatical and I've got to make sure Church works for three months including Christmas and we do this huge Christmas Eve thing for the whole of the town... it was too much and it still is too much and I'm still doing it and sometimes I ask myself why. So, part of me says yes you know without [name] it was really hard because I've got responsibility without authority. Everybody expected everything to happen, but if, but nobody, I wasn't in any, anyway, I had no authority to say this is what we're doing because you're not even a local preacher... and that was really hard and I don't think people, I don't think people really meant to be difficult, but they just had no comprehension of how many balls I was trying to keep in the air. And it didn't come as any surprise because over many years for varying reasons, the minister here and myself have been quite close and I've been in the manse when things have been really tough and I know how hard it is so it didn't surprise me that yeah. You need, you need that minister or deacon, or you know to defer to. When you're trying to do something by committee and the rest of the committee don't communicate with you, you can't make a decision and so yes, and that's really hard for the minister I know, you can't... everything comes to that point.

SE – [name]'s been reappointed. He will eventually go but what do you think will happen at that point? Will the circuit appoint someone just for here?

L – No, it's not... it could all fall apart before [name] goes because [name] who was chair of the district is going to retire before [name] goes. He is going to have to be replaced by a superintendent. That superintendent might have very different ideas about what he wants for his circuit. We've got one minister who is coming up for reappointment in 2004, 2005 who has really really struggled to have to deal with five churches. I could be wrong, but I don't think she will want to stay, I think she will want to move on somewhere. And although at the moment [name] has been

reappointed just for ..., part of his reappointment letter said but we will have to reassess it during this time, but as disappointed as I was and he was, the circuit has a responsibility to those other ministers. If we drive them into the ground and a nervous breakdown, what is the, you know. So, you know, I'm not sure what will happen when [name] goes. I mean, I would hope, I would hope we would've shut some of the chapels by then, reduce the workload, put the finances into something good.

SE – And I guess that if you were to have someone who was very different to [name] appointed, that would have an impact to what goes on here as well?

L – Yes, yes. The really positive thing is that whoever comes will be of [name]'s generation, who won't be of the generations of the previous Methodist ministers, who wonderful as they were, were of a certain era. You know we see students coming through, you're all young, it's good

SE – They're not all young! So, if I came back in about five years, what do you think café particularly might look like?

L – That's a very good question... if you'd have come five years ago, if you'd have come before [name], we have transformed, we have totally transformed. Five years' time.... I would really hope, I was just trying to think how old, how old people would be. I would really hope that those of us who are a kind of fifty plus would have seen you know the good that [name]'s done, and we would want to appoint someone with a similar outlook. Every minister is different, and you can't expect ministers to be something they're not. I would have hoped, I would have hoped that Methodism would have moved on in that time, I think that Methodism has really got to move on. It does worry me that, I mean that having sat in our circuit meetings and I have been asked to be a circuit steward, but I know that at the moment the circuit will not hear what I've got to say. I mean financially, you know, were supporting all these little churches so we're struggling financially because our assessments gone up and we've got lots of elderly ladies in their seventies who think they're doing us a marvellous service by doing a jumble sale and raising £100. All that's going to mean is that our assessment is going to go up even more, and what this church ought to be doing is if any church, if the members of that church aren't prepared to fund that church out of their own pocket, that church isn't viable. If you look at churches in America, Mosques, the Jehovah's witnesses, they fund what they need because they're passionate about it, that's what they want to spend their money on, and if we can't do that there's something wrong, and I, you know, I think that maybe the passion has gone out of Methodism and Christianity. I've got no answers, no answers for that, but I went to a church in America, we do it here now, we don't have a collection, you put money in as you go in and this church in America, it was, it was, it wasn't particularly wealthy, it didn't meet in its own building, it met in a sort of warehouse type place but talking to them the minister said you know, was saying that I don't have to, I don't have to even talk about money, the congregation know about tithing and the box is as the back, you think that's amazing, that's really refreshing, because if [name] ever encourages us here to do anything about giving, we did a cream tea, we just gave people creamed teas outside and had some music and the number of people who sort of said you know, what are you raising money for? We're not raising money for anything. But the church always wants, you know, we're always going to other people for, we're always trying to raise money to support ourselves, we ought to be doing it ourselves. At the little chapel in Hilton, with a handful of members, a very elderly member died with no family. He left his entire estate to the church, so they did up the entire building, they put in the carpets and they took out the pews and it was all very lovely. They still only a few. Bless him he thought he was doing the right thing, but actually it, it would have been better, it would have been better if that church closed, they have a loose arrangement with the Anglican Church. It would be far better if that church closed and that money could be spent on the Anglican Church, or on work in the village. But yeah, tough one.

SE – That's really the end of my questions...

L – I don't have an awful lot of self-confidence I suppose, because that's how I feel about church, about Methodism and about Christianity, but I accept I could well be completely wrong. I don't know, I know... one thing I kind of really struggle with at the moment, is that [name]'s very forward thinking and there's a core of people here who are forward thinking, and so are most of the clergy, it's actually the local preachers who I really struggle with. On a LP Sunday, and actually, a lady from Westminster wasn't any better, they, the children are involved in the service in some way, the operation Christmas child service, you know, the children brought all the boxes up to the front in the service, and the preacher didn't acknowledge them, didn't thank them. You haven't got to have a children's address, but you could acknowledge they're there and that they are part of the congregation. And yet they don't. and in some ways I feel that what's holding Methodism back is other local preachers, I mean some of the dear souls that they are they have been preaching for fifty years and creating safer space training, the people I had the most trouble with was the local preachers. You know, they had to go or they won't going to be able to preach any more but they didn't believe me you know, because I said it's a requirement that you attend... well I'm not going... that's what I mean about my authority, you're trying to put something in place that's really important, with no authority.

SE – Well, thanks for your time.

Transcript of conversation between
Simon Edwards and 'Steven'
12th May 2013 at Fresh Expression A.

SE – The best place to start is if you tell me a little bit about how you came to be involved in Air and Café Church

S – I've always been interested in things which are on the fringe of church drawing people in. Up till very recently was a member of contemplative fire which is run by Philip Roderick and is very much on the fringe so I'm familiar with what the attempts are and the uncertainties about and quite how you position yourself and how far away you are from the centre of gravity in the church generally. So, it was a very natural place to be and obviously [name] is extremely good at it and so it is a pleasure to take part in these things, both Café Church and Air. I'm very happy to do musical things and everything else that he wants or what I have time for. Both.

SE – Are you here every time?

S – I'm here as often as I can be, not quite every time. I try to be. It's certainly a priority.

SE – In terms of how you became involved, was it that you were asked to come and do it, or did you volunteer to?

S – A bit of both I think

SE – Ok, one of the questions I ask is, is today's experience typical which I can't quite ask yet, but how would you describe a typical Air to start with?

S – Deliberately out of the normal 'church service' format...something which is very what's the word, creative and for which the structure and the normal way of doing things is really irrelevant and therefore they don't get done that way.

SE – Sure. Ok.

S – Is there any more you, anything else you want me to say or? My impression is that it's something that touches people in quite a place that is not anywhere near reached in the normal form.

SE – Would you say that Air and café church are fresh expressions of church?

S – Yes, with the café, how fresh that still is I don't know. It certainly is different and it's something that attracts people so... well it does here anyway.

SE – What would you say the aim is? For both I guess.

S – I think one of the aims if I can use that expression is to be relevant, especially in view of the missing generation we've been through in church life and so there's been no family teaching or any sort of indication as to what might be a good idea in terms of church, and so it's something which goes in for that problem rather than you know attracts people in that way, rather than the old formal unchanged way which was relevant you know a generation or two back but no longer works as well as it did.

SE – What do you think is the best part of Air, and then Café Church?

S – Air, probably the descent into a place we can be quiet with God and there isn't anything in the way, there's no notices coming up and there isn't the announcement of a hymn number or anything like that. You can... and that certainly appeals to people, it is a major thing, and it draws people... and then Café, at Café I would say it's the familiarity of being round tables and having coffee when you want to rather than when you're told you can...and its going back to the early church way of doing things and people won't realise this when they come in but they realise there's something they can connect with.

SE – Ok I think the question is kind of looking at both together, Air and café. What is the relationship with the Methodist circuit and what goes on here?

S – Well [name] and his ministry here is seen as something special which needs to be supported and room needs to be made for it in as much room is available... there is obviously I won't say a conflict, but there is a lot of churches, pastoral in nature, and their certain way of looking at things which are probably not congruent with fresh expressions. I'm sure [name]'s doing so he's well aware that you know there's a circuit review that there's conflicts to be resolved.

SE – How do people in the circuit look upon what goes on here?

S – Well there's probably two lots of people. One is, and it's not particularly age related although it does tend to polarise that way to some extent, but the older people who've been here for fifty years and done the same thing for fifty years are a bit "what is all this?" We haven't been told about this, and, you know this is very strange, and can't be go back to as we were. The rest of the people, including people who are not that young, including me if you like... it's a question of where they're at, and what they see and what God's spirit is doing amongst us and what the opportunity is and I have to say there's an element of that in the elderly people if they ask themselves as well, in as much as they don't at the end of the day. They might complain but they don't actually stand in the way of it. They won't understand it but that's not the problem. God just wants a way to be made and that's been done.

SE – Do you get people from the other Methodist churches in the circuit visiting what goes on?

S – Yes.

SE – Is that quite often? Regular?

S – It's reasonably regular yes because people know about it, it's well advertised on the internet and things like that and so it's reaching an audience that hasn't been reached before and people are curious and they'll come from quite a way away sometimes, or locally. Within the circuit I think people have found out how to do it for their own churches. They can't do it the same way because they haven't got a [name], but they are growing and there's one or two churches in the circuit who have regular café services for example, I don't know about Air, but certainly Café.

SE – OK. Would you call yourself a Methodist?

S – No, well I have been for the last five odd years since we moved here, I call myself a Christian, I go where God leads me and God led me here and he was very direct about it, I know where I want to be even though it's uncomfortable sometimes.

SE – So do you ever get off to circuit events or circuit Meetings or that kind of thing?

S – As little as possible to be honest! There are some things you have to do like I lead the band, and I have a ten year old drummer and therefore I had to go to Safeguarding meetings so ok, if it's needed I will go to it, but, and I know the people in the circuit cos they know me and they're interested and talk to me and I will do that informally as much as possible.

SE – Ok. What would you say is the main difference in what goes on in Air or café church and what goes on in a normal church?

S – There isn't somebody at the front who is the person in charge. I mean [name] is obviously in charge but he doesn't present himself that way, the room isn't set up that way so in café for example, we have a stage area where the minister will normally be, he can't be there because the band take the whole place up. He sort of sits down on one of the cushions on the floor sort of vaguely somewhere around near the front and wanders around and that's really good.

SE – Ok. We move on a little bit. I'm thinking first about Café Church, and then about Air. Has Communion been celebrated in either of them?

S – Not that I know of, but I have to say in my contemplative fire days, Communion was very frequently used, so there's no reason why it shouldn't be.

SE - That was my next question. What about then, Baptism

S – Yeah again, not done as yet, oh wait a minute, we may well have had one in the café service, you'll have to talk to [name] about that one but certainly it's something that would fall naturally into that sort of service.

SE – In either of them you think?

S – In either of them, but particularly café in as much as people come to that who are perhaps younger and might have children therefore it's a natural place for them to do it.

SE – Sure, and who do you think would be the best person to preside should Baptism or Communion happen?

S – In general here I would say [name].

SE – If other circuit staff were flown in to administer Communion and what have you, would that be appropriate do you think?

S – Yeah, I think it would be, as long as they're sympathetic to the scene they find themselves in.

SE – Who would you say was in charge. You've already said a little bit. Is there a team of people?

S – There is a team of people in both cases, and [name] encourages them to actually take leadership. The fact is though, that [name] is in charge, he's the one who sort of lets things happen although he's very happy for it to be a team thing,

SE – Do you think if [name] was given more, following the review, was given other churches to look after as well, how would the teams cope with that?

S – In terms of café, not too badly because he had a sabbatical last year and although we were all very very relieved when [name] came back, the fact is the thing works well we, you know, [name] had told us how to go about it, but, but the people were incredible people in place to actually do it. Air I think is in an earlier stage of its carnation, and therefore there are a few people but its, it needs to get a bit further before we can be confident to carry it on.

SE – Do you get input from local ministers, both Methodist ministers and not Methodist?

S – I'm not sure because I don't know all the input that comes in, Methodist ministers in the circuit, certainly yes. The other I'm, I wouldn't like to say no, but I don't know what goes on.

SE – Do you think it's important both for Café Church and for Air that there is a minister present, and ordained person present?

S – No, to be honest. Its, for us, it's really good that [name] does it because he's so good at it, but it's not absolutely necessary.

SE – What do you feel is the role for the ordained here... should [name] go, or be stationed Fresh Expression B, and another presbyter is stationed here. Would their role within both Café Church and Air be the same as what [name] is doing?

S – No I shouldn't think so. [name]'s a one off and it'd be up to them as to how, what they saw fit, they wanted to do. But I think [name] would try and develop it so that it ran with the people who are there and he would make very clear to who was coming next that he had done that on purpose... giving him the options, or her...

SE – Sure. If I came back in five years' time, what do you think that both Air and Café Church would look like?

S – Good question. I think Café Church would be much as it is, it's working extremely well, although it would develop in some way, I think the general shape of it would stay the same. Air, I would like to think would develop a bit further and you know, particularly the team that's behind it would have grown.

SE – It's a tricky question isn't it, particularly with things that are still in their infancy, you're not quite sure what they're going to look like next month anyway, I guess.

S – Yeah.

SE – Well, thanks for your time.

Transcript of conversation between
Simon Edwards and 'Philip'
22nd May 2013 at Fresh Expression A.

SE – The usual question I would start with is how you came to be involved in it, but I kind of have an idea of how you came to be involved, so perhaps a general overview of how you came to be the minister of just one church and how all the bits and pieces arose.

P – Ok, So, I was, I came here after my first five years in ministry, to the [...] circuit. When we arrived here, I had three churches, so I had [...] and [Name] a large rural congregation, a large church, but decreasing rural congregation. [...] a very small joint congregation with the Anglican church and then [...].. and for various reason perhaps changes in worship, and I think I'm quite cynical about church growth, I think it has a lot to do with being young and having kids and so [...] started to grow on a Sunday morning, and so we had a lot of people arriving just on the fringe of church. People saying, I feel I want to start thinking about faith since I've had kids. Is it alright to sit here? And then the various small tweaks that we were making was seeing folk arriving but there was the real difficulty of Sunday by Sunday things just not working for them being so, perhaps connecting with the things that I was offering but not with what was happening week by week, and I just realised that I needed to start, I needed to have more time and energy to be involved with the people that were arriving here as well as the huge pastoral need in Fresh Expression A, it's an aging congregation. Venture FX then reared its head, and we thought for a little while that this might be venture FX. I wondered about applying for venture FX and being sent Fresh Expression B, by way of [...] up the road. I was perhaps playing with that for a while. But it felt wrong to move from where I was stationed because of what was happening, and it would be a betrayal of what God was doing here. So I spoke to the circuit about it, and said thinking about venture FX, they freaked out, said can't do this, because it was just so, venture FX kind of just came on the church and nobody really knew about it, and I think they felt freaked out, I was quite involved in it because I was involved in some of the paperwork for it, so was up with it, and then it wasn't an easy time, it was a horrible time so words of betrayal, this isn't what Methodists do, that kind of thing came up but a very kind of wise superintendent who understood what was going on, said look we've got to give it time, we've got to give it, this is a wonderful opportunity, let's see what can happen in [Name] and so I then got [Name] on its own to be half time traditional, and half time trying to do the new thing so that's where we are. That's a very long-winded way, sorry!

SE – That's helpful. What's the aim of Fresh Expression A, thinking of maybe is it a mission priority of the circuit?

P – So I think there's words that are banded around. Such as centre of excellence, that somehow by doing something well in the circuit and focusing resources absolutely will have a wider impact because everybody wants fresh expressions, or church growth, or however we want to coin it, we all want to be growing as our congregations, but we can't do that with the resources we have, therefore to have a place that has a focused amount of energy and time, to shape and build and do things well, will hopefully have an impact on the wider circuit. I don't think it's happening as quickly as people wanted, but there are examples of so when the plan is strained, some of the smaller churches are saying well we want to know what Café's about and therefore not having their service and coming and seeing what Café is and that's having that sort of knock on effect. That circuit meeting's sharing about what's happening, what good practice is, it's beginning to influence what's happening. Whether this will be for a long-term thing, I don't know that debate is happening at the minute... sorry what was the question?

SE – Aims.

P – Aims, aims, ok, so. The aim here is to say what can a mixed economy look like. We have great resources in the building. There's no point in us planting in the local pub or sports centre. Actually, our building is really good. It's got a horrible colour scheme, but it's a good resource for, to be used for Gods mission and the realisation that it can't just happen, these two congregations that are very traditional, and one that's new to faith, new to church, don't connect with established patterns of worship, that they can slowly begin to merge and become one together. So I guess the vision is for a church that has many access points in worship, and I guess its several congregations meeting under the banner of Fresh Expression A, not several churches meeting in Fresh Expression A and so there's beginning to be more healthy overlap between Café Church, traditional church, Air and it's kind of this network that, basically I think it's not a network church, I hate, I don't want labels because everything has connotations but it's a church where people are connected in different ways and traditional folk may not see Air or Café folk, but they are still under the banner of this church.

SE – OK, so they kind of have a holistic thing perhaps?

P – Yeah definitely and nobody's excluded from anything, everybody's welcome to be involved, but it's more working on the understanding that we may not see so and so on a Sunday morning, but they are authentically involved in, I don't know, Air may be small but actually [name] who comes along to Air can't connect on a Sunday morning at all but he loves the 24/7 prayer room and Air and it's kind of that integrity in saying you may not see them but this church is ministering to them and it's this trying to get the understanding that mission is more than bums on seats, more than, church is more than bums on seats on a Sunday morning. The big problem we have is about saying, so church council, the makeup of church council is a very hard one because folk that want to... people who traditionally rule are those who understand Methodism, not necessarily faith, well they understand faith, but those who are involved in Air or Café are very new to faith, have strong ideas on church, but as yet haven't

made a commitment to membership, let alone to church council, so for me, that's why five years doesn't seem long enough, because it's about establishing them into the life of the church, but more to take on leadership responsibility.

SE – How do you get around the October counts and all that?

P – October counts...didn't do it this year because I was on sabbatical. I have an extensive, we have a lot of adherence so I kind of go with Peter Brierly's take on church membership and I think increasingly the Methodist church is that regular church attendance is once a month and so we have members that are way more committed, we have adherents who are way more committed to church, be it traditional church, or be it Café than we do members that are just on the list. So October counts feels a farce at times, but it's a good discipline, I see it as more of a discipline for me to make sure I know who's in my congregation... and I'm not sure what membership means if I'm honest, it's kind of radically, it's radically changing and I'm kind of a bit more, I'm less keen on convincing people of Methodist doctrine than getting them to sign up to this community of faith to begin with, but I think for me the level of commitment seems to be financial so people are less willing to... so we've got quite a few damaged people who, who have been alienated from church for one reason or another but feel safe here, and their level of commitment is that they tithe and so it's not like I know what they give, but they've told me they tithe and that's their commitment to us at the minute, they can't be, they don't want the Methodist label and that's not because they don't like Methodism, but because they're damaged by church, so that's a quandary, because actually the October stats are about members made and increase/decrease and we kind of roughly... so last year, 7 members died and 7 new members were made, so we kind of evened out on that, but adherence is just growing, we grow by about, the last three years, we've grown in terms of adherence by between 30 and 40 a year. People coming once a month or once every couple of months to one thing or another.

SE – What would you say is the number in general of adherents is there?

P – Adherents? So without my computer, so around about 105 is adherence, so folk that we have a meaningful relationship with, and I think more than, so we used to think we had massive adherence because of afternoon fellowship and open circle, and open door, and some of those things are really valid, but 165 adherence are folk that are kind of begun to be involved and have made steps to be more involved, by coming to worship or coming to... beginning to turn to the church for advice and questions about faith so... what's begun to happen for me is that the rites of passage have become more and more important and we are starting to have a church where people who get married here want to come to and people who have a funeral here feel they can become involved in the life of the church, so that's one of our areas of growth so when there used to be a statistic on how many funerals have you done, they're now more than that, they're folk that really look to us in those journeys, be it grief or be it the joy of a child being born, it feels like they can be a part of us.

SE - At the beginning of you being appointed to one church, to do things differently, how did the membership or congregation of the church take to that initially?

P – There were a few who were really excited by it and were really behind it and I think something of that was wow we've got one minister. Then it took a... so I think there was a level of relief because it showed the leadership team that I may be applying for venture FX and there was a relief that [name] has stayed and we've brokered a deal, and I don't think that... so the church was growing and was happy, and I don't, and I think there was a good feel about the church, and I think there was, I think it was more the kind of... people are desperate to keep their minister because they're so frightened of stationing and so I think there was that within it, there was a huge relief and then I think there was the trying to work out what it meant, so people thought that I would do more pastoral visiting, it would become more of a pastorate and the people got frustrated that they weren't seeing me more often, yet I only had one church now, why was that? And then having to trying to educate, and people still say they don't know what I do, and that's a level of, for them, church is a very specific thing and a minister does a very specific thing and in the circuit, there is what is [name] doing, and I think a lot of what I've done has been about the relational side and investing in people. So, after I've met with you, I'm going out for somebody, going out for? Going out with somebody who wants to have a coffee to talk about their issues and problems that face them, but there's this, there's the wanting to sell the project to them and what we're doing, but actually I can't go and say well so and so is struggling, and I met this young dad who's struggling with kind of life, marriage, work balance, because that's a betrayal, and I'm increasingly aware that like the AGM was on the website and I'm there sharing stories of people's lives I'm touching but in the kind of podcast savvy world actually people are going what the hell's [name] talking about, he's sharing that he's met... and actually it's this fine balance of people knowing I'm a minister, and where is this agenda I'm pursuing with them and actually they see friendship, they see community, they see gathering, but then for me to talk about church growth alongside that, these folk I'm meeting could think get lost, but people, sorry back to your question... people, people people love, people love the idea that we are beginning to grow as a church. They didn't love the idea that we would kick into Café once a month, they're happy with it once a quarter. Why can't, why aren't these people being more of... they thought overnight our church council would be full of new faces, there would be... we had a few resignations because people thought, oh ok, I don't agree with this. We had people saying when can I resign and somebody new take over. But, yeh, so, there was a sense, there was a certain negativity because people also who are very lifelong Methodists, believe passionately in circuit what's happening here isn't a very circuit thing in that they say your section is just one church. Why are you doing that? And trying to explain, well hopefully this will have circuit impact and it was, so why aren't you preaching across the whole plan? Those kinds of questions.

SE – That's the danger, it looks a bit congregational

P – Yeh definitely and I think what we do here is, yeh it is about one congregation, but hoping that there will be some impact on the wider circuit, but I, but I don't,... so even though Air, in the both times you've been here, have been really low numbers, each morning I've been at a congregation where there are less and preaching. So in terms of resources, actually, you know there's not a big difference. It may be that we meet in here, but in a world of networks, actually what does a network section look like? It is kind of, so I see the, I see the flaws in it, but I think the questions of justification of what we're doing, and trying to prove what we are doing also need to be asked of Great Barford where there were five people where I went to and it cost me, well it cost the District £60 in fuel for me to go there, so it is kind of in terms of resources we need to kind of think, we need to apply the same critique and questioning to both, and both may stand, or one may go, but all the same these questions need to be asked.

SE – So, you touched on it a little bit, what was the circuit view around that? From other churches that suddenly found that they've got to share a minister between three churches, [Name] get their very own.

P – So I was quite interested... so my churches who I moved away from, so that were given to somebody else, so [Name] and On the fateful Sunday where it was announced and it went public, I was planned at ... in the morning and asked them not to share it until I'd told ... in the evening. There was sadness that they were losing a young minister, and that they were coming under another minister, but I was really surprised how a lot of folk felt that there was an inevitability about it, that perhaps my gifting's as a pioneer would be used Fresh Expression B and would be used in a more focused way and there were questions about... there were responses of oh I wish it was us who were getting you on your own, but I can see that families are growing and coming to ..., and so I was really surprised by the response so several people in Ramsey said, it's really good to see that there's some vision back in the circuit and there was a hopefulness that in Ramsey perhaps there would be more visionary thinking for them as well. So, there was that sense of this is radical, this is hard for us because we're losing a minister, but actually that kind of a visionary stepping out of the ordinary, trying to grapple with what church needs to be, people responded to. From that Ramsey now have a lay worker who is about pioneering, half time lay worker, and Berkley Street have a part time youth worker, kind of involved in fresh expressions and things, but there was a negativity and I think I still live with that negativity. I think I still feel very guilty about what's happening here, and I see my colleagues under pressure, and I do struggle with that. But it's this balance between kind of prophetic leadership and maintenance leadership and I'm not kind of saying [name] knows the way, this is the only way, but it's that really hard balance between democratic, everybody has a say, but actually we end up with the same of the same and saying let's try this and it will be painful and it will be hard, and yeah... there's a particularly hard feeling in the section, somebody still with personality clashes, so I was... one of our circuit leadership team is a 34 year old and I'm 34. I was talking about the amount of time that needs to be put in for to good websites, and she would counter and say I don't use websites, not all young people are like you [name]. Talk about Facebook and Twitter, and she's like no that's nonsense. Talk about different patterns of worship and she says I'm really happy with what's going on. So, there was that clash and there's still that tension. The history of the circuit is that the section used to be on its single station, so that was four churches. As a result of the changes, that's become five, a five-church section. So, there's like, hang on a minute, in joining we've ended up our minister divided even more than they were. And there's a lot about information sharing, and about... and I think we look back now because it happened so quickly and rapidly, there was perhaps not of communication about it. There wasn't enough information and support group wasn't kind of set up perhaps soon enough for the work and people who kind of managed some of the expectation for me, because that all kind of ended up on my shoulders, and that was, that was partly my fault, partly the fault of the superintendent, but kind of just wanting to respond to the need that was in [Name] actually its borne greater fruit, but perhaps there's some lessons to be learnt about implementation and that kind of stuff.

SE – So now there's a re-evaluation about it. What do you reckon will happen?

P – It's really up for grabs... so we had our first leadership team meeting to talk about it, circuit leadership team, and I don't know what they were thinking. They've asked every church to feedback what they are doing in terms of mission and how they can see that grow, and my theory about it is that it just, it becomes an audit of activities and people begin to find a language of mission to explain what's happened for years and not grown and yeh I don't know, I really don't know. I think I will probably end up with... so there's been talk of me becoming superintendent and having one church, which I kind of like the idea of, it's a pay rise, and it's a whole lot more work, but there's perhaps scope for influencing what's happening, but I don't know if I want that. And then there's the idea of me taking on maybe one or two other churches, maintaining one, just ebbing along. And then there's talk of... which was always at the back of our minds, that [Name] would become a sending church, and we would perhaps work with one of the smaller village churches. So, for example, Hilton down the road, two miles away we have members coming from Hilton anyway and they've got a, they've got a Sunday school room, a really well-equipped Sunday school room with a nursery that meets there every day of the week. Their vision behind it was look, we've got this amazing building and they can come to our church on a Sunday, but that was kind of fifteen years ago, and not one child has started coming to that church, but there's kind of room, room to maybe... it's a church with loads of financial resources, well could Café Church happen there? Could we begin to do what we've done here, model it on a smaller scale? The resources are here and perhaps it can... perhaps its kind of... our next missionary step is to begin to call and revive a small rural village church, so, yeh. I think in an ideal world, I wouldn't get another church back, but I think I may get one or two back... would be my thoughts... but I think it would be on the understanding that I just maintain them and don't put a huge amount in.

SE – Do you reckon that would have any effect here, both on what you are doing, the things that are going on and the people?

P – Inevitably it would. I just won't be around as much, so, some people know I'm in the vestry on a Wednesday morning, and people come and kind of potter and say hello, and people come for like, talk things through, pastoral situations. I think in terms of my finger on the pulse, of the kind of unchurched, horrible word, but kind of those who aren't used to church, kind of the pastoral engagement that I have with them via email and that kind of keeping abreast of what's happening, yes that will have an effect. And the kind of stage too, I would worry that... I'm needing to, I'm needing to be involved in enabling leadership to emerge in this church, and I worry that, the fact that, ministry in smaller churches is so kind of presbyter centric, that I will end up doing so much to maintain them. That I won't be able to... so I don't have, I won't have, so at the minute I don't have many Church Councils, or property and finance meetings, but actually, they're poured into enabling and training leaders for doing small groups, and that will just, that will disappear, and that's kind of, that's quite sad. So that's my fear about it. I think it will be, the next stage, the next five years are all about discipleship and enabling ministry and seeing what we're to become which takes a lot of time and that's my fear. Because even when I was in Downham Market with my ten churches, ministry was a whole lot easier than it is what I am doing now, far busier in what I'm doing. Because actually I can't just roll out the same crap week after week, I can't fob off so and so with the fact that I've got... oh sorry I can't be with you, I'm at Ramsey... actually that doesn't happen here. There's a lot more demand on my time and expectation, so yeh, maybe it's easier, maybe two churches would be nice, I could put my feet up and yeah... so I think there will be less time for creativity. So, Café Church is two additional meetings a month, because we do it as a team, we set up as a team, we plan it as a team. Air, the same, two additional things. So, it's not like I'm not doing anything, which is what people think. So yeah.

SE – Talking about Air and Café Church, how did they come about?

P - Café, well I tried Café in ... Methodist church, it went really well. ... is about to close, but... I began, people started to come along to church and I asked them, you know, what is it you do on a Sunday morning, what is it that you enjoy and what came up from that was you know, 'we love sitting around in café's drinking coffee with the kids, we love doing things as a family and, and I kind of... there was a Christmas tree festival here, so we filled our church for the circuit with Christmas trees, and it meant that for two weeks in December, it's an amazing time of year, our church was filled with pagan fertility symbols and we couldn't worship in there, so that Sunday I said, come on, we've got the hall, let's try Café. We tried it and it worked. There was opportunity for flexibility to try something new and it was really successful. Left it six months... people said "oh you should try another Café. I said "ok, we can try it..." "Nah," and it worked again, and it started to grow, but people... because it was only once every six months there wasn't that significant growth in it and as I was talking to people about Café, people within the church, people who were interested in coming to Café, they just said it needs to be more regular because we need it in our diary because we... people were like, I'm planning already for six months' time what family visit I'm doing and I want to be able to go to Café, and so it became once a month. There's a fine balance for me between, it's easy to talk about the joys of collaborative ministry and team working but Café has been this thing where people have had to see it done in order to sign up to it so it took a lot of work to get it going and erm... but the response to it was huge, and it was very easy for a team to be gathered around it. There was a response to the creativity and to the 'this is really good fun' so the Café planning team is only... the Café team of it, there's only two of us who have been in the church longer than two years which is really exciting for me because they, the folk who are new to church and faith keep us in check saying "that's really churchy you know, and the reason we come is because you don't do that" So that just thrives and happens.

Air came out of perhaps... we've got some contemplators in the church who were saying we don't have anything... we find it really hard that traditional worship is in a language that we find hard to understand and very wordy. Café is this intense space, and then some Café folk also were talking about wanting to go deeper in faith and have more time to reflect and think about it and so we tried Air and it was quite successful the first time. It struggles and Air is still becoming something, and I know it's not the finished article by any means but it's almost this thing that needs to be in the diary for folk to come and be still for a while and it takes too much time, too much energy at the minute on my part, but it's about folk getting a vision for it and folk are kind of involved in it, but there's not a real strong team around it and that's my one worry with Air, is that a lot of the stuff comes from me, and if I'm knackered actually it's pretty crap and so that's the weakness in it but it arose out of this want for people busy parents, tired parents, especially tired busy young professionals saying I needed this space to start my week and its actually become a bit of a... couple of retired ladies, a Quaker and Tim and a few others, and I know... its... Air has become quite an alienating experience for some folk new to church, not new to church who have migrate to our church because they've seen it growing, because I think they want an evangelical worship led... not evangelical even... they want kind of a band led, quality band, quality praise service with a good word. That's what's needed for growth, and I don't think it is because everything I hear from folk who are new to churches, "don't make us put our hands in the air, don't start beating us over the head with the bible and so that's been quite alienating for a few who were involved with Air originally but have kind of slowly not been involved, but I don't mind that because they're, they've got a bible study group which keeps them happy and they're involved Sunday by Sunday but... yeah... so the guy who I'm meeting today hasn't been to Air the two times you've been here but has come to us kind of from a Buddhist background and is quite intrigued in it.

SE – So, Air relies on you a lot. Does Café Church still rely on you tremendously, or would it be able to get going properly if you weren't there?

P – In the short term, the... I think they would struggle... if they were to... if it was just for the next year they'd struggle, but when I was on sabbatical it happened fine. It was... the team took responsibility for things each month and it happened fine. I think, I don't know... I seem quite chilled out, but actually I'm a control freak, so I think there's as much about me in thinking could they, couldn't they?, and kind of say for me, niggly things creep in. so like, the thing that makes Café good is the finer details and I think sometimes you don't know, you don't learn about the finer details until you do it yourself, and it became, I think towards the end it became quite Sunday school-y. But that's about confidence up the front and it can only be learnt, it can only be once you're doing it on your own. So, there's folk who are brilliant at it, so Steve who's a photographer, he's had family issues, his son's just got done for smuggling cocaine on a school trip to Tanzania. So, he's not been involved in Café for a bit. But Steve is like, he's really new to church and he's just, when he's introducing the tasks, he does it better than I do. He's just a natural, brings in, so I said, oh Steve can you introduce this thing about... what was it about? ... about life, about going too fast and about what makes you slow down and stop, and he kind of stood up and I thought he was just going "we're now going to talk around a... and he stood up and was like, I don't know about you, but here's a confession for you, I got done for speeding the other day and kind of waved this amazing story around the next task and so Café I'm really confident about happening, but that's taken a lot of time and energy to do that. Air we need kind of a couple of others more committed in order for Air to function without me. Air didn't happen while I was on sabbatical. Anthony found the weight far too much and freaked out would be fair to say.

SE – Ok... around the sacraments and their role in both. Have you done communion in either?

P – No. I've thought about communion in Café and I still think I don't know how it would work but I... it... the Methodist 'it is a converting ordinance' and all of that... I don't know if we are at that point yet. I don't know if that's me being chicken about it but I... so, I regularly try and talk about the sense that Jesus met around tables with friends and the kind of sacramental nature of what we are doing in sharing. And so, one of my frustrations with Café is that old people say they couldn't eat a whole pastry, so they cut them into four and it's like... Because I hope we are modelling something of the kingdom in what we do. I think communion fits naturally into Café, but I haven't thought through a creative way of doing it and I don't want it to be an alienating experience because I know there are folk there who come along because they feel they can be who they are, and so the thought that we will suddenly... they would walk in and they're happy talking about faith, sharing their questions, don't align themselves to Christ yet, but are one a journey, suddenly to be faced with communion, I think that's the worry, and I think that at the back of my mind, the reason why we can get round that is because we're not saying Café Church is a church in its own right and I think I feel quite happy with that and there are folk who come to Café and come to just communion and their journey has been to Café Church while faith is incredible and important in my life, Jesus Christ... yes he's a significant person to me now, I want to take communion. So, there's been that route to our once monthly communion... yeah so, I think at Café it would work, and there's an amazing Café communion, communion by numbers and grace church. You kind of just have this... it's an amazing service, but it's for people who are really part of church and understand it... Yeh maybe one day. I've toyed about having a Café... we flag up having a Café communion at another time where people who are interested in communion in a Café style will come to that, but I don't think Café... so... .

Air I think... we nearly had it not may but April, so we toyed with the idea of kind of breakfast on the beach and coming out of that but we decided against it in the end. But I think Air will be a really natural place because there's the option to key in and key out, but I don't... I... Café I'm not sure... Air really easily in a way that I think christenings fit really naturally into Café, I don't know whether I'd be doing a christening in Air, but I think that we are not claiming to be church in either of those I feel quite happy that the sacraments are covered within the life of our church. So I prefer to do a christening in Café rather in normal church because I can put the font right in the middle of it, everybody's gathered round, there's a sense of community, everyone looking at this child, about welcoming them, its brilliant.

SE – How often do you get other ministers visiting or doing things?

P – Coming to our church to have a look, or do you mean... .

SE – Coming to look and see what goes on ... do they ever lead it or any of it?

P – They don't lead a Café or Air. On Sunday, we had five visitors, a minister from Cambridge, from a... I don't know what sort of church he's from... can't remember which church, I didn't speak to him, someone said this but... we had people from [...] come and see what we were doing because they are wanting to do something like that. In terms of ministers they... they're not involved... they... ministers enjoy coming along and being resourced by what happens I think so we occasionally get ministers along to Air or to... yeah, and to Café quite regularly. In terms of the life of the church, other ministers come and they do communion services, or they're planned here, but not that often... I guess if we're honest, they're busy with their own sections. That would be the case. Yeah.

SE – Ok. What's the role of the ordained person here?

P – Here? Role of the ordained... yeah. Ok, I guess there's all the...so for me, a huge part has been trying to say I represent you as a church in these places and part of what's my ministry in the life of this church is to represent God to you as your minister and your presbyter, so pastorally being there for folk and all of those elements, but also trying to say, look we've had loads of funerals, I've had 8 funerals in the last month, it's been like a huge weight, but trying to get to people, like trying to say to people, you need to realise that I do this on your behalf in these situations and trying to say, and for me thinking I'm a minister on behalf of this church, on behalf of God in

these situations in these places I'm going to, that kind of representative act. I think for me it used... I used to talk in terms of incarnational ministry, still do think it's very important but it's kind of almost developed, my calling has developed out of that in that kind of representative nature of Christ in these situations and these places and kind of... I always remember my training at Wesley, a sense of where do you stand and [name] would like get us to, in a [name] way, kind of get you to picture, imagine where you were, and everyone was like yeah I'm in the pulpit preaching the word, and I'm like, I'm out on the streets, just kind of at the doorway, and for me, and that's part of... and that's caught up in my calling and who I am is that kind of representing, welcoming folk who are a part of the church already, being there to know them, know their needs, be on top of their pastoral matters, and care for them, but also that kind of... one of the real privileges for me is standing outside the church when a wedding's happening or when a funeral's happening because it's like we are about God's business in this place, in this community and kind of that's just really significant for me, which is not what I thought it would be, and so the dog collar has become a lot more significant in a really kind of stupid way, I didn't think I'd be into it, it's still hidden behind scruffy trousers and a jumper, but I do a lot of pastoral work in town, so I do a lot of preparation and admin in the golden lion, and a couple of funerals have come out of that because I've been able to chat with old people who are there. I had a huge funeral last week and part of that is because I kind of knew one of the church members, son was ill, and they were in the Golden Lion and I kind of went over and said how are you doing Eric, and his son in law was dying and he was there having a coffee and we had a chat and we talked about football and that kind of representative act has been kind of... it's not about me being an evangelist, it's not about be talking about God. It's just about being the minister in those places that I find myself. Erm... yeah... and I think that for me it's that focus... it's trying to focus the God element of what I do... constantly thinking is this about God what we're doing, so these huge problems that I don't go to the... my previous minister did the Tuesday afternoon fellowship, three out of four Tuesdays and there was this expectation on me to do that and I've just said I can't and I don't want to kind of sing from golden bells... I don't feel it's is... there are elements yes, where we're representing our minister in... but for me that wasn't... I don't feel that... actually it just, it was about representing God to this clique who comes to church anyway so there's been quite a shift in that... yeah...

SE – Coming towards the end, if I came back in five years what would it look like?

P – Yeah... it's an interesting one because I've just got a five-year appointment because I wanted to stay another five to see through what's happening and I, and I think, so I think Café will still be happening. I'd like to think that those that are searching after faith and have got a kind of glimmer of faith would be really involved, would have found that faith and it would be transformative and will have shaped them, it won't just be this vague idea that they're interested in, that this kind of flicker that's in a lot of people will become a reality and, and kind of they will get to grips with that, and it will transform who they are. But that will be through others enabling that to happen. I think there's a lot... too much depends on me at times, in terms of networks and keeping in touch with people, and seeing how they are and from... our big push from September is about discipleship, and realistic patterns of discipleship because I think a lot of people are too busy, they're too busy to search, they're too busy to commit to finding faith, so they've got to be realistic demands because it's not easy being a follower of Christ, but realistic ways of people being able to deepen their faith, and so there's a few... we're beginning to identify a few people who said my home can be used for a discipleship group and I don't know what that discipleship will look like because I'm stubborn, part of me doesn't want alpha or Emmaus or anything because I don't like doing what people tell me to do but there will be some[Name] contextually relevant discipleship program that the church is doing in groups as a church that will deepen... so for me there will be a programme of discipleship that is running the whole time, that folk can be keyed into.

I'd like to think that Air would be more than it is now because I really think there's a need for that kind of contemplative stopping, that there would be some momentum behind that over five years and I'm fairly sure there will be... I think the church will look very different in terms of demographics. At the moment I'm doing between seven and ten funerals of members a year, and those ones are only getting older and yet it remains a key part of what we do, I'm not denying that, but the church cannot help but get younger, just because people are getting older, and so, seeing people who have just arrived and have been part of Christian communities before, I think we will see those more of those more involved in the life of the church and yeah... the mission that is at the heart of us at the minute would kind of more and more be part of our DNA, that creativity, that there would be more people coming from, more coming from other folk, not just from me, that my role would be more of oversight than centre to all these things. I think that for a time it's been really important I'm here for five years, and I'm starting a lot of things but moving towards sustainability, moving the minister out of what's happening and seeing these things happen on their own would be really important, and we're getting there. When I think we're getting there, suddenly I think we're not, because everybody will pull out of planning Café for one month and it will just fall on me, but I think it's the nature of commitment actually, we live in a very flaky society. People don't commit to things, and it's trying to get them to do that. I don't know if I've answered your question, but, yeah no, but seeing folk, seeing folk, I think we are beginning to see and we will see folk bedded in and a part of the life of the church but it takes a long time to do that and people aren't just coming... I think people work in the 1950's/60's Sunday school model which is you go to Sunday school, and then you become part of church and you work your way up... actually folk... we've got folk who dropped out of church entirely start to be involved, or folk who have had no experience of Christian faith at all and that gap is really wide and I think ten years is a realistic length of time for them to become involved in it.

SE – Thanks for your time, I appreciate it.

APPENDIX III

TRANSCRIPTS OF INTERVIEWS AT FRESH EXPRESSION B

Transcript of conversation between
Simon Edwards and 'Paul'
21st October 2012 at Fresh Expression B.

SE – I have some questions, which are more of a guide than anything else, but I guess that the best place to start is how did you come to be involved in Fresh Expression B?

P – Right, OK. Well, approximately 12 or thirteen years ago, as you probably already aware, the person who started this church or this initiative, to re-establish a Methodist presence in the city centre was a minister called ... Glasson, who is now based in Bradford. At that stage, the group that I am involved in, STORM, which is an LGBT group, was coming under some pressure to not be at the Catholic chaplaincy. It wasn't direct pressure, it was just the typical sort of thing within the catholic community of should such groups be whatever... and we'd rather that you didn't... we're not telling you not to but - sort of thing... anyway the founders of the group who were two ladies called [...] and [...] somehow linked up with [...] had a conversation and [...] said by all means yes, come and use our space, what you are about is what we are trying to achieve and we're about. So from that we started to meet regularly on the first Sunday of the month, in the afternoon for an act of fellowship and worship within our own LGBT group. Then got a little bit closer with ... and got more involved in the governance of this place and then it was decided by this community that we were not external from it, we were really part of the family and therefore we should be taking our place on the Church Council and things like that. So for some years I had resisted actually getting that involved, only because I took the view I'm a practicing catholic, who am I to tell the Methodist church what they should and shouldn't be doing. But when I took over the role of coordinating and facilitating the group I felt that it was appropriate that I should possibly be taking a part, also my relationship with [...] had deepened and I'd sort of very much embraced this idea of the welcoming, non-judgemental community that is established here and is possible quite unique in the sense that all are welcome, people of faith or no faith, people who are whatever. As you know from bread-making sessions here, that people go out there and they make bread which obviously is seen by the community as being the principal form of worship. but then around half past 12 people are invited to come in and take part in an informal prayer session with some sort of spiritual reading or scripture based, and sharing as you have done this afternoon. But there is no compulsion, you're not told that you can't just come and make bread. It something that I find very rare in any Christian environment that there isn't strings attached. I mean as much as the good work of the people on the streets those who go and give soup and bread and sandwiches to the guys selling the big issue, but there is always that hook of 'let's all say the rosary first' I've seen them do it. It's that thing, say a prayer and I'll give you a sandwich. But that atmosphere has never been fostered here, you come we take you and accept you as you are and we gently reveal the face of Christ to you and if you care to look upon that then ok, if you don't then... .

SE – So it's 'you can make bread if you want to, but you don't have to come in here and do this, unless you want to come in and no one will judge you if you don't come in. in the same way, in here, if you want to light a candle and say something, wonderful. If you don't, that's fine too' – which you don't get a lot in church.

P – And the reverse side of that is, as much as I'm involved in here, I've once and that was under protest, cos I was doing it for the group I was involved with has never made bread, yet when I'm off I regularly come for prayers, so it's the other way around that you are welcome to come and not make bread. And there will be people who come in, who literally just drop in for lunch – a lot of the big issue sellers do that. That is the other side of the ministry here, we have a great ministry to our brothers and sisters who are living on the streets. So, that's also my sexual orientation has never been an issue, I don't feel that I am tolerated, I feel I am accepted – it's not an issue who I chose to love or not as the case may be. And it's not as if they're saying, 'well we know that' and whatever, it just it isn't an issue in the same way as a heterosexual coming here there is no one saying, 'he's one of them.' It's not an issue, as far as I am concerned, to this community, I am [name] who happens to have other baggage, but so we all have. And that is part of the uniqueness.

SE – So that's how you came to be involved. Some of these questions are probably not easy for you as a non-Methodist, but I'm going to ask them anyway.

P – Well, I'll do my best to answer them.

SE – The next thing is more to do with this place, because outside it doesn't have the look of a church, does it? How do you think that people find this place? Without it having a spire and a neon cross.

P – So you're talking of how do people find this place in as in a geographical location?

SE – Well, I think so. How do people know it's here is perhaps the question, because there is only a tiny sign on the window downstairs as well?

P – Well, one there is the usual sort of things, it's on the website, there is literature that people take away and there are little maps. Also there is a network, one of the things that we do within here is to, sort of, what we call team preaching, at the invitation of a community we go out and either input into one of their services or conduct the

service ourselves, and obviously there is an element of promotion in that. And that could be for arguments sake, when you take up your posting, 'oh I know these guys in ..., we'll get them down one Sunday.' So, there is that, where people have had pastoral appointments or have come across us in some way. It could be that you as a church member have been encouraged to come here and then you have gone away and said to the mothers union in your parish or whoever, so there is a whole network of, it's definitely that God finds the way and a lot of it is word of mouth and a lot of it is through other things we have done, and links that have been forged through history or through the dynamics of [Name] Obviously, [Name] being a published author also has brought that to the attention of others as people have read her books and though 'oh, there's this place in ..., let's go on the website and find out more. I was at a retreat a retreat house in Rainhill, and we were making bread and some reference was made to Bold Street by some of the people who were attending the retreat and running the retreat. So, it's part of the ecclesiastical network that people know, people are sent here for pastoral experiences - as you know yourself from your own whatever. And other traditions within the Christian and non-Christian community, we have a couple of Buddhists here and few others so, it's just the spirit is moving.

SE – Having looked around a little, there is not a lot that says it's a church, there are some, if you look hard enough, they are there. But there isn't an enormous cross hanging on the wall and all of that baggage, do you find that that is helpful to people who come in or not?

P – Yes. I would say generally speaking, yes it is helpful for those for whom we are primarily reaching out to in the sense that we are trying to reach to those who are on the margins, those who have been either hurt by established church or who have lost interest because of the structure of established church or simply have no knowledge of established church. To confront them with the rarefied, politically charged dynamics of a parish community and strange surroundings can be intimidating. I think for some who are looking for traditional church it may be a barrier, one of the great tensions that this community has is that a lot will look at us and say that you're not church you're just a project, and it is a really sore point that some, especially with the Connexional stuff, just don't get it. they just don't get how the church doesn't need to be in a rarefied place with certain types of furnishing and certain types of words and rituals, it can only be a valid service if we have sang three Wesley hymns and read the lesson from the bible and the preacher has preached for twenty minutes on the inside of a ping pong ball, but that all validates it cos he or she has done it. So, I think generally speaking, yes, it's going back to the early church when people didn't meet in special buildings, they met in people's houses, they met in places familiar, they sat round, they talked, they reminisced, they shared their concerns, they supported each other and raised those concerns to their heavenly father and then shared a meal. In a lot of ways, you know, we're nothing new, we're simply revisiting old territories. You know, stuff that we had lost and formalised. For some it isn't there, for some it is very right they have structure. As I say, my own faith tradition is Catholic and I am a traditional catholic, so I am used to smells, bells, high choirs singing Latin and the rest of it and that all scratches my itch. But I can feel just as comfortable as you have seen this afternoon, just sitting round and reflecting on the word of God and sharing and listening to the word of God broken through other people's stories, I'm sure you would agree with me that God speaks with many voices and in many ways. All that is in the bible is true, but all that is true is not in the bible.

SE – I want to talk about leadership. Obviously [Name] was given a mandate, 'go into the city and do something' and she went and wandered around and talked to people and the word bread kept coming back to her. Would you say that this is [Name]'s or not? When it all started, 12 or 13 years ago, how much did it rely on [...]?

P – That's a difficult question for me to answer, because although I was about when this place was being established, my association was very much at an arm's length. And I wasn't actively involved in the gestation period and the early years of growth. I would say that initially, yes it was in all intents and purposes [Name]'s baby and that she successfully brought it to birth and weaned it ... and I think the community has grown and taken ownership of it for itself. Obviously when [Name] came to leave and [name] took over the mantle, things have changed and we as a community are at a crossroads in a lot of ways. We are in some respects, too successful at times we really are bursting at the seams and saying is this building fit for purpose or should we just be concentrating on bread or should we be evolving. I think the bread metaphor is, and symbolism, for the community is still vitally important and we will in essence be a church who makes bread and worships and makes God and Christ present as the bread of life in bread. However, I think we have, we at the sort of adolescent stage at the moment, the beginning of that pubescent period that we're are feeling confident enough that we want to try and find out who are we, but not confident enough to turn our back on our maternal parent and say 'we can stand alone' we probably are relying a lot on what would [Name] have done in all this. So, yes, the sort of spirit of [Name] is still present, I think we are moving to a stage of saying this is our community and, you know, looking as all children do with fondness to our parents but acknowledging what was right for the parents isn't necessarily as right or as relevant for them because [Name] a different time a different era sort of thing. So, I think if that makes sense, we're at a stage where, yes [Name] is still somebody special and held with great affection and always will be, but we've moved on from this being the church of ..., the great baker.

SE – Without [name] or another ordained Methodist, would everything still work?

P – Yet again, that's a difficult question to answer, partly because I'm not actively involved on a day to day basis – what happens on a Tuesday or a Thursday I don't know. I think yes it probably would do, because looking from things at a purely functional point of view, there is sufficient people here to ensure that the volunteers know what

they are doing. Whether the community could take on the pastoral side of things in the same way as one who is trained in that, it doesn't have to be a Presbyterian or a Deacon, it could be a, as happened with County Road, you have got a lay person who has had some training and support because I do think there are certain elements that obviously a pastor brings to this place in the sense that we are dealing with a lot of vulnerable people, people who sometimes need to talk or need to be brought down as it were. In a positive sense, just sort of pacified and just helped a little. I definitely feel that yes, there needs to be a pastoral presence, I don't necessarily think that there aren't people within the community that with the right support who could take over that if that were the case. And you know, speculating, the next appointment we get here would not be a presbyter because reality says staffing levels are tight and why put a person who is authorised to preside over Eucharist and expected to minister into a community that in a lot of ways doesn't function on a normal pastoral level. You know, [name] only by invitation would be expected to do funerals or weddings or christenings or that type of thing. There isn't an element of catechesis within this community as such. Whereas I would expect within a Methodist normal parish setup there is opportunities for passing on the faith and developing people on their pastoral journey. Now that's not to say that [name] doesn't do that in other ways here, but those other ways may effectively be done by somebody who is a deacon or a trained lay person to, as you saw today, break scripture and so on.

SE – Leading on a bit from that, Methodism has two sacraments (baptism and Eucharist) does that go on here, in the traditional way – bread and wine, water?

P – Baptism, yes and no. yes in the sense that, [name] since he has come here has been fortunate enough – is it January or February when you usually have the convenient, it can't be September, it must be January – we've had here new members have been received and some have required baptism, others haven't as they have come from other Christian traditions. I know [name] has performed a couple of baptisms at the cathedral for members of this community so in that respect, yes it has happened. I'm not aware that [Name] ever did it, but that may just be my own ignorance. So, on a regular basis, the normal sort of pastoral environment, no it doesn't happen – its once in a blue moon.

Eucharist does happen here on a reasonable level, when we used to have morning worship as opposed to the afternoon (we've only recently in the last two months moved to the afternoon) that usually had an element of communion. From my own point of view, for the last five or six years we have had a Christian SADA meal on palm Sunday evening which, one the first Jewish Christian side has been undertaken then moves on to a commemoration of the Lord's Supper, so in that respect there is at least an annual sort of celebration at Easter or thereabouts (to use a very Catholic phrase.)

SE – In the community, I'm talking about Eucharist again particularly, who would the community be comfortable with presiding?

P – Yet again a difficult one for me to answer, because obviously from my own perspective, it doesn't matter to me who out of this community does it because I don't recognise their validity anyway, or my faith says to me that the authority isn't there. So, I think for a lot of people it wouldn't matter and I also don't think it would matter if it was performed in a traditional way. For a lot of people, we would argue that we have communion twice a week in the sense that we gather around a table, we break bread that has been baked, we share a bowl of soup, we communicate with one another, we celebrate each other – which, let's face it, the word Eucharist means and that is Eucharistic, that the presence of Christ at that meal is, he is always the principal guest and he through each other and how we minister to each other, he's there to be reflected and is reflected in the stories that are told and the jokes that are shared. In a non-traditional sense I would say that this community would consider that there is twice weekly Eucharist because they are making Christ present through the fellowship of physically creating a loaf, but also in that loaf being broken and shared as family as friends where all are welcome at that table in the true Eucharistic tradition.

SE – I know ... was generally here full-time, wasn't she?

P – I don't think she was, I don't think [name] is ours...

SE – [name] is also the Superintendent of [Name] as well.

P – Well that's a role he's only just taken over, and we were at great pains in negotiating that it wasn't going to be detrimental in any way to his ability to function here. I think [Name] had ministry elsewhere, if memory serves me right, she used to go somewhere on a Wednesday and whatever salary she was deriving from that was used to support this place. I think it was somewhere up in the lakes or Derbyshire, I got the impression she was doing some sort of lecturing or something, elsewhere. But yes, she was principally here as [name] is as minister, his first appointment is to here. He's taken over the [...] simply because there wasn't anybody to stand in and it's seen as a temporary measure. Well, I mean, reality is that we have resisted being incorporated into other circuit, but reality is going to say, if not the next round of when [name]'s appointment comes up there is going to be serious questions asked about how can you have a one church circuit etc. etc., you know and though I personally don't think that we could adequately fit into a traditional circuit because we are... whatever... it's incredibly difficult for Methodism to say 'well you know, yes we'll allow you to stand aloof' I don't know if there is anything within the Methodist tradition which allows such a thing to happen. My own tradition, does have situations where network of religions orders and

things like that, you can have institutions which are part of the church but are not part of, you know, a diocese or whatever else, or can be part of the diocese but are not be affected by the [Name] I think that we do see ourselves as being a resource as a way of a retreat centre in the way that we are able to give a unique pastoral experience to those in training to allow other to come and get another expression of how to worship which is extra ordinary to what they would normally have and therefore in a sense is like a spiritual shot in the arm to revitalise, you know, a stale and steady sort of spiritual journey as it were. So that is part of our trying to discern where, what, where to do we fit into Methodism and where does Methodism fit into us.

SE – It's an interesting question, isn't it? What would you say your relationship is at the moment with particularly the District and the circuits within it, because when I worked in the [Name] circuit for a while and at one point the [Name] circuit had the central hall, and there was, looking back seven or eight years ago, there was a lot of whinging and moaning about Fresh Expression B. Mainly about the district keeps giving it money and all it does is make bread. That's what came across and I just wonder how you would describe your relationship with them, both how they look at you and how Fresh Expression B sees that in context.

P – Again it's difficult for me to answer because I'm only seeing things from Fresh Expression B's point of view, and I'm only seeing them from strictly Fresh Expression B, not Fresh Expression B the Methodist church within the city centre.

SE – Yours's is a unique perspective as you have not had a circuit to come from to compare it with.

P – We had a process, a good twelve months well probably more, of mapping the way forward. Now, one of the things, there was a lot of meaningful discussion went on about merging and federations and all sorts of other whatever's and part of the process was that we agreed to have a joint circuit meeting and I'll be honest with you, we as Fresh Expression B were saying 'what's the point of us going to these meetings' because we'd go to the meeting and we'd discuss all sorts of initiatives – safe city and cities of sanctuaries and all these sorts of things, and then we'd go to the next meeting and discuss either exactly the same thing or something completely new and nothing ever went forward, we'd just have meetings and we'd discuss something and then we'd go to another one. So my gut instinct was that the [Name] circuit airs on the traditional side and really doesn't get us and would really struggle to see us as church, the [Name] circuit tends to be more welcoming and therefore if we were looking for bedfellows, the [Name] is probably the one we're closest to and obviously that bonding is going to increase as we are sharing the superintendent. But because of the sort of dynamics of the circuits, [Name] seems to be more involved in social justice issues, they do a lot of work with the homeless and asylum link which is very akin to what we're doing. Whereas the [Name] doesn't seem to have the same connection, I know, we, obviously the district president get is and is very supportive of us and who knows. But so, it's difficult but I think it's, I refer to the previous answer, I really think that it's what you define as church as to whether you are going to understand Fresh Expression B or not. I mean if you are seeing church as being a building, being a set of doctrines and ideologies then no, we're not going to have a closeness with the majority of traditional Methodists. Because we don't have the building, we don't follow the prescribed formulae, we don't ... adhere strictly to the doctrinal principals. I don't suppose that there are churches, circuits who have non-Methodist sitting on them. I know it's all permitted and my presence on the Church Council in no way is going against the rules or regulations, but it is something that probably doesn't happen for various reasons. So, I hope that answers your question, it's difficult because I don't know some of the politics, but I do get the impression that ... but with saying that I think as more and more ministers are being encouraged to dip their toe into what we are about, the mood change will come. If sufficient people have had some positive pastoral experience here, and or the sort of thing that [Name] is now doing in [...], then the view of that will change and people will possibly not rely so much on the hymn book and the bible as being the ways to do it.

SE – One or two more questions. Thinking about this afternoon in here, would you say that that was typical of what goes on for the Sunday worship?

P – Yeah. I mean we basically follow that format, that this community puts great stock in sharing our understanding opposed to being preached at.

SE – So, for instance, if you were working with another circuit and they sent Local Preachers in to take this, do you think that that would work, or would it not quite be appropriate?

P – If it were a situation where somebody was coming in and saying, 'we will start at half past 2, and we will sing hymn whatever and blah blah blah' and would go through it in a traditional sense. We would tolerate it the first time because this person is doing us a favour as occasionally when [name] is not available and we require a pastoral presence, somebody will come in from elsewhere and the prayers here will be run differently. I came one time and there was the previous superintendent of the [Name] circuit, he was a lovely guy don't get me wrong, but it was very formal in some of the prayers, the basic structure was the same. But he read prayers and intercessions and it wasn't from the heart as it were. And that was tolerated because 'that's [name]' he's doing us as favour. If it were to be last month we did that, this month we're doing the same, I don't think it would work because this community has proactively said 'we don't do conventional church' we are here to rediscover and redefine how God speaks to us and how we make Christ present. So to answer your question, no I don't think, I think there would have to be an element of flexibility between both sides, we're not going to suddenly say 'you will come in and you will throw the lectionary away as you enter the door and you will do things our way' and whatever else. I mean, [name] is not

[Name] and [name] is doing things differently than [Name] did and [name] holds on to certain things, as far as I know, ... never did a covenant service, but [name] has regularly since taking over has that 'this is part of our tradition,' he doesn't do it in a traditional way but the elements of the Wesley covenant is incorporated in that service and things and you know. And he does sort of ensure that certain things that are his to do, he does, whereas ... would, it wouldn't have bothered ... one way of the other who presided over the Eucharist, whereas [name] obviously says 'I am the one who has, that has the permission and therefore it is right and proper and is my due to do that.' So, yeah, I think it would be a matter of negotiation and on both sides accepting the good of each's way and setting aside the things. I don't know if that answers your question.

SE – No, it's good and helpful. Thinking about going forward now, from here, what would you see being the developments or the changes that will happen, say if I came back in five years? What would it look like, what would it feel like?

P – Well whether we would physically be here might be one of the biggest things. Whether we were anywhere in particular or whether we were being very nomadic and hitching our camel to wherever it would go. I think the constant would be bread, bread would still be there in some shape or form. I think the making of bread is an essential element of who we are and our principal identity. I think, we will have hopefully developed and grown with the needs of the community as is, so you might find that we are more actively involved in dealing with people who are non-British and dealing with that element and we might have developed into co-working in food banks and that sort of thing because obviously our ethos is to be there with those who are pushed to the edges and so we will do our best to adapt to what the community feels is necessary to meet those needs. We may also pastorally being led in a different way, because as I say, I really think that Methodism has not got the resources to give us a presbyter and that is a reality that we as a community are going to have to deal with – that the next person appointed here may be a deacon or a lay person or Ander or somebody like that might be invited to say 'you are a circuit preacher, you take responsibility and you coordinate this.' Whether we retained some of the traditional elements that are present here but not evident, what I mean by that is like christening, the Eucharist, I don't know because I suppose that depends on who is doing what and how our community then feels the necessity to function within the loose traditional framework, because obviously if we had a deacon or lay person, the emphasis on Eucharist in a bread and wine sense may be seen to be not that crucial to who we are as a community because as I say that sharing of the soup is more Eucharistic to us. So in some respects I think the community will grow and develop as things develop and that to use the boat analogy, we will trim our sails and steer our way whatever the current or the winds provides is going to bring us to the best or safest port and who knows probably amongst that there will be the odd storm, minor or major, that we have to batten down the hatches and get through it. But I would like to think that within five years' time, that we will have moved and developed to meet the needs within the city, because the city's needs are changing, unemployment is changing, the demographics of the city are changing and maybe we need to be reaching out to those who are asylum seekers more than we are, than we were ten years ago because we just didn't have the same level of people moving. Because of the economic situation, we may need to be ministering to those who find themselves without gainful employment and the realities of physically coping with not having that routine in your life and we forget the financial side, there is that physiological thing of 'for the last 20 years, Monday to Friday I have got up at this time, I've done this... what do I do now?'

SE – Final one. Do you think it will always remain Methodist?

P – No. I think the way this community is evolving is that it's going to become post-denominational. As I say, I'm not saying that this community is unique in having the likes of myself with an active involvement, but there is probably not many and as I say we have a big input from the URC minister who has a very close working relationship and has for years. [...] and [...] were co-partners in this venture and here was more involved than his successor, but his successor is still an active partner with this place. There are... some of the people who come and make bread come from Anglican traditions, some from non-Christian traditions and I think, as I say, one of the facilitators is a Buddhist monk, so I think as a community now we will... I don't even know if Methodism will continue in its present form. Let's face it, what little I know of church history, Methodism was born of the church of England so the way the dynamics of the way the Christian community is changing fifteen of twenty years' time in this county you are going to see coming together of various factions for survival purposes, and whether that's a formal coming together in the formal sense that the moderator of the Methodist church and the ABC will sign an accord saying we are one, we are united or whether it will be for all intents and purposes building and things like that are shared and manpower is.. where Anglicans do one Sunday and the Methodists the other so they can be spread around and minister within a geographical area so I can see that. The way that the Christian community is developing, it needs to look and say 'let's put aside our petty squabbles' and this is what we agree on and have always agreed on. I know my own faith tradition is one of the worst for saying we are right and everyone else is wrong, you come back on our terms and in our timescale. But I do think that in Britain and western Europe, that we are going to see a greater federation of the Christian family and I think that places like Fresh Expression B are going to be the templates that church authorities look to see how did they achieve it and how do we take it to a wider. So, in that respect I don't think that it will remain strictly Methodist, I think that if Methodist exists then Methodism will still have a significant presence in this place but that might also be reflected in how Methodism fits into the national jigsaw as it were.

SE – I think that is very helpful. Thank you for taking the time to talk to me.

Transcript of conversation between
Simon Edwards and 'Anne'
22nd October 2012 at Fresh Expression B.

SE – A good place to start then is, how did you become involved in Fresh Expression B?

A – Here? I have spent all my working life in administration, through various places, businesses, organisations, I retired early about seven years ago now, was freelance for quite a while and then in the mid to early summer of 2012 I was looking about for something to do and the job here became vacant. I applied, late, and the application went into the spam box and didn't get considered, they appointed somebody. Between appointing somebody and starting, that person changed their mind, it was too far down the line for them to go back and re-draw on the people they had originally interviewed and so they had to go back to square 1, put the whole process out to interview again. At that time they said did I want to resubmit my application, I said I did, and the rest as they say is history. And I've been here just on 12 months, I started in September 2011, and it had been going on for them since the previous April.

SE - How would you describe your role?

A – The job title is 'administrator and pastoral assistant' so essentially I am employed to keep the office ticking over, answer the phone, write letters, do some scouting about for funds, buy new equipment, all the general admin tasks, but if we get really busy outside in the bread room and we don't have enough facilitators or helpers to help out, I have been on a number of occasions come out of the office and gone and helped either facilitate bread making or made the soup or done washing up, that kind of role. Sometimes I get to lead prayers, if [name] is busy and we don't have anybody to watch the ovens, it covers the whole range and I did actually do the full facilitator training not long after I got here so I understand how the bread room works as well.

SE – You were in and out today; would you say that today was a normal example of what would go on, on a Tuesday?

A – Yes, I would actually. It looked to me like a fairly typical day, we had a number of regulars, one visiting party, at least one or two people here for the first time, a reasonable number of regular facilitators and that's about... the number we had in today in total is about what it comes out at, anywhere between 18 and 30.

SE – What is the role of the facilitator in all this?

A – The facilitators are there to essentially make sure the people who come make really good bread that they can be proud of so that it hasn't been a wasted exercise in that sense, they take home something hard and crusty that isn't edible. They are also to make people feel welcome, to convey the ethos of the place in the way they behave and the way they encourage other people to behave, to actually keep an eye on potential tensions and either deal with them or refer them, raise awareness with somebody who can deal with them, it doesn't happen very often, but occasionally.

SE – Overall then, what would you say is the aim of Fresh Expression B?

A – I think the aim of Fresh Expression B is to provide a place of Christian friendship and fellowship where people who really wouldn't go to church of any description feel welcome and also that welcomes people who are very much on the margins, who have no experience... you see the people who may not actually have a primary interest in coming to a church for Christian purposes, for worship purposes, for any kind of spiritual purposes. But they will come here for the friendship, the fellowship the food, the ambience, for the fact that they are encouraged to and given opportunities to be as full as person as they can be. Some of the people who you have probably seen this morning, they come with quite severe learning disabilities, but it's amazing how much they grow into the whole process of making bread and helping with the tasks, you can see their confidence growing. So yes, it's partly about making anybody and everybody feel welcome, but also by having prayers as part of the worship of making bread, people who wouldn't go anywhere near a traditional church will come and sit and listen to what is going on, listen to the conversation and maybe light a candle and go outside and say 'that wasn't too bad, I could do that again.' So, its softening the edges of what has been, for some people, a very hard religious experience previously or no religious experience previously.

SE – Those first few questions were by way of introduction and understanding what is going on, the next ones are a little deeper.

A – How much deeper are we going to get, we're practically in the basement as it is!

SE – Some you might not be able to answer, and that's not a problem, but I will ask them anyway. How would you describe [name]'s role as a presbyter, as the minister of the place here?

A – OK. He is without shadow of doubt, for the people who come, the person. He is quite often the first person they meet, quite often he's the one who will weigh out the flour and take people's names and that's, on the surface that looks like a practical role but it has the sideways advantage of helping [name] get to know people, they get to know him because whoever else they may or may not get to speak to in a morning, they have spoken to him so if they need to go back and speak to him again they feel like they know him. He's obviously also the key spiritual leader within the organisation, within the church, but he has a unique ability in a place as informal as this to be able to represent all the best bits of Christian love and caring in a very non-churchy way.

SE – In terms of... I need to introduce this question. While I was in [Name] I had lots of contacts and when discussing Fresh Expression B, there was a lot of bad feeling back then, particularly amongst, around 7 years ago, ministers and circuit stewards who would complain that... there were two main complaints, one was 'all they do is make bread' and the second 'they just keep getting more and more money off the district to do it.' Those were the two things I heard fairly regularly, it may have changed since then, and the question is around what do you see as the view of the surrounding circuits of this place and what goes on here?

A – I have absolutely no idea, I can't answer the question because I have no part in other circuit Meetings. Absolutely none. I mean, having heard you say that, that's the first time I have ever heard that said and right now I'm struggling to process that so I have no idea what people think.

SE – I'm guessing that it has changed because these things move on and change as they get going and it was in its infancy back then. Part of it is, with something very different I don't think people could get the idea of how it was church.

A – Yes, if we take it out of the [Name] context for a moment and just talk about it as a FX, I can imagine that there are, and certainly were, a lot of people who would struggle with the idea of a FX and I say that having been the administrator of the FX course in the Mersey district for the whole of last year, so I can understand how people from a very traditional church background would struggle with the concept of how here... was church because we don't look like a church building and we don't meet on Sundays and we don't have the regular connections and so I can understand that. If anybody ever said that to me 'all they do is make bread,' well they'd better be standing a fair distance away when they say it, and have a chair to sit on because I might rather bore them for a long time and tell them that's not true.

SE – And we have to judge something which we have never seen or been part of, which is why I couldn't write about this without having been and been part of it. or I could have done it but it wouldn't have been a true representation. Well, you did answer this question, is it church?

A – Yes, but not as we know it. it is quite definitely church but, like I say, it doesn't have beautiful doors at the front, it isn't even at pavement level, it doesn't have hymns and prayers and stuff for an hour and then we all go home until the next time. And it does have a practical activity and fellowship at its core, so whereas traditional Sunday church would have an hour of worship and half an hour of fellowship over a cup of coffee, this place is about the hour of fellowship and the worship, love and understanding that comes out of that in a very practical way. And the half hour of worship, and if you were here today you will have heard him say 'this is where we reconnect quietly with each other, with God with the whole ethos of what we're doing.' But yes, it is definitely church just not as we know it.

SE – In terms of the Sacraments, speaking the other day with [Name] was helpful in seeing how that has operated here in the past so there have been some baptisms where you've been off to the cathedral and people have been baptised into the community here and then there is Communion occasionally. What would you say, having been here for a year, is the communities view around that, is sacrament viewed as an important and integral part of what goes on or something which is an extra?

A – My personal view is that, is that the sacrament happens twice a week every week but like everything else here it doesn't happen where you might expect it or in the way you might expect it to. So, if you think of the sacrament in terms of a fellowship meal shared in God's name then it happens twice a week every week and it happens out there over lunch. Ok it's not, there's bread in there, but for most people they may not actually recognise it in that way because, and if they didn't they would probably go home before lunch. Because either their experience of church sacraments, and the services which go with, them are completely alien and 'we don't do that because we're of no faith' or their experience of formal church is so grim that they wouldn't feel welcome, would think they were wanted so they wouldn't come. I don't do Sunday worship, just because of my commitments in the [Name] end, with church and preaching and one thing or another, yet. Although they have now changed the times so I might now be able to, so I have no idea what they truly recognised bread and wine Eucharist type sacrament would be like.

SE – It does depend on the understanding of sacrament as well, is it the sign of God's grace or does it have to be 'little cups' and what have you.

A – Well this is what I'm saying, I think it happens here twice a week every week. But unless someone hits you over the head, you probably wouldn't recognise it and like I say for some people if they did they would run a mile. So it's just the way we do things here, you'll hear one or two people say that.

SE – This is more of a practical one, where does the funding come from? There is some offering for the bread and stuff...

A – Yes, we take donations at every meal time for to cover costs for the bread, but I don't think it does, because not everybody who comes can afford that. People who bring groups are often overly generous, so you will have a group of 10 who come and they will send us a 3 figure cheque, they may be small figure or big figures but even so. We have had substantial donations from groups who have been once and remember us, so much so that we can buy big pieces of equipment. I understand that we have, I don't know about the formal funding, you'd need to talk to the treasurer or [name], but I understand we have a diminishing Connexional grant, which is our main source of funding on an annual basis.

SE – So this would be the same as across the Connexion where the grant is slowly decreased to promote self-funding?

A – I don't know what the intention was, I think it was a five-year agreement and I have no idea what the basis for that was.

SE – It diminishes over time to encourage the church to find its own revenue stream?

A – yes, I don't know where the District fits in. That thing about getting more and more money from the District, I don't know, I should know but I don't and to be honest, I only do 15 hours a week and other people take care of the money.

SE – Is there a long-term vision for Fresh Expression B?

A – There is always a long-term vision and it moves according to where you are at the time. Yes there is a long term vision, and that is linked very much to future funding, ecumenical relationships in the city centre and the pure logistics of this building, I think. Because a building which was absolutely perfect 11/12 years ago, the community has evolved, the building has evolved, the issues have evolved and the work needs to evolve further and so we are always having to think about what happens next. And there is a whole raft of stuff going on this year which [...] will be able to tell you more about, or heather can tell you more about when you get to talk to her. But yes there is a vision and it is linked to the building, the funding, what else is going on in city centre and our relationships with other city centre ministers.

SE – So very much linked to the context here then?

A – Yes.

SE – I think we are coming to the end. Do you think that Fresh Expression B will always remain Methodist?

A – It depends what you mean by Methodist especially when it has " around it. my instinct is to say, yes as long as Fresh Expression B remains, it will have a fundamentally Methodist principal, will always have a Methodist ethos, yes as long as Fresh Expression B exists it will be Methodist in that sense because that is where it lives. That is what it, I don't know if that is what it set out to be about, I rather think it might be, that is certainly what it is about, and even if it merged or worked alongside or shared mission with other ecumenical groups I don't think that will change. And listening to people who are key players in the community at the moment I think that is what it will always be for.

SE – My questions are finished, unless there is anything else you would like to say but haven't had the chance.

A – Only that I am truly amazed and humbled by the number and range of people who find their way up those stairs. But I have had since we started back in mid-September, I have had expressions of interest from 7 different individuals or groups from as far away as Wiltshire and Gloucester and Berkshire, and the suburbs of [Name] People saying 'we've heard about you , we've seen the website, we've seen the FX video, we've been before can we come back' and they come the ones who have been before bring others because they love it, the ones who have never been.. There is an email that came off the system yesterday 'I've been looking at the website, is it really ok just to turn up?' Yeah, absolutely, but if you're bringing ten people please let me know in advance because we might need to book you in. In all the year I've been here, there have been very few days when somebody new has not walked over the doorstep, and ok they don't stay, we are an itinerant, but they take that away and they say, 'maybe we could do something similar.' Or it was just a unique experience, and what they write in the visitor's book is something special. But it speaks to people in a way that if you wrote the steps on paper, you might wonder how does that happen. There is only one possible reason why that can happen, God wants it that way. Praise the Lord.

SE – That's great, thank you very much.

**Transcript of conversation between
Simon Edwards and 'Joan'
6th December 2012 at Fresh Expression B.**

SE – I have large selection of questions, I probably won't ask them all because I think most will come from the conversation anyway, but I guess a good place to start is if you just tell me a little bit of how you became involved in Fresh Expression B.

J – How I personally became involved? I came back to England in 1999 having been away from the country for about 25 years and I had a job here in the centre of [Name] at one of the large retail stores and [Name] who was the minister here was the chaplain at that store, and that's how I met her. She was very good at sussing people out as being people who could contribute to her team, but also recognised that I was also in need of some support. So, she invited me to make bread, at that time there was no Fresh Expression B as we know it, and we made bread in somebody's home and I went to make bread and we had it rising on the age and then we went in for lunch at this lady's house and she set up a large table and we all sat around and had soup and rolls and the conversation was just mind-blowing for me. I was in a place where I felt that my faith had gone completely and I discovered that it hadn't gone completely, it had gone underground and here was a place where all the questions I had, I was allowed to ask them and I wasn't necessarily going to get the answers but at least I was being given permission to doubt and to ask the questions. So I became a member of this community and in the fall of that same year, in September, they rented this place and as I said, [Name] was very good at gathering people up around her who could contribute something to the community and I have a background in outside catering and so she asked me if I would source the equipment for the kitchen. So, does that give you an overall view?

SE – Yes, that's very good, thank you. Would you say that what happened today is typical of a Thursday?

J – There is no such thing as a typical Thursday and yes, it was because we had no idea who was coming. We try to be open and offer to hospitality to whoever comes through the door, so the fact that we had a baby of three weeks and a lady who was nearly 70, people from all faith and none, people from all denominations and none, is typical – if there is anything at all typical of Fresh Expression B.

SE – What would you say is the aim of Fresh Expression B?

J – The aim of Fresh Expression B... From my point of view, it's a practical expression of Christianity, that's my personal view and from my point of view that sits well with my faith. I think the aim is to be a Methodist presence here in the city centre, to engage with the community and to give people an opportunity to feel safer and to experience the love of God and possibly, as I said earlier, to ask questions and to come to their own decision about where their faith is at and if they have any or not.

SE – What is the best part for you?

J – The best part for me is the fact that I thrive on being with people, it's the practical part of it, that there is something that we go away with... that we take away and can share with others who have not been here. It's just the excitement really, of not knowing what to expect and that this is all done in the name of Jesus Christ.

SE – What, these questions are not in any particular order, so they do jump around a little, what relationship is there between here and local Methodist circuits... So [...] really isn't it? What's the relationship with those two circuits, I know the relationship with [...] now as Superintendent of ...?

J – I would say that we are better known in the outside world, the whole world, than we are in [Name] I would say that there is, or has been, an element of suspicion amongst the other circuits in the area. They're aware that monetarily they support this project, as it's known to a lot of people, but we call it a church and to us it is very definitely a church. There is a kind of a fear of, this is a sense I have, that there is a fear that if people come here, I don't know, there might be some kind of disloyalty shown to their own circuit. Which is unfortunate because when we first started the church, most of the core community were people who were members of other churches, which is why [Name] didn't instigate Sunday worship, our worship is Tuesdays and Thursdays, it was so that we didn't tread on people's toes and encourage divided loyalties or anything like that. Some people will come here, the people who do come here from the local circuits come because, for all different kinds of reasons, they might come to recharge their batteries, they might come because they find there is something extra here that they can contribute to and take something away from that they don't get from their own church, they might find that it is something that they can bring a group to. We've also been out to, either to team preach or to have bread making workshops with other churches, but over time it doesn't seem to change the overall view that we're better known in South Africa and Germany and other parts of England and Scotland than we are in [Name]

SE - I worked in [Name] for 5 years, and I left 5 years ago, I grew up in Linacre Mission, so I have been around. One of the things I kept on hearing was the phrase 'all they do is make bread.' How would you respond to that?

J – I would respond by inviting people to come here, because the only way you can know what we do is by coming here. So my suspicion is that, going back to the previous question, is that that's an easy way to dismiss it, but once people cross the threshold they then experience something different, it doesn't suit everybody and that's fair enough, but there is definitely a lot more going on here than making bread.

SE – Would you call yourself a Methodist?

J – No, I'd call myself a Christian personally, and that's partly because I was brought up in the URC church, I was married to a Catholic for 25 years and for me, the essential part of being here is not about being a Methodist, it's about being a Christian.

SE – You have already answered this question, but is Fresh Expression B church?

J – Yes. Very definitely, very definitely for me. And in fact, I, very gently, often correct people who say, insinuate or even say that this is a project and say well 'I'd like to correct you, but actually we are a church, very much so.'

SE – Does Communion and Baptism happen here?

J – Yes. It does. We take communion at relevant times of the year, we have a covenant service, usually in January. We share communion whenever [name] feels it is appropriate, I shared communion here in this place in my wedding which took place in this room, we then had the service with the community in and shared communion there and then we had also made bread in this place which we took to the blessing service which was in Crosby. So, Communion is very much part of the church, but more than that I feel that we break bread and take communion every time we break bread and every time, we make bread and share it around the table.

SE – And is it always [name] who presides?

J – When it is communion, yes, it is always [Name] who presides in the sense that he is the ordained minister. Around the baptisms side of things, we do have baptisms, but they don't usually take place here in this building. we have an arrangement with the Anglican church, at the Cathedral and we use the Lady Chapel, because they have a font - we don't have a font here and [Name] also has other place that he has presided over baptisms.

SE – Do you think it would be appropriate for anyone else to preside?

J – I think in the sense that we are a Methodist church, it doesn't feel that that would be appropriate to me.

SE – Who is in charge?

J – Interesting, I was talking to somebody about this last night and saying that the leadership is rather from the middle. It's not about a hierarchical top down, if anything its more from the bottom up and we always try to consult with members of the community, for example when we employed [Name] as our new minister, the whole community was involved in the choice of candidate. There are times when an authority figure is important in maintaining the inclusivity and the safer space, and at that point it's appropriate that [Name] be the one who uses that authority, but in general terms it is very much a community.

SE – Do you get visits often from clergy and other people from churches?

J – Many times, in fact it is one of the parts of this mission that I feel is most beneficial to the Christian church. We are aware that we serve as a place where people come to recharge their batteries, where people come to experience a different way of being church, where people are encouraged to come possibly to discern their calling, that could be JVC volunteers who come to work here trying to decide about going into the priesthood or becoming a monk. Or people who are advised by their mentors when they are candidating or prior to candidating to come and experience church in a different guise and they are advised to come here and so nearly every year that I have been here there has been somebody on placement or who has been encouraged to pop in and share in the life of this community for a period of time. And also, that's part of the training, [Name] was very much involved in... as a trainer at Cliff College, as I understand it, she was a trainer and things like that. I may be speaking out of hand there, but that was my feeling –that there was a training element to what she did.

SE – Is there ever a time when LP's lead things, such as the worship or the prayers?

J – yes, very much so. More so than that, anybody who is a member of the community who feels that they would like to lead prayers is given that opportunity. Sometimes that person might be paired up with the minister and they do it together, other times people are asked because there is no... the person who was going to lead is not able to be there at the last minute. Since [name] has arrived, we have [Name] I'm aware that he has tried to make it that there is always a ministerial presence here, and if he is not able to be here then he arranges for somebody else to

be here. That doesn't necessarily mean that they are here in charge, it just means that there is a ministerial presence, but that person doesn't necessarily have to lead prayers.

SE – What do you think is the role of the ordained person in Fresh Expression B?

J – The role of the ordained person? Because it is a church, I feel that it is really important that there be a minister here, I think it's important that people who come from other denominations and all faiths and none, see that this is a church with a minister. I somehow feel that we would lose a great deal if we were reduced as being considered a project and I feel that the danger would be greater of that happening if there were no ordained minister here. I also feel that in order for us to be church in its fullest sense, we need to have the possibility of taking Communion and having Baptisms and marriages here on the premises and an ordained minister is the one who is able to do that. And I also think that quite a lot of younger people who we have who come and choose to start to facilitate here actually appreciate the fact that there is a ministerial presence, they might not be able to verbalise that but I actually feel that it is appreciated.

SE – How did the community feel when [Name] was asked to be the Superintendent of the [...] circuit, was he here full time until that?

J – Well he has never been full time and neither has [Name] been full time because part of ourselves making ourselves a sustainable church has been that there are other parts to the role. As I say, [Name] was a tutor and a chaplain and at one point in time she was also seconded to [...] and was working with survivors over there and that brought in money which helped to go towards paying her stipend. With [name], his mandate included the chaplaincies and he still does that, a part of the question you asked earlier is that we have over the last two or three years, started to try and work with the circuits here in the local area and we have discovered that we do have quite a lot in common in our mission work with the North Central circuit. When this was first mooted, as a Church Council and as a circuit Meeting, we discussed it very carefully, we asked [name] how he would feel about it because ultimately, it's he who has to do the work and we made some very strict provisos about what we were prepared to allow him to do and not allow him to do. And you're going to ask me what they are, but one of them was that the work there needed to be such that it didn't impact detrimentally on the work here – which I think was perfectly understandable and acceptable. A lot of thought went into it and a lot of thought does go into decisions we take here and it's never just one or two people who take the decision it's as many people as we can find to give their input.

SE – If I came back in about five years, what would Fresh Expression B be like?

J – It might not be here. This is a possibility that it with us all the time, from a financial point of view, we are very fragile, and we have learned that we have to trust and trust that if God wants this church to continue, he will provide. At the present time, we are being funded by a decreasing grant and it, in 2014 will reduce to nothing, we are always trying to vision our way forward believing God is there and the latest discussions are around is this, are these premises fit for purpose. We have life problems, and that means access and that impacts our ability to be inclusive, there are times when we are bursting at the seams a little bit like today and yet it seems to self-regulate so if it seems that we are bursting at the seams we think 'oh gosh what are we going to do' and then it... things calm down a little bit. So, and we also believe that to be the community that we are, and be alongside people who are living such fragile, marginalised lives in the main, we need to be fragile ourselves, so living on the edge is important, even though it is hard for us to do. So, in five years' time I have no idea where we're going to be, we're just going to have to trust that God will show us the way, I sincerely hope and pray that we will still be here because I believe that we offer something which is unique and something which is very beneficial to everyone here in [Name] and way beyond.

SE – There is probably only one more question. When you arrive downstairs and look at the entrance, it can sometimes be hard to spot. Does that have an impact on people who come in or is there a different way that people find out about Fresh Expression B?

J – It's part of what we are about, because as well as the inclusivity as I have mentioned before, we try to be a safer space. We are not a drop in, we are not a traditional church and we don't push the Christianity, church side of things at people, we hope that it will rub off, that they will experience it and want more. we've had many discussions about whether we should have a bigger sign and all these kinds of things, but I think you experiences one of the things today. One of the people who came to prayers today explained that it took a lot of courage to come, and this is a person who has been a churchgoer for many years and has a very strong faith, So, imagine what it is like for someone who is living on the streets, who maybe has low self-esteem, if they manage to find their way to the door it is important that it not overawe them – this is an ordinary place and if they manage to cross the threshold and the outrageous hospitality will come through. So it is actually a conscious thing that the door is hard to find the bell is hard to find because it helps to keep the space safer, many people who come here have been very hurt by the church we find that we do quite a lot of pastoral work with people of other denominations and we're kind of picking up the pieces in many ways. And in the past we have done a lot of work with a group called Kasi we actually set up this piece of work where we employed a lay worker for two years, the district has not picked up this piece of work and it is working with Christian survivors of sexual abuse. Unfortunately, at the present time we

can only work with women, and we've always been praying that there be enough funding who could work with male survivors because it's just as important as working with female survivors. And so, the fact there is this space which isn't in the big room, the fact that people can do the washing up or make the soup, the fact that people can come and knock on [my] door and speak to her and she is there to do some pastoral caring, all these things we hope will mean that it is a safer space and we can only maintain that... if we were a shop front on the ground floor, wide open big window, things would shift and maybe there will come a time when that is appropriate and that is part of what we're trying to discern because people say there is no non-conformist presence in [Name] and we gently say yes there is and we've been here for 13 years, and they say yes but it's not like a church – there is no cross over the door and there is no... whatever...and it's not inviting. But you need to cross the threshold and come here and be a part of the community, in fact you need to be able to become vulnerable enough to do that in order to be able to benefit from what, hopefully, we can offer and my sense is that sits well with what Jesus asked us to do.

SE – How would you define the community here, so who is in the community?

J – Anyone who walks through the door on any one day is the church community for that day, and that's really important for the inclusivity point of view. Anybody who, there are obviously boundaries that we have to put in place and sometimes we have to... some of the most difficult things we have to do is when we have to exclude people. And part of the training that I do in facilitator training is to try to help the facilitators understand when the boundaries need to be held, when we can be a little more flexible, how to deal with those situations and ... for example somebody comes in who has drunk a little bit too much, that's another reason why we have the threshold because it's better for us to go downstairs and meet that person, talk to the person and say 'look, today doesn't feel like it's the right day for you to come here, but you'd be welcome to come back another day' rather than let them come in to the community and possibly be disruptive and then have to exclude them. So that is another reason why the door is like it is, with the fact that you are buzzed in because this isn't a public building and it is important that we bear in mind that we are trying to be inclusive but in order to do that we have to, and to maintain a safer space, we have to hold that tension. There is another part to the community though, which is the core community. And there is a core community which grows and shrinks and is as much of a revolving door group as the community, maybe not quite such a revolving door because one would hope that they would stick around for a year or nine months, like the JVC volunteer, and people who come on placement. The decision makers, although we do try to include the members of the community in all decision making, ultimately the trustees or the Church Council are legally responsible for the spending of the money and all things legal, so therefore there are times when that core community is really crucial and does have to make sometime difficult decisions. And one of the things I personally struggle with is that sometime the core community feels very small, and there is a lot of responsibility that is held by those few people and so what we would try to do at that point is either make bread together and pray or just pray and our prayer are often answered but not in the way we expected.

SE – I have nothing else to ask you, unless there is anything else that you want to add, or you have not said.

J – No, I don't think so. I just find it a wonderful place, if I have to take a back seat for any reason, I really miss it. I often come in here feeling quite tired and drained and sometimes I feel just as tired and just as drained but with that glow at the end, and sometimes I feel completely revived. Today was just a wonderful day, I felt like it was a day full of new opportunities and new beginnings and I just pray that we will be able to continue what we are doing. We are not a fresh expression, we were here before Fresh Expressions was even thought of, we are more an emerging church, and maybe we're an emergent church now, because the emerging has already happened. I don't know.

SE – Thank you very much.

Transcript of conversation between
Simon Edwards and Revd. 'John'
6th December 2012 at Fresh Expression B.

SE – I do have some questions. Although you were not here in the beginning, how did you come to be involved because I'm sure it was not the usual stationing method?

J – How did I become involved here? When I was Superintendent of [Name] I would come here, I would move my day off from a Friday to a Tuesday or a Thursday and come here and bake bread on a day off and enjoyed it.

SE – And how did you then become the minister of the church?

J – When...this station did not place a minister during the normal stationing rounds, all of the presbyters in the connexion were notified that this post was open and so at that time I decided, I was in my third year at [...] and I decided that I would put my name forward. Mainly because I knew that with the sequencing of my appointment, I would never have an opportunity to even consider this station during normal stationing rounds, but when it was opened up to the Connexion I put my hat in the ring and thought I would go for it. And to be very, very honest with you I did it just because I told myself that if I didn't do it, I would be kicking myself. But at that time when I put my hat in the ring, I honestly, very honestly did not think I had a remote chance.

SE – So, you have been here three years. What would you say is the aim of Fresh Expression B?

J – To be a safer place where people who normally would not, most of the people who come here are the people who would normally be ignored in traditional church. It's much easier to ignore people who have learning disabilities or who have behaviour difficulties or are homeless or have been hurt by the church. It is much easier for traditional church to ignore people who don't fit in, and so the aim I believe here is to provide a place where people can come no matter where their faith is, if they have been born and raised in faith or they are exploring their faith or if they have no faith at all. That they can experience a place of welcome and acceptance and to experience God's love.

SE – What is your favourite bit?

J – My favourite bit of ministry here is to see people flourish despite odd that are stacked against them which may not be in their control.

SE – Is there any link, and I guess that you might not be able to answer it fully, between the start of this and what happened... is there any link between Central Hall and here?

J – From my understanding, Central Hall was not in existence, I mean it had been closed for many years when Fresh Expression B first started. And so, when Central Hall was sold, the proceeds from Central Hall sale were ring fenced by the Methodist Church strictly for city centre ministry in [Name] That's my understanding of the relationship.

SE – That leads on to one or two brief questions around funding. How is Fresh Expression B financed, I know there are donations for bread-making, but how is the rest funded?

J – We have a Connexional grant which was a five-year grant, we are currently in year 4 and which has been declining over the years, there is also a District grant and the rest is funded by donations, donations at bread making day and contributions from individuals and then assorted smaller grants

SE – Do you pay an assessment to the District?

J – Yes, we do, there is a formula that is calculated for this circuit, this is a single station circuit, for the assessment to be paid.

SE – What is the relationship between Fresh Expression B and both the [Name] district and the circuit that are around?

J – Fresh Expression B is the city centre Methodist church, so it is the single church in the city centre circuit and the city centre circuit is a circuit in the [Name] district.

SE – When I was in [Name] one of the things I heard was people complaining about Fresh Expression B with phrases such as 'all they do is make bread,' how would you respond to that.

J – I wouldn't respond to that, because I don't respond to rumours like that.

SE – Would you encourage people to come in and see before they say anything?

J – I would encourage people to experience anything in life before they started to spread a rumour or anything like that.

SE – Do you get people from other circuits visiting?

J – Many, Many. From, not only from the [Name] district, not only from circuits outside of the [Name] district, but from circuits all over the country

SE – And you get a lot of people on placements as well?

J – yes.

SE – So you became Superintendent of [Name] in September, how did the community here feel about that?

J – This community, the decision to share Superintendency between [Name] and city centre, that decision was made by the leadership of both circuits. The Superintendent was retired early and [...] circuit was looking at various factors in its life and they decided that what they wanted to do was rather than go into stationing for a Superintendent minister was to actually ask for a non-Superintendent minister and they consulted with the leadership here in the city centre and asked if I would consider taking on Superintendency. The superintendent at the time, [name], and I did not initiate that conversation, that conversation was initiated by the leadership of both circuits which [Name] and I felt really good about because that proposal was actually being discussed amongst members of both circuits and so we basically observed the progress as they met with each other and discussed parameters. For example, one of the parameters was I would not take pastoral charge of any chapel in the [Name] circuit; I would actually be their Superintendent and supervise the ministry staff there. And so the proposal was brought to the leadership teams and both circuit meetings approved it and the circuits had been very mutually supportive of each other in the past, mainly probably because of proximity but also in terms of, I think that the people who are part of the city centre circuit and people who are involved in the [Name] are very outward looking, they are very collaborative, and I think that when all was said and done. When I was given the proposal, knowing how the decision had been arrived at I was actually very pleased and honoured to be asked to do it, mainly because it was a decision that wasn't made from, it wasn't imposed on the two circuits, it was something which the two circuit through discussing with each other thought would work out well and they explored it and came together and agreed on how, what the boundaries would be. The two circuits haven't merged; they are operating separately, but with just one shared Superintendent, which I have had to change my working style to accommodate but it is actually, I think that the transition, its four months now, I think that the transition has been really smooth and its actually been a pleasure. Which makes me kind of smile all the time, I'm waiting for the other shoe to drop is really what I'm doing, but so far, the other shoe hasn't dropped.

SE – Do you think it'll ever lead to a union of the two circuits?

J – I don't think that either circuit is ruling that out, I think that both circuits are very good at keeping their finger on the pulse of life in the circuit and also listening to the spirit, they are very much into and with discerning what does God really want to do within the inner city and the city centre – they are two very different animals to work with but think that the inner city circuit and the city centre circuit in ..., they both understand each other quite well.

SE – In Fresh Expression B what Methodist meetings go on, so there is a Church Council, is that the circuit Meeting as well?

J – The Church Council and the circuit Meeting are one body, however, because there are times in the meeting which is called C4 which stands for City Centre Church Council, and there are components of the meeting where it has to be specifically delineated and these are reflected in the minutes that we are in church council, when dealing with circuit matters, the Church Council is closed and the circuit Meeting is opened and everyone is asked to put on [Name] City Centre circuit hat and act in the circuit's interests. So that has to be clearly defined in the minutes.

SE – So does that meeting also cover the pastoral meeting as well?

J – Yes. It covers all. This church does not have a separate meeting for ever separate function of ministry, it is all covered in one meeting. Now, it might be a little longer than, it took me some time to get used to the fact that the meeting started at 6 and we'll get out at 9. Now that's 3 hours, that's a long time, but, and C4 meets once a month whereas in traditional settings circuit Meeting will take place quarterly. But the property functions, the finance functions the pastoral functions, worship, learning, all of these areas which in a traditional church setting they might call individual Methodist meetings for these items, these are all agenda items once a month on the Church Council agenda. Now in terms of other Methodist meetings, the [Name] District City Centre Network meets here periodically, the support group for the [Name] training and development coordinator, [name], takes place here, the [Name] District treasurers meeting takes place here. So this, in terms of the actual physical space, there are Methodist meetings that hare held here outside of the Church Council

SE – Is there membership of this church?

J - Yes.

SE – And how do you become a member?

J – If a person requests to become a member of Fresh Expression B then I will work with them on membership and then receive them into membership of the Methodist church here. Membership in its traditional sense does not work here, and so people who worship here are looking for a connection and not necessarily... people come through the door here and they are not met with a whole list of expectations or anything else, they can be themselves and they are respected in that and they are not forced into any type of expectation or anything like that. If people will request to become members and they often will do, and we do keep a membership register here for records, then we will. And we will actually make that open for people in the community to explore if that is something they would want.

SE – How many members do you have?

J – On the Statistics for Mission, I believe, right now it's about 35.

SE – Another related question, do you have to do an October count?

J – Yes we do.

SE – And which numbers is it that you count?

J – The bread making sessions, that is worship which takes place here on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and the entire experience is worship and begins with bread making at 10:30, prayers at 12:30pm and the community lunch around the table with bread that is baked that day at 1 o'clock. And so yeah, there is a third Sunday of the month worship that is here, but that is secondary to the Tuesday and Thursday worship. So, when I compile statistics for mission, all of the numbers and all of the statistics are held very tightly, have to be entered in the midweek because the way that statistics for mission is structured, the way we have to report, it's still assumes that Sunday is the primary day of worship and this church does not consider Sunday to be its primary day of worship.

SE – Thinking about sacraments, how often is communion celebrated here?

J – In the pure theological sense, communion is celebrated every Tuesday and every Tuesday here, in the sitting around the common table at 1 o'clock on any given Tuesday or Thursday, sharing bread that has been baked that morning and sharing in a common meal. In terms of institutional communion, that is served on the third Sunday of every month, probably I would say maybe just about every other month, not every single Sunday it's served. And then people who are ill, people who are in hospital will be taken communion also.

SE – Do you think that it is important that you preside at those?

J – Do I think it's important that I preside? It's part of my vocation.

SE – Would you feel comfortable with lay people presiding, because obviously Methodism changed the rule for FX with dispensations at conference.

J – What we have done, for example throughout the North Central circuit, we will allow Deacons and lay people to preside over communion using elements that have been blessed in a service and that is, in the North Central circuit that has now eased making the sacraments available, particularly to a lot of very frail, elderly who are shut in at home.

SE – How about baptisms?

J – Baptisms, there is a standing agreement between the [Name] City Centre Methodist circuit and [Name] Anglican Cathedral and all baptisms that take place on behalf of the city centre Methodist church take place at the Anglican cathedral and the minister in charge will preside. All we need to do is contact the dean's office, that is one of the ecumenical relationships that is absolutely wonderful to work with because all I have to do is let them know the date and the time, give them the information of who's being baptised and it's just amazing the preparation they will do on our behalf. We had an adult baptism in February of this year and the individual who was baptised actually requested to be baptised here in these premises, it was important to her that the baptism take place here, in the cloud room. And so, in that instance, she was baptised here.

SE – Can we talk about facilitators for a minute? What would you say their role is here?

J – Their role is to provide assistance to people who need help with the bread making process, they are basically part of the team to help safeguard health and safety and ensure that the code of respect is basically observed and to ensure the smooth, they are the people that in case of emergency people will turn to, they will oversee the operations of the equipment, there is a real Health and Safety element with that whole area with the ovens, and

only facilitators who are trained are allowed back there to operate them. Facilitators, here, also though depending on how they are developing and if it's something they would like they will also be asked to preside over prayer they will assist with basically just the smooth operations here and also several facilitators choose to meet with, to be part of church council also. They really are, I think if you were to compare how we do things at Fresh Expression B you could view facilitators in the same light as, perhaps, stewards.

SE – And they don't have to have become a Christian to be a facilitator?

J – No they don't, but they do need to be CRB checked.

SE – And they are all accountable to you, or the Church Council?

J – They are accountable to the Church Council and they are appointed by the Church Council.

SE – Do they have a code of conduct for facilitators or is there a generic code for everyone?

J – The code of respect is followed by everyone and the code of respect is posted in the main room, and basically, they are concepts or rules or anything, they are concepts like confidentiality, like respect, inclusivity, creating safer space. And those concepts are all part of the ongoing training, they are part of the safeguarding training, we've incorporated it into the Methodist creating safer space module that we deliver here has an expanded area of the code of respect here and it's also the ongoing training.

SE – Overall, at Fresh Expression B do you think it is important that there is an ordained presence here?

J – This community feels that an ordained presence is helpful to allow a very strong spiritual development to take place. Whether it is an ordained presbyter or diaconal, I personally feel that I like the advantages that both orders have, this ministerial setting has never had a diaconal presence but in my opinion a diaconal presence could work very well, there are many deacons who, when I have to be away or on holiday, there are deacons who will offer to be here as a ministerial presence.

SE – Who would you say is part of the community?

J – Who I would say is part of the community is anyone who is even remotely touched by the mission and ministry here and the extent of people who are touched by the ministry here is extremely broad and far reaching. [name], who was here visiting from Gloucester, was told by her Bishop to come and visit Fresh Expression B.

SE – Do you think that Fresh Expression B will always be Methodist?

J – Fresh Expression B, really, should not only be Methodist. My own opinion, I feel that Fresh Expression B would flourish even more if it worked more in partnership, particularly with the URC, the URC has always been incredibly supportive of Fresh Expression B, and there is a URC minister who is loosely, the city centre minister is also linked with Fresh Expression B here. He is a real gift to the ministry here, the ministry here is not just a Methodist ministry, I believe that it is truly ecumenical.

SE – IF I came back in five years' time, what do you think Fresh Expression B would look like?

J – I have no idea, no idea. Because, Fresh Expression B is not even remotely similar to the place I came to three years ago. It's a place that really just allows the spirit to be at work and does not try to put God in a box and allows people to experience God and experience God's love and to just experience each other.

SE – So it's continually changing with the people who are in it?

J – Yes.

SE – So I could go back to any of the churches of the [...] and know what was going to happen in them, it would be the same as when I was there. But if I came here in a month or two, it would be a different feel?

J – It would be a completely different feel and you might even have a completely different cast of people here. Everyone is free to come and go as they please, as their own spiritual journeys mature or take on different paths, people come and go. But people always come back and part of the life here is always, people will come or former members of this community who have moved on. But we have made Fresh Expression B available to them to help them shape their own spiritual journey.

SE – I have no other questions for you, unless there is anything that you want to say that you haven't said yet.

J – No.

SE – Thank you for giving me your time.

APPENDIX IV

TRANSCRIPTS OF INTERVIEWS AT FRESH EXPRESSION C

Transcript of conversation between
Simon Edwards and 'Jane'
25th April 2012 at Fresh Expression C.

SE – As I said, I've got a list of questions which looks rather long, but some of them are quite short. But first, do you want to tell me a little about how you came to be involved in Fresh Expression C?

J – Do you know ...?

SE – I don't.

J - ... is the ... Faith in Schools Trust teacher, the teacher for a group which started when. Methodist church closed down. They wanted the money earmarked for children, the Methodist circuit eventually decided to form a trust for seven junior schools and one senior school in the area, and she was employed as a teacher for religion etc. within the schools. She came to our church to talk to us and was asking for volunteers to help at the... each term they have all the children from the top classes of the junior school for two days, so 75 children per half day, 300 children coming through on two days. Two are called rewind, one is for Easter, one is for Christmas, and then fast forward is looking for the top class going to senior school. And it's working through those for half a day, through quizzes, games and crafts and a booklet. And she wanted volunteers for that, and as I say she came to our church, so that's how I got into that and then from that I met [Name] and [Name] was looking for volunteers to come here when she first opened and I said I could do two hours a week, so that's how I came to be here.

SE – So how long ago was that?

J – It was several years now...

SE – I think it's been going for about four years now, the project, hasn't it?

J – I think that's about it, I was just going to say four years. It was when she was first forming it.

SE – And so, you are here once a week?

J – Yes, for a couple of hours, across the lunchtime to help in the kitchen because the majority of the members of this church are very old and are not able to help in the kitchen really.

SE – Ok. Would you say that what is going on downstairs now is typical, particularly of a Wednesday?

J – It's really variable, particularly on a Wednesday, its variable numbers, and you can't judge it by the weather or ... It's really really variable. But this is sort of average. Half terms are obviously, it's packed.

SE – Fresh Expression C is called a 'Fresh expression of Church,' have you ever heard that expression before?

J – No.

SE – Really FX are new ways of being church, so there may be some which are similar to this, as a kind of community project, for want of a better phrase. Some might be completely different style of worship, there is one in ... which is centred on making bread. So, there are lots of different things which fit into the title.

What would you say are the aims of Fresh Expression C? What does it exist for?

J – I think part of the aim was to provide a playhouse that was not a commercial one, out to make lots of money. But a safe and pleasant environment for families to come to without it being really expensive. And hopefully get them to come to the monthly service of Community Praise.

SE – Is there anything else like this in the area? Was this something which was seen as a need in the community?

J – Well, it was seen as a need, but it was initially seen as a way of keeping this church open, else it would have closed. The church numbers were going down and they were very elderly, and it was just [Name]'s idea of how to keep it open really.

SE – What do you believe is the best part of what goes on here?

J – I think the best part is when you walk in there is a nice atmosphere, there is quiet music on, it's clean. When my grandchildren were young I used to take them to these soft play centres, and they were often in old mills or air raid shelters, and I in my job worked with children with disabilities and we did a soft play room and I knew we had to have six inch foam on the floor, four inch foam on the walls. I know these were children with special needs, but

in some of these other places it was very thin, and the children would get damaged. So, I think that it's that it is a clean, safe, friendly, peaceful environment, when you walk in its got that atmosphere.

SE – Yes, I think that when I came in with [The Minister], I noticed. I've been once before; I've got two boys and we came a while ago. But we used to live in Dover and went to an enormous one which charged an exorbitant amount of money to get in and you would just walk around it and find things taped up and dust all over it and there were no balls in the ball pool and all that kind of thing. So, I think that what I have seen here is different, here it is well maintained, and the volunteers are friendly and that makes a difference

J – I think so, they're not out to get as much money as they can from people.

SE – Do you think that the way Fresh Expression C goes about achieving its aim of being a safe environment; do you think that it could change? If times changed would they change how they run things, would they get rid of the playcentre if something else was felt necessary?

J – I have no idea, I'm, sorry.

SE – I recognise that you are not a Methodist, which is not a bad thing!

J – I have no strong feelings about it either way, I think it's often about the way you were brought up initially, as a child I was C of E but then when we moved to Cleckheaton and we knew nobody, I went to I think it was a Methodist chapel because my friend went there. But even at that age which was, I think I must have been about 8, I just did not like the fact that you didn't kneel down to pray, it didn't seem right to me. I know it sounds strange and I know that I was only that age, but I just didn't feel right, I didn't feel comfortable. So eventually I went down to St Johns in Cleckheaton, and sort of, my mother followed there, and we became involved with that really. I was on the PCC and Sunday School teacher and all that sort of thing, and eventually, even though we moved, we kept on going to ... for many years my youngest child was perhaps about 12. The vicar at ..., would encourage children so she joined the choir with all her friends and because she went, I changed to ..., so it's a lot to do with families.

SE - And it's were you feel comfortable?

J – I think so. As I say I don't have strong feelings about the way people worship at all really, and we don't kneel down much in the C of E now anyway. Ironically enough, only a few do.

SE – I recognise some of what you said, I feel uncomfortable in some of the modern 'free' churches, the ones that are very... conservative evangelical ones they make me feel uncomfortable.

J – When I think back... we had a caravan and at Easter, I know you should go to church at Easter, but we went away in the caravan to caravan club rally in Derbyshire, a big one. And they had the Salvation Army service there in a huge hut and the kids loved it, they really loved it all the tambourines and the clapping. And if we want the next generation to come to church, we have got to do something. And they are the only churches that are expanding, I know two people in different types of evangelical church. One had to build an extension on, they had to book the scout community headquarters all day on a Sunday because they couldn't fit into their own church, so there must be something there...

SE – On the day that you are here, do you find lots of people from the Methodist circuit come in or not?

J – There again, it varies. There are a few that come in, not every week, but I would say that every couple of weeks there's somebody who comes in, yeah.

SE – Would you say... and you might not be able to answer this... that Fresh Expression C is church?

J – I think on an ordinary day, no. But I think that the people coming on an ordinary day see the atmosphere and if that encourages them to come to Community Praise, yes then that is church. And they wouldn't go off to church otherwise.

SE – I guess that you could equate it to a coffee morning, so people come and feel accepted in a coffee morning, they might then come on the next day or something.

J – I think that's it really. If they know the atmosphere, and know it's here, it might encourage them.

SE – Do you come to Fresh Expression C praise at all?

J – I've been twice with the grandchildren; it just depends if I have – I don't usually have the grandchildren on a Sunday. So, it's only if I have them that I come.

SE – I'm planning next month to come to it and speak to [Name] and get her views on it all... and speak to Vera so that should be good. But in the ones that you have been to, how did it run, what happened?

J – We did games, quizzes, crafts, bit of video watching, so it was all... I've been a guide leader for many years (I've had to finish that because I'm too old) but I helped run things like that, and it's the same sort of format. With guiding, you are working around your guide promise, and you're doing all the other things, and it's similar to that. It's a mixture, a bit like the faith in school's trust thing, were trying to get home to them what the Christian message is about Christmas or Easter, but you're doing it in a roundabout way. And it's the same sort of thing really.

SE – Was there some prayer offered, was there scripture...

J – Yes there was. Some of it was dramatised, [The Minister] is really good at the dramatised side of doing scriptures. He does the faith in schools trust and he's really good. But they do stop, and they think, and they listen. And sometimes a video as well, about the appropriate story, but yes there was some bible reading and prayers.

SE – Was there Communion on the times you have been?

J – No, I didn't know they did that.

SE – I know that [The Minister] has done at least 1, because he was telling me about it at some point.

J – No, I didn't know. As I say, I go to my own church on a Sunday, so it's only really if I have my grandchildren on a Sunday which isn't usual.

SE – Would you think that Communion and Baptism would be quite important in Community Praise?

J – It depends who's coming, I think Baptism would be ideal, to have other children welcoming some new member of the church. I don't know about Communion, it depends whose. I know it sounds awful but when we had a Christening at church, it depends on the family, not so much the family as the other people who are coming and their respect for church. And it is difficult to concentrate on praying etc. in church when... with certain behaviour. And yet I know that we ought to be there to welcome a new member into the church and I think it's the same with Communion.

SE – So a little bit of sensitivity maybe?

J – I think so, and I think if you are wanting to think seriously about Communion and Baptism then yeah I'm not sure about the Baptism part with a lot of children who are not used to coming to church, so they are not used to being quiet and conforming.

SE – Who's in charge?

J – Well, I know there is a committee, but on a practical basis, [name] is in charge. But I do know that there is a committee with Methodists, but obviously [name] is the one who is managing it, day to day.

SE – And of course [The Minister] is the chair of the committee isn't he.

J – Yes, I know that there is that behind it, but I don't experience it, I just work here.

SE – Is there a large group of volunteers?

J – I think so, I think they have got... well I think there's at least one volunteer coming in each day. And then there's [name] comes in to do the party bags. And then they've quite a lot of volunteers for the parties. I think there's about half a dozen of them help with the parties, I don't do that because they are not at time I can do. So yeah, there must be quite a few.

SE – On the times that you have been, have other Methodist ministers, or other local ministers been involved? So maybe local Anglicans or URC ministers?

J – Occasionally. I think that the Anglican bishop came in his robes, which was a bit... [The Minister] pops in quite often and yeah one of two others who I recognise as Methodist ministers.

SE – Do you think it's important for a minister to be present here?

J – On the ordinary sessions?

SE – Yeah, or both.

J – No, I don't think so. I think that would not be a good use of a Methodist minister's time really. I think, yes, to pop in and out and to be really aware of it, but not to be there all the time.

SE – So if someone suggested that maybe [The Minister] would spend a whole day in here, you don't think that would be a worthwhile thing?

J – I think it would be worthwhile to find out if [name]... if someone wanted to talk to the minister then perhaps have a session where they make an appointment where they could talk with someone that wanted to talk. Obviously, if there were loads of Methodist ministers with loads of time to sit here and talk to people then that would be fantastic, but I don't know that's going to happen. I mean you are a bit like ours, sharing several parishes, aren't you? So, I suppose in an ideal world, yes, but... I think they should be available if a need is identified. Some of the customers wouldn't like to, to feel religion rammed down their throat.

SE – Would it feel a little uncomfortable to have two of three of them sitting there in their clerical wear.

J – I think so, yeah. But others it might be helpful to, you just can't tell. You don't know what's going on in families and what they need.

SE – We are coming to an end. If I was to come back in 5 years, what do you think that playhouse would look like?

J – Well I would like it to be the same, but then you don't know if families and children's needs are altering, because of everything moving on. If you think back five years ago... soft play areas have been around for a long time, but you don't know if things will alter. Children are going to school earlier; most schools have one admission, so they go, some of them, just after 4. More and more mothers are working so children are being looked after elsewhere and I suppose if finance gets worse, more mothers will work. They won't have the freedom to have the time to bring them. So, it might be circumstances alter, but if not, I would like to see it stay the same.

SE – Is there anything else that you want to add, that you haven't mentioned?

J – Not really. Only to say that I enjoy coming, I enjoy being part of the ..., because what's amazing about that is you have got so many different people from different churches working together. It may be that we only meet once a term that everyone gets on, you know how people in churches can be, and it's a bit the same here. When I first started, I was working with a volunteer from Central chapel and it was really nice, she was really friendly, and I think that's what's nice about it. I don't know if it's a generalisation, but people in the Church of England are less ... genuinely friendly. And I wasn't well about three years ago and to find that as soon as the Methodists knew, the circuit was praying for me, is a really good feeling. To find out that a whole circuit was. it's that sort of genuine wanting to help each other and be nice to each other that I found really nice.

SE – I have run out of questions! Thank you for talking to me.

Transcript of conversation between
Simon Edwards and 'Sharon'
26th April 2012 at Fresh Expression C

SE – Can you start off by telling me how you came to be involved in Fresh Expression C?

S – I have come to this church since I was 9 or 10, until I was a teenager and wanted to go off and do other things. I almost got married here, but the roof caved in two weeks before, so I had to go to ... My sister got married here, we had my nephews christening here. I would have had my own daughters christening here, but because I got married at ... I went back to ... So, I have been here quite a few years really. When the church changed into playhouse, we started coming because my daughter was 2 and I have a niece who is a little younger and a nephew too, so we started coming and bringing the kids and then [name] offered me a job, and that's it.

SE – So would you say that this place is special?

S – It's not like a job, it... I don't know, it's like people have said to me sometimes, you know like some people say 'I can't be bothered going to today...' Like you might think if you were in a different sort of job, 'I don't feel well – I'm not going.' But here you just come, even if you're not feeling well, you come. You might go home after a bit, but you come. Do you know what I mean? It's a different sort of place, it's really relaxed, and we have us moments when it's busy, but it's nice because I've come here all my life. At first it were odd, because it was totally different to what it used to be, it's nice that they've kept on downstairs for the older members, so they can still come.

SE – How often are you here?

S – Every day.

SE – And then you're around at Fresh Expression C praise as well, are you?

S – I've been a few times. But that's nice as well.

SE – Are you at work for that or is it something which you choose to come to?

S – I chose to come to it, yeah.

SE – Is today typical of what goes on in the week?

S – Yeah, it's just... depends on the weather as to how many people will come in, like yesterday I never sat down. Even when the weather is bad people don't come, or people come. Like the two weeks in March when the sun was cracking the flags, there was one day when no one came in. People were making the most of going to the park, I don't blame them. But yeah, a typical day people come in and we might get a dinnertime rush or we're just busy all day.

SE – And half-terms, are they just crazy?

S – Yeah, I don't work... I only work term time.

SE – Are all the volunteers female, or are there any male volunteers?

S – They are all female now, we used to have [name], he used to come and blow the balloons up, the kids called him 'jelly baby man' because he used to hand out jelly babies, but his wife has been really poorly, he kept coming a bit. But now he can't leave his wife. It would be nice to get at least another male volunteer as lots of children aren't used to men. He was really good to them.

SE – Here's an odd question, who chooses the music that is played?

S – [name].

SE – And do you recognise any of it?

S – Some of it yeah, I start singing away.

SE – It seems interesting to me to have that music in the background, it's quite an interesting clue to this being part of a church isn't it?

S – Yeah. Some people have said to me before that they don't like the music, and I think that those are the people who don't have a church background and don't come because it is a church; they come because it is a play gym.

SE – Have you heard the phrase ‘Fresh Expressions of Church?’

S – I have but I don’t know what it is all about

SE – Fresh Expressions is a movement which is sponsored by Methodist and the Church of England and the URC. Which is to do with different ways of being church, so this is looked on as a fresh expression, a different way of being church. So, this is different from one in [Name] which is based around making bread, but both are Fresh Expressions.

SE – What would you say are the aims of Fresh Expression C?

S – Customer that come in, making sure they are happy, keeping them coming in, making sure they have what they need and being friendly with them. We do get a lot of regulars that come back in. Making sure everything’s clean and tidy, nobody wants to bring their kids to somewhere that is untidy and dirty.

SE – I have two boys who are 3 and 5 and we would go to an enormous one of these and you would see dust everywhere and Sellotape and gaffer tape over the cracks in the mats and I guess they run it into the ground and then replace it and so after a couple of years it just looks a bit tatty.

S – I think that’s it. With a lot of places like that, it’s just a business to them. This is run differently, yes, it is a business, but it’s not about making money as making sure it’s clean and people come back. When they might just stick something together, if it happened here then [name] would be ringing up and getting it replaced, because it looks better. People have said that they like going here because it’s clean and everything is right.

SE – What do you think is the best part? Both of your working here and of the project?

S – I don’t know... I like it all.

SE – Or is it something which comes as a whole package?

S – Yeah, I think it just comes as a whole, it fits really well, and I can still come with me mum and bring the children and its good.

SE – What is the relationship between Fresh Expression C and The Methodist Church, so the church here and the circuit. The circuit is the collection of local Methodist churches. Do you think that there is a relationship between this project and the other churches?

S – I think so, everybody seems to know. [name] keeps in touch and we have people from various churches that come.

SE – Do they volunteer, the people from, the other churches?

S – Yes. We have [name] from [Name] church who comes on a Friday and a Saturday for parties. And there’s [name] who’s been in today from Cleckheaton and we have [name] from Cleckheaton on a Monday. I think its word of mouth and everybody pulls together. You know.

SE – Have you been to any other meetings or events in any of the other Methodist churches?

S – Not for a long time, I used to go to a pantomime at St. Andrews each year, a guy I knew used to play the drums, so we used to go every year, but haven’t been for a long time. I think most churches tend to do things, don’t they?

SE – Now this is probably a tricky question, do you think (and this is entirely your own opinion) that Fresh Expression C is church?

S – No. No... it is... but I don’t know how to explain it. I think I still think of it as church because I’ve been here since being a child. But it has totally changed it, like the kids all call it the ‘ball pool place’ and whatever, it’s now the play gym, but church is still here as well.

SE – It’s an unusual mix isn’t it, of church and this project.

S – Yeah, like when I first came to Community Praise, I didn’t know what to expect and [name] kept telling me to come. I am quite often busy on a weekend, and one Sunday I thought I’d go and see what it was all about. And it were lovely, it were great. The kids had a good time, bit of a sing-song, [The Minister] and [name] did their bit and then the kids went to play and it were really nice, so it’s nice that people come in and they do have a bit of a service and sing-song, but then they do go and play and everyone has a cup of tea and everyone is made welcome.

Because sometimes with kids your just told 'that's that and that's that' and nobody cares. But totally different ball game here.

SE – Thinking a little bit about Fresh Expression C Praise, you've been three times, in the ones that you have been, was Communion part of it?

S – No.

SE – [The Minister] has mentioned to me at least one Communion here, do you think that would be important here, or is there another place for it?

S – I think a lot of the people that come, go to church anyway so they will do communion at their own churches. I couldn't see it being a problem; I think people would be fine with it. Because a lot of people do go to church anyway, you get the odd one that doesn't. No, I think it would be fine.

SE – You said that you almost had one of you children christened here, how would you feel about having them christened here as it is now?

S – We had me nephew christened here, two or three years ago and it were lovely because they set all the chairs out in rows like church and then we had the Christening, [The Minister] did it, and then afterwards the kids played and we all had a cup of tea. Then we went and had food at me sister's house. It was different, but it was nice.

SE – Do you think it's important who is in charge of Baptisms and Communion, should it be [The Minister] or whoever is the minister, or should it be other people. Would it be appropriate for [name] to do it for example.

S – Don't you have to be qualified to do it?

SE – You do, I'm just curious.

S – [name] does go round and do services, but I'm sure that if she were a part of it, it wouldn't be a problem.

SE – A slightly easier question, who is in charge?

S – [name].

SE – Is there a hierarchical structure? So, who is underneath [name]?

S – [name].

SE – And she is in charge of what goes on in this building?

S – Yeah.

SE – And then [name] has the management committee above her?

S – Yeah.

SE – Do other ministers, come in often, I know [The Minister] pops in from time to time.

S – Occasionally we get people, I don't know who they are, but [name] obviously sits with them and chats to them, cos we always rib her about that. But yeah, occasionally, but [The Minister] is the one we see. Possibly that's just because I know who [The Minister] is.

SE - Do you think that it is important that the minister is around?

S – Yeah, I think so, because it's still a church. I suppose that if the Minister wasn't around and someone wanted a Christening or whatever, he could be contacted. You need that contact I think because people still do class it as church.

SE – If I came back in about 5 years, what do you think it would look like?

S – Exactly the same probably... [name] doesn't do change! Might have new tables maybe.

SE – Is there anything else that you want to add that you haven't been able to say?

S – I don't think so, no.

SE – Well in that case, we are finished. Thank you very much.

Transcript of conversation between
Simon Edwards and 'Nora'
14th May 2012 at Fresh Expression C

SE – I know that you are a member of the church and have been for a long time, can you tell me a little about that and how it has changed to become Fresh Expression C?

N – Well, it was quite a thriving church, we had been the smallest in the circuit but then my sister and I built it up, we had a Sunday school of over 70 children, just from the village. There isn't that many children in the village now I don't think... and gradually families came in those days and when the families stopped coming, we went down fairly quickly, because the children in the Sunday school brought their parents you see? And more recently we've got down to three or four members in the congregation, we've got more but they're all housebound, all elderly...

SE – How did the church change from [Name] Methodist Church into Fresh Expression C?

N – Well, [name] came to me one day and said I've got an idea. I think, I'm not sure, but I think that I was the first person she approached. She told me about it, and I said, 'I think that's the answer to prayer, [name].' I'd been praying for a long time that God would guide us in what to do with the church and so I felt it was the answer to prayer. And there were more people in the church at that time, but gradually people have died off and there are about three or four of us in the congregation now, there are more seven or eight who are housebound. I think that's all I have to say about that.

SE – How often do you come, are you here every Monday?

N – Yes.

SE – And what is your role on a Monday?

N – Mainly just letting people in from 10am to 1pm.

SE – How many people do you usually get coming through?

N – There is no pattern to it at all. I can remember one day when they were queuing to come in and it was pandemonium to begin with because we had to deal with them all as quickly as we could and like this morning, we've been sitting waiting for anybody to come in. You just can't tell, there is no pattern at all to it.

SE – But when there comes a half-term, it's full isn't it?

N – Yes.

SE – So, I mentioned the phrase 'Fresh Expression' earlier on, what would you say a fresh expression is?

N – I would say anything that would get people interested in coming inside the church and giving us a chance to witness to them.

SE – What would you say the aim is of Fresh Expression C?

N – The aim is, like we've just said with the last question, to get people into the church with the aim of ... them becoming Christians, but without pushing it. And to answer any questions that they have.

SE – What do you think is the best part of Fresh Expression C?

N – The Sunday service, once month Community Praise.

SE – It was quite busy yesterday wasn't it?

N – Yes, it was very good.

SE – It's nice to see so many children here, having fun isn't it?

N – Yes. Even though most of them will belong to some church, but even so they need to be kept interested, so that church is an interesting place for them.

SE – So that when they grow up, they don't wander away? What relationship is there between Fresh Expression C and the circuit?

N – [name] could tell you that better. Well the circuit aren't against it, but I don't know what other people feel about it. It's not something that people say... we don't understand it or anything like that.

SE - Would you say it's looked on kindly by the circuit?

N – Yes, oh yes, it's often praised.

SE – And it's been spoken about at a national level as well hasn't it?

N – Yes, it has.

SE – Do some of the volunteers, or some who just pop in, belong to some of the other circuit churches?

N – Yes, outside of our churches as well, other churches.

SE – I remember [name], who volunteers on a Wednesday, is part of an Anglican Church, so quite a few people belong to churches other than Methodist?

N – Yes, there were quite a few there yesterday, from the Anglican Church, yes.

SE – Would you say that Fresh Expression C is church?

N – Well, that's what we've got to decide. We have to decide at the next Church Council meeting whether it is church. [Name] church is still something separate, but in the minutes, it does say that that's only up to September and we've got to say, to decide whether it becomes... we let the circuit take it over.

SE – So in September it may be that [Name] Methodist Church ceases to be?

N – Whether Community Praise can become the church. We've got all that to decide.

SE – Those are some big questions aren't they.

N – Yes, we've got more or less until the end of July. But definitely before September. And there are so few of us to make the decision.

SE – Were all of the four members here yesterday?

N – The four members... I think they were.

SE – It's quite interesting that all the members who used to meet here are now feeling part of Fresh Expression C Praise, isn't it? It's good that it's not just for children or just for adults, but somehow manages to cater for everyone.

N – Yes, that is the church now.

SE – I think [name] and [The Minister] worked well together yesterday, do you feel that they work well together?

N – Yes. They complement one another. [The Minister] never misses.

SE – Has there been many communions as part of Village Praise?

N – Two or three. People have been delighted that anyone who wanted to take it could, adults or children and it's gone well. But [name] and I have been talking about it this morning, she says it's really, as far as she's concerned, it's really only for believers. Do you agree with that?

SE – I'm not sure, Mr Wesley used to say that actually Communion is something which can convert people, that having communion can bring someone to understanding faith for themselves. So, I'm not really sure, the official line, I think, is that you should be baptised to have it, but we're quite loose on that as well. If Communion can bring someone a little closer to God, then who are we to stand in the way?

N – Yes that's right.

SE – There has been a few Baptisms too, have you been present at those?

N – No.

SE – Do you think it's important that the minister is in charge of the Baptisms and the Communion, or would it be more appropriate for someone else to preside?

N – Aren't local preachers allowed to?

SE – Local Preachers can baptise but not preside.

N – Oh I see yes.

SE – Who would you say is in charge of Fresh Expression C?

N – [name]. She has done a very good job. Yes. It was her baby and she approached me before anyone else.

SE – There is a team of people who look after the place and help it to run, there is a management group isn't there?

N – Yes there is.

SE – So that committee has overall oversight and then there is [name] and then [name]?

N – I know she is involved but I couldn't tell you exactly what she is involved in.

SE – Do you get a lot of other ministers coming in?

N – We get a, quite a few from other people I don't know if they are ministers or not, from different parts of the country.

SE – People who come to look and see what it is like?

N – Yes. I wonder if they think they could start up something and then find that it's too involved and... I've never heard of another starting up.

SE – Yes, I don't think there is another like this; there are lots of different ones. So, one I will visit later in the year is focused on making bread and sharing it. There is one in Cornwall that is all around surfing.

How important do you think it is for the minister to be present here? [The Minister] or [The Superintendent]?

N – I think it's very important, they need to know that it is a Christian organisation and the fact that the minister comes with the clerical collar shows them that.

SE – So then people can talk if they need to?

N – Yes and if they're not, [name] is good at picking up when people need to talk. And can call someone.

SE – To draw things to an end, if I came back in five years' time what would Fresh Expression C look like?

N – I just can't imagine. It doesn't seem to be growing a lot, its successful but doesn't seem to be growing a lot. So possibly very much like it is now.

SE- And you think there would still be a Community Praise?

N – Well possibly, it depends on who is in charge, [name] is talking about the Diaconate and it depends if someone can follow her.

SE – And you'd wonder if someone came after her would have the same enthusiasm for it, as its been her project.

N – yes it would be very disappointing if it did fall through if she became part of the Diaconate, they can't become a Deacon in their own circuit.

SE – Yes, the Diaconate tells you where you are going. Is there anything that you have not had the chance to say that you might want to add?

N – I thought of something, but no I can't think what it was. We'll have to say that's it.

SE – What I have found refreshing here is that the congregation are not against what is going on.

N – No I don't know anyone who is against it. As I said I thought it was an answer to prayer as we lost people and more died off, we were getting to be a very small church.

SE – Well thank you for talking to me.

**Transcript of conversation between
Simon Edwards and 'Susan'
14th May 2012, at Fresh Expression C**

SE – I was speaking with [name] earlier and I said that the thing, which is amazing about Fresh Expression C, to me, is that the older members were not against it.

S – No, from the very first utterance of the suggestion at Church Council, I was astounded because I thought I would have to do some selling here, but they were all 'yeah, that's fine.' And I thought did you really say that?

SE – I have a list of questions, some we may get to, and some may come up in other areas. What I am exploring is Methodist ecclesiology, and there is a whole raft of Methodist ecclesiological statements. Called to love and praise, the faith and order reports, all of that, and then our calling and our priorities and so on.

S – And the marks of mission, we go more with the marks of mission, maybe the priorities as well.

SE – All the F&O stuff is saying what a Methodist Church looks like, it does this, it does that and so on... it's a little idealistic.

S – I think if we had the ecclesiology as he wanted originally then we wouldn't be in the mess that we are in now.

SE – So that's what I'm looking at – ecclesiology and how it works in fresh expressions, and so how is it church and how is it perceived to be church and those types of questions. Perhaps we can start with you telling me a little bit about how Fresh Expression C came into being.

S – I think really here in particular, the church folk that have always been here have always looked at ways to be mission. [name] probably told you this used to be a school just after the war so it was used by the authority for that, it was an air raid shelter during the war, a staging post for people to gather and I think that from the very earliest time people always wanted this to be an outreach and down the road was the Anglican mission outreach, so mission has a big input to [Name] And when I joined the church 20 years ago, the church had got down to 30 members or so and the Sunday School to about 10. My background isn't Methodist so some of the Methodist practices that happen here, I was astonished to say the least that they were still carrying on, because the Sunday School was such that when you got to 12 you then looked after the crèche, but I was saying 'have these children got a faith', and they would say 'no, but that's what you do when you are 12.' And I said 'no, no, no that's not what you do.' So, from the very earliest stage we re-jigged the Sunday School to be more into teaching children and be reassured of the foundation being there really. As they go to their teens, they left and other people in the church died and weren't being replaced which is the pattern isn't it? We then went through the pattern of doing bring and buy sales, we did holiday clubs, we had a share Jesus mission just before the year 2000. And then in the year 2000 we decided to do a questionnaire of the whole of [Name] and sent out 200 questionnaires and they were collected back, we only had about half a dozen back which is usual for the number, and one of the overwhelming things which came back was that they said 'the church is great, they need us when they want our money, but they don't do very much for the community itself, and they never provide the building – you only use it for an hour on a Sunday, so when is it getting used in the week, we can use it for birthdays or football. The [Name] football team has about 18 teams, junior sections, you don't even offer the club somewhere to have their tea,' and at the time there was nobody in the membership to think that it was a great idea, but when people were in their 70s who is going to open up and who is going to do the parties. So, it became a logistical nightmare as there was only me and my fiend Lynn who were under 40 at the time, so you just think that it can't happen, and with CRB and all the other things which came with safeguarding, it just couldn't happen. So we were thinking 'that's it' we could love to, they then did the share Jesus mission which followed on from that and we began to realise that you can do something singing and dancing for a week, you can bring in a team, but when they go home everyone goes 'where is so and so' and they don't come anymore, and the actual continuity of being here all the time if you can't do it, it becomes a bit of a gimmick, at the same time the numbers were shrinking and we didn't have people in post. One of the suggestions was joining with the Methodist Church down the road (which will remain nameless, for obvious reasons) and we had a lot of discussions with them and got to the point of saying that in principal it's ok. But then I went to a meeting where the architect for the new church came to the meeting, and was saying 'when [Name] is sold, we'll have the finance to do...' And I was like 'sold? That wasn't part of the deal' and I came back to the church and said 'look, if we do nothing now, then [Name] will cease, it'll be sold, and that'll be the end of it.' Previous to that I started up ..., which started from the sale of a church in the other side of the circuit that appointed a school's worker, solely from the sale of the building. That's the first time it had happened in Methodism since circuit Advance Funds were instituted, and through the District we were able to do it because at that time you were only allowed to use £10000 for mission, but we used the whole sale £80000 to fund the youth worker. So we did that and part of the plan was when another church very close to that was closing and I wanted to suggest doing a playhouse there, because my Godchildren had gone to places and I was looking and thinking why wasn't it a church that had don't this? So, I suggested, and the minster said, 'hands off, the church have decided what they are doing, they are

closing, the decision has been made.' Originally, I had thought of it there and it would have been a base for ... the school's worker and then she could have gone on and don't stuff with teenagers after school, that was the original thought. So when the stuff happened her I came back to here and said how about doing a play gym here, which is when I got the massive support, and I was 'wow' at the other church it was 'hands off' but here it was just an overwhelming 'yes' and from then, that's, the way forward was put into action. Going to the circuit meeting was a different story because obviously going there for some funding plus backing, and Manchester was even more intriguing because I had to go in person, they really didn't get it at all, they didn't understand what a play gym was to start off, they didn't understand the concept behind it, they didn't understand how actually bringing people into somewhere where they are comfortable worked. So a lot of ground-breaking, and I have to say, Fresh Expression C has firsts put in front of it, because we were the first insured through Methodist insurance who use us as a blueprint, for Manchester we were the first to do something radically different with the building, and precedents were set. And also, the circuit meeting didn't get it, to explain to predominantly older people what a 'wacky warehouse' was... and amazingly the treasurer of the circuit lost his voice on the day of the circuit meeting and he couldn't speak. Unknown to me we were only supposed to get £16000 offered, but we got the full 80, applied to Biffa as well and they said yes to the £52000 so within hours we had got all the money we needed to start which, again, was quite remarkable. On top of that Manchester came back and said we hadn't got enough locally raised money, which was a bit of a bombshell at the time, we only had £3000 in the bank, and we had to have a certain proportion. And then within 48 hours, £40000 had come, had been given as donations by individuals, give it back when you can, no time scales. Which then Manchester had to give the green light because there was enough locally raised money, so it started. From start to finish, the proposal went in in September and we opened in the following October. And it would have been a lot quicker than that if I hadn't used the probation service to do most of the work, so that took the longest period, having the probation service here. But I always say that Methodist works in lifetimes of change and this changed in 9 months which is... quite fast.

SE – Yeah, we used to live in Dover and there is Methodist church there which has been trying to do something with their church for 18 years. It's just gone nowhere.

S – I've known churches, the newest church in this circuit is Broomfield which was rebuilt from the original and it closed last year, and so building a new place doesn't bring a new congregation or bring a change, maybe it does at first, once you've got the new things and people come to look at the nice chairs and the way of designing it, but it doesn't actually bring people into the church. And a lot of the arguments here were because of where we are situated, who is going to come, we are not exactly in the right place for business plan purposes. We certainly didn't have a track record to say we have a big congregation or lots of people to help, six old people and me isn't really conjugate to saying yes let's go for it. Everything was against us as we started, but as I say the mountains just disappeared overnight, and the day we opened there was just me and a couple of others and the members agreed to come a day a week to be on the gate, but over the 5 years we've got the point where it's just [name] who comes. Which is a shame, but it was always going to be the scenario. But part of my belief was that I was never going to change what they had as traditional worship, so every Sunday morning they would have what would be deemed as Methodist worship downstairs. The worship area was made to be identical to what they would perceive as Methodist area. So, that was put very much at the forefront, there is no point in me saying let's make a nice modern place upstairs, and then you can go in your dark hole downstairs and do your Methodist thing and we'll just move on from you. Never was the thing to make them change, and I have a great belief looking at the church now that was doesn't mix is trying to make adult congregations become children. Family worship was good for a time, but now I believe that you do it at a different place and at a different time and you say to people 'come and have family worship' and encourage the members to support it rather than tell them they are going to have to put up with it, all you end up with is loads of older people unhappy and younger ones who don't really get it because it's not really either. You try to mix the two and they don't match. People here do support it, so they come at 4pm because they want to be here not because I'm taking away from them what was theirs. And that was a sea change for them, to be respected as members, not saying this is what you get whether you like it or not. Now their service has dwindled off as they have become too frail, but that's not because we have made that happen, it's just the depletion of numbers and Fresh Expression C Praise it what I would see as the future of this church here, and we have between 40 and 60 coming to that. I know probably we are the first or one of the first Fresh Expressions to get beyond just having an act of worship here, as we have Communion here which would be considered one of the rights of passage which is being struggled with in other FX as the minister's role and that side, but that isn't an issue here. We do have the next step issues and are they members of this church or Community Praise and how we decide, but I don't know necessarily that that is the be all and end all of the role of here. Because some of the people attend other churches and they say that because of the setups of their churches they very rarely worship together as a family. So to have an opportunity to come and be family is something they value and I think sometimes we forget that, we have people who have hundreds of jobs in church which means that they can't go to church as a family as they are off stewarding or doing Sunday school and the children get abandoned, which is why they sometimes resent church. So, the fact that we can offer here the fact that they can stay together as a family is really one of the plusses.

SE – If you had to, in one sentence, sum up the aim of Fresh Expression C, what would you say?

S – I would say it's being church in the C21. And being real about what faith means to live the faith, not just have it thrown at you. And I think most of the week time is about living out your faith, it's not just in an hour of hymns, prayers and a sermon. So, for me it's the everyday faith, talking about it.

SE – What do you think is the best part of Fresh Expression C

S – People in here now who come in in the week, I would get rid of the parties, they are not the be all and end all for me. Community Praise is for me the culmination of what it was all about and seeing people for who that is the date in the diary, and they are there. And then people who come in the week who I now have a personal relationship with because they know and they know people on different days. Because we have different staff on different days, we all have a different circle of people we know and there is that bonding for people that come and really for me it was summed up in the lady whose son was born with brain damage and she came and asked if we would pray for them. And he's the only one who left hospital and she brought him and he ran in at 3 years old and she says that it's our prayers that have made him right and I thought that for me that is Fresh Expression C, the fact that we have actually done something for her through faith, that has changed the life of her son. To offer that, we wouldn't have that opportunity if it was just church on a Sunday, they wouldn't have come for one and two they wouldn't have felt comfortable enough to have said would you pray for my son. And I think because people are comfortable once they get to know you here, that to me is the biggest thing that church doesn't do in its normal sense, the vicar of the person leading get the 'hello, nice service' but you never get to the crux of people's needs. But here we do because we see them every week, they do come with all the baggage and we get grandparents as well.

SE – I guess that when people come on Sunday, they put an act on 'I'm fine today,' but here it's not like that.

S – It's normal, here we've had 8 Baptisms and the reason that we've Baptised here is that this is a relaxing place and they know what we are, they don't have to be told that we are a church. The first time maybe they will say 'did this used to be a church' but we say 'it still is' and once they have got over the fact that it is still a church, and when they come for a Baptism they feel very comfortable, that moment when people come into church and they don't know where to sit and they don't know how to behave, we don't have that here. The atmosphere in the place is very normal for them, and one of the strange things at Community Praise happens, nobody goes on the play equipment until they are told. Whether they come for a service, for Community Praise or a Baptism they don't, it almost disappears. And they wait to be told they can go and play, they wait for the 'yes.' And if you come to a play gym normally, they are undressed and in before they have got the shoes off their feet usually. So, there is that knowing what it is and knowing it is church but also knowing that they will have the opportunity afterwards to enjoy themselves on there. The biggest Christening party we had was 90, 90 min for it, and they thought it was wonderful that they could stop afterwards and have tea and coffee and the children could play. We do that on Mother's Day as well, so families can come and enjoy having Mother's Day, the children are fed first and go and play, then the parents can have a four course meal and not be pestered by the children who don't want to be sat around a table for three hours. So even in that respect you see that the opportunities are there to make life easier for families, not just say this is what you have, put up with it.

SE – Still on Community Praise for a minute, you mentioned Communion and Baptism a little bit and those are important things that happen, how important is it that it is a minister that is known presiding? So, if someone from the other end of the circuit who nobody knows came in to preside, would that be appropriate?

S – I don't think they would bother as long as the recognisable people led it. As long as me and Jeanette and the others were there, I don't think the act of the sacrament would put people off. How they did it might, so they have got to fit in with how we do it here.

SE – So those who wanted to come in in their robes might not be entirely appropriate?

S – Well that has happened actually, the Bishop came in his purple robes on a Wednesday morning. The incumbent vicar from the parish wanted to bring him in to show him and a little boy came up to him, looked up and said, 'what you wearing a dress for?' You'd probably get some of that, but do they need to be in a robe, is it appropriate for where they are? You hear people talk about appropriate behaviour, [The Minister] if he put a collar on, I don't think they would be bothered about that, but if he walked in in his full robes, they might think him odd. And when I first set it up, I didn't want that. I wanted him to come in jeans and things that people would associate with normal people, but I don't put anything like a suit or a jacket on, because why do we need it? The fact that the worship is here, and someone might say 'where are the hymns,' well the songs are there the prayers are there, the real bit is there. It's where they are at, the family at the second table yesterday were the baptised family and they come to Community Praise as a result of being Baptised here. She said that they would come every week if we had it and probably most of them would say the same. But as we put so much into it, it's not practical to do it every week as we don't have the resources, but if we did I would want that and it would be my aim, that would be the service that happens here at four o'clock every Sunday. And that would be my vision for the future if it could happen that way. But I don't think that the Communion side, Communion from my back ground was for believers and it was always around the Lord's Table, it wasn't like this big event that you have to be a minister for, and you have to have gone through training for. It was about sharing the bread and wine and we've made that very much the pattern when we do it here. It's not made to be this 'holier than thou' part that you have to be good enough to take, and actually

when we offered it, it was the children who ran out to take it. It was them pulling the adults, who maybe didn't feel comfortable, but it was nice that the children didn't see an issue with coming forward, for them it was just a normal part of an act of worship.

SE – Yeah, it becomes a little patronising when they come out and you put your hand on their head.

S – Oh yeah, bad hair Sunday they used to call it here. And there isn't a lot of ecclesiology about when do you accept children for Communion; I know that in their circuit when a child goes forward for Communion, they get it. That's been a change of the last 10 years or so, because how many of the adults understand what they are doing, and we would never turn an adult away, but we will say to the children that they don't understand. Some adults don't really understand, I can tell you now that I have had conversations with people who have gone to Anglican churches all their life and have been frightened to ask what the Communion service is all about and I've explained it here, and you think... all their life... We seem to just go through rituals, but we don't know why we do it or what it's all about.

SE – My boys, whenever we go up always put their hands out, because they want it. Why should we get it and they just have to stand there next to us?

S – Well, Isobel, her sister who was here just said 'oh its Communion, are we having wine today?' She is down the front, but I have to say that there is no flippancy, no messing around, she behaves at the rail just as you would expect anyone who is doing it reverently to do it. And I thought, she has got it, cos normally they are running around like something demented and they don't.

SE – Yeah, they see it as something special, they may not get quite what is going on, but do any of us completely get what is going on?

S – Well, we all have our different views on that. I know [The Minister] has his views on eating all the stuff afterwards and I say its Ribena and bread. That it will remain. We don't do anything special with it, it doesn't become anything special for us, it is remembrance for me. But I know there are big differences in that and how far we take it. Are we almost catholic in our ideas or are we the other end?

SE – Moving on a little bit, what is the relationship to the circuit?

S – Now, very good. As we have just gone into a new circuit and that has helped. And the other reason is that it is now seen, rightly or wrongly it is the flagship of Methodism here. When it started it wasn't as we'd taken money from the circuit and there was quite a bone of contention about it then. But I think, the new superintendent came, and other things happened because of it.

So now the circuit are thinking of taking over the trusteeship because of the membership situation here. Now if that had been 5 years ago, I would have been concerned as it would have been sold and got rid of. And one of the constitutions we built into Fresh Expression C is that someone from the mission enabling team of the District and someone with sympathy to Fresh Expression C was always the chair. And it was to safeguard the future, and now one thing which I think will never happen is that it will not be put in the ownership of one church. And that is what we feared, that they would just see as a money resource only, but the fact that it is owned by the circuit means that it is seen as a missional tool.

SE – Well, it could be sold for quite a lot, set up with a client base.

S – Oh yes. We have to take £900 a week and we do. There are very few churches which could match £900 a week and we do, plus we have money left at the end of the year. And we employ four staff. So, the overheads here are massive but we don't run a deficit. That's rare these days, so you think that we are doing it right, we were self-sustaining after 5 months which in business plan terms is good.

SE – And the prices are not extravagant... We used to head off to one in Folkestone and they would charge £4 per child.

S – You could easily take that and do it wrong, people come here and say it's too cheap, but on the market here it is right. Plus, if you are just doing it to make money that's not why we have. It covers the cost and that's all we need it to, and the extra money is being used to fund Rewind, that we funded in the local schools and I'm out doing mission projects in Gomersal funded because of here. And we are possibly going to get £45000 on the back of this, not because of me, but because people look at Fresh Expression C and say that well if it worked the then the people behind it have the vision. And we couldn't get that much funding from any church organisation because we had no track record, and now if you have the right people in place you can use funders much better, because you can say what you have don't. Look 59000 people have come through and this is what people say about us and we're on the DVD for FX so people see it and are happy to support it because we can see the good it does. And what frustrates me in Methodist is that we are very happy at funding organs, and carpet and building attached to it, but where is the mission? So many changes have happened in buildings at huge expense, far more than this

was and actually all it is about is fabric of buildings and there is no concept of mission other than people will come because it looks nice. It's not sustainable, or we rent out the buildings, I almost feel like Jesus and the rich young ruler because so many people come here and go away sad. And they go away sad because they have to give up their building which they are renting out. And when I say to them, but where is the church in your lettings, the keep fit, the karate? There is no church input into any of them, so why are you so desperate to keep them when the life of the church is deteriorating? Fresh Expression C is a franchise, and I'm happy for it to go anywhere in the world. But the one thing which is not for sale is it's not a business and it goes with all of the Christian input, the tracts, the council would say it's too Christian, but the parties have all the tracts and the bookmarks whether it's a Muslim party or an agnostic, they get it, that's part of it. And I would not put that for sale for anything, I know one church, a Christian organisation did come here and start one called the Ark, but they had parties on Sundays, that's not part of our understanding and so I would be very unhappy if they called themselves Fresh Expression C and wanted to buy into that. So many people when you ask them say 'oh well you don't do parties on a Sunday do you, you're a church' and I didn't tell them that. But they know it's what we stand for and they don't question it. And I think it's good we don't, some churches even let their buildings on a Sunday.

SE – This is probably an easy question for you, is Fresh Expression C church.

S – Yes. Next. I think I had to answer that for the council when the neighbours kicked off the first time after asking them first about doing it and they said that the church does lots of different things and they didn't have a problem with it. After 6 months, they kicked off they did have a problem with it and said we had to apply for change if we, I said why. And then they came in and they said this isn't church. I said come in, the music playing is hymns, you'd recognise them if you came to church, there is a prayer tree and it says on the tables there are people who will pray with you, I said that I spend more time here talking about faith than I ever do from a pulpit because it is real and it's people's real issues, so I said there's your sermon. I said the bible is around if people want it so if you want to take the elements of a service out, they are here. But what people don't recognise is that it's not for an hour and not in pews and not best dressed. And the space that we used to put the playcentre in is the same amount of space that was taken up by the vestry and the organ and the kitchen, so it is fixed but it replaced what we had before. And the space to sit in is the same space as before. They disappeared, it wasn't in their interest to peruse it, which is good, as Methodist church didn't want us to go down that road because other churches when they come up against that, neighbours having a strop, so I stuck to my guns because if we had backed down – which would have been easy, but it had future implications. If someone wants to do something really different and they have had OK, as soon as someone complains about it the church could be stopped doing some of the things it should be doing. And that has happened in London with music being played too loud, when people wanted to stop the worship band and you think if we had set the precedent then they would have had to back down and that would have been bad.

SE – You mentioned the neighbours a little bit, what is do you think is their impression of what goes on? For them is this still church or is it something different now?

S – They... in the cold light of day they say it's a good thing, if people didn't have cars it would be even better, I don't think they have an objection to the people coming, and they see it great that the building is being used and not derelict or being vandalised and all the things that were happening before Fresh Expression C. But I think people need to take into context that we had huge issues before [...] ever existed, the building was falling apart, we had teenagers hanging around drinking and smoking and everything came back to us, what are you going to do about it? Kids were playing football in the car park and the neighbours hated that, we had a dance school, we had the scouts here every night of the week, they didn't like that because they were coming up in cars. We had a dance lady come and started a dance school here, they didn't like that because she was here from 3 till 9, so historically it hasn't just been because of this; they just don't want people up here in cars. And I'm afraid that's a modern curse, but we did talk about having a mezzanine floor, the neighbour complained that he would have to look at it, but he doesn't come in the building, never has done. I've been here twenty years and never seen him in here, but it's all my grandfather this that and the other. And I think, yeah, the grandfather is the generation that was here, but you are not here any longer.

SE – So they don't mind what you do, as long as it doesn't affect them?

S – It's NIMBY, I have been slated for calling them that, but it is that, not in my back yard. It can be anywhere else but not here. But when you remind them of the fact that the paint was peeling off the windows and it was lowering the price of their homes the state the building was in and the balls that came through the windows that was never ever replaced by them because they didn't see that they had to pay for it and all the stuff that was frustrating of being a church and having a building that was under attack from the teenagers... it's not cool for teenagers to hang out at a play gym. So, they have disappeared, nowhere to be seen, but they haven't thanked us for that, there is no kids hanging around here in any shape or form any day of the week. But that's been forgotten. But when you look at things, if this place was sold and I think one of the things that the guy who has been the most obnoxious, when I first said to him to give him some flowers when the dance lady left because he had created so much about that, I said then that if the building was sold it would probably be flats and he's held on to that. 'you said it would be flats' I said well, no but in all honesty across our circuit so many churches have been sold and made into flats it wasn't an assumption that was wrong and it is probably where most churches end up being, either houses or flats, that the destiny once they are beyond usage. So, it wasn't a stupid statement, but he held on to it, and it could have

been, but it could have been a whole load of other things. A night club a cinema, a restaurant, that is one of the many options. And even now, because of the Charity Commission it would be sold as a play gym it would never go back to being a derelict building. And I don't think they have got that concept either, that as a business we are very accommodating to their needs where other people may not be. And I don't know how you get that one across to them now, because they see the church as something which will always back down and always be soft. But at the end of the day if they don't get why we are doing it, they never will. And if I want to be evangelical about it, we only ever get attacks from them when we are doing the right things in a spiritual sense, so in a way it is part of the spiritual warfare we've got here. But people do get what we are doing, and we have a good time and we get comments of thank God, you're here and then surprise surprise the neighbours come in and shout. And I would see it very much as a... when this happened, the recent one, I'd just come back from a wonderful time down in London, Hillsongs convention. And within two days of coming home he comes in and yells at me for being the witch of the neighbourhood, so to me it was no surprise that it happened then, but if we don't see faith in the same way then people say don't be daft, you can't spiritualise this. I say why have we gone without any complaints since September last year, and things happen for you personally, and then he comes and shouting about all sorts.

SE – Who is in charge?

S – God. And if He closed it tomorrow, I would be more than happy it had served its purpose, I've always said that. If I walked away tomorrow and it continued it is right. It's not about [name], I know people say it, [name] says. That is the standard, but it is not [name]'s project and it never has been. And if it ever was then I would walk away tomorrow, it's not about me it's not about the things we do as people. And it always proves the point that as one leaves another one takes their place, that's why I don't have a fear about it – we've lost all the members from here apart from [name], other people have come and taken their place from out of the blue. One will leave and within 48 hours another has offered to help, and you think that's why I know it's God's work. And the things that happen, like we raise the £900 every week and it's usually at ten to six on a Saturday as you count up, and it always balances up at the end of the week, if it was mine that wouldn't happen. And it's like a lot of churches battling on when they really aren't doing God's will anymore and that's why they are in the state they in. I think that you do need leaders and do need people, it seems to be a modern trend to be a facilitator, but people do need some leadership and they are very willing to follow, but you have to have direct leadership and someone responsible and where the buck stops. In my view that is a typical Methodist thing, you need leadership, you need teaching and people will follow; that's where the class meetings were so powerful because that was the small group and it was all orchestrated from the top, but we seem to have turned that model backwards and say I'll push the people when the people have never been the type to be led from behind, they need someone from the front. I always parallel in my experience of Methodism, they are like sheep, they'll grumble moan, but they'll follow on baaing... but they will follow and they are very faithful and the fellowship that they bring is one of the biggest strengths, that they welcome people and the fellowship side is massive but what is often lacking is the leadership to say we are going to do this and stick with it.

SE – We are coming to an end, if I was to return in 5 years, what would it look like?

S – Might be a nightclub in five years, could be a teenage climbing wall, I actually only ever saw it as a five-year programme, I thought once the first lot of kids went through it would have to change after five years, I honestly didn't think there would still be the need. But that has been proved wrong and it might well be that that is the pattern until out there decides that play gyms aren't the thing that people want to be at, and at that point people will need to move on and ask what is the need. I wouldn't want this to be Methodist, that it would not change, when I first set it I said this is right for now but how long now it will be determined by the users and it will be the same with Community Praise, at the moment we have got a cohort coming through and people ask me the question 'what happens when they become teenagers, what happens about the next step?' and I say that when it gets to the next step that's when we have to say 'what do we do.' But that hasn't happened yet, but it will have to be dealt with. Maybe in five years it will not be here at all. The purpose might have ended, and if I was still here, I would be happy with that, if that is what God wants of this building in five years' time that it isn't here, then that is fine by me. What is sad is when you hold on to a vision that has died because you don't want it to go and it is you that doesn't want it to go. If people stopped coming tomorrow, then we would have to think if we are doing the right thing and perhaps ask the question again 'what is it we need to do?' God is blessing it now and I think he will continue to do so until the point when we have lost the plot, or it has served its purpose, or it will evolve into something different. We were joking on Sunday about pulling down the thing and putting pews back in, well if that's what happens then it happens and yes it would be a bit sad to see it but if that is really the right thing for the place then we shouldn't stand in the way of that. It's easy to say.

SE – I've got nothing else, is there anything that you want to add that you have not been able to say yet?

S – No, it would just be nice. One thing that I really regret here is the lack of ministers that come and meet real people. For me in the week all these people I talk to is so easy, but I very rarely see a minister here. Even to the degree that the local vicar, his wife did a placement here and she said that half of his congregation is here in the week. And I said how easy would it be for you to meet your congregation because they are here.

SE – There is nothing stopping them from just coming in for a cup of tea is there?

S – No, and do you know why. They don't have a conversation about the real world. Ministers are fine because they can have little Church Councils and coffee mornings in church and its comfortable because everyone, they talk to are church folk. And they come here that conversation is irrelevant, nobody wants to talk about church issues because they're not churched so you have to get beyond that and think that these are real people, what can I talk to them about. And if your life is so centred around church and ecclesiology, you don't unless you really make, and effort have an outside conversation. I think sometimes they are so spiritually minded that they are no earthly use, because they don't know what's going on in the world that they can talk about. And there is huge issues in people's lives, and it is not that they don't want the church, what they want is someone relevant in the church. To talk about the news and the things people have got, they don't want to talk church politics. And I'm not one personally one who is outgoing, and I have to learn it as a teacher, and I find it frustrating that if I had to learn it to be a teacher then why can't a minister learn to do it. They want them in church but if you don't build a relationship you aren't going to get them in church. We have hundreds of people through here in the week and they will be down at the coffee morning in [Name] but don't come here, what's the problem? And the ones who don't come are very quick to say, when we have a problem, stop this or that and they just don't know what goes on here and what a stupid thing they're saying. If they were here more perhaps the neighbours would talk to them, and I can't change it because ultimately, I am not the person in charge as they see it. If I am asked one question more than any, it is 'are you the minister of the church?' There is always the assumption from people like you coming to interview me that I am the minister, and when I say that I am just a member, they are astounded that this happened without the minister. And I think that isn't that the historical foundation of Methodism, that it is a movement of people and the ministers were the shepherd of the flock. And now we expect the minister to do it and we don't want to get our hands dirty sometimes. So, some parts we have lost the original aims of the Methodist church and sometimes I think just move because if you don't, you will die. Movement means move, and we don't wasn't to be an Anglican church which is set. Maybe I'm too radical?

SE – Thank you for taking the time to talk to me.

APPENDIX V

TRANSCRIPTS OF INTERVIEWS AT FRESH EXPRESSION D

Transcript of conversation between
Simon Edwards and 'Jenny'
2nd June 2013 at Fresh Expression D

SE – How did you come to be involved in Fresh Expression D?

J – Right yeah, I was actually worshipping at [Name] Methodist, when [a former Minister] stood up and gave his vision to the church and said, you know, this is what I feel is, you know, this is what I can, will see, this is what I'd like to, you know for us to be praying about and doing. We had only just, we'd not long moved up from Surrey and I'd been involved in three other areas where new churches had been formed... and I didn't want to move up here, it was a forced move, for lack of a better phrase and I just felt at that time that God was saying, what are you here for and I thought, that is rubbish! I don't believe you... so from then on, I was involved in... we went out doing questionnaires and I was involved in that, I was involved in meetings when we talked about them and everything. When it started, I wasn't on the core team, the actual initial part because of family commitments basically, but there was an inner core team and an outer team, so I was a part of the outer team. From there we moved actually to Elsham and so I didn't come as often. Then due to family issues I didn't come for a number... quite a long time because of problems we'd got and then I guess it was about probably 4/5, 4 years ago, I felt that it was time to pick up the pieces again, I felt very much that the church I was in was not fulfilling what God wanted me to be doing as much as anything, ticking boxes in various jobs, but not, you know, I wasn't comfortable there. And from there I spoke to [name] on lots of occasions and then asked a couple of years ago, 2 and a half years ago if I could come on the core time because that felt right at the time and from there I applied for when they advertised for the assistant post, I applied for it and got it. I felt very much that God was saying that was you know, that was right.

SE – So how many years have you been involved in it?

J – Well I mean... I always think I've been involved from the start, which I have but I have but I've had breaks from it and so... yeah, I mean, our son had a very severe accident and was in rehabilitation in and out of county and everything, and so family had to you know, going to any church was a problem probably for about five years so I dipped in and out as and when I could.

SE – Ok... thinking particularly of tonight. Would you say that was a typical evening session?

J – Yes it varies from week to week, so sometimes it will be small tables, Café Church type set up. Sometimes it will be rows of chairs... I mean last week it was a lay preacher that took it so it can be a variety of things, you never know quite what you're coming in to I don't think.

SE – Ok, right. What would you say the aim of Fresh Expression D is?

J – The aim is to... I mean we've got... yeah... to tell people about Jesus, and to bring them to faith, to disciple and.... We've got a phrase, reaching discipline and maturing so that is all people for Jesus Christ, so that is putting it in a nutshell.

SE – What do you think is the best part of Fresh Expression D?

J – I think in lots of ways its being able to talk to people. You know, it's good having the services... obviously, the presentation plays a big part but being able to talk to people afterwards and being able to do that over a cup of tea and food is always a lot more relaxing than if you're trying to talk to someone in a lot more stark environment.

SE – Thinking a little bit from... particularly when I was here 13 years ago, to now. How would you say it's changed and developed during that period, or or since its begun how has it changed?

J – I think it changes, it's not a change, I think it has changed several times, its evolved in different ways. some of the time we've had very large numbers of young people coming in, and then we can go to almost none. So, it... the format has changed in that yes now we probably do it in a more relaxed style than when it first started and more people are involved in it, as you said when you came Peter did everything other than the music, the music group behind and even the way the music group perform now, it's done differently now to when it first started. I think the music is a very important part of Fresh Expression D set up and it's not just Christian music, it's secular music that comes into it and the musicians you know, do really well and they, they practice you know, when they can, and you know it depends on who's available, it's not the same people each time, a rota system is run and so people, different people are more capable than others

SE – And hopefully I'll see some of that over the next three or four weeks, that would be quite helpful...

J – Yeah, because we've got some of the younger, some of the younger people involved playing drums and singing, so you know, that's bringing them on to you know, be part of it more.

SE – Thinking a little bit now about the relationship of Fresh Expression D to the circuit... how would you describe the relationship between Fresh Expression D and the rest of the circuit?

J – Interesting... its... initially it was, when it was set up, it was all going to be part and parcel to the circuit but actually I don't think... my point of view is that it doesn't necessarily work out like that. But we almost... I see it as almost a separate entity to the circuit, but it's not, because it's funded, it's supported but in broader terms, so it's different.

SE – Do you get people belonging to other Methodist churches coming along here as well?

J – Yes, yeah, I mean some of the people that are on the leadership team have been part of it right from the beginning, so they, and some of them still go to [Name] Methodist, some of them don't, some go to other Methodist churches as well, although I don't worship regularly at Earl Shilton I still go and I take communion there because communion isn't something we have readily in the same sort of way as a regular church.

SE – So are people from Fresh Expression D involved in circuit Meeting and that kind of stuff?

J – Yes, yes there are. There are some from... when the circuit Meeting is on, there's representatives from Fresh Expression D leadership team that go and speak on behalf of Fresh Expression D yes.

SE – Would you call yourself a Methodist?

J – No! No... I'm not, I've been part of... I was brought up Baptist. I've been involved in evangelical churches, I've been involved in other Baptist churches, very different to the one I was brought up in. So no, I'm a Christian and that's my emphasis, that I'm a Christian wanting to serve God where he wants to put me basically.

SE – What would you say is the biggest difference between what goes on here and what goes on in the other Methodist churches of this circuit?

J – I think that basic Methodist church, you have a regular service, you might have a messy church as part of it at another time, you might have all sorts of other things going on, but Fresh Expression D is... we don't have you know, a sort of... well our presentation isn't the same as a traditional Methodist service and I think that's the main difference, and there's, you know, that's never been the intention that we would be like a Methodist church, it's always been intending to meet people where they are.

SE – You mentioned communion a moment ago, does communion happen here at all, is it frequent/infrequent?

J – It's probably about three I would have said probably about three or four times a year, probably once a quarter basically. [name]'s got a dispensation, which, I'm not quite sure when this dispensation came through, but it was always difficult, someone else had to come in up until then

SE – So it was always a presbyter who came in?

J – Yeah yeah, that's right.

SE – Do you think that communions important to what goes on at Fresh Expression D?

J – I think people value it, it's done in a very different way to a traditional Methodist, you know, communion service, and it will vary again according to... yeah, it's important and people appreciate it and it's.... I've lost my train of thought now...

Yes, what was your question again? Yes, it is very important, and I think bearing in mind that there's newish Christians, people that won't actually understand it necessarily and that has an impact on how frequent its done and how it's done.

SE – [Name] with an authorisation, how do the circuit feel about that, because obviously it's the circuit that applied for it? Is it welcomed an accepted? Is it ambivalent?

J – Yeah, I don't really know to be honest

SE – Probably more a question for him I guess

J – Yeah, I was going to say, yeah I think he'd be the best one to answer than or perhaps joy even

SE – How many baptisms have there been?

J – We have had baptisms, we have had several, oh I wouldn't like to say, I can't remember how many, and again that's partly because I've not been here consistently in the time... I mean when we have had baptisms... (Calls B)
B? Roughly how many baptisms have been done at Fresh Expression D?

B – Oh my word

J – Over a period of time?

B – Feels like about 5, yeah, I think so, feels like 4 or 5 baptisms

J – I was going to say about 4 or 5... paddling pool jobs

SE – And is it usually [name] again who presides?

J – Yes, yes, whoever is baptised usually has someone who comes alongside them

SE – Who would you say is in charge?

J – Who is in charge? Well it's a team, its team. Well obviously, [name] is a paid leader and the dynamics have changed in that [name] come on board and I've come on board, but decisions are predominantly made leadership wise, so a group of people, then someone then puts it forward. That's how I understand it.

SE – What was your role within it all?

J – Within it all? Well, I'm assistant leader, so I work with [name] and that varies... I've only been doing it a year, so it was, you know... it's taken me quite a while to you know, understand the role, and I, I personally do more work towards small groups, prayer, in our action teams. I lead the maturing... discipling and maturing team because that's what I'm most... that's where my gifts are. I've also don't prayer leaflets and tried to encourage people in praying and bible reading and things like that.

SE – Do you get the local ministers being involved? So, the other circuit ministers particularly. Do they have any level of involvement in here?

J – Not a great deal no, it's, I mean, we are sort of almost self-contained

SE – And less now that [name] has his own authorisation.

J – Yes that's right. I mean we do have outside speakers. The chap from... can't think... Yeah, we have outside speakers, but they aren't all Methodist ministers or anything.

SE – But generally it's led by people that are...

J – Yes, in house

SE – Do you think that there's a place at Fresh Expression D for ordained people

J – I'm not sure I can answer that one at the moment to be honest

SE – What would be different if it was an ordained person in charge rather than [name]? Would there be a difference?

J – I don't know it depends what their remit... and how they saw Fresh Expression D and its workings, you know, to be honest...

SE – If I came back in 5 years what would it look like

J – I have no idea, it could look very similar, it could look very different, according to what God wants from us and our aim is to be doing what God wants rather than what we want to do, whether it's... however it needs to be done...

SE – Thanks for your time tonight.

Transcript of conversation between
Simon Edwards and 'Alan'
9th June 2013 at Fresh Expression D.

SE – So, the best place to start is for you to tell me how you came to be involved in Fresh Expression D.

A – I got recruited to be the leader, what will be ten and a half years ago. So, there was a post advertised in the circuit to take over as congregational leader at Fresh Expression D on a half time basis and to then also be a half time mission enabler in the circuit. But having said that, I was probably involved in Fresh Expression D before that because I'd been involved in planting a church at exactly the same time as Fresh Expression D was originally set up and... in terms of understanding the language and having an understanding of the context although it wasn't in a Methodist context, it contained a lot of very similar language and thinking and understanding behind it.

SE – Is that still the same role that you are in now?

A – No. I am now still leader of Fresh Expression D. I am no longer mission enabler within the circuit, I resigned that post four or five years ago.

SE – Thinking briefly about tonight, would you say that is a typical evening?

A – Yes. Yes, it is. So... the chairs might be arranged differently, we quite often do café style and although this evening, effectively, the children and young people left, we also do all age which is about once every four to six weeks.

SE – What is the overall aim of Fresh Expression D, if you could summarise it?

A – Yeah. Well we have a mission statement which says that our aim is to ... to make... make, grow and mature disciples of Jesus Christ. That's it.

SE – And what is the best part of it for you?

A – I can answer that at a number of different levels. Personally, the best part is when people come to faith, that for me is what excites me more than anything else, I would rather spend my time doing that – encouraging people to become people of faith or to make enquiries about Jesus, going through the whole process of talking with them and sharing with them and praying with them if that's appropriate, and all that kind of stuff and then them getting to the point of making a commitment and then they make that commitment in a public setting. That for me is great, it's great being part of a community where they are willing to do anything to achieve that. So we have had discussions about whether we have presentations on a Sunday evening, because it might not be the best way of us trying to do what is it that we are trying to do, although there were some people who will have struggled with that conversation, but there is no... we bounce everything up against making, growing and disciplining, disciples of Jesus. If we are not able to do that then we are not interested.

SE – So there is a certain kind of freedom within it all to match what you are trying to do to the aim?

A – Yeah. And the methodology by which we do that or the model we use to do that has changed over time. So, for instance, Sunday evenings is always called a presentation, since I've been involved it's become less presentation and more interaction, because actually that's what seems to work better.

SE – Let's think for a few minutes about the relationship to the circuit. How would you describe the relationship of Fresh Expression D to the circuit?

A – I think it is good. There have been times, certainly when I've been here in the past 11 years when it has not been good, when at times it is not, it's actually been destructive, when people have tried to close Fresh Expression D down and I think in many ways, actually it's just because things are different and I think often people can sometime be a little afraid of things which are different and because they don't understand a different way of working or a different way of doing things. But I like to think we work, I try and think we work quite hard, I think sometimes what it is to be circuit is specified in a certain way, whereas we are often, we often don't do that or don't fit into that nice neat traditional 'well this is how we are circuit', we actually we do circuit in a different way. And the language ... so for instance, the circuit is asking some serious questions about the future and that kind of stuff and I sat down with our leadership team and shared with them those... the outline of some of those discussions and immediately, because we have a tradition at Fresh Expression D of praying and fasting, the leadership teams say well is the circuit doing that. And so, I said no they are not and so we wrote to the circuit and said this is something we have done and we found it to be good and beneficial, so how can we help facilitate the circuit in praying and fasting about this because... so that's us being circuit minded, but if you asked our people to go to a circuit service then the vast majority of them would not want to go because it's just not their thing. If that makes sense? And that whole thing about unity and diversity is quite important

SE – Sometimes it only works from one side.

A – Well it can do sometimes, yes, because you are not measuring up to what it is supposed to look like. But we are just doing things differently and that's ok. But the whole theology of a mixed economy, and behind that my observation would be that language which is talked about in FX and is out there and is understood within the FX movement, I'm not sure that is understood wider at a grass roots level within the Methodist Church and also at a circuit steward, superintendent level. In some case it is, and some other places is isn't., and I would say that that is a work in progress.

SE – Does Fresh Expression D have representation on the circuit Meeting and circuit Leadership Team and so on?

A – Before I can answer that question, there is an issue that we don't have membership at Fresh Expression D. I have membership of the Methodist Church but it resides at another Methodist Church because Fresh Expression D is not recognised as a Methodist Church, so my membership resides at [Name] Methodist Church even though I never worship there and on that basis I'm allowed to be a Local Preacher and on that basis I'm a member of staff. We have two other members of staff because we have a Connexional grant, we have two other members of staff and neither of them are members of the Methodist Church and so neither of them have any voting rights at circuit Meeting. I can go to a circuit Meeting because I am a member of staff. It's a pragmatic decision that we make in that respect in that having three half-time members of staff there is only so much that they can do so we make a decision that they do not go to staff meetings. But we do send somebody if I can't go to a circuit Leadership Team, we try to get somebody to go in my stead. And so that, the only people from Fresh Expression D who are, we do have representation at circuit, we have two other reps, both of them have their membership at [Name] Methodist Church and for me that's just... it's a nonsense. If Joy our youth worker wants to go to the circuit Meeting, she can go but as a member of staff she doesn't have a vote.

SE – It interesting, who is it that is not defining Fresh Expression D as a church? Is it because there is no membership?

A – That is a long... there are a number of things... so for instance Fresh Expression D has its own bank accounts and it has its own regular givers and under the tax reclaim, we claim the tax back on all that giving, so actually the Inland Revenue recognise us as a church. But as we don't have a properly constituted, we don't have a membership, a properly constituted Church Council and all that kind of stuff. And there is no... In many ways there is some of those things that we are not interested in doing some of those things because they just don't work for us, so why would we do them. The whole idea of FX is that you create something which is different, and not after a number of years go back to what was perceived not to be working in the first place. That seems illogical to me and for me there is not a... well I think there is a multiple understanding of what it is to be church in CPD, but the issues are around how willing are people to be flexible in their understanding and their understanding of those rules and regulations within CPD. Some people are flexible, and some are not.

SE – I guess you find that some people say you can be church as long it's as we tell you that you can be...

A – We would call ourselves church as the people who come to us say this is my church, and we are not going to apologise for that. We are on the plan.

SE – So it's an odd set of contradictions isn't it?

A – It is. And we went through a phase of trying to talk about that and sort it out but actually it just... wasted energy and ended up being quite hurtful, because it ended up being a rejection of who we are and what it is that we are trying to do. And for me I find it more helpful to talk about Methodist charisms of holiness, evangelical zeal, meeting in small groups, I find that language more helpful to be able to talk about it that way, so emerging church or re-emerging church, there is a part of me that says the whole FX movement gives people a space to critique that which already exists, which is traditional, but also to say this is our Methodist roots and we are not fasting twice a week, meeting in a small group to challenge each other and to disciple and to witness to others, are we really Methodist anyway?

SE – So Fresh Expression D could say which is something like 'we are far more Methodist than you are'

A – Well I think that would be... I would never be as arrogant to say that in quite that way, but I would... that is a language that we have increasingly begun to use. To say what is Methodism, or Methodism's... and what does that, how does that work out and what does it look like because my own observations is that we often have what I have called a very 'Victoriana' Methodism. And that's ok, because clearly that works for some people, but it doesn't work for all people.

SE - Does Fresh Expression D have an assessment to pay to circuit?

A – No. not formally, but we do pay an amount to the circuit every year and that has been increasing for the past 5, 6, 7 years.

SE – And is Fresh Expression D funded by connexion or circuit or both?

A – By a mixture of circuit, Synod and Connexion, we are in receipt of grants from all of those and also regular givers at Fresh Expression D.

SE – And are they decreasing grants?

A – Yes.

SE – And how does that impact Fresh Expression D?

A – Well when we get to the end of 2015, those grants run out and our aim is to be self-financing. Whether we'll get there is another matter, but that is our aim.

SE – There is never an offering during the presentation, is that intentional?

A – Yes. And it has been intentional since the very start and I see no reason to stop that largely because often the portrayal of church is all we want is your money. There is a box at the back which is just a box with a thing stuck over it which says offering or something like that and people are able to put some money into that if they want to. But we have 12 or 15 people or family units who give by Direct Debit every month because it's the most tax efficient way of doing it. And that equates to about £12,000 a year.

SE – I guess for that amount of families, it's a bigger amount that you might find at some churches, it's a larger commitment.

A – Yes, there is on some family's behalf, there are some other families who are in sin about their lack of giving to Fresh Expression D when both adults are in full time jobs and they still go to the rugby or they still have sky and that is a discipleship issue.

SE – How often do you get other ministers from the circuit coming to Fresh Expression D?

A – Not very often.

SE – is that intentional, or because they don't want to or because they delegate it to you?

A – Well we don't have anybody in pastoral oversight of the church. The present Superintendent made a decision without consulting us, but that was the decision she was making and that was it. Previously, the Superintendent had pastoral oversight of Fresh Expression D and so there would often be some discussions which took place which of... can I come and be at Fresh Expression D, we did have a slight issue there because he was very traditional and so I had to have discussions with him about turning up in his full gear complete with preaching tabs. You've seen what Fresh Expression D looks like on a Sunday evening, it's just inappropriate, and so he would come, and he would be there in a shirt and tie and that's fine. We have had ministers come, I've now got a dispensation for doing communion, we've gone through any number of phases of how it is that we celebrate communion. From shipping a minister in to come and do communion, people would turn up and say, 'who's this guy', we don't know them. To extended communion and now we have got to the point where I have had a dispensation for the last two years. And that can only be argued on the ground of depravation at the moment, but there is new Standing Orders in CPD about missionary situations. So, those were the main reasons why we would invite a minister in that respect. So, on one had we have got a Superintendent who wants to be involved, it wasn't his cup of tea particularly, but they would be happy to come and there would then be a discussion, often quite a heated discussion about what was appropriate and for whatever reasons the present Superintendent made the decision not to have pastoral oversight. Now, practically, I don't think that has made any difference whatsoever, personally I found it quite, I thought it was a detrimental, because the decision was made without any consultation. Which personally I think is a bit rude.

SE – Ecclesiologically it's quite interesting isn't it? It says that we are not going to look after you so therefore you are not one of us.

A – Yes, exactly. It says you don't matter. Which is... I think often we have found that decisions have been made nobody has actually come and talked to us. So, what was the original question?

SE – The question was how often do other ministers come?

A – So it's not very often, we did have an occasion when we confirmed somebody and because it was a confirmation and it was Easter Sunday, and we wanted to have communion and we got one of the local ministers in and that caused a massive uproar because I did the confirmation. He wasn't happy with that, personally I didn't have a problem.

SE – Which church were they confirmed in?

A – Well, that's actually... we had some young people who became Christians, they have since moved off to college, but actually we confirmed one of the present Methodist minister's daughters and she became a member of [Name] Methodist Church. Which is just bonkers. Or you could argue that it's a new form of Connexionalism. Personally, I think it's a bit tenuous, but there you go.

SE – We talked a little about your authorisation, do you think that communion is an important part of what goes on in Fresh Expression D?

A – For some people it is, yes. For others, I don't think it matters one way or the other.

SE – And does that, in part at least, depend on where they have come from?

A – It can do, yes. So I mean... it's not a hard and fast rule, so I would say that for some people who are church people, it doesn't matter, but for some of those church people it matters an awful lot and we have no end of discussion about who's allowed to do it and what are they allowed to do, what form would it take, what words would be used... and for some people that was very painful but for some it was just.. can't understand why we are talking about this. And then you have the same range for some de-churched people and some unchurched people and so I personally think it's a lot related to learning styles and personality types. Some people like the visual, we have started to do – it's become a tradition, a Christmas eve communion which is 5:10, half an hour, forty minutes and we get quite a lot of people come to that because it starts their Christmas and it is always quiet, meditative and at times it is stunning and you can touch the presence of God, because people know that something special is going on. And then there are other times when it's organised chaos, and who cares? And for me, the whole issue about... I am not called to be a minister, that's, I'm pretty convinced about that. God is not calling me to a ministry of word and sacrament. But because of no pastoral oversight, we needed to get to the point where we were able to be full church because, and surely that's what Jesus commands of us... do this in remembrance of me, so we needed to obey that command and so that means that I carry that responsibility as the leader of Fresh Expression D for now, it will stop at the 29th September.

SE – What do you think will happen at that point?

A – I have no idea. Your guess is as good as mine.

SE – It's a new thing for everyone and there will be discussions with circuit around who comes in and who does what and the whole, should another person be authorised will come up...

A – Yes.

SE – In terms of oversight, who is your line manager?

A – The superintendent

SE – And do you manage the other two?

A – Yes, we meet. Well we've gone through phases actually, we used to meet every other week and then we went through a long phase of meeting every week on a Monday without fail where we would read the bible, talk about it, pray together and then we'd do the business. We've actually slightly changed that recently where we still all meet for three weeks out of four and read the bible and talk about it and pray because I think that what Methodists should do, and then sometimes we meet as a three to talk about business and sometimes I'll meet with [name] and then the following week I'll meet with [name]. So effectively they get one-to-ones. I personally think that that is important that we talk about the work that they are doing, I've not met my supervisor for well over a year.

SE – It seems that this lack of oversight is extending to the whole of Fresh Expression D.

A – I'm very willing to meet with my supervisor but I don't see it as my responsibility to say that we should meet.

SE – Yes, I had a similar experience when I was a Lay Worker...
So, what is the role of the ordained at Fresh Expression D?

A – I'm not sure I can answer that question.

SE – You'd need an ordained person?

A – Yes. Because I think actually what that goes to the heart of is what is ordination. And what is calling. And I'm not sure at the moment that the MC is particularly clear on that. I would say I'm ordained by God to this.

SE – Set apart...

A – Yes, I am. But that might not be a traditional understanding of what ordination is within the Methodist Church at this present time. My observation is that other people have clearly said to me 'you're called to do this; you are the right person to be doing this' which is great... because if I wasn't, I'd be screwed!

SE – That's a good point. Going towards the end, I have two questions which have just jumped into my head. Why is it the message that is used?

A – Because I think for 2 reasons, it is American so sometimes I struggle with it and there are times when we use the Good News, it's not very often. But it's to do with the freshness which I think it brings, it's not a literal translation, but it brings a freshness and it brings what I think is an incredible important book that we do not use enough or read enough to live more. And so, this evening, you will know that when I read the passage this evening people paid attention. And the word of God is alive and for me, sometimes we will use video clips, we've used the miracle... the miracle maker... we've used that in the past because it just lends itself to bringing the words alive. So sometimes there are Americanisms which make it more difficult but actually, and we've done that for quite some time. Now there are some Christians who come to Fresh Expression D who will be snooty about that but tough... go home and read the NIV if you want to.

SE – Do intercessions come into Fresh Expression D?

A – yeah, they can do, but not always. So, this evening actually, you asked me earlier about a usual, we will often make quite a lot of use of silence and it is silence, there is no music playing in the background. So this evening was quite action packed, we usually give quite a lot of space for people to reflect in appropriate ways, so we might give them something to hold, or something to interact with, we might give them a piece of paper with some things written on it, we might but PowerPoint slides and get them to reflect on that. So, in that respect it usual and so sometimes intercessions will be, and can be a part of that, but we usually don't do, pray for the world, pray for our county... that doesn't usually happen very often, if at all.

SE – A quick one – would Fresh Expression D ever get its own building?

A – We have a culture which says people are more important than stuff, and although it's a pain when we turn up in the middle of January and the heating isn't on enough and it's cold. But if the boiler is bust, it's not our responsibility. I think God has called us not to have a building, that is my opinion, we have as a leadership team, talked about that. So, when we applied for the grant funding, we entertained the idea, but actually we made a decision not to. So, we often will joke that the only things we own are a barbeque, a portable PA, a paddling pool and a marquee. And several laptop computers.

SE – Final question, and perhaps one that you may not be able to answer, if I came back in 5 years' time, what would Fresh Expression D look like?

A – Yeah. For the tape this evening as of 8:20 I resigned from Fresh Expression D 3 hours ago, so I have 4-month notice period to serve. So, five years' time. I hope it will be healthy, stronger and will still be making, growing and maturing disciples in a way that is relevant today, whatever that might look like. If that means that it looks like they have stopped doing Sunday presentations and they meet round people's tables and they equip people... who care. And that happens in 12 homes on a Sunday without fail which means that 60 people meet, great.

SE – I have run out of question for you, unless there is anything, I have missed that you want to add.

A – I think for me I would make two observations, one is that at a Connexional level, the Connexion talks a discipleship movement shaped for mission, but at a grass roots level my observation is that an awful lot of people have no idea how to do that and often communities, churches, FX who do have an idea about that are often frowned upon. And belittled and marginalised.

And there second thing is that if we say that mixed economy is reality, and then let's make it a reality and not a lip service. Those are the two things I think I would want to say.

SE – Well, thank you for this, I appreciate your time.

**Transcript of conversation between
Simon Edwards and ‘Roy’
16th June 2013 at Fresh Expression D.**

SE – I’ve got some questions, whether you can answer them or not doesn’t matter... These questions are the same as those asked to everyone here and every other place I’ve been to. The best place to start is if you can give me a brief outline of how you came to be involved in Fresh Expression D?

R – Yes, I forget how long it has been going for, it’s been nearly 20 years. It happened with doing a survey and series for meeting with [a former Minister], just as a church and him putting over his ideas and then he asked for people to go all round ... with a questionnaire, we had knocked on practically everybody’s doors who accepted us with a list of questions like ‘if you wanted to learn about Jesus, where would you be more comfortable?’ questions like that and ‘how do you see [Name] developing?’ all different questions where they had to give the answers. [name] put all that together and obviously Hastings was the thing and what he done, he picked, well I say picked, he picked people to be part of his team from all round the circuit, not just from [Name] where he was stationed so he tried to pick people who... so that he didn’t take people away from the church that, you have to be careful because if you take too many people away from churches then they are down... but I remember it, we didn’t know what was happening, he just said ‘I’ll be round’ this was just general, in the next couple of weeks I shall be formulating my team. I remember sitting down after dinner and sitting in the chair I said here’s [name], what’s he wants I wonder! And of course, it was an introduction to be part of the core team which was made of about 12 of us and of a larger team which I think numbered 40, which was all round the circuit. Basically, we started in the September and we prayed, talked about what we wanted, what our strengths were, different things like that, each time we met because we met every Sunday at the same time and we had then towards the end we decided to do it on January 23rd or something like that and before that we done practices. People had to go out and be greeted in and we done one service with ... we tried it inviting people from the circuit to come and we done it with the eats and drinks beforehand and we realised... no... because you take too long eating and drinking and the service starts at ten past and so that quickly got altered and well , we kicked off towards the end of January which was very happy and seeing who was going to turn up and that. But yeah it was fulfilling and that, it was good.

SE – So you have been around for as long as it has been going. Are you here every week?

R – Yes, basically. It’s something which we try to be, in my case it’s changed over. This is my church, this comes first because I quickly found that after [name] had gone, you couldn’t do two. And you had to come down on one, if you were going to serve one.

SE – So it became more difficult to split?

R – Yes it did, and we had difficulties with the circuit and that... it became more difficult.

SE – We might touch on that a bit later on. Would you say that tonight was a typical example of what goes on in Fresh Expression D?

R – It’s typical of a service that goes on, well a presentation, yes, it’s not necessarily that form. I don’t know what we done the last weeks because we were on holiday. But it might be set our more traditional last week or the week before, but this week it’s café style, more relaxed, it’s all age so we, the children were with us. But it was still relevant for today, which is the important thing.

SE – So what would you say is the aim of Fresh Expression D?

R – It’s to... initially it was to get people in who are unchurched and lead them to God by getting to know them.

SE – So it was a piece of evangelism?

R – Yes, but not in your face. I must admit, I don’t like that, when they’re in your face, but this is more getting to know people, alongside them. I mean we are all going on the same road, but different stages, and just help them to start and... keep them along the road

SE – What do you enjoy most about Fresh Expression D?

R – I enjoy most the variety of it and so it... I mean... you can go to a MC and you know full well that you are going to have a hymn, prayer, hymn, reading... you know it’s structured. Which there’s nothing against if people like that, but now it’s nice to do the unexpected and not know what you are doing. Obviously, we know roughly what we are going to be doing. There is a freedom to do it and I think that’s important and it helps people who are not used to church, or to be mix in more if it’s more freedom and not just we always do it this way and we always will. That attitude.

SE – We are going to think about things to do with the circuit, do you get a lot of other, people who attend other churches in the area attending Fresh Expression D?

R – Yeah, we used to at one time. We've had quite a few people from not all Methodist, we have some from the Baptist, they have moved here, and they are finding it... and they have been with us 6 or 7 years, we are open to all. At one time, they used to have a Sunday evening where one church used to come each week from different churches but that got dropped off. I remember one church that came, and an old gentleman came in and come just around the corner and they were practicing and he heard a drum 'I aint going in with drums' and he turned around and went out and the you could always tell the people who came in with the churches because they always go after the service, they don't stop for what our main part is, getting to know them

SE – Would you call yourself Methodist?

R – No, a Christian.

SE – What would you say is the relationship of Fresh Expression D to the circuit as it was and then as it is now? Is Fresh Expression D seen as part of the circuit, is it seen as something tagged on at the end...?

R – In my opinion it's seen as part of the circuit, yes. One that's bearable with, because with FX they don't want to know loose it because...

SE – Is it a necessary evil?

R – I think that depends on the people in the circuit. But I mean it's going to, we are going to go through a difficult period now with [name] going, so I mean we shall have to fight us case again

SE – The circuit will be involved in terms of new appointments...

R – Yes, they will, depending on which way we want to go. I think it's important that we get our own mind together and know which way we want to go, and I remember once we had to fight us case again to justify us and we brought out a DVD and I never forget it. On the night we were at the circuit Meeting and we were going to show the DVD we stood in [Name] in the foyer and it had just chucked it down with rain and there was this double rainbow that come and we all thought that's a sign and everybody was pleased with the DVD we had done and so we felt that God had sent us that rainbow, just to give us the sign.

SE – How often do you get communion at Fresh Expression D?

R – When it's necessary, if [name] thinks it's, like Easter or Christmas we always have communion. Not as often as a church would, but [name] has only just been given special dispensation to do it, so otherwise we had to import another person to do it. Which I, I don't know what your views are, but to my way of thinking you don't need another white collar... but you are going to be one, so I need to be careful.

SE – It's particularly tricky for Fresh Expression D which is a community of people who to have someone come in who no one knows... it raises a whole load of questions.

R – Well if you read the bible, Jesus says do this in remembrance of me, so why do you need another?

SE – Would you say that communion is an important part of Fresh Expression D?

R – No, I wouldn't say it was important, no.

SE – But it might for some people?

R – It might be, but there again, probably some people would get it at

SE – So there are a few who attend other churches as well aren't there?

R – I hasten to add that it is [Name] Methodist Church if there are any that are There about 6, Methodist Churches maybe seven.

SE – Who is in charge of what goes on?

R – [Name] in the leader, there is then... we've just restructured for the last fourteen months ago, we have BLT which consists of six and then we have got action teams so the, [name] is the leader but then we have got Chris she is the cooperative leader, [name] who is the youth leader, then [name] who gave the talk, myself and then [name] on the team we've done away with... well I say done away with... we've moved away with having the core team. Yeah.

SE – So do local ministers have any input at all? Do they visit?

R – No, no, I wouldn't like to say the last time they visited but...

SE – Were there more visits when it was [name] in charge?

R – There were more visits... there weren't from other ministers no.

SE – But there was more interaction from the circuit?

R – Yes, yes because, yeah, because I think it helped having... because he was circuit minister, and if he said, you know, let's do it where the churches coming one...

SE – That's what happens. Do you think there is a role in Fresh Expression D for an ordained person?

R – I think there's a role for a person who can lead and be able to think out the box and be relevant for today. I wouldn't like to say whether its ordained or what, I think that depends on the gifts that the person has. I mean, Tim does this for half of his time, but it takes more than that, it's bound to. I know full well that when [name] done it, he had Jane who is accompanist/pianist and he had another unpaid, who turned out to be paid, assistant as well so.

SE – There's quite a lot of work.

R – It's a lot of work and if you're going to have another church as well, you know, if you're going to do Fresh Expression D, then in my opinion, you've got to do Fresh Expression D and that's it. You know, I mean, but as I say, it depends on your gifts, which is very important because you know.

SE – Final question, we've come to the end. If I was to come back in 5 years' time what do you think Fresh Expression D would look like?

R – I wouldn't like to say, it's where God has led us, I mean, that's what we always aim to do. I mean we've evolved probably more... We've moved on like everything else...but I wouldn't like to say where we'll be, but I should sincerely hope that its God led still, and we've gone in the right direction of what we think that God wants us to be at.

SE – But you say Fresh Expression D, in one form or another would still be something

R – But yeah there again, it depends on the circuit and the costings...

SE – A whole load of different factors as well?

R – Yeah it is, I mean they support it, they pay [name]... well they've done it in a grant actually, but that runs out in 2013... 15... but yeah.

I think if you're going to start something, looking back at it, if you're going to start something like this, then I think it's important to get a team and not just go straight into it, but do like we do... not saying it its right or wrong, but do preparation, like we started in September talking, praying each Sunday at the time, and not be frightened to change if it doesn't work. I mean sometimes you can do things... just for the sake of doing them just because we've always done it which is totally wrong. You know, we've got to be prepared to say, "no that was wrong what we done there, lets alter it and do it this way." You know... I mean that's one of the benefits of meeting every two weeks, you know, because if we see something that's not working, we can stop it and think no it don't work, or want to do anything in the third week... it's not like a church... we've got to go to the Church Council, oh when's that? Oh, I've just missed one, blow me!! You know I'm not saying that's right or wrong but, you know...

SE – That's it, I'm finished. Thank you very much.

**Transcript of conversation between
Simon Edwards and 'Ellie'
23rd June 2013 at Fresh Expression D**

SE – I have a list of questions, they're the same questions I've asked every single person in every place... a good place to start is always how did you become involved at Fresh Expression D?

E – That's a very good question... well yeah, it was through youth work. I was working for Youth for Christ and started off as assistant centre director in '04, locally and in this area and then after a year of doing that part time and also being part time children's and youth worker in another church on an estate further out in [Name] Did that for a year and then from September 05, actually became the director of Fosgrove YFC. The guy was heading it up thought it was right to pass the baton on and I went for the job, didn't expect to get it, went up against another guy and got it and thought 'oh my goodness, now what do I do? I'm leading a centre of a youth organisation; this is really scary... and schools and stuff.' So yeah, so, that kind of started that journey, and as part of that I had gap year students come through YFC doing a year out and there was one guy in particular that was linked to Fresh Expression D, in fact [name] contacted us and said could we have somebody, but I think it was... yes, they had him for a season and obviously he started some of the youth work, so our RS group, our 11's to 14's, they were sort of taken out by us... also the guy was called [name] which was quite bizarre so we called him [name]' so we had [name] for a year. I wasn't...my husband and I, [name], we weren't involved in Fresh Expression D at that stage, but obviously supporting Fresh Expression D with their youth work angle and then after that, we couldn't... I think we had more churches wanting volunteers the next year than we were actually able to supply and so it got to the stage where [name] was going 'as leader of Fresh Expression D, we need help with our youth work, we're looking to Fosgrove YFC, can you help us and I said well, if you are looking for someone to run RS too, its either me or nothing I'm afraid, as centre director. I have no other volunteers, their all plugged in to other local churches. So, I said as long as you don't mind having me and I can bring my husband in as well, and the two of us can do it as a pair when you need us, and that's fine. So, we started that but... so it would have been the October half term of 2006, we decided having left our previous church and the children's and youth work of that kind of, yeah, did it for a year, so when we became director... carried on with that but yeah, so from 06, kind of October time, so it's coming up to seven years or something.

SE – So what is your role here?

E – Yeah ok, I'm Fresh Expression D youth worker, so that basically is doing anything, all things with young people and the remit is from age 11 right through to eighteen. So yeah, that means monthly social events, we have 'mingle' for that. I run the CU here out of Hastings called 'I sit' after school on a Friday. So that runs from 3 until 4:30 and that's a weekly thing during term time. I do assemblies here as well on a Monday. Yeah and then we have an annual labyrinth that we run here in school as part of their like RE department we get invited in and so we run that for kind of two or three days. As part of the week of prayer for Christian unity, sort of, locally in the area, that's kind of bridges contribution to prayer and young people in the school, and yes, and then also we do residential's and things so we're taking young people to fort rocky in September and we did last year, last October as well.

SE – Good, ok. So how often do you attend Fresh Expression D then? Are you here every week?

E – Pretty much, yeah. Unless we're away as a family, or a celebration crops up and we can't be here but yes.

SE – So thinking of this evening. Would you say this evening is a typical example of what goes on?

E – Yeah, I think so. I mean it's really hard to define kind of what's normal, because obviously normal is relative.

SE – Are there things that change every week?

E – There are, but we have certain elements as a community so it tends to be more often than not, we will have sung worship, have bible reading on the screen that's then read out. Obviously pray as part of that as well, so I guess part of the elements that I would deem to make up church they're there in there somewhere even though they might take on a different form each week so yes.

SE – Ok, right. What would you say is the aim of Fresh Expression D?

E – Ok, well we fairly recently changed our mission statement, which is reaching, what is it... I'm trying to remember now... hang on its discipling... no... reaching, discipling, maturing, all people for Jesus Christ. So yeah... it used to be this great big long thing, and nobody could remember it apart from Monica and we were like this is silly. If we don't know why we meet and what we're trying to achieve then why are we even meeting? So yeah, in amongst everything we do whether it's during the week or on Sundays, we try and mature those who are already disciples, we try to disciple them and teach other people to disciple each other and also to reach others whether that's people on the front line in terms of their work place or their neighbours... or...I mean, it could be friends, it could be family,

it could be anyone, but try and empower people, encourage people and support people to do that during the week when they're not part of Fresh Expression D community as a gathered community I guess.

SE – Ok, what for you is the best part of Fresh Expression D?

E – Wow, gosh, there's so much I like about it, or else I wouldn't come, and I wouldn't do what I do. I guess thinking all about what [name]'s been talking about tonight about passion. Passionate obviously about young people, I believe that's a God given passion of mine, so passionate working with them and just supporting them and doing the whole reaching, discipling, maturing thing with them really makes me tick. But then also... I like the worship and the people, just the hospitality as well, the way that anybody could just walk in off the street and I'd like to think that hospitality is right up there in terms of priority of us to make them feel welcome as well, so yeah, there's lots of things.

SE – Ok, have you seen a lot of changes since 06 in what goes on?

E – Yeah, more people have got involved in various different way, whether that's during the week so maybe new people turning up to small group... also events and groups that we have during the week, or during the month we've had new faces come to that and that kind of thing so that's been quite good. Obviously, we've had some people leave as well, so there's been that change it's not just been people arriving, but people disappearing for various different reasons, and not always for comfortable reasons either, it's been, it's been some tough times in that way... what else has changed? Yeah, I see more people doing things up front and I guess people bring obviously, their different skills, but kind of different ages being involved up the front as well because when I first arrived it was predominantly [name] with a little bit of [name] and now obviously, we've had [name] do a whole presentation tonight. I love doing it and I often get to do it. My husband does some. [name] when she can, there's just so many new faces up there so it's quite good to see people stick to certain things but do things in their own way and I quite like that change that's occurred.

SE – Ok thinking about the relationship of Fresh Expression D to the Methodist circuit... whether you can answer it or not it doesn't really matter too much... how would you describe the relationship of Fresh Expression D then to the [Name] Methodist circuit?

E – The first word that springs to mind is disjointed and I don't know kind of whose fault it is necessarily. It's probably one of those scenarios that's six of one and half a dozen of another but yeah, it's quite often... yeah it's difficult to put your finger on it but I think because they view Fresh Expression D as a project rather than a church and those of us who worship here would say Fresh Expression D is church for us, but when it was set up they saw it more as a project and maybe it was set up as a project and over time as changes have occurred it's become church but I think kind of from the top down it hasn't been seen that way so I think that probably makes this whole disjointed thing go on so it makes it then tough with communication both ways and we have to try really hard at it to sort of go, this is us and this is how it works and it feels like as well we often have to justify our existence which gets quite wearing and draining and tiring and yeah. I'm sure it could work if we really tried on both ways.

SE – Do you get a lot of people from [Name] I know there's a load of people come from [Name] Methodist. Do you get people from the other churches because [Name] it's not far away either is it?

E – Yes you do. Yeah there are a couple who predominantly worshipped at [Name] then they did a bit of a cross over where quite a few people have got a foot in either camp still with [Name] and here and I think they probably only occasionally go to [Name] now, I think it's more top heavy bridge and that's happened over time and there's somebody else that comes on a fairly regular basis... who attends [Name] Methodist as well, so yeah there are other churches in the circuit where people kind of bridge the two.

SE – Have you been to any Methodist meetings, like circuit Meeting and that kind of fun?

E – Yes, yeah when I was first in post, I went to a circuit meeting... so yeah, I've been to the odd one or two and also staff and steward's meetings, I've been to some of those as well and yeah, so various kind of different levels of meetings that they have as part of their structure.

SE – Would you call yourself a Methodist?

E – No, no my background is totally mixed up and I've been in all sorts of different denominations, so no, I'm just a Christian that happens to be a part of the Methodist circuit here and employed by them as well.

SE – Ok. Think about sacraments for a moment. Is communion celebrated in Fresh Expression D?

E – Yes, it is, probably about once a term and Tim has a dispensation being a lay worker to be able to administer that because up until that point it was quite tricky because we'd either have to have somebody from the circuit come and do that element of the service, the presentation and that kind of thing, so it's made it easier and we think we probably do have it more frequently now because we have the dispensation.

SE – Did it feel awkward when someone else dropped in to lead that part?

E – Yeah because I guess we kind of felt like we were in a goldfish bowl although more a fly on the wall and it almost felt like maybe they were there for, I don't know, an ulterior motive kind of, of watching what we did, I don't know, and saw kind of yeah other things other than just the bit they were there to do and you were kind of conscious they were there particularly if you were singing or doing something from the front because all the time your eye was just kind of drawn to them and alright yeah, they're here for that reason but actually they might be here for other reasons that you don't know yeah.

SE – Do you think communion is an important part of what goes on at Fresh Expression D?

E – Yeah, I would say so and I think because we don't have it perhaps as frequently as every week or every other week or even once a month like I know quite a lot of other churches and other denominations do. I think it makes it more special because we only have it at certain times, and it tends to kind of fall with certain important times within the Christian calendar as well so for example on Christmas eve... I think that's the time when I appreciate having communion the most, just, yeah, just the way we do the service is a lot more low key and it tends to be almost like Fresh Expression D unplugged with not having so much PA and stuff so yes, it's good.

SE – What about baptism, have there been many baptisms?

E – Yeah, not so many of late but yes there have and we'll blow up a paddling pool and have it in the courtyard outside the back doors in the school in the quadrangle so yeah there have been a few, and again, a variety of ages as well, so some young people, some adults... some have been quite spontaneous, and some you know, it's taken a few meetings with them, perhaps with Tim or whoever and kind of getting to that point of 'do you understand what you are doing?' fantastic, let's go for it, so yeah.

SE – Ok, so who is the one then who presides then at baptism.

E – [Name] always done it but it's been obviously been a partnership in the water with somebody else and it's tended to be who the person being baptised has felt most comfortable with.

SE – Ok. You've partly answered this one already! Do you get a lot, any input at all from local Methodist ministers as well as the other circuit ministers?

E – Yes and one retired one as well actually. Sometimes he's still invited to come and do the talk element of a presentation so yeah, not very often but it's good to know kind of we can call on people should and if we want to and yeah those who we have a particularly good relationship with like this retired minister, it's kind of handy that... and he gets Fresh Expression D as well and I think that makes a difference if they get us, regardless they are still employed or whether they're retired, I think they're more likely to get an invite back if kind of... actually you understand where we're coming from, you've got a bit of an idea of where we think we're headed and actually we really appreciate what you have to say what you feel God's saying so yeah.

SE – Do you think there's a role at Fresh Expression D for ordained people or not?

E – That is a really good question... I think there should be. It's hard to tell whether kind of the phase and stage we're at at the moment whether it be a hindrance or a help. When it was set up it was set up with a guy who was, so in the past history says yes it does work, but then obviously we've had [name] and he's not and that hasn't mattered at all and it's been very different and I think that's why a lot of the changes have come about because he isn't, therefore that it kind of governs a little bit as to what he can do and what he can't do and obviously before the dispensation of communion for example, that was an example of that, so I think in the future it could do, but there would have to be a particular character, they would have to be very special I think in order for them to be a good fit, because otherwise I don't think people would be happy or comfortable, and it would be like saying you were having somebody just kind of plonked in to do communion or whatever. It would feel like that.

SE – They would not. It would be unlikely that they would have Fresh Expression D on its own, so they'd probably have [...] and [...]

E - Yes and then whether they would view it as a church as well, and all that kind of comes into question so yeah, not sure, but possibly.

SE – There's one more that popped up. Has there ever been a funeral?

E – No, although, there was, there's a lady within in the past few months, she's part of the small group that Chris is a part of, terminally ill with cancer and did pass away and so the funeral was chosen, the families wishes of it happening, I think it was St Catherine's in ..., but Tim and a few others were actually asked to do readings and take part as part of that and actually thinking about it, Tim has taken a funeral of a member of staff here I think she lost

her mum not so long ago, and he was very flattered well you know being vice chair of governors but also knowing that he leads a church that happens to operate in the school that she works in. she felt she could approach him and say "I don't know anybody religious at all that might be able to take my mums funeral will you do it?" so obviously he said yes and it happened in whatever church or wherever. So certain links, but in terms of somebody that we know really well, I guess not so, but yeah, there's no reason why it couldn't I say.

SE – Ok. Final question for me, if I came back in five years' time and this is probably quite an interesting one with what's going on at the moment. What would Fresh Expression D look like if I came back in five years' time?

E – Well my hope and my prayer is obviously if it's God's will that it will still exist first and foremost... because financially we're, well, we're more than half way through our five-year plan of finance at the moment which is due to come to an end... well my contract comes to the end in January 2015. I don't doubt from a youth work perspective that there will always be young people and children and they will always be there to work with and kind of nurture and all the rest of it, but whether there will be the finance for me to actually do that is a huge question mark, and obviously that brings into question all the other areas of Fresh Expression D... so yeah obviously financially it's no different kind of Fresh Expression D over not just youth work, so yeah, I'd like to think that we were still in existence and breathing and pressing on with what God wants for us but I don't know. So many people are asking me at the moment, it will carry on won't it, even kind of into October after Tim's gone and I'm kind of going yeah, we're not getting any hints otherwise at the moment, so we'll have to see what happens.

SE – Will there have to be some discussions with the circuit?

E – Oh yes, so much to unravel, which [name] and I are only beginning to sort of tip of the iceberg touch at the moment. Yes.

SE – Which is an interesting thing ecclesiologically because if a circuit minister left, they wouldn't have a discussion 'do we close the church at this point?'

E – No, no they wouldn't. That's very true.

SE – Well, thanks for your time.

APPENDIX VI
INVIVO CODE WORKBOOK

INVIVO CODE WORKBOOK

CODE FROM RESEARCH	LOCATIONS
1. Circuit	O, A1, A3, A2, B1, B2, C1, C4, D1, D1, D3, D4
2. Sacrament	A1, A2, A3, A4, B1, B3, C1, C3, D1, D2
3. Separation	A1, B3, C3, D1, D2, D3
4. Worship	O, A1, A2, A4, B4, C3, C4, D1
5. Clergy	O, A1, A2, B1, C1, C4, D1, D2, D4
6. The future	A1-4, B1-4, C1-4, D1-4
7. History	O, A2, C4, D3
8. Vision	O, A2, B1, B2, C1-4, D1, D2, D3
9. Aims	O, A2-4, B1-4, C1-4, D1-4
10. Evangelism	O, A2, C3, D1-4
11. Traditional	A2, A4, B1, B4, C4, D2, D4
12. Church	A2, A4, B2, B3, B4, C1, C3, C4, D1-4
13. Evolution	A2, B3, B4, C2, C4, D1, D2
14. Identity	A2, C4, D2
15. Tension	A2, A4, B2, B3, C4, D2-4
16. Obedience	A2, B1, C3
17. Presidency	A2, A4, B1, B3, B4, C1, C2, D1-3
18. Leadership	O, A1, A2, A3, A4, B1, B2, D4, C1-4, D1, D2, D3
19. Control	O, A2, B1, B3, C4, D2, D3
20. Priesthood	A2, A4, B1, B3, B4, C4, D1-3
21. Different	A3, A4, B1, B3, C1, C2, D1-3
22. Diversity	O, A3, A4, B1, B4, C2, D2
23. Authority	A2, B3, B4, C2, C3, D2, D4
24. Team	O, A3, A4, C2, C4, D2, D4
25. Doctrine	A4, B1, B4, C2, D2-4
26. Mixed economy	O, A4, B4
27. Trust	A4, B3, C2, D2-4
28. Governance	O, B1, B4, C1, C2, D2, D4
29. Incompatible	B1, D2, D3
30. Building	O, B1, C3, C4, D2
31. Presence	B1, C3, C4, D2, D3
32. Ecumenical	B1, B4, C4
33. Congregational	O, A2, A3, B1, B3, C3, C4, D1, D2
34. Learning and Caring	O, B2, B3, B4
35. Accountability	A2, B2, B3, B4, C1, C2, D2, D3, D4
36. Responsibility	A4, B2, B4, C3, C4, D2
37. Ministry	A4, B3, C4, D2, D4

38.	Project	O, A3, B3, C4, D2, D4
39.	Catholicity	A4, B4, C4, D2
40.	Service	O, C1, C2, C4
41.	Understanding	A2, C4, D2
42.	Ownership	O, A3, B2, C3, C4, D2, D4
43.	Resource	A2, A4, B1, B4, C3, C4, D1, D2
44.	Freedom	A1, D2, D3

KEY

O	-	Observation
A1	-	Fresh Expression A interview transcript - 1
A2	-	Fresh Expression A interview transcript - 2
A3	-	Fresh Expression A interview transcript - 3
A4	-	Fresh Expression A interview transcript - 4
B1	-	Fresh Expression B interview transcript - 1
B2	-	Fresh Expression B interview transcript - 2
B3	-	Fresh Expression B interview transcript - 3
B4	-	Fresh Expression B interview transcript - 4
C1	-	Fresh Expression C interview transcript - 1
C2	-	Fresh Expression C interview transcript - 2
C3	-	Fresh Expression C interview transcript - 3
C4	-	Fresh Expression C interview transcript - 4
D1	-	Fresh Expression D interview transcript - 1
D2	-	Fresh Expression D interview transcript - 2
D3	-	Fresh Expression D interview transcript - 3
D4	-	Fresh Expression D interview transcript - 4

APPENDIX VII
THEORETICAL CODING THEMES

THEORETICAL CODING THEMES

Ecclesial Identity

Traditional Ecumenical
 Understanding
 Project
 Presence
 Identity
 Catholicity
 Church
 Evolution
 Different

Relationship to Connexion

Vision
 circuit
 Doctrine
 Resource
 Separation
 Tension
 Trust
 Obedience
 Congregational
 different
 Incompatible
 Building
 Mixed economy
 Diversity
 Freedom
 Ownership

Leadership and Authority

Leadership
 Responsibility
 Ministry
 Ownership
 Presidency
 Sacrament
 Priesthood
 Clergy
 Control
 Governance
 Authority
 Team
 Accountability
 ownership

Aims

Aims
 Vision
 History
 Worship
 Learning and Caring
 Service
 Evangelism

APPENDIX VIII

RECORD OF OBSERVATION AT FRESH EXPRESSION A

OBSERVATION SHEET

THE CONTEXT

NAME &

LOCATION: _____ Fresh Expression A: Air _____

DATE: _____ 14/4/13 _____

TIME: _____ 19.30 _____

DESCRIPTION OF FX SPACE:

The entrance is to the side of the building.
There are no signs to indicate Air.

Air is in the church hall, lighting is ambient with uplighters. Cloths cover the windows and noticeboards.

A centrepiece representing a beach – tarpaulin, sand wood, stones, fire.

Projected visuals. Chairs in a semi-circle

Guitarist to accompany

Imposing former Wesleyan church. Not many passers-by. Mainly surrounded by housing

PARTICULAR CIRCUMSTANCES:

Sunday evening. The Sunday after Easter.

THE PEOPLE

NUMBERS: 11

AGE RANGE: 30-70

GENDER 4 male, 7 female

BACKGROUND:

All white.

1 American.

1 Zimbabwean – lived in the UK for many years

THE LEADERSHIP

WHO APPEARED TO BE LEADING THE FX?

The presbyter led the whole act of worship

WAS AN OVERALL LEADER EVIDENT?

Yes – the Presbyter

HOW WAS LEADERSHIP EXERCISED?

He introduced each element. Gave instructions when needed. Similar to traditional worship

THE FX

DESCRIPTION OF FX AS OBSERVED

A welcome to all gathered; people sitting and chatting; a time of silence.

3 candles lit in the name of Father Son and HS

An introduction to the theme – breakfast on the beach (John's Gospel)

Song – Amazing grace

Reading from scripture – John

Thought including a video clip

Questions in groups

A time of reflection

Scripture reading – John

Video clip

Thought part 2

Reflection in silence

A response – collect a piece of wood and leave worries behind.

Iona chant

Blessing

Refreshment and social time (similar to what might be expected in any other church)

QUESTIONS/ISSUES FROM OBSERVATION

- Is this a replacement for another act of worship – a traditional Sunday evening perhaps? Are these people the 'remnant'?
- Are there any other leaders for Air? Is this just led by the presbyter?
- What are the demographics of the village – are they represented here?

OBSERVATION SHEET

THE CONTEXT

NAME &

LOCATION: Fresh Expression A: Café ChurchDATE: 21/4/13TIME: 10.30

DESCRIPTION OF FX SPACE:

The main front church doors are open, two people are welcoming.

Café Church is held in the sanctuary – the pews were removed some time ago.

The worship band at the front, behind the communion rail.

15 tables arranged around the room with 8 chairs per table. Newspapers, cakes, etc. on the tables.

Tea/coffee, juice on a table to the side where the choir stalls would have been

There is a kid's corner to the rear for the very young. There is one helper with various toys and colouring sheets. Sofas arranged in a L shape

PARTICULAR CIRCUMSTANCES:

'Good Shepherd Sunday'

'Feel free to do whatever you want to, sit and read the paper etc., or be involved.'

THE PEOPLE

NUMBERS: _____ 70+

AGE RANGE: ____ 0 – 80+

GENDER _____ Mainly female

BACKGROUND:

Mainly white, middle class.

Local people?

THE LEADERSHIP

WHO APPEARED TO BE LEADING THE FX?

A team of people wearing t-shirts, the presbyter in jeans and jumper with clerical shirt.

WAS AN OVERALL LEADER EVIDENT?

Yes – the Presbyter

HOW WAS LEADERSHIP EXERCISED?

Similar to traditional worship – the presbyter leads with occasional others leading parts, he presided over the worship.

THE FX

DESCRIPTION OF FX AS OBSERVED

As each part of worship is introduced a slide appears on the projection screen to indicate what to do – scripture, song, candle.

Twitter # during the service to make comments

Service begins with the notices

Then a candle is lit and a prayer.

Song – bless the lord.

Introduction to the bags on the tables – shepherds and sheep. Write on a post-it what makes a good shepherd and what the sheep look for (not everyone engaged)

A short talk – the good shepherd referenced

A quiz – identify voices leads into another talk and table questions around familiar voices

A second candle lit on each table

Songs -the Lord's my shepherd, faithful one, Lord I come before your throne

Notices – birthdays, donations for newspapers etc.

Scripture reading

Write prayers on a sheet on the table and light a third candle

Sone – guide me o thou great

Thought part 2

Blessing

Refreshment and social time

QUESTIONS/ISSUES FROM OBSERVATION

- Budget for this?
- What do the church members think?
- Isn't this just AAW around tables?
- Where do the people come from – how far away, are they coming from other churches for this? Is this just something different for circuit folk to come to?

OBSERVATION SHEET

THE CONTEXT

NAME &

LOCATION: _____ Fresh Expression A: Air _____

DATE: _____ 12/5/13 _____

TIME: _____ 19.30 _____

DESCRIPTION OF FX SPACE:

Set as the previous visit.

But: in the middle, there are three candles with cloth underneath. Paper with the scripture text upon it and scratch cards are around the edge of the cloth.

PARTICULAR CIRCUMSTANCES:

Sunday evening, Springtime

THE PEOPLENUMBERS: 8AGE RANGE: 30-70GENDER 5 male, 3 female

BACKGROUND:

All white and apparently local

THE LEADERSHIP

WHO APPEARED TO BE LEADING THE FX?

The presbyter led the whole act of worship – as before

WAS AN OVERALL LEADER EVIDENT?

Yes – the Presbyter

HOW WAS LEADERSHIP EXERCISED?

He introduced each element. Gave instructions when needed. Similar to traditional worship

THE FX

DESCRIPTION OF FX AS OBSERVED

Welcome and candles lit.

Song/chant

Introduction to the theme – deep (going deeper)

Through Inc. video clips

Questions to reflect on in small groups

Prayer

Scripture – blind Bartimaeus (Mark)

Thought – scratch the surface, leads into the people creating a picture on a scratch card

Song – I want to be out of my depth

Thought

Time of reflection – video of deep diver

Chant/song

Prayers

Blessing, extinguish candles

Refreshments served

QUESTIONS/ISSUES FROM OBSERVATION

- Are people here out of loyalty?
- What is the total number of people associated with Air?

OBSERVATION SHEET

THE CONTEXT

NAME &

LOCATION: Fresh Expression A: Café Church

DATE: 16/06/13

TIME: 10.30

DESCRIPTION OF FX SPACE:

Tables laid in the same way.

Band of 7 people

More people present as there is the thanksgiving for a child included in the service.

PARTICULAR CIRCUMSTANCES:

Thanksgiving rather than Baptism

THE PEOPLE

NUMBERS: 74

AGE RANGE: 0-80+

GENDER mainly female, but 17 young people

BACKGROUND:

All white, local. Mainly older and retired.
Younger people are with the Thanksgiving party?

THE LEADERSHIP

WHO APPEARED TO BE LEADING THE FX?

The presbyter led the whole act of worship

WAS AN OVERALL LEADER EVIDENT?

Yes – the Presbyter sat at the front throughout.

HOW WAS LEADERSHIP EXERCISED?

He introduced each element. Gave instructions when needed. Similar to traditional worship

THE FX

DESCRIPTION OF FX AS OBSERVED

Notices are printed on a sheet on each table

Introduction – ‘engage with as much as you like’

Light a candle

Song – you raise me up

Thanksgiving for child at centre of the space. No formal liturgy

Light a second candle and pray for the child.

Through – aliens in the midst (introduced by another man)

Draw an alien

Scripture – Ps146- god who cares for all, even the aliens.

Task – labels, write what your label is

Reading – Galatians -all one in Christ

Songs – Our god is a great big, your love is shining, my Jesus my Saviour.

Notices

Story – a betting vicar, felt uneasy in a betting shop...

Video – ET

Story

Activity – make a paper chain -connections

Prayer

Song – at the name of Jesus

Blessing

QUESTIONS/ISSUES FROM OBSERVATION

- Thanksgiving party didn't engage at all at first... does that matter... they did engage a little as time went on.
- Significance of notices on tables? Who for?

APPENDIX IX

RECORD OF OBSERVATION AT FRESH EXPRESSION B

OBSERVATION SHEET

THE CONTEXT

NAME &

LOCATION: _____: Fresh Expression B

DATE: _____ 21/10/12

TIME: _____ 14.30

DESCRIPTION OF FX SPACE:

in the centre of ..., mainly shops and cafes.

Speciality shops perhaps because the rent is cheaper here?

The building looks like a run-down office building. Flaking paint. Big issue seller outside.

Lots of passers-by. No obvious signage for the presence of Fresh Expression B, a small note in the window (postcard sized) and the name over the buzzer.

Sunday worship held in the small meeting room – the cloud room which is painted blue and white to reflect clouds.

There is STORM art on the walls (LGBT)

Love hearts on the walls.

Chairs laid out around the edges of the room with a table in the centre. On which are candles and a scripture reading.

PARTICULAR CIRCUMSTANCES:

Monthly (3rd Sunday) afternoon worship

THE PEOPLE

NUMBERS: 7AGE RANGE: 30-60GENDER 5 male, 2 females

BACKGROUND:

All white.

Middle aged couple (circuit steward and treasurer)

Middle aged Catholic man

JVC volunteer female

Hartley Victoria (Meth) student Presbyterian on placement.

THE LEADERSHIP

WHO APPEARED TO BE LEADING THE FX?

The presbyter led the whole act of worship

WAS AN OVERALL LEADER EVIDENT?

Yes – the Presbyter[Name] but the circuit stewards are present also

HOW WAS LEADERSHIP EXERCISED?

Gently, but giving the impression of being in charge.

THE FX

DESCRIPTION OF FX AS OBSERVED

Welcome

Lighting of candles in the centre, stones around them on the table.

Silence

Written liturgy of invocation

Scripture readings X2

Time of sharing – all can share, nobody comments upon other's sharing

Prayers Inc. lighting candles for others.

The lord's prayer said communally

Very free and easy - informal, with no real depth to it.

QUESTIONS/ISSUES FROM OBSERVATION

- Are sacraments ever celebrated in this act of worship?
- Where is oversight of the FX?
- Does the lack of comments upon others reflections provide a tacit acceptance of everything which anyone says? What of agreed doctrine?

OBSERVATION SHEET

THE CONTEXT

NAME &

LOCATION: Fresh Expression B

DATE: 23/10/12

TIME: 10.30

DESCRIPTION OF FX SPACE:

The bread-making room is a long room, filled with tables each laid with a board, bowl and utensils.

There are cupboards at the far end under the window. To the side is another area with ovens, cupboards and washing up area.

One Methodist poster is on the wall. The rest of the wall space is filled with notice boards. Health and safety notices etc.

Everyone invite to make 2 loaves and share one – but this isn't enforced so people bake one.

PARTICULAR CIRCUMSTANCES:

Tuesday bread-making session.

A youth group of 6 children and leaders are present

THE PEOPLE

NUMBERS: 23

AGE RANGE: 9-60

GENDER 2/3 female

BACKGROUND:

One black facilitator, facilitators are all young.
Mainly local people – not all British
Local youth group.

THE LEADERSHIP

WHO APPEARED TO BE LEADING THE FX?

Unsure – Presbyter not present for whole sessions. Facilitators instruct small groups in the bread-making process.

WAS AN OVERALL LEADER EVIDENT?

The presbyter has oversight

HOW WAS LEADERSHIP EXERCISED?

The facilitators looked to the presbyter for direction.

THE FX

DESCRIPTION OF FX AS OBSERVED

Facilitators around the tables when people arrives, preparing the utensils.

People are allowed in at 10.30 not before.

Each is given a bowl and asked how many loaves they will make. Given ingredients and informed of the cost.

A facilitator helps a group to mix the ingredients and then to knead – some chat whilst doing this, others focus upon giving instructions.

Some inappropriate conversations are overheard – the atmosphere isn't rarefied ...

The bread proves, tea and coffee are made, then the second kneading before the dough enters the oven...

An announcement is made that worship will be in the cloud room. Everyone may go, but nobody must.

Some short prayers. A time of silence and the lighting of candles around the same centrepiece.

Everyone gathers for lunch – some notices are given: who has made the bread which is shared, how much its cost and that there is a bowl for donations. Soup shared.

After some time, those who have made bread collect it and leave. The facilitators have a de-brief meeting which I am not invited to

QUESTIONS/ISSUES FROM OBSERVATION

- Why are so many things done behind closed doors here – closed meetings etc. how is this 'church' accessible to all?
- What is the role of the facilitator?
- Where is God in this? Apart from a couple of mentions, nothing.
- What is the youth group doing apart from making bread? Is there a Christian element to it?
- Why are people here? 'it's very therapeutic'
- Why do I feel that my presence is inconvenient?

OBSERVATION SHEET

THE CONTEXT

NAME &

LOCATION: [Name] City Centre Methodist Church: Fresh Expression B

DATE: 04/12/12

TIME: 10.30

DESCRIPTION OF FX SPACE:

The same as my pervious visit.

PARTICULAR CIRCUMSTANCES:

Tuesday bread-making session.

Advent

THE PEOPLE

NUMBERS: _____ 21

AGE RANGE: _____ 3weeks – 60+

GENDER _____ 5 male/16 female (2 kids)

BACKGROUND:

4 adults with learning difficulties and their carers present
Some seemed to be regular.

THE LEADERSHIP

WHO APPEARED TO BE LEADING THE FX?

Unsure – Presbyter not present for whole sessions. Facilitators instruct small groups in the bread-making process.

WAS AN OVERALL LEADER EVIDENT?

The presbyter has oversight

HOW WAS LEADERSHIP EXERCISED?

The facilitators looked to the presbyter for direction. The presbyter lead every aspect – including the prayers

THE FX

DESCRIPTION OF FX AS OBSERVED

Facilitators around the tables when people arrives, preparing the utensils.

People are allowed in at 10.30 not before.

Each is given a bowl and asked how many loaves they will make. Given ingredients and informed of the cost.

A facilitator helps a group to mix the ingredients and then to knead – some chat whilst doing this, others focus upon giving instructions.

The atmosphere is happy.

I overhear a 'why I don't go to church' conversation

The bread proves, tea and coffee are made, then the second kneading before the dough enters the oven...

An announcement is made that worship will be in the cloud room. Everyone may go, but nobody must.

The prayers seemed to be last-minute and disjointed from a lack of preparation. But follow the same broad pattern as previous visit. Advent prayers and poem used. Candles then brought to the lunch table.

Everyone gathers for lunch – some notices are given: who has made the bread which is shared, how much its cost and that there is a bowl for donations. Soup shared.

After some time, those who have made bread collect it and leave. The facilitators have a debrief meeting which I am not invited to

QUESTIONS/ISSUES FROM OBSERVATION

- My facilitator didn't really engage with me... apart from telling me when to add various ingredients. Could I have just baked in silence and had no interaction? Is that a way in which community is built? Or is that making the place accessible to those who don't want conversation?

OBSERVATION SHEET**THE CONTEXT**

NAME &

LOCATION: Fresh Expression BDATE: 06/10/12TIME: 10.30

DESCRIPTION OF FX SPACE:

The same layout as the previous visits

PARTICULAR CIRCUMSTANCES:

Thursday bread-making session.

Advent

THE PEOPLE

NUMBERS: _____ 24

AGE RANGE: _____ 3 weeks-60+

GENDER _____ Mainly female

BACKGROUND:

Visitor from the Middle East

The remainder are local

A visiting Anglican Reader

Parents with small child who were also present on Tuesday

THE LEADERSHIP

WHO APPEARED TO BE LEADING THE FX?

The presbyter was directing people as they entered and giving out ingredients – he was in charge.

WAS AN OVERALL LEADER EVIDENT?

The presbyter, in civvies, led everything.

HOW WAS LEADERSHIP EXERCISED?

The facilitators looked to the presbyter for direction.
Informal

THE FX

DESCRIPTION OF FX AS OBSERVED

Facilitators around the tables when people arrives, preparing the utensils.

People are allowed in at 10.30 not before.

Each is given a bowl and asked how many loaves they will make. Given ingredients and informed of the cost.

A facilitator helps a group to mix the ingredients and then to knead – some chat whilst doing this, others focus upon giving instructions.

My facilitator is a friend of the presbyter who sings in the same choir, this was a conversation topic.

The bread proves, tea and coffee are made, then the second kneading before the dough enters the oven...

An announcement is made that worship will be in the cloud room. Everyone may go, but nobody must.

2 men sitting in the cloud room leave just before prayer 'they'll be in here in a minute' yeah, the God squad'

The prayers are the same as the previous Tuesday – the annunciation, time to reflect, candles and the lord's prayer.

Everyone gathers for lunch – some notices are given: who has made the bread which is shared, how much its cost and that there is a bowl for donations. Soup shared.

After some time, those who have made bread collect it and leave. The facilitators have a de-brief meeting which I am not invited to

QUESTIONS/ISSUES FROM OBSERVATION

- Where is faith for those who just make bread? Is the community element important to them?
- Can I be anonymous here?

APPENDIX X

RECORD OF OBSERVATION AT FRESH EXPRESSION C

OBSERVATION SHEET

THE CONTEXT

NAME &

LOCATION: Fresh Expression C

DATE: 25/04/12

TIME: 11.00

DESCRIPTION OF FX SPACE:

[Name] Methodist Church converted to a children's play centre and café.

All pews, organ, pulpit etc. have been removed and the space is now filled with a soft play area over 2 levels shaped like a boat – the Playcentre .

Background music – hymns in panpipe!

Café area, a folder on the counter with the story of the creation of Fresh Expression C.

Baptismal roll on the walls, picture of the church through the last 100 years, display cabined with various teapots and plates with names of Methodist churches, hymn books and bibles. It is locked.

There is a Cross shaped window.

It's clean and tidy. The atmosphere is friendly.

PARTICULAR CIRCUMSTANCES:

Ordinary Wednesday morning. Project manager and centre manager aren't present.

Catering manager present

It is a school day so only younger children present.

THE PEOPLE

Numbers: 7 adults, 5 children

Age range: 2 - 60

GENDER Mainly female

BACKGROUND:

White British, local people

THE LEADERSHIP

WHO APPEARED TO BE LEADING THE FX?

The catering manager was the senior leader

WAS AN OVERALL LEADER EVIDENT?

Catering manager running the kitchen.

HOW WAS LEADERSHIP EXERCISED?

As a secular café – the shift manager is in charge.

THE FX

DESCRIPTION OF FX AS OBSERVED

Appears to be a children's play centre and café which could be found in any other town. But there are some vestiges of church here.

The people can recognise that it was a church – but do they know that it remains so?

The menu in the table mentions the project is one of the churches. Wesley links to Methodism, the Playcentre links to scripture – do people recognise this?

Staff interact with the patrons; these people are regular and have developed relationships

There are some Methodist posters – deepening discipleship. A cross on the wall.

Several people browse the folder.

QUESTIONS/ISSUES FROM OBSERVATION

- What is the point during the week? It is offering something to the community?
- Is it a church, or a church project? When does it become 'church'?
- Is there a chaplaincy role?
- What is the difference from a secular play-gym?

OBSERVATION SHEET

THE CONTEXT

NAME &

LOCATION: Fresh Expression C

DATE: 26/04/12

TIME: 13.00

DESCRIPTION OF FX SPACE:

[Name] Methodist Church converted to a children's play centre and café.
Green millennium sign outside. No sign to indicate presence of a Methodist Church.

The cross window is obvious from the outside.

The setting is the same as the previous visit.

PARTICULAR CIRCUMSTANCES:

Thursday afternoon – it is quiet, a school day, there are not many people present in the road nor inside Fresh Expression C.

THE PEOPLE

Numbers: 6 adults, 6 children

Age range: 1 – 65+

GENDER 1 male. Mainly female

BACKGROUND:

White British, local people

THE LEADERSHIP

WHO APPEARED TO BE LEADING THE FX?

Centre Manager wearing a top with Staff printed on the rear.

WAS AN OVERALL LEADER EVIDENT?

Red staff top.

HOW WAS LEADERSHIP EXERCISED?

As a secular café – the supervisor is in charge.

THE FX**DESCRIPTION OF FX AS OBSERVED**

Similar to the previous visit. Thought there are more staff in the kitchen

The prices for the food and drink are not excessive even though it is run as a business throughout the week

Leaflets for Samaritans Purse and Action for Children are present today.

QUESTIONS/ISSUES FROM OBSERVATION

- Who chooses the background music?
- Why are the volunteers all female?
- The centre manager doesn't want to be interviewed? why?

OBSERVATION SHEET

THE CONTEXT

NAME &

LOCATION: Fresh Expression C (Community Praise)

DATE: 13/05/12

TIME: 16.00

DESCRIPTION OF FX SPACE:

As before, but all of the tables and chairs are filled with families.

PARTICULAR CIRCUMSTANCES:

Community Praise, all age worship which occurs monthly in Fresh Expression C, the children play in the Playcentre afterwards.

THE PEOPLE

Numbers: _____ 35

Age range: _____ 3 – 80+

GENDER Equal numbers of children, 1 man, the rest are female (3 men arrive towards the end)

BACKGROUND:

White British, local people

Mainly women bringing children/grandchildren

Older church members are also present.

THE LEADERSHIP

WHO APPEARED TO BE LEADING THE FX?

The General Manager (a LP) is leading the worship in a traditional way. Presbyter was present and led a portion of the worship.

WAS AN OVERALL LEADER EVIDENT?

The GM stood at the front and directed/led worship

HOW WAS LEADERSHIP EXERCISED?

Authoritarian.

THE FX

DESCRIPTION OF FX AS OBSERVED

The playcentre is not open yet.

Crafts are on the tables; these are linked to the theme of Christian Aid Sunday.

This is similar to Messy Church or a mid-week children's club – led parts and craft parts. With actions songs spread throughout.

It is constantly noisy – are people listening?

The leadership is very informal – perhaps too much, they share jokes amongst themselves.

The leader engages primarily with the table in front of her, rather than the whole gathered group.

25 minutes in, and I've not heard God mentioned.

The crafts are not for the adults – just the children, is this intentional?

After 45 minutes the children are allowed to play in the playcentre whilst refreshments are served to the adults

QUESTIONS/ISSUES FROM OBSERVATION

- Where are all the men?
- Are all of the people from other churches or community members who see this as their church.
- Why was God mentioned so infrequently?

OBSERVATION SHEET

THE CONTEXT

NAME &

LOCATION: Fresh Expression C

DATE: 14/05/12

TIME: 11.00

DESCRIPTION OF FX SPACE:

The weekday setting is the same as my previous visits.

PARTICULAR CIRCUMSTANCES:

Ordinary Monday morning.

It is a school day so only younger children are present.

THE PEOPLE

Numbers: _____17

Age range: _____2 - 60

GENDER _____2/3 female

BACKGROUND:

White British

Few people at 11am, but number increases during the time I am present.

THE LEADERSHIP

WHO APPEARED TO BE LEADING THE FX?

General Manager is present for the whole day

WAS AN OVERALL LEADER EVIDENT?

There wasn't a lot to do with so few people initially

HOW WAS LEADERSHIP EXERCISED?

As a secular café – the shift manager is in charge.

THE FX

DESCRIPTION OF FX AS OBSERVED

As previous visits.

The GM has good relationships with the patrons. She knows many by name and has developed relationships with them. She spent time moving around the tables and 'working the room.'

QUESTIONS/ISSUES FROM OBSERVATION

- How much does it cost to run this place?
- Where does the money come from? circuit? District?

APPENDIX XI

RECORD OF OBSERVATION AT FRESH EXPRESSION D

OBSERVATION SHEET

THE CONTEXT

NAME &

LOCATION: Fresh Expression D

DATE: 02/06/13

TIME: 17.00

DESCRIPTION OF FX SPACE:

Hastings High School in a suburban environment, primarily housing but there are some shops not far away. The school is in the estate and reasonably hard to find.

A sign for Fresh Expression D is on the school gate. There are greeters at the school doors who direct visitors to the hall where the FX takes place.

The hall is arranged with a screen on the stage and the band directly in front of it, there are four semi-circles of chairs facing the front. An area with mats and toys is located at the rear.

The curtains are closed meaning that one cannot see in from outside

Tables with food are located at the sides of the hall

Background music – Christian ‘pop’

School art lines the walls

PARTICULAR CIRCUMSTANCES:

Sunday evening – nothing particular

THE PEOPLE

Numbers: 30 (8 children)

Age range: 0 – 60+

GENDER 6 men (of 22 adults), the rest female

BACKGROUND:

White British, local people
Some from circuit churches

THE LEADERSHIP

WHO APPEARED TO BE LEADING THE FX?

The youth leader led the presentation from the front

WAS AN OVERALL LEADER EVIDENT?

No... the event seemed very informal

HOW WAS LEADERSHIP EXERCISED?

Traditionally - from the front.

THE FX

DESCRIPTION OF FX AS OBSERVED

Music playing, people chatting, children playing in the middle of the room.

Welcome and intro theme – being a mouthpiece for truth and justice

Song – Beauty for brokenness

Game – truth and lies

Notices

Children move to the gym

Song – (Iona)

Video clip – LICC

Scripture – 2 Sam12: 1- 12 (the Message)

Talk with group questions

Song – we shall stand

Prayer

No blessing just 'food now served'

QUESTIONS/ISSUES FROM OBSERVATION

- Where is oversight
- Is there an assessment to be paid?
- Where is the funding from?
- Who are the leaders?
- Where are the people from?

OBSERVATION SHEET

THE CONTEXT

NAME &

LOCATION: Fresh Expression D

DATE: 09/06/13

TIME: 17.00

DESCRIPTION OF FX SPACE:

The setting is the same.

Chairs are arranged in rows facing the front, with a children's area included.

The band is not the same individuals as the previous visit

PARTICULAR CIRCUMSTANCES:

Sunday evening – the paid leader announced his resignation at the beginning of the session.

THE PEOPLE

Numbers: 39 (11 children) Age range: 0 – 60+

GENDER 21 of the total are male

BACKGROUND:

White British, local people

Some people from circuit churches

THE LEADERSHIP

WHO APPEARED TO BE LEADING THE FX?

The paid leader led the presentation

WAS AN OVERALL LEADER EVIDENT?

It was not evident through the presentation

HOW WAS LEADERSHIP EXERCISED?

Traditionally - from the front.

THE FX

DESCRIPTION OF FX AS OBSERVED

Music playing, people chatting, children playing in the middle of the room.

Welcome, notices and intro theme – faithfulness and making culture.

‘we are going to praise God’

Song – Wonderful, so wonderful

Interactive talk

Notices - including resignation announcement

Prayer

Children move to the gym

Short talk related to the theme

Scripture Matt 5: 13 -16 (salt and Light)

Song – Ancient of Days

Video clip – LICC

Talk

Song – Everlasting God

Prayer

No blessing just ‘tea’s up

Social time and refreshment

QUESTIONS/ISSUES FROM OBSERVATION

- Are funerals held here?
- Who becomes leader after this resignation?
- Intercession or lack thereof?
- Who is permitted to preside at the presentations?

OBSERVATION SHEET

THE CONTEXT

NAME &

LOCATION: Fresh Expression D

DATE: 16/06/13

TIME: 17.00

DESCRIPTION OF FX SPACE:

The setting is as it has been for the last two visits. The chairs are arranged around tables.

The band is smaller than the previous weeks.

PARTICULAR CIRCUMSTANCES:

Sunday evening – the Carnival was held today; people are not present because they have been busy with Fresh Expression D's float.

THE PEOPLE

Numbers: 21 (6 children) Age range: 0 – 60+

GENDER 6 men (of 15 adults), the rest female

BACKGROUND:

White British, local people
Some from circuit churches

THE LEADERSHIP

WHO APPEARED TO BE LEADING THE FX?

The paid leader of Fresh Expression D led the presentation, others were involved for the first time in my observations.

WAS AN OVERALL LEADER EVIDENT?

Yes – from the paid leader's demeanour

HOW WAS LEADERSHIP EXERCISED?

Traditionally - from the front.

THE FX

DESCRIPTION OF FX AS OBSERVED

Music playing, people chatting, children playing in the middle of the room.

Welcome and intro theme – being a learner of Jesus' ways.

Song – The Father's song

Game – human noughts and crosses

Thought

Video clip – LICC

Saying sorry on paper... destroying the paper to be set free

Prayer

Song – Our Father in heaven

Game – human noughts and crosses

Scripture – Mathew 78: 7 - 12 (the Message)

Thought

Write on paper desires, then pray

Song – Father God

Game – human noughts and crosses

Song – we shall stand

Notices – update on carnival involvement, transition meetings to be held following the leader's resignation.

Prayer

No blessing just 'food served'

QUESTIONS/ISSUES FROM OBSERVATION

- Where is the presbyter here? I've been 3 times and not seen one...
- How is the link maintained to circuit?

OBSERVATION SHEET

THE CONTEXT

NAME &

LOCATION: Fresh Expression D

DATE: 23/06/13

TIME: 17.00

DESCRIPTION OF FX SPACE:

The setting is as it has been for the last two visits. The chairs are arranged in semi-circles as they were the first week.

The band is 4 people.

PARTICULAR CIRCUMSTANCES:

Sunday evening –nothing special

THE PEOPLE

Numbers: 36 (6 children)

Age range: 0 – 70+

GENDER 12 of the total are male

BACKGROUND:

White British, local people
 Several families
 Some from circuit churches
 Some new people (new to me)

THE LEADERSHIP

WHO APPEARED TO BE LEADING THE FX?

An individual began with the words 'I'm leading the presentation tonight'

WAS AN OVERALL LEADER EVIDENT?

The paid leader was not present this evening

HOW WAS LEADERSHIP EXERCISED?

Traditionally - from the front.

THE FX

DESCRIPTION OF FX AS OBSERVED

Music playing, people chatting, children playing in the middle of the room.

Song – God is good

Welcome and intro theme –a four-week programme on Philippians.

Group conversations – what are the characteristics of God?

Scripture – Philippians chapter 1

Notices

Young people move to the gym

Song – Before the throne of God

Thought

Video clip of a new version of And can it be?

Thought

Nooma video clip

Thought

Song – God in my living

Prayer

No blessing

The curtains are open at this point – this has not happened previously

The presentations seemed very disjointed – what was the theme?

QUESTIONS/ISSUES FROM OBSERVATION

- How do fresh expressions cope with transition?
- Should leadership always be lay and local?
- What qualifications are required to lead here – tonight seemed to need more training.

APPENDIX XII

FRESH EXPRESSION C BUSINESS PLAN

**[Anonymised] Business Plan 2005 – 2009. For the creation of
“Fresh Expression C”**

The Vision:

- To demonstrate “a New Way of being Church” for the communities of today.
- To reach out to the local community with a service in demand locally.
- To offer a place where people can come and relax and have opportunity to talk.
- To offer a place where children up to the age of 11 can come with their parents/carers to play and have parties.
- To offer accommodation for Children’s’ Support Services.
- Fresh Expression C will become a centre for community life and a focal point where people with children can come to play and socialise.
- We offer opportunities for discussion groups such as Alpha and keep fit for parents/carers while their children are safe to play.
- We offer an affordable play area for single parents/carers in an area where paid entertainment for children is expensive and hard to find.
- We provide a place for Dad’s to bring their children to enjoy activities together.
- We look to provide activities that local people need , including older people who live locally in a modern café area.

How we intend to achieve our vision

- We have converted the main body of the church into an indoor play area (similar to that of the “Wacky Warehouses”). There are two play areas for different aged children.
- There is a seated area with chairs and tables for parents/carers to supervise their children playing, and to socialise.
- There will be a separate area that can be used for parties and meetings or Christian bookshop.
- Fresh Expression C and re-furnished rooms now provides suitable accommodation for local services to use.

Identification of need

Due to the decline of the congregation over the last few years the church members needed to re-assess the viability of a worshipping church at [Name] During many meetings and much prayer it was decided that the church needed to re-think how it served its local community.

After much debate a scheme was drawn up this became the present vision for the church, that being:

- To convert the main body of the church into a children’s play area and coffee shop
- To re-furnish the downstairs rooms for the use of local groups and the child minders group.
- To install new toilets.
- To create a new worship area downstairs.
- To create a bookshop and consultation room.

This information was passed to an architect who with quantity surveyors conducted a feasibility inspection and produced a costing budget and plans for the new building. These were presented to the circuit meeting in March 2006 and were approved.

After this approval local consultation has taken place in the form of a questionnaire to three local schools (600 sent out) and a letter to all local residents explaining what the church is hoping to do and asking for any comments. (Following)

Prices charged at playhouses locally

1. Wacky Warehouse –£2.95 for 1 hour play

Play facilities for Children from 0 to 10

Numbers of children

Mon 23

Tues 25

Wed 40 Inc. 1 party

Thurs 44 Inc. 1 party

Fri 77 Inc. 1 party

Sat 177 Inc. 6 parties

Sun 120

Total = 506 for this week 15th Jan to 22nd Jan 2006

Most weeks have at least 10 parties

Most weeks range between 500 to 600

2. **Tumble Tots** –new management 3 years ago £2.00 for as long as they want to stay.
Small playhouse for young children up to the age of 7 or 8

288 children for the last week (1st Feb to 7th Feb)

Averages out between 300 – 400 per week.

They have at least 11 parties per week. Each party has between 12 and 30 children attending and Fresh Expression C is closed to the public during a party which lasts approx 1.5 hours.

Their numbers are constant usually for 5 years as families stay with them usually till their children start school full time. They then only come for parties. By then a new cohort has started.

3. **Bouncy House** –: £2.95 for as long as they want to stay.
Small play area in a converted Salvation Army Hall. The play centre re-opened under new management in April 2005 and has undergone a complete re-furbishment. They have had to start getting customers again their figures are:
100 children per week
11 parties a week with between 10 and 30 children
Average attendance ranges between 100 and 200 throughout the 10 months they have been open.

Outputs and Achievements

The re-development of ... is an exciting venture into the unknown. We are hoping to coin a phrase “Go where no Church has gone before....” In this step of faith we hope to establish a “fresh expression” of church to the local community. Our hope and prayer is that people will experience all Christianity that has to offer in an informal non – threatening environment.

Overall the scheme will:

- Give added value to all users
- Offer a more attractive, better fitted, option to new users
- Provide a new lease of life to a tired rundown building
- Protect the premises as a community asset for future generations
- Increase the range of community services the church is able to provide
- Assist the church achieve its vision and mission and calling

The Refurbishment scheme will provide the following outputs:

1. New facility for the community to use
2. Job opportunities for local people (at least 4)
3. Improved building
4. New rooms available to use
5. New kitchen, café area for local people
6. New playhouse for local families
7. New modern worship area for the worshipping community
8. New toilets and lift
9. New windows and heating
10. New storage areas

The outputs of this refurbishment will provide the following achievements:

1. A facility for all the community to use
2. Accessibility for all – wheelchair users independent or with carers, restricted walkers, prams and pushchairs into and throughout the community and chapel areas.
3. Improved security for the building and protection of children
4. New and improved equipment for catering by members and community users
5. Opportunities for local services to reach the community where they are
6. Quality safe play facilities for local people

7. A place where people can meet locally to socialise over a coffee

Timeline of the scheme

2005	July	Special Church Council decide to look at future of the church
2005	September	First plans given to the Church Council to consider
2005	October	Meeting with builder to look at plans.
2005	December	Initial vision and plans brought to the circuit meeting.
2005	December	Minister & Superintendent Minister and project manager visit Property Division – project approved in principle provided an architect appointed.
2006	January	Architect appointed and plans drawn up for the play area and mezzanine floor – brought to Church Council.
2006	February	Amended plans approved by Church Council. Application to Ecclesiastical Insurance for £200,000 (8 to 12 week wait for response).
2006	March	Church Council agree to fund project from Chapel Aid and the church be sold if the money cannot be repaid. Proposal put to the circuit meeting asking for £80000 from CAF approved but as a loan provided one of the closed churches sells to enable this amount to be given.
2006	May	Proposal goes to the District for approval of Schedule 1 submitted to Property Office.
2006	June	Biffa Waste Management application submitted
2006	June	Approval of Scheme from Property Division
2006	July	Application outcome from Ecclesiastical Insurance
2007	February	Building work starting
2007	October	Completion of building work – painting and setting up of play area and cafe
2007	October	“Grand Opening Day”

Management and Appraisal of the Scheme

Management

The scheme is managed by a working party approved and appointed by the church council consisting of:

[Name] (Superintendent Minister of the circuit)

[Name] project manager and member of ... Church

[Name] (circuit Steward)

[Name] (circuit Steward)

[Name] retired teacher (C of E rep)

[Name] (Property is his expertise)

[Name] Classroom support teacher (Moravian rep)

[Name] Retired Teacher (Member of the Church Council)

[Name] (Member of the Church Council)

[Name] Lecturer in Early Years (Member of Free Church in ...)

As previously mentioned consultations with users have enabled the scheme to be formulated and the management group continue to liaise with users and the local community.

The progress of the scheme is evaluated by the Church Council at regular intervals and also by the circuit meeting and circuit stewards.

The Methodist Property office scrutinises and evaluates the scheme's technical aspects, its objectives and the financial requirements/implications and advise where necessary.

Appraisal

In addition to the appraisal opportunities in developing the scheme and monitoring its progress mentioned above there will be further appraisal upon its completion.

The main opportunity of appraisal will be a “Grand Opening Day” which will enable

- Comments to be submitted by the local community including existing users, schools, community groups, local councillor, supporting charitable bodies and external funders.
- Publicity for external funders e.g. Landfill Operators.
- Assessment and comment by local press.
- Immediate promotion of the completed work, extended facilities and community opportunities through a wide range of media.
- Photographic evidence and media quotes.

APPENDIX XIII
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORMS



Cambridge & Chelmsford

Cambridge Campus
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Int: +44 (0)1223 363271
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PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

The Research Project

*Emerging Church or Re-emerging Church?
Do Fresh Expressions of Church in a UK Methodist context offer a new or
significantly changed Methodist ecclesiology?*

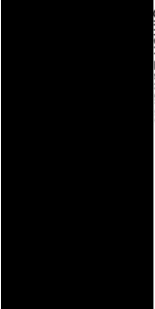
Many Methodist circuits and local churches invest a great deal of resources in Fresh Expressions of Church and therefore have an interest in understanding how such expressions relate to the church as a whole. The aim of this research is to examine several Fresh Expressions of Church (in a Methodist context) as case studies to explore their ecclesiology¹ and how they relate to The Methodist Church.

You are invited to be a part of this research as you have been identified

The results of this study will be written up as part of my doctoral study with Anglia Ruskin University and may be subsequently published.

I will be organising and undertaking this research, please feel free to contact me for further information.

Simon Edwards



¹ Ecclesiology can be understood as the study of the nature and purpose of the church.



Your Participation in the Research Project

You have been invited to take part in this research because you are active in a Fresh Expression of Church which I am examining as a case study in my research into the impact of Fresh Expressions on Methodist ecclesiology.

At no point are you obliged to take part in this study. Even after completing the consent form you remain free to withdraw from this research at any point, without giving reasons. To withdraw, fill in the part of the consent form relating to this and return it to me.

Should you agree to take part in this research, you will be asked to have a recorded conversation with me after a meeting of the Fresh Expression of which you are a part. This conversation should last about half an hour and will be a reflection upon the Fresh Expression.

All recorded conversations would be transcribed following the meeting. You will be provided with a copy of the transcript which you may comment on. Once you have seen and commented on the transcript, the recording of the conversation will be destroyed. Hard copies of data would be stored in a locked cabinet when not in use. Any personal data stored on computer will be held in an encrypted file.

All transcribed interviews will be destroyed once they are no longer required, they will not be kept longer than five years from the submission of the thesis.

Your consent to participating in this research does not compromise your legal rights.

**YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS TO KEEP,
TOGETHER WITH A COPY OF YOUR CONSENT FORM**



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Participant Consent Form

*Emerging Church or Re-emerging Church
Do Fresh Expressions of Church in a UK Methodist context offer a new or significantly
changed Methodist ecclesiology?*

Researcher:

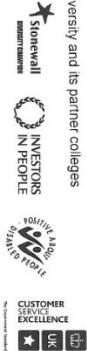
Simon Edwards



1. I agree to take part in the above research. I have read the Participant Information Sheet which is attached to this form. I understand what my role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, for any reason and without prejudice.
3. I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded.
4. I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.
5. I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.

Data Protection: I agree to the University¹ processing personal data which I have supplied. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me

¹ The University¹ includes Anglia Ruskin University and its partner colleges



Name of participant (print).....
Signed.....
Date.....

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM TO KEEP

If you wish to withdraw from the research, please complete the form below and return to the researcher named above.

*Emerging Church or Re-emerging Church
Do Fresh Expressions of Church in a UK Methodist context offer a new or significantly
changed Methodist ecclesiology?*

[NAME OF PARTICIPANT]

I WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY

Signed: _____ Date: _____