

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

This is our body: Pioneer ministry in the Methodist Church

Hannah Mary Bucke

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ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF ARTS, LAW AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
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This thesis is focused on the experiences and conceptualisations of pioneer presbyters working in the Methodist Church of Great Britain (MCGB). The MCGB has, throughout its history, sought to reach out to those beyond existing church communities. In recent years it has experimented with new forms of community and ministry through the Fresh Expressions initiative in 2004, the Venture FX pioneer scheme in 2008, and now Methodist Pioneering Pathways. Such initiatives seek to provide a framework for lay and ordained people to connect with those the church is not currently reaching.

The MCGB conducted a review of the Venture FX scheme in 2011, however there has been no dedicated research into the experiences and conceptualisations of presbyters - those ordained to a ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral oversight - who express their ministry primarily in pioneering contexts. I wanted to discover how pioneer presbyters understand their ministry in relation to these charisms and explore their experience of exercising an unusual form of ministry. I devised the following question in order to frame my research: What are the experiences and conceptualisations of pioneer presbyters and what are the implications of these for the life and mission of the MCGB?

Appropriate to the discipline of practical theology and to the meaning-making focus of the research question, I have adopted an inductive, social constructivist approach and used qualitative methods, conducting semi-structured interviews with four pioneer presbyters. Alongside this data I have included data from my own experiences as a pioneer presbyter.

The data revealed the importance of the body in ministering word and sacrament, and the significance of identity and vocation, both as presbyter and pioneer. However the most significant finding was the ambivalent relationship between pioneer presbyters and the MCGB, and the sometimes painful experiences of pioneer presbyters in relation to church structures and processes. The research challenges the way in which the MCGB supports its pioneer presbyters. It also raises questions about the connectedness of pioneers to the church and the quality of relationships within the MCGB, ultimately with consequences for our missional endeavours.

Key words: pioneer, presbyter, Methodist, body, identity, vocation, narrative, relationship.

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Glossary

Candidating: the selection process for those offering for ordained ministry in the Methodist Church, including the submission of written work and panel interviews.

Circuit: A group of Methodist churches in a local area, overseen by a Superintendent.

Conference: The body, made up of lay and ordained representatives, which has oversight of the Connexion and makes decisions on Methodist policy.

Connexion: A large grouping of connected churches, often across one country, governed by a common discipline. In the Methodist Church of Great Britain, this is made up of the churches in Scotland, Wales and England, along with the Isle of Man, the Channel Islands and Shetland.

District: A regional unit of the MCGB made up of several circuits, overseen by a Chair of District.

Formation: the process of being formed for ordained ministry, involving training at a theological college and an initial period in role as a 'probationer'.

Probation: a period of time following theological college and before ordination, usually two or three years, spent working as a presbyter or deacon under supervision.

Stationing: the process by which presbyters are assigned to appointments within or outside control of the Methodist Church by the Conference.

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Chapter One: Introduction and Context

I sit on a bench at the top of the High Street. I have put on my clerical collar with jeans and a parka - the uniform of my vocation worn with the uniform of the street, of everyone from rough sleeper to student to shopper. I wonder what I have done, what I am doing here, but mostly I wonder what I should do now. How on earth do I build a ministry here? Where do I start? What is my common ground with these people, who do not necessarily share my faith commitments? (Bucke, 2015, p. 8)

Introduction

In this research I aim to explore pioneer presbyteral ministry in the contemporary Methodist Church of Great Britain (MCGB) through the experiences of those engaged in such ministries, including my own. I also seek to identify some of the implications of these for the MCGB. Initially my research was focused on the questions of whether and how pioneer presbyters express the ministry of word and sacrament in their missional context, and I was particularly interested in the sacramental aspects of mission; the early stages of my research reflect this. In the light of the data and its analysis, my focus and thinking have changed, and the latter stages of this research focus on the relationship between pioneer presbyters and the MCGB, from the local church through to the Connexion. This is reflected in the change from my original title of 'This is my body: ministering word and sacrament beyond pulpit and table' to 'This is our body: pioneer ministry in the Methodist Church'. However, in spite of the change in focus, understanding the experiences of pioneer presbyters has remained at the heart of this research throughout.

In this chapter I will describe my context and background as a researcher practitioner, and explain how this relates to my interest in this research. I will set out the research question that this thesis aims to answer and identify the gap in knowledge out of which this question emerged. Finally, I will give an overview of the thesis structure.

Professional Context

In September 2013 I started a pioneer ministry in a large seaside town in the South East of England. It was my first appointment and I was stationed there as a probationer presbyter, but it had been my hometown prior to ministerial training and I had candidated for ministry on the basis of a strong calling to pioneer a different kind of ministry in that place. It was an unusual station for a Methodist presbyter, and a new ministry for the local Circuit. The quote that opens this chapter is a reflection on the very early days and weeks of this new ministry and represents part of the genesis of this research. In my role as a pioneer presbyter, I was particularly interested to explore, through

my own practice initially, what it meant to be a presbyter in such a context, called by God and authorised by the MCGB to a ministry of word and sacrament but in an unusual context where that calling would not be expressed through preaching and presiding. The question 'how is this a ministry of word and sacrament?' was key in the early stages of my ministry and this research.

Whilst the research focus shifted in light of the data, some of the concepts I explored in those early stages have remained important to my later explorations of the pioneer/church relationship. In particular, embodiment and narrative have been threads that run throughout this research.

My early experiences in ministry were highly significant to the research origins but there are other experiences in my Christian journey that are important and have a bearing on my research journey. My initial calling to ministry is rooted in a powerful experience, which I described in Paper One:

A personal divine encounter with both physical and emotional dimensions. I trace from this moment, which I would identify as an experience of the Holy Spirit, a dramatic shift in the way in which I relate to God.... The shift was from a commitment of the mind outworked through behaviour in the world to a sense of relationship with God in which my whole self could know God intimately... I am now conscious of the potential to encounter God in every moment and of the divine presence in the everyday (Bucke, 2015, p.10).

This encounter is now reflected in my understanding of human experience as a locus for divine encounter, as well as in my interest in practical theology as a way of interpreting such experiences, and in pioneer ministry as way of pointing to the presence of God in life beyond the walls of the church.

In the months that followed this powerful experience, a strong sense of calling to presbyteral ministry developed. However, whilst I was clear that it was to presbyteral ministry, I had a growing sense that a standard Circuit appointment with pastoral charge of congregations was not part of this calling. During the discernment process I trained as a Street Pastor and I recall my first night out in the town centre as something of a 'lightbulb moment'. It was here, amongst the nightclubbers and rough sleepers, that I realised what was possible when Christians stepped out from their churches and engaged with people where they were, in their spaces and on their terms. It was through this experience that a calling to pioneer something new began to form.

Having decided to candidate for presbyteral ministry, but for 'something different', the process itself formed an important part of the genesis of this research. It became clear that I needed to justify why, at a time when the numbers of presbyters available were not sufficient for the appointments that needed to be filled, I did not feel called to a standard Circuit appointment. It was therefore necessary for me to begin to articulate the importance of ministries wholly focused outside of local churches, and the importance of presbyters, those called to minister word and sacrament, being stationed by the MCGB to such appointments. Whilst such ministries are more common in the

diaconate and in lay appointments, I was aware that very few presbyters were engaged in such work. Some of my initial thinking during the candidating process related to the role of the sacramental in mission and whether this was something that needed further exploration. Although these ideas were far from fully developed at the time, they played a part in forming the questions I initially set out to answer in this research.

Returning to my professional context, I spent the early stages of ministry developing a regular presence in the town centre and building a network of relationships. Through this network, and over the course of the six years in which I was engaged in this ministry, I developed a creative arts project with ecumenical colleagues, 'Icons-on-Sea', in which we used art and performance as a means of engaging people with the Gospel stories. The sacramental aspects of this work were the subject of Paper One. I also initiated two chaplaincies, one to the town's theme park, working with hundreds of staff, mostly of student age, and another to a homeless project with a particular focus on those with addiction problems. The theme park chaplaincy formed the basis of Paper Two, with its exploration of ministering word through pastoral care.

One final important element of my professional context has been the pioneer community within the MCGB. Informal conversations with other practitioners enabled me to begin testing out my own hunches about the issues that may be common to pioneer ministry, including the role of word and sacrament, and the dynamics of the pioneer/church relationship. These conversations also persuaded me that the voices of pioneers were not always being heard within the MCGB and that there was much theological exploration to be done in relation to these experimental ministries.

Gap in knowledge and research question

This research seeks to bridge a gap in knowledge about the experiences of pioneer presbyters in the MCGB, out of which the following question arose: 'What are the experiences and conceptualisations of pioneer presbyters and what are the implications of these for the life and mission of the MCGB?'

Methodism has experimented with new ways of engaging with the Christian community since its inception, emerging from eighteenth century attempts to engage with people beyond the formal structures of the Church of England. Across the generations there have been successive attempts to renew this missional emphasis, such as through the Forward Movement of the Wesleyan Church that sought to reduce the distance between the Christian gospel and the urban poor from the late 1880s, and through the Methodist Association of Youth Clubs, launched in 1945 by the MCGB and at its most influential in reaching unchurched young people in the 1960s. Recently, as a response to the contemporary context of church decline and as a way of seeking to find a new way to engage the spiritual but not religious in an age of rapid social change, the MCGB has initiated projects such as Fresh Expressions in 2004, followed by the Venture FX scheme in 2008,

identifying and supporting a small number of lay and ordained pioneers. Whilst a review of Venture FX was completed in 2011 (Cosstick, 2011), and included some feedback from those engaged in it, its main purpose was to review the whole scheme in relation to future funding and a potential extension. In addition to this review, I have found only one other piece of research relating to the experiences of presbyters serving outside of Circuit appointments, a survey of those engaged in and supporting sector ministry¹ published in 2002 (Bellamy, 2002), prior to the advent of Fresh Expression and Venture FX.

There is a growing body of literature relating to how pioneer ministry may be defined, its theological foundations, and guidance on practice². However my literature research demonstrated that there was currently no research focused solely on these new and emerging ministries specifically from the perspective of presbyters and their experiences. My research therefore makes a contribution to this area of knowledge and practice. This research also casts a spotlight on presbyteral ministry in mission in order to assess its effectiveness and to explore the implications this may have for a denomination in decline.

Finally, this research was motivated by my desire to reflect deeply on my own practice and to help answer the many questions I had about what it meant to exercise a presbyteral calling in a pioneer context.

Overview of the thesis

Chapter One: Introduction and context. I introduce my research and my professional context at the outset of the research journey. I also identify the purpose of this research, my research question, and the gap in knowledge from which it arose.

Chapter Two: Conceptual framework. I set out the theological and philosophical perspectives underpinning my research into pioneer presbyteral ministry, analysing the key concepts I initially identified using relevant literature. I explore Methodist ecclesiology, and pioneer ministry's place within it and the UK missional context. I also identify the characteristics of presbyteral ministry.

Chapter Three: Methodology. I locate my research within the discipline of practical theology, set out my chosen methodology and research methods, and justify my choices. Finally I identify issues of reflexivity, the potential limitations of this research and the ethical considerations.

¹ Sector ministers were then defined as being those who exercise their ministry in secular contexts, often workplaces.

² Books include Jonny Baker and Cathy Ross' *The Pioneer Gift* (2014) and Andy Milne's *The DNA of Pioneer Ministry* (2016), and articles such as 'The birth pains of pioneer ministry' (Church Times, 2nd March 2018).

Chapter Four: Data collection and handing. I describe the process of collecting and processing the data. In addition, I give a brief overview of the four interviews undertaken and identify the codes I assigned to the data.

Chapter Five: Overview of Findings. I summarise the findings of my research using evidence from the data collected from participants and from myself, and I begin the analysis process. I also establish the categories into which I grouped the data, and identify the themes I will take forward for further analysis.

Chapter Six: Interpretative Findings. I analyse the four themes identified from the initial analysis, locating and interpreting them in the light of relevant literature. I also identify the meta-theme drawn from the data and subsequent analysis.

Chapter Seven: Meta-theme Analysis and Implications. I justify my identification of the meta-theme arising from the analysis of the four themes in Chapter Six. I analyse this meta-theme in the light of the literature and suggest the implications of this research for the MCGB. I also recommend some possible practical ways forward.

Chapter Eight: Concluding reflections. In this chapter I summarise my research and its contribution to knowledge and practice. I revisit its limitations and suggest areas for future related research. Finally, I offer my reflections on the research journey as a researcher practitioner.

Chapter Two: Conceptual Framework

Introduction

In this chapter I set out the key theological and philosophical perspectives which underpin my research. I also demonstrate how these perspectives relate to my professional context as a pioneer presbyter in the MCGB, ordained to a ministry of word, sacraments and pastoral oversight yet called to develop a new ministry amongst unchurched people, with no church building or gathered congregation. Although in my Stage One papers I focused upon word and sacrament only, as my research started to develop, I reflected that oversight, including pastoral responsibility,

is significant to a properly Methodist understanding of presbyteral ministry and also to the gap in knowledge this research seeks to address.

Following an overview of Methodist ecclesiology, locating this research within the Methodist tradition, therefore, I turn to the concept of pioneering as a way of defining ministry in new contexts, and I explore word and sacrament aspects of presbyteral ministry. Here I identify broad perspectives which enable an understanding of how word and sacrament might be ministered to unchurched people in their ordinary lives rather than within the Christian community through preaching and presiding. Finally I outline the ministry of oversight exercised by presbyters.

The Methodist Church

Whilst this research may have relevance to pioneer ministry within other denominations, it is rooted in British Methodist understandings of presbyteral ministry and pioneering. It is therefore important to explore aspects of MCGB ecclesiology pertinent to the practice of such ministries. The need to pay attention to the nature of the church has become increasingly important in my research as I have noted the complex relationship that pioneers (in particular) have with the institutional church, reflected in the multiple ways in which they use the term 'church'.

It could be said that the Methodist people have an uneasy and complex relationship with the idea of a Methodist *Church* because of its beginnings as a movement within the Church of England. This movement explicitly aimed to reach those who were no longer engaged with the established church, and as such was experimental in nature. John Wesley took a pragmatic approach to mission, regarding the whole world as his parish, and this ultimately led to the break with the Church of England (The Methodist Church, 1960, p. 103). Wesley saw what he understood as significant pastoral and sacramental needs in North America and took the decision to ordain two men to minister there, a decision that saw the Methodist movement break with the established church and become a distinct denomination. This practical approach to pastoral and missional need is part of Methodist DNA and remains so today: 'It has been said that with ordination, as with much else in Methodism, we do not have a considered theology which we then put into practice; rather we find theological reasons for what we are already doing because what we are doing works well' (The Methodist Church, 1974, p. 110). Such an approach, in which 'mission was seen as prior to church order' (The Methodist Church, 1999, para. 4.5.6), has resulted in the development of Methodist theology through practice, 'largely as the result of a series of ad hoc experiments' (1999, para. 4.7.9), and it is possible to understand Methodism itself as practical theology.

Called to Love and Praise (The Methodist Church, 1999), the MCGB's most recent authoritative statement relating to Methodist ecclesiology, asserts that 'The Methodist Church has always understood itself to be part of the whole Church of Christ' but that it offers 'a distinct contribution to the wider Church' (1999, para. 4.1.1). In identifying this distinctive contribution, the report focuses

particularly on the origins and development of the Methodist Church from a 'connexion of societies' (1999, para. 1.4.5.b) to a denomination. These societies were galvanised around a 'disciplined framework for religious devotion' and John Wesley's 'passionate conviction that the Gospel was for all' (1999, para. 4.2.1), outworked in a methodical approach to Christian life, through acts of piety and acts of mercy. The report highlights three characteristics of early Methodism in particular: fellowship as the 'spiritual cement of early Methodism', a holiness that was 'not solitary but drew people together closely' and 'a pragmatism and flexibility' in relation to mission (1999, para. 4.2.14).

However, the report also acknowledges that there were consequences for the Methodist movement from the transition to a denomination. Identifying one of the ways in which the Methodist Church became trapped by its past, the report states that 'a "society" can be a group dominated by its boundaries' and fall victim to 'cosy sectarianism' (1999, para. 4.2.10). The report also highlights that 'Some apparent cooling down may be inevitable when a movement begins to be more settled, developing its own patterns and traditions' (1999, para. 4.2.12). In drawing out both the distinctive characteristics of Methodism rooted in its origins, and naming some of what was lost as Methodism became a church in its own right, the report highlights the complex history out of which the MCGB's ecclesiology developed.

In seeking to reflect further on Methodist ecclesiology, as defined in *Called to Love and Praise*, the work of Roman Catholic theologian Avery Dulles offers an approach that helps me to begin to unpick some of the ways in which the Methodist Church officially understands itself that will form a way of interpreting how pioneers understand both the universal church and the MCGB that authorises their ministries.

Dulles offers a way of exploring ecclesiology through five commonly understood models:

- Institution: focused on structure and governance aspects
- Mystical Communion: focused on community, relationships, and spiritual communion
- Sacrament: the church as a sign and a means of God's grace
- Herald: focused on proclamation of the word
- Servant: the church in dialogue with the world and for others

The Institution model, defined 'primarily in terms of its visible structures, especially the rights and powers of its officers' (Dulles, 1987, p. 34), and identified positively in terms of mission grounded in 'stable organisational features' (1987, p. 35), is immediately problematic in relation to Methodism. This is in part because Methodism's origins were as a movement that explicitly recognised the shortcomings of the institutional, established church: 'Some Methodists were never members of the Church of England; others had little love for the established Church' (The Methodist Church, 1999, para. 4.2.3).

The Institution model is also problematic because of Methodism's pragmatic approach to ecclesiology: as previously discussed, Methodist ecclesiology is primarily formed out of consolidated practice. One result of this is the lower theological value placed upon Methodism's institutional dimensions, and an inherent suspicion of institutions remains within the MCGB.

However it is clear, for example, from the Standing Orders of the MCGB that govern its practice, that its visible structures and the rights and powers of its officers are of real importance. Although Methodism may have emerged as a movement in the 18th century it is established in law as a church and exhibits 'stable organisational features' such as circuits and patterns of ministry that make it clearly identifiable as an institution.

The Mystical Communion model emphasises 'interpersonal community' (Dulles, 1987, p.47) and Dulles highlights the appeal of this model to some Protestants as 'anti-institutional' (1987, p. 48). This model indeed appears to sit more comfortably with Methodist ecclesiology, particularly in terms of the roots of Methodism in a 'connexion of societies within the Church' (The Methodist Church, 1999, para. 4.2.1). Within these societies, which were constituted of bands and classes, members 'were committed to a common discipline of Christian life' and 'gave each other support' (1999, para. 4.2.2). Whilst there is clearly a strong relational dimension to Methodism's societal roots, there was also significant structure, even in its early origins, and there is perhaps more of the 'structured society' of an institution present than is always acknowledged.

Combining elements of the Institution and Mystical Communion model, Dulles offers the Sacrament model, which brings together their 'external and internal aspects' (1987, p. 63). Understanding that, according to Vatican II, the church is a 'sign and instrument' of 'union with God and of the unity of all mankind' (1987. p. 64), there is thus a dual nature to the church as Sacrament: it must both point to and be a reflection of God's grace, 'a sign of grace realising itself' (1987, p. 69). Some elements of this model can be identified in John Wesley's understanding of the interior and exterior dimensions of faith: 'Wesley's call to personal faith and to holiness reflected a concern for justice and integrity in everyday life' (The Methodist Church, 1999, para. 4.2.2), as well as in the disciplined approach of Methodists, balancing social holiness with social action in the wider world. For Wesley and for the MCGB, mystical communion is not invisible and spontaneous, but is incarnated in social ordinances and means of grace.

There are clear resonances with the Herald model of a proclamatory church within Methodism's origins as a movement raised up to 'spread Scriptural Holiness throughout the land' (The Methodist Church, 1999, para. 4.2.1). John Wesley's preaching ministry, which took him out beyond the walls of the church, and the preaching tradition within Methodism that continues today, also resonate with this model. Dulles' criticism of the model, particularly in Protestant terms, 'that the Word has become not flesh but only word' (1987, p. 85), prompts a return to Methodism's pragmatic characteristics: the concern with reaching ordinary people where they are and the central place of social justice means that the Word remains enfleshed within Methodist ecclesiology and practice.

The focus on the church in dialogue with the world in the Herald model, in which ‘the Church takes the world as a properly theological locus’ (Dulles, 1987, p. 92) is again pertinent to the practical theology of Methodism. This is particularly the case in terms of Dulles’ description of the Servant church as one that is ‘dialogic, because it seeks to operate on the frontier between the contemporary world and the Christian tradition’ (1987, p. 92), something Methodism has sought to do since its inception. A further dimension to the Servant model, that of a ‘ministry of reconciliation, of binding up wounds, of suffering service’ (1987, p. 92), resonates strongly with the MCGB’s self-understanding as a church called to social justice and social action, to ‘mission and service to the world’ (The Methodist Church, 1999, para. 2.3.4), a phrase repeated throughout *Called to Love and Praise*.

From this dialogue between Methodist ecclesiology as defined in *Called to Love and Praise*, and Dulles’ models of the church, there is plenty of room for individual Methodists and local congregations to place the emphasis in different places. The Institution model, however, stands out as the most problematic because of the way in which Methodist ecclesiology developed through experimentation and pragmatism, and for some early Methodists, through a rejection of the established church. Whilst for many Methodists the notion of the church as institution may be alienating, like other mainstream denominations, there are many institutional features of contemporary British Methodism that cannot be safely ignored in practice and yet are not part of the mythology of what it means to be a Methodist in the popular mindset. Personally, my own sense of call was not focused upon anything institutional, but almost by definition, in going beyond the institutional and so the notions of church as mystical communion and as servant have more immediate appeal, although, as I will explore later, there may be connections between the sacramental nature of ministry that I want to articulate and the notion of church as sacrament that may help to bridge some of this gap.

I have begun to build a conceptual framework for this research with the notion of church as the MCGB has articulated it because this is foundational for understanding both what the MCGB understands itself to be doing in creating pioneer pathways for ordained ministers, and for interpreting, therefore, the experience of pioneers, myself included. I now turn to pioneering itself as a concept.

Pioneering

The pragmatic approach to theology and ecclesiology explored in the previous section is reflected in the Preface to the *Deed of Union* (the document that formed the MCGB in 1932), which states that the church is ‘always in need of reform’ (The Methodist Church, 1932, p.iii). In such a context, pioneer ministry has an important place, and the practice of pioneering within Methodism is not a recent one. Notoriously, John Wesley himself went out into the open air to preach to people in rural

areas as well as into the slums and prisons of the cities (Wesley, 1967, p. 139), practices that may be understood as forerunners to contemporary pioneer ministry. Understanding a pioneer in its broadest sense as someone who is the first to explore a new place, context or area of knowledge, this original pioneering spirit has remained a thread running through the MCGB into recent times. For example, the need for experimentation with new forms of ministry in new contexts is highlighted in the 1974 statement on ordination:

There may be situations which demand that some pioneer, whether Minister or layman, should be very much 'on his own', to some extent cut off from the normal collegiate ministry of Ministers and laymen in partnership. All Christians are called to show initiative in new situations and circumstances, and the church needs to be generous and sensitive in recognizing the divine call of the pioneers (The Methodist Church, 1974, p. 116).

In the contemporary context, pioneering forms of mission and ministry have become a significant focus for the MCGB because of the sharp decline in church attendance and Christian affiliation in the UK, a phenomenon that has particularly affected Methodism. This trend of decline can be identified in the most recent census in 2011 (Office for National Statistics, 2011) in which 59.3% of respondents identified as Christian, down from 71.7% in the 2001 census (ONS, 2001). It is also reflected in church attendance figures: a reduction from 11.8% of the population in 1980 to 5% in 2015 (Faith Survey, 2015). At the end of the 20th Century, Professor Emeritus of the Sociology of Religion Grace Davie, a key figure in the identification and analysis of religious trends in contemporary Britain, frames this decline with the phenomenon of 'believing without belonging' (Davie, 1994). Davie states that in the UK, as in other European countries, people 'persist in believing, but see no reason to participate with even minimal regularity in their religious institutions' (1994, p. 2). Writing two decades later, Davie identifies that while traditional forms of organised religion might be in decline, belief is not, though the effect of this is that 'fewer believe in a credal sense. As a result, the idea of a common narrative (of Christian liturgy or of Christian language and metaphor) becomes more tenuous almost by the day' (2015, p. 5). Davie singles out the non-conformist churches as those suffering most from these trends, identifying the United Reformed Church and the Methodist Church as experiencing 'dramatic' decline (2015, p. 57).

It is in this context that increased interest in pioneering ministries and their effectiveness makes sense. The MCGB's response to decline, in partnership with the Church of England, was the initiation of Fresh Expressions in 2004, which sought to release people to explore new forms of Christian community appropriate to contemporary contexts (Anglican-Methodist Working Party, 2012). This was followed by the Venture FX pilot scheme in 2008 and more recently, the Pioneering Pathways initiative. The MCGB now defines a pioneer thus:

A pioneer is someone who is able to connect with those who are not currently relating to church and Christian faith. They are able to help people to encounter God and explore what it might mean for them to be a disciple of Jesus Christ in the context where they are. They are

also able to re-imagine what Church could look like for such people. We think of a pioneer as someone who, as a primary focus of their ministry, is connecting with and aiming to form disciples among un-churched or de-churched people. A pioneer will then be intentionally developing an appropriate new ecclesial Christian community, or fresh expression of church, where these disciples can flourish (The Methodist Church website, *Pioneering Pathways*).

This definition of a pioneer is much narrower than that used in the 1974 Statement on Ordination and merits some critical attention. Whilst the idea of breaking new ground by working in new contexts and alongside unchurched people is a key feature of this definition of pioneer ministry, the focus upon new ecclesial community as the ultimate goal raises significant questions.

My own sense of call that led me to candidate for ordained Methodist ministry in 2010 was based on a sense that the church needs to help rebuild the lines of communication with people outside of it; to listen and seek to understand people by being immersed their context; to undertake 'local public theology' and dialogue with wider society at all levels; and to offer pastoral care and engage in social justice. I did not necessarily think that I was called to plant churches in the way that this definition envisages.

Some of the more negative connotations of the term 'pioneer' are worth noting here. There may be overtones of 'conquering' and 'claiming' space or people, and so of an individual or group seeking to dominate without consultation with or respect for others in that space. A further issue with the 'church planting' model of pioneering is the assumption that building a new Christian community is always the right answer for every context, ignoring the importance of other, broader, aspects of Christian mission such as those found in the Anglican document *The Five Marks of Mission* (The Church of England, 2017). This statement, originally developed in 1984, has since been adopted by other denominations as key to understanding the mission of the Church Universal, and includes sharing the gospel, nurturing disciples, acts of service and social justice, and care for the environment.

There is a danger that the MCGB's definition of pioneering is far narrower than our current missional context requires and gives an answer to a question that wider society is not yet asking, namely 'what does Christian community look like here for today?' My experience suggests that we may need deeper and more sustained ministries alongside people who are largely detached from traditional Christianity and inherited church models in order to listen, learn and respond to them, way before we begin to rethink church in that place. Such an approach rejects the business connotations of an 'entrepreneurial' model of pioneering, in which self-starting and risk are for the purpose of profit. In a Christian context, entrepreneurial pioneering might be understood as risk-taking for the sake of making new believers as opposed to risk-taking for the sake of new and deeper relationships with those outside the church.

In concluding this section perhaps an analogy of ‘tilling the ground before sowing the seeds’ may be appropriate as a way of understanding pioneering more broadly for the contemporary context. For this reason I take as my definition of a pioneer those whose ministry is focused in new contexts, regardless of whether the ultimate goal is new ecclesial community. As a result, I have decided not to confine my research to those identified as part of the Venture FX or Pioneer Pathways schemes, but intentionally to select presbyters whose ministry is focused in new contexts in order to reach those outside of the church.

Ordained pioneer ministry in the MCGB

Because my research question originated in the quest to understand my own calling as an ordained pioneer presbyter, and developed to focus upon the self understanding of presbyter pioneers rather than pioneers in general, it is important to pay attention to Methodist understandings of ordained ministry as they might be expressed in, or challenged by pioneer experience.

In its most recent authoritative statement on the nature of ministry (The Methodist Church, 2018), the MCGB affirms that it shares the view of the wider Church expressed in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* that:

“In order to fulfil its mission, the Church needs persons who are publicly and continually responsible for pointing to its fundamental dependence on Jesus Christ, and thereby provide, within a multiplicity of gifts, a focus of its unity. The ministry of such persons, who since very early times have been ordained, is constitutive for the life and witness of the Church... Their presence reminds the community of the divine initiative, and of the dependence of the Church on Jesus Christ, who is the source of its mission and the foundation of its unity. They serve to build up the community in Christ and to strengthen its witness. In them the Church seeks an example of holiness and loving concern.” (World Council of Churches, 1982 cited in The Methodist Church, 2018, para. 7.4.1).

The Methodist Church currently recognizes two orders of ministry: the presbyteral and the diaconal. Citing the 2002 Conference Report *Releasing Ministers for Ministry*, The 2018 Statement defines presbyters in the following way:

Methodist Presbyters are ministers of the Word and Sacraments in the Church of God. Through ordination and reception into Full Connexion they are authorised by the Conference: “to be public people who represent God-in-Christ and the community of the Church (particularly the Methodist Church and its Conference) in the world, and the world and the community of the Church in Christ before God, as they seek to serve the needs of

the Kingdom in the power of the Spirit.” They share a collegial responsibility for embodying, exercising and sharing with others the Conference’s oversight of the Church both as it gathers in Christian community and as it disperses in the world for worship and mission. They have authority to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments. (The Methodist Church, 2018, para. 7.4.4.1)

I draw from this document that presbyteral ministry as it is understood in the MCGB is a ministry of word, sacraments and oversight.

Embodiment, Sacrament, Place

As I first began to think about what it might mean to exercise presbyteral ministry in a pioneering context the first concept I was drawn to was that of embodiment.

It occurred to me early in my ministry as I grappled with how to connect with complete strangers, that my connection was initially at a fundamental level, that of a shared experience of embodiment, and embodiment in *this* place; I am here and they are here in this place. These reflections drew me to philosopher Martin Heidegger’s work, *Being and Time* (1962), a key text of twentieth century European philosophy. One of Heidegger’s central concepts is that of *dasein*, being-in-the-world, as a way of understanding human existence, in which embodiment and place are essential and inseparable constituents: we *are* being-in-the-world. *Where* we are embodied and *who* we are are intrinsically linked. A dualistic understanding of the self as body and spirit is rejected, as is the Aristotelian notion of place as mere geographical location rather than a significant player in embodied existence. *Dasein* is significant in terms of the material world and its relationship to human existence: it is not a separate or lesser dimension but fundamental to who we are. We might therefore say that humans are ‘at all times in a dialogue between self and that which we encounter’ (Bucke, 2017, p. 172). Heidegger’s *dasein* provides significant underpinning to my sense of the importance of being in a particular place as a pioneer practitioner, particularly in the early stages of my ministry as I sought to understand its meaning and effectiveness. Further it offers a philosophical foundation for the exploration of the contextual nature of pioneer ministry, in which embodiment and place are fundamental.

Because of its emphasis on the embodied self in the material world, *dasein* also has strong resonances with the Christian doctrine of the incarnation. Baptist systematic theologian Paul Fiddes offers an important contribution to ideas about the incarnation and its relationship to embodiment, the material world, and the sacramental. Writing in *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (Fiddes, 2000) Fiddes highlights the fundamental nature of the incarnation to the Christian faith: ‘Christian belief is about the incarnation of the divine Logos in flesh and blood; it

is about physical sacraments which connect us here and now with the Word-made-body' (2000, p. 280). In an argument that resonates with the rejection of dualism suggested by *dasein*, Fiddes asserts that, in spite of a contemporary context in which we might be seduced by ideas of virtual encounter and relationship, all encounter is in fact embodied because we cannot 'be' without our bodies (2000, p. 278-9). Fiddes also understands the nature of God as embodied, with the embodied encounter as the model for divine/human encounter through the incarnation. It is because God took human form in the person of Jesus that we may participate in the divine, and as Fiddes states, 'Christianity is a religion of the body' (2000, p. 280). However, whilst recognising embodiment as connecting the human to the divine, Fiddes is clear that there is 'an element of the "unlike" as well as the "like"' (2000, p. 279), and that substance is important 'but not in the sense of identifying divine and human substances with each other' (2000, p. 282). This suggests that our embodied nature allows us to participate in the divine but is qualitatively different from God's incarnation in the person of Jesus.

Drawing on the work of feminist eco-theologian Sallie McFague, Fiddes offers a sacramental theology derived from the sacredness of embodied, material existence through the paradigm of the incarnation, in which the whole creation and all of life has sacramental potential (2000, p. 289). Of particular interest as a pioneer called to a sacramental ministry is Fiddes' use of an idea by Anglican theologian Austin Farrer in which a Christian minister can be considered 'a walking sacrament' (Farrer, 1970 cited in Fiddes, 2000, p. 294). Because of the blurred line between being and doing, because we embody Christian living and values, we are signs of Christ's ministry in the world (2000 p. 294). The potentially sacramental nature of those called to specific ministries within the church does not depend upon our individual characteristics - we are not perfect people. Rather, like the ordinary things of the sacraments: bread, wine, water, we 'can embody an ideal without *being* an ideal' (2000, p. 295). Here Fiddes is pointing to 'the distinction between the embodiment of something other than the self, and the nature of the self', in which 'the meeting rather than the place of meeting is significant' (Bucke, 2015, p. 12).

Fiddes offered some useful concepts for my professional context as I sought to make sense of my presence in the town centre and my calling to word and sacrament. Of particular importance have been the ongoing questions I ask as I reflect upon my ministry: 'where is my body?' and 'what is my body doing?' (Bucke, 2015, p. 12).

The concept of the material world as potentially sacramental is also found in the work of Anglican bishop John Inge. Drawing on the works of Schillibeeckx and von Balthasar, Inge develops the idea that from the particular of the incarnation and the sacramental rites of the church can be extended a much broader understanding of the sacramental in all of life (2003, pp. 60-61). In common with Fiddes, for Inge the sacramental in the world, like the sacraments themselves, is participatory and relational: an encounter involving the person, the material world and the divine (2003, p. 79). On the question of place, Inge understands the world itself as having sacramental and revelatory potential, citing Professor Timothy Gorrige on particular moments in time and

space which can be understood as 'rents in the opacity of history where God's concrete engagement to change the world becomes visible' (Gorringe, 1989 cited in Inge, 2003, p. 67). Such experiences are explored by Inge through the work of William James in the 19th Century, and Alister Hardy and David Hay in the 20th Century, with Hay's 1990s survey finding that over half the adults in Britain have experienced some kind of sacramental encounter, many of which have taken place away from churches or other holy places (Inge, 2003, p. 70-72).

Through the work of Heidegger, Fiddes and Inge, I have begun to construct a framework in which our embodied selves in the material world can be understood as fundamental to our being, and in which a sacramental ministry becomes possible through embodied encounter with others and the world. These concepts are important in pioneer ministry because of its highly contextual nature where place and embodiment are key factors in building relationships. They are also important for a form of presbyteral ministry that explores new ways of ministering and thinking about the sacramental. Continuing to focus on Inge's work, I will now examine the question of boundaries in relation to such broad understandings of the sacramental.

The Pioneering Context: Beyond Walls and Boundaries

The potential for sacramental experiences in all of life prompt Inge to ask questions about where the boundaries should lie: when is a sacramental encounter or event actually sacramental and when is it not? (2003, p. 67). For Inge, the key is relationship and the need for an individual to both be aware of and respond to the presence of God in a place, through an encounter, or simply in everyday life. Inge quotes John Macquarrie on the need for response: 'For anything to become a sacrament, something has to be contributed from both sides' (Macquarrie, 1997 cited in Inge, 2003, p. 80); the sacramental aspect of any event must be completed in the individual experiencing it. This means that the completed sacramental event can only be experienced by those who already understand something of the Christian tradition. Whilst Inge acknowledges the potential for the sacramental beyond the walls of the church, such experiences are the preserve of those who are sometimes to be found within them, and who understand something of God as mediated by scripture and tradition (2003, p. 80). This subordinates human experience to church tradition. Therefore, while the work of Inge opens up the possibility of the sacramental in wider life experience, the constraints he places upon this are not entirely compatible with ministering the sacramental amongst those with little or no church background or Christian literacy, precisely the people pioneer presbyters minister amongst.

An alternative view, which places greater value on embodied experience over structured interpretations, and may therefore be more useful to pioneer presbyters, can be found in the work of Anglican anthropologist and theologian Douglas Davies. Davies' approach focuses on the intersection of the theological and the social, and on the role of ritual in religious belief. In common with other theologians, Davies takes the paradigm of the incarnation as the foundation for an

understanding of the material world as 'a potential vehicle for the divine' (2002, p. 11). Davies also rejects as false the division of the world into sacred and profane (2002, p. 11). This worldview begins to open up the possibilities closed down by Inge.

These ideas suggest that an exclusivist understanding of the sacramental as something ministered by the church is a narrow construct and, drawing on the work of influential philosopher and Protestant theologian Paul Tillich, Davies explores human experience as a location for divine encounter. Davies understands Tillich's theology to be existential: rooted in human experience and the nature of being. This theology, Davies argues, is engaged with 'life and experience...in a way that sees involvement as a participation in God' (2002, p.14). Such a conceptualisation underpins Davies' understanding of embodied experience not as subordinate to systematic theology but as a legitimate source of theology in itself for ordinary people: 'ordinary believers are seldom guided and informed by systematic doctrines...because ordinary life does not work in that way' (2002, p. 21). In common with the other theological and philosophical thinkers who underpin the framework for my research, Davies rejects any kind of mind/body dualism or the 'partition of the self' (2002, p. 29). He understands this concept as stemming from belief in a disembodied afterlife and from the persistence of the platonic notion of the soul-over-body ideal (2002, p. 29). Davies offers instead the view that all human experience is embodied experience (2002, p. 34).

Focusing specifically on the place of embodied experience within faith, Davies regards our behaviour not simply as an outworking of our beliefs but a factor in forming our beliefs. For him, 'embodiment theory' is an alternative to and safeguard against the 'over-systematizing' approach of traditional theology to religious belief (2002, p. 41). Such an approach to embodiment and faith suggests that the relationship between them is dialogical: our behaviour can 'enshrine and express belief at one and the same time' (2002, p.41). Davies offers a perspective through which embodied experience, including of those outside the church, might be a significant factor in faith development: 'embodiment questions the primacy of profile for formal doctrine when considering Christian spirituality and practice. In reality, spirituality is a behavioural endeavour, and people "become" Christian by behaving Christianly' (2002, p.42). This has significance for pioneer ministry, and particularly a model of pioneering that involves sustained ministry in the world, because of the focus on experience and behaviour as potentially formational in the development of belief, rather than products of it.

The concepts explored thus far all, to some extent, reflect the significance of embodied experience in the material world to both human existence and to the divine/human relationship; the sacramental in all life is made possible *because* we are embodied in the world. These are helpful concepts for pioneer presbyteral ministry because they enable the sacramental to be understood beyond the celebration of the sacraments in church and they allow for the formation of faith and belief in the lived experience of ordinary people. Further, pioneer presbyters engaged in incarnational mission may be seen as having sacramental potential in themselves and there is a role for them in drawing the attention of others to the divine presence in ordinary life-in-the-world.

To me, this is a fruitful way of understanding what it might mean 'to be public people who represent God-in-Christ and the community of the Church (particularly the Methodist Church and its Conference) in the world, and the world and the community of the Church in Christ before God, as they seek to serve the needs of the Kingdom in the power of the Spirit' (The Methodist Church, 2002, section 4) in ministries located outside traditional congregational contexts.

Following this exploration of what it might mean to be a minister of the sacraments in a pioneer context, focusing particularly on the concept of embodiment, I then turned to consider what it might mean to minister the Word, drawing on ideas about story and its relationship to embodiment in the material world.

Ministering the Word in Story and Body

In this section I will argue that the concept of embodiment, which has been central to my exploration of how pioneer presbyters might be understood as ministers of sacrament, is helpful to a pioneer ministry of word, particularly in relation to pastoral encounter. From my own experience sharing in the embodied experience of being in the town centre, there have been many encounters and conversations with others there: 'A person in a clerical collar seems to be an invitation to some to tell their stories, stories that are often difficult to hear, and I assume, difficult to tell' (Bucke, 2016, p. 152). The acts of telling and hearing stories are fundamental parts of Christian ministry, and of the Word and pastoral care dimensions of presbyteral ministry. Whilst there may be a common association between a ministry of word, the Word, and words, in terms of preaching and pastoral care, in this section I will explore ways in which stories may be understood as more than words and may also incorporate elements of embodiment and 'being-in-the-world'.

In seeking a framework for understanding the role of story in pioneering I began with the work of French philosopher Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur is a key voice in understanding narrative in relation to human existence and identity, and for Ricoeur, narrative is how we make sense of our lives: he states we are 'life story' (1991, p. 20). In ways which resonate with theologians and philosophers who reject a mind/body dualism in favour of an integrated understanding, Ricoeur's ideas about the relationship between life and story point to an understanding of humans as living an embodied story. In 'Life in Quest of Narrative' (1991), Ricoeur criticises recent ideas which separate life and story according to the real and the fictional (1991, p. 20). Instead Ricoeur favours a view, rooted in Aristotle, of story as dynamic: a process that involves telling, hearing and interpreting, and so is enacted and lived (1991, p. 21). In the interpretive nature of the process Ricoeur identifies an essential component of human existence: because we understand and interpret we are more than 'biological function' (1991, p. 27). Our embodied existence is intrinsically linked to our life story, and in ministering the Word, the embodied encounter and the sharing and interpreting of stories are significant elements.

A related theological perspective on human life and story is found in the work of pastoral theologian David Lyall, whose work draws on that of Ricoeur in his exploration of the relationship between narrative and pastoral care in Christianity. Whilst Lyall recognises the place of psychotherapy in developing ideas about the importance of narrative in pastoral counselling, he acknowledges the pre-existing intrinsic relationship between theology and narrative, which is 'a vehicle for the communication of truth' (2001, p.44). Lyall points to the unique relationship between narrative and theology rooted in the Christian story: the story of God's relationship with humanity through the Jewish people in the Old Testament and the stories of the life of Christ told through the four gospels (2001, p.45). Drawing on the work of Sallie Teselle³, Lyall accounts for our love for and dependence upon stories by highlighting her understanding of 'the narrative quality of human experience' (Teselle, 1975, cited in Lyall, 2001, p. 45). This in turn has its origins in the incarnation: 'That God should be with us in the story of a human life could be seen as a happy accident, but it makes more sense to see it as God's way of always being with human beings *as they are*, as the concrete temporal beings who have a beginning and an end - who are, in other words, stories in themselves' (Teselle, 1975, cited in Lyall, 2001, p. 45).

The work of Lyall and those he draws upon demonstrates the importance of humans understanding ourselves through narrative *because* we were created in this way by a God who is revealed in spoken and written narrative, and in 'the embodied narrative of Jesus' (Bucke, 2016, p. 152). Narratives - the telling, hearing and interpretation of stories - are an inevitable and intrinsic part of human existence, and one which must be accounted for in the ways in which Christians minister to others. This may be particularly focused in the act of pastoral encounter, where ministering the Word occurs in the sharing and interpretation of life stories in the light of the Christian story.

I now return to the concept of embodiment in order to explore some theological perspectives which examine in greater depth the role of the body in relation to story, particularly in pastoral counselling. Professor of Pastoral Theology Donald Capps, writing on the relationship between pastoral encounter, narrative and the body, is critical of psychological perspectives which focus too heavily on 'wordplay' in the counselling relationship (1993, p. 40). Capps describes the danger of 'a view of pastoral conversation as disembodied speech' (1993, p. 44). Offering an alternative perspective using the work of the poet Denise Levertov, Capps focuses on body language as a means of expressing empathy: 'Her poetry is deeply attuned to the language of the body, and her own body as a source and means of understanding' (1993, p. 56). The significance of the body's language in Levertov's poetry, in which 'the body speaks on the soul's behalf' (1993, p. 64), is brought into dialogue with the pastoral counsellor's empathetic role, which is to 'leave the realm of the abstract and disembodied spirits to others, and to enter the body's world' (1993, p. 64). Thus a ministry of word expressed in pastoral conversation goes beyond words and into the embodied dimensions of human existence. For Capps, this attention to the physical can be transformational:

³ Cited earlier in this chapter under her birth name, McFague.

‘When one participates in the body’s world, the very form of communication changes, and something new and different occurs’ (1993, p. 64).

Whilst Capps focuses on the body specifically in relation to the pastoral counselling relationship, a broader perspective is offered by Anglican theologian Rowan Williams. Williams presents a view of the divine/human relationship as one involving God ‘inhabiting’ the material world and the human body (2007, p. 3). Drawing on Paul’s letter to the Galatians, Williams explores Paul’s negative use of the term ‘flesh’, inferring that his understanding of flesh is ‘human life minus relationship... human life that is not inhabited’ (2007, p. 4). Human life is only truly properly lived when our flesh is inhabited by God’s spirit and we are in relationship with others; this is salvation. Here it is possible to see echoes of Ricoeur’s thinking in relation to our need for others and for relationship because we need others to ‘hear’ and interpret our life story. However, for Williams the relationship with others is more than the validating one that Ricoeur proposes. Rather, because we are created for relationship with others, our flesh, inhabited by God, is ‘a language, a system, a means of connection’ (2007, p. 4). This has implications for those in ministry, and particularly incarnational forms of ministry, because the medium can be seen as the message: the ‘being alongside’, sharing the same spaces and embodied experience in the world *is* the initial means of connection, modelled on the incarnation.

Williams explicitly links this idea to story, suggesting that understanding our lives through story results from our spirit-inhabited flesh and the true relationships this enables. Our life story is not experienced as if we receive passively external things that happen to us. Rather we tell the stories of our relationships, both with others and with the world, ‘the story of how your life, how your flesh, became inhabited’ (Williams, 2007, p. 5). Story and body are enmeshed in a network of relationships where meanings and interpretations are created, potentially important for pioneers because of the relational nature of such ministries.

The Pioneer Context: Word Beyond Walls

The perspectives I have explored thus far point to the possibility of a ministry of word understood in broad terms and in contexts beyond the gathered congregation. A further perspective particularly relevant to pioneers can be found in *Christ in Practice* by Methodist theologian Professor Clive Marsh (2006), which offers a ‘practical Christology...an exposition of the meaning of Christ as discovered through, and related to, the practice of human living’ (2006, p. xi). Marsh sets out the purpose of this work as not only for Christians but ‘a challenge to anyone of a different religious tradition or of none to think about how *their* understanding of what it means to be human is gained and “worked with” - what stories they live by’ (2006, p. xii). Marsh names stories as a given in the human experience, suggesting that we depend upon stories for self-understanding and to shape our lives, regardless of our faith commitment. In common with other theologians, Marsh highlights the importance of story within the Christian tradition, identifying the various ways in which

Christianity has communicated itself: 'Narratives (gospels), icons, creeds, confessions, plays, sculptures, paintings, and much else besides create a working image, as a result of which it becomes possible to say "there is Christ"' (2006, p. 22). Whilst narrative is only one form of communication, all the others might be described as having narrative qualities or capturing key moments in the Christian narrative.

In common with other theological perspectives, the incarnation and relationships are key themes for Marsh. His overarching motif in identifying Christ's presence in the world is 'loving relationships which enable people to flourish as human beings' (2006, p. 24). Here Marsh offers a framework around which those seeking to exercise a ministry of word beyond church walls might conceptualise it - are we participating in and pointing to the presence of loving relationships in which people flourish?

Yet while Marsh is writing from a Christian perspective and offering a way of understanding the Christian narrative in a wider perspective, he acknowledges that it is one of many stories which people live by and is aware of the dangers of 'Christian imperialism' (2006, p. 44). His practical Christology 'is offered to a wider public, and not just for the use of Christian people... It accepts that other accounts (religious or not) will be given as to "what is actually going on"' (2006, p. 45). As I stated in Paper Two, Marsh's work is 'particularly pertinent to my own context, ministering to people with little or no church background and seeking to open up possibilities for them to engage with the Christian story in a way that is non-threatening' (Bucke, 2016, p. 156). Marsh understands the value of the Christian story to those outside the Church but is sensitive to the postmodern, post-Christendom context in which pioneer ministry takes place.

In common with Marsh, Anglican priests Christopher Cocksworth and Rosalind Brown offer a perspective on how the Christian narrative intersects with the wider world, rooted in the incarnation. This leads them to draw together embodiment and a ministry of word in a way that provides a useful summary of the perspectives relating to word explored in this chapter: 'Being for the Word means living with holy wonder in a world in which the Word of God took human flesh, a world in which the Word speaks, whispers, shouts and serenades today' (2002, p. 82). They give parity to the exercise of such a ministry in the world to that exercised in a congregational context: ordinary life is 'just as much of a sermon as the brief time we spend in the pulpit on a Sunday' (2002, p.101).

In this section I have explored a number of perspectives which enable a ministry of word to be understood in contexts beyond those normally exercised within congregations, such as preaching. These perspectives have highlighted the importance of narrative in human life and in the Christian faith, and of pastoral encounter and relationships as potential locations for the Word to be made present in human life.

Before concluding this chapter I will now consider the ministry of oversight, and its significance for the pioneer presbyter.

Oversight

Initially, I had intended this research to be focused upon the ministry of word and sacraments. This was because I interpreted pastoral oversight as pastoral responsibility, something my experience suggested could be easily expressed in a pioneer context. However, as my research progressed, it became apparent that pastoral oversight was not unconnected to the issues my research is seeking to address. Particularly relevant was the role of presbyters in the collegial pastoral oversight of the MCGB: 'They share a collegial responsibility for embodying, exercising and sharing with others the Conference's oversight of the Church both as it gathers in Christian community and as it disperses in the world for worship and mission' (The Methodist Church, 2018, para. 7.4.4.1). I began to ask questions about whether pioneer voices are contributing effectively, and whether pioneer presbyters feel able to contribute to the leadership of the MCGB. This led me to question the influence of pioneer ministry beyond the very small numbers of people currently engaged in it.

Whilst there is not the scope here for a detailed study of the role of oversight in the work of pioneer presbyters, it is important to offer some discussion of the nature of oversight. Because the original aim of my research was both to understand how pioneer presbyters conceptualise the word and sacrament aspects of their ministry, and to suggest how the MCGB and its practices might be influenced by this, the relationship between influence and oversight is worthy of some reflection.

In the Conference report, *What is a Presbyter?* (The Methodist Church, 2002), the MCGB acknowledges that the origins of presbyteral ministry are complex and emerged out of the developing context of the movement as it became more established and formalised: 'as the various connexions of societies took on the marks of a Church, so those who exercised oversight of the movement and led it by example in worship and mission took on some of the roles of parochial clergy' (The Methodist Church, 2002, section 1). Thus the need for oversight of this growing movement was a key factor in the development of the presbyteral office.

However, the nature of oversight within the MCGB might also be described as complex in terms of the role of lay and ordained in exercising it. The MCGB understands oversight or *episkopé* as rooted in the idea of God 'keeping an eye' on God's people (The Methodist Church, 2005, p. 1), and leads to the commonly-used expression 'watching over one another in love': Oversight is defined by the MCGB as involving 'aspects of watching over, watching out for, monitoring, discerning, disciplining, directing, guiding, encouraging and caring' as well as 'governance, management and leadership' (2005, p. 1).

As a denomination in which lay and ordained share fully in leadership, the task of oversight is understood as based upon the trinitarian model of shared power and responsibility (The Methodist Church, 2005, p. 2). This pattern can be seen across the various layers of responsibility and authority within Methodism - Circuit, District and Connexion - in which both lay and ordained are required for each meeting to be properly constituted, and in which oversight is only fully realised when 'that of the ordained and that of the lay interact' (The Methodist Church, 2002, section 7).

However alongside this interdependence of lay and ordained, presbyters have a unique role in the exercise of oversight, particularly in relation to the Conference, the overarching authority within Methodism:

Mr. Wesley's Assistants (who later developed into what we know as ministers and, more recently, presbyters) had a particular role to play. They entered into a covenant relationship of being in 'full connexion' with Mr. Wesley and, later, the Conference. This means that they had, and Methodist presbyters still have, a particular part to play in exercising the oversight of the Conference in that a core emphasis of their ministry is to exercise pastoral responsibility on behalf of the Conference in a way that is always meshed with their ministry of the word and sacrament. (The Methodist Church, 2005, para. 2.23).

The importance of the presbyter to the task of oversight is stated in the *Deed of Union* (The Methodist Church, 1932): 'Christ's ministers are stewards in the household of God and shepherds of his flock. Some are called and ordained to this occupation as presbyters or deacons. Presbyters have a principal and directing part in these great duties' (The Methodist Church, 1932, Clause 4). This is further demonstrated in that the President and Secretary of the Conference are both presbyters. It is clear that whilst oversight is a task for the whole church, presbyters have a distinct role at every level of church governance.

The question that arises from this in relation to my research is: do pioneer presbyters play a full part in this task so that their insights and experiences influence the MCGB's thinking and practice? This is particularly important in the light of leadership, which requires that 'people are inspired to be imaginative and to participate in the development of new vision, and are empowered to share their ideas and act upon them' (The Methodist Church, 2005, para. 1.13). It is my sense anecdotally that pioneer presbyters are not yet fully participating in their oversight responsibilities, in part because they are often by nature those who do not wish to engage with the meetings and business of the church. A further factor is that the nature of pioneer appointments can draw people away from the mechanisms and structures of the church into places where the needs are such that there is little motivation to devote time and energy to church business. In addition, pioneers are marginal and minority voices, whose ideas about the future of the MCGB may not sit comfortably with its current practices and structures. Yet if oversight is 'participation in God's oversight of the world' (The Methodist Church, 2005, para. 4.1.1), those whose ministry is located in the wider world have a vital contribution to make to the MCGB's understanding of how this may be done.

The asking of this question is encouraged by the 2018 report: For many years, the Methodist Church in Britain has thought of oversight as being expressed through ‘governance, management and leadership’ (The Methodist Church, 2018, para. 6.2). Although it is acknowledged that oversight is not defined solely in these terms, in many contexts they have dominated thinking, leading, in some cases, to the development of a rather narrow and functional understanding of oversight. The limitations of this framework are increasingly recognised, and in recent Anglican-Methodist conversations the need for a broader understanding was re-emphasised: ‘Oversight is more than governance, leadership and management. It includes the preservation of the integrity of the community in continuity with the apostolic faith and mission through the work of corporate bodies and individuals in teaching, preaching, encouraging, making judgements, evangelising and offering pastoral care.’ (The Methodist Church, 2018, para. 6.2).

Coming to understand oversight as being something that is beyond the management of particular church communities broadened my interest in the way in which pioneer ministry is or fails to be engaged in the collegial oversight of the Connexion’s life.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have examined the theological and philosophical perspectives which form the conceptual framework for my research. These comprise the concept of ordained and pioneer ministry within Methodist ecclesiology and the UK missional context; embodiment and its relationship both to the sacramental, and to narrative and the ministry of word; the nature and importance of oversight within the presbyteral role in ensuring these broader ideas are fed into the wider church’s thinking. In the following chapter I will set out the methodology I will be using to conduct this research.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

In this research my aim was to discover the experiences of pioneer presbyters, and to explore the implications of these for the MCGB. My original focus was to understand how pioneers conceptualise their ministry in relation to the wider ministry of Methodist presbyters, those ‘set

apart by ordination to the ministry of the word and sacraments' (The Methodist Church, 1932, clause 4). This developed further, as detailed in Chapter Two, to include oversight.

In this chapter I will outline the context and initial focus for my research before relating this to the discipline of practical theology. Out of a definition of practical theology, I will account for my selection of qualitative research as my overall methodology before giving a description of and rationale for the particular methods chosen. Finally I will identify the limitations of this research and its ethical dimensions.

Context and Focus

My interest in pioneering as a presbyter, rather than as a deacon or lay person, as well as the contribution such presbyters could make to the MCGB, stemmed from my own practice as a pioneer presbyter. As I began to reflect on how my ministry was one of word and sacrament, I sought opportunities to reflect on this with other pioneers. I was struck by the similarities of our experiences and conceptualisations, and felt this was worthy of further exploration. However, I acknowledge that the number of presbyters who have experience of pioneer ministry is very small. At the start of this research only nine presbyters were identified as part of the Pioneering Pathways programme, and a further 15 were estimated to be engaged in pioneering in some way (email from Ian Bell, Pioneer Ministries Co-ordinator, 12.10.16); we are anomalies, not 'norms'. For this reason, I wanted to broaden the scope of my research to incorporate presbyters not strictly considered pioneers but who exercise their ministry in secular organisations. Such individuals were likely to have confronted similar questions about how presbyteral ministry might be practiced beyond traditional contexts; according to my own definition, outlined in Chapter Two, they too are pioneers as they open up new opportunities for mission and ministry.

In the early stages of this research, I considered comparing the experiences of pioneer presbyters with those of deacons and lay people doing such work. I eventually rejected this possibility because I was aware that the proportion of pioneer presbyters was so small and that this research presented an opportunity to focus entirely on these marginal voices. Presbyteral ministry is mostly expressed in church-based appointments, through pastoral charge of congregations, preaching, and presiding at the Sacraments. Such appointments represent a dominant expression of presbyteral ministry in a way that is not the case for deacons and lay people, whose work is less constrained by such conventions and may be much more varied. This has significant implications in terms of the oversight role that presbyters have within the MCGB, as discussed in the previous chapter: pioneer presbyters have fewer opportunities to influence church governance because their voice is insignificant within the whole. I hope that this research project gives a platform for these voices so that the church may learn from our practice and understanding of presbyteral ministry.

In the light of the decline in church attendance and adherence already highlighted in Chapter Two, much is being said within the MCGB about the need to 'do things differently' and solutions to decline have become a theme of church debate in recent years. The idea that the MCGB needs to make changes in the light of the current missional context raises significant questions about practice for all those within it, particularly its ordained leaders. This research aims to address questions of practice for the current context, in particular what might be learnt from the experiences of a small number of pioneer presbyters. For this reason I now locate my research within the discipline of practical theology, using literature from a number of practical theologians.

Practical Theology

It is difficult to define practical theology: it has been described by John Swinton and Harriet Mowat as 'a rich and diverse discipline' (2006, p. 3) and by Bonnie Miller-McLemore as 'not an easily defined category' (2012, p. 5). Yet whilst acknowledging this, a number of key themes and ideas can be identified. Swinton and Mowat suggest 'the common theme that holds practical theology together as a discipline is its perspective on, and beginning point in, human experience and its desire to reflect theologically on this experience' (2006, p. v). Similarly, Stephen Pattison and Gordon Lynch state that practical theology 'treats contemporary human experience as worthy of sustained analysis and critical reflection' (1997, p. 408). This idea of valuing human experience can be traced to a central concept within practical theology: Anton Boisen's 'living human document' (1936). Miller-McLemore highlights the central place of Boisen's 'living human document' as significant in the trajectory of practical theology: 'Among the intellectual developments in the academy at large, early twentieth-century psychology demonstrated the value of close study of the "living human document" as a valid "text" for theological study' (2012, p. 1).

This view points to another key feature of practical theology: its dialogical and interdisciplinary nature. Whilst practical theology has its roots in the work of Schleiermacher, who viewed it as the natural outworking of all other forms of theology, with a direction of travel from theory to practice (Pattison and Lynch, 1997, p. 409), the psychological insights of Boisen and others from the mid-twentieth century contributed to a new understanding of practical theology. Here, human experience was 'comparable to traditional texts of scripture and doctrine' (Miller-McLemore, 2012, p. 1) and worthy of wider influence: 'Boisen argued that attention to patients' experiences could itself generate new understandings about the human condition and the nature of human relations to God' (Pattison and Lynch, 1997, p. 411). Thus, practical theology became a dialogical discipline: 'a place where religious belief, tradition and practice meets contemporary experiences, questions and actions and conducts a dialogue that is mutually enriching, intellectually critical and practically transforming' (Woodward and Pattison, 2000, p. 7). Included in this dialogue are disciplines such as psychology, sociology and anthropology 'because the theological tradition does not in itself provide all the information about the modern world that is needed to have a good understanding of many issues' (Woodward and Pattison, 2000, p. 9).

Finally, practical theology is active and transformative. Swinton and Mowat describe practical theology as 'performance of the gospel... embodied and enacted in the life and practices of the church as they interact with the life and practice of the world' (2006, p. 5). Miller-McLemore describes it as having its ultimate aim 'in the pursuit of an embodied Christian faith' (2012, p. 5). This pursuit of practical wisdom does not reach its end in knowledge but in action. Swinton and Mowat state that the aim of practical theology is 'not simply to understand the world but also to change it' (2006, p. 27), while Woodward and Pattison identify that one of its outcomes is that it should be 'practically transforming' and ultimately should result in 'people changing their attitudes and beliefs in practice so that they begin to behave differently' (2000, p. 7).

These key themes from practical theology are to be found in the structure of my own research design: I am taking as my starting point human experience, specifically of pioneer presbyters. I will be allowing their experiences to dialogue with existing theological insights as well as those from other disciplines, with the ultimate goal of renewed understanding and transformed practice within the MCGB.

Theology in Four Voices - a practical theology model

Having located this research within the discipline of practical theology, I have selected a model for theological reflection from this discipline as part of my methodological approach: 'Theology in Four Voices' (Cameron et al, 2010, p.53). In developing this model, Cameron et al were motivated 'by a desire to find more faithful ways of relating theology and practice, ways that did justice to the whole discipline of theology and to the complexity of practice' (2010, p. 1). They describe practical theology as 'concerned especially with the making of connections between theology and faith practice, and between the Christian tradition and the present' (2010, p. 49). Finding ways to connect theology and practice underpin the study of practical theology and this research.

Significantly, Cameron et al recognise the need to raise the status of practice and give practical theology its rightful place amongst other theological disciplines: 'The naming of faith-full actions as a theological voice, draws practice into a dynamic set of other theologies, which are often much more recognised as such' (2010, p. 53). In setting out an 'heuristic and hermeneutic framework' (2010, p. 53), the four voices are identified as an intersection of theology, tradition and contemporary practice. They are identified thus:

1. Normative Theology: Scriptures, creeds, official church teaching, liturgies
 2. Formal Theology: The theology of theologians, dialogue with other disciplines
 3. Espoused Theology: The theology embedded within a group's articulation of its beliefs
 4. Operant Theology: The theology embedded within the actual practices of a group
- (2010, p. 54).

I have chosen this model because it allows for the complex intersection of these four voices, not only in terms of the normative-formal as a critique of the espoused-operant but including 'a proper challenge to the normative and formal voices from the theological wisdom of practice' (2010, p. 56). This gives value to the espoused and operant theology of pioneers alongside the normative and formal theology of church and academy. In allowing for this relationship between the different voices, it is also appropriate for the potentially complex relationship between church and pioneer.

Qualitative Research

Because it is experiences, attitudes, beliefs and ideas that I wish to access through this research, as well as how these interact with practice, I have chosen an inductive approach. This approach is described by Vernon Trafford and Shosh Lesham as using 'various forms of interpretive analysis of meaning-making' (2008, p.98), and takes the data as its starting point, generating meaning from it. As I am using an inductive approach, I will be working within the qualitative research paradigm, generally regarded as the most appropriate for research which explores and interprets human experience. Social scientist Colin Robson describes the qualitative paradigm as having a 'focus on meanings' and upon context: 'situations are described from the perspective of those involved', and 'the personal commitment and reflexivity of the researcher is valued' (2011, p. 19). The significant role of the researcher within the qualitative paradigm is also highlighted by Professor of Educational Psychology John Creswell, who describes the researcher as a 'key instrument' in the research process because she collects and interprets the data herself (2009, p. 175). Linking this to the inductive process, the researcher identifies themes from the collection and interpretation of data. (Creswell, 2009, p. 175).

Swinton and Mowat, writing from a theological perspective, highlight the usefulness of qualitative research in theological enquiry. They identify it as enabling the researcher 'to explore the social world in an attempt to access and understand the unique ways that individuals and communities inhabit it' (2006, p. 29). For them, it is the nature of humans as 'interpretative creatures', and the importance of context and location in the world, which make it particularly valuable in theological research (2006, p. 29).

From this exploration of relevant literature, I have concluded that the inductive, qualitative approach is the most appropriate methodological paradigm for this research, given the importance of meaning and interpretation in my research, and my role as a researcher practitioner. However, whilst clearly appropriate in terms of a philosophical perspective, it is important I address some of the theological issues relating to subjective and objective meaning raised by this approach.

A qualitative approach assumes the validity of human experience as a data source from which interpretation and meaning can be generated into new theory, with implications for practice.

Underpinning qualitative research is a social constructivist epistemology, which Robson describes as 'a view that social properties are constructed through interactions between people, rather than having a separate existence' (2011, p.24). This implies that meaning is a human construct rather than being objective and existing in its own right. For Cameron and Duce, writing from a theological perspective, social constructivism 'embraces relativism' and gives parity to all values systems, which are 'equivalent and need to be tolerated' (2013, p. 32). Where this becomes potentially problematic is that it offers no privileged position to faith perspectives (2013, p. 32).

Practical theology research allows for the significance of human experience: Swinton and Mowat state that 'Human experience is presumed to be an important locus for the work of the Spirit. As such it holds much relevance for the continuing task of interpreting scripture and tradition' (2006, p. 6). However, the social constructivist approach is for them controversial because it challenges notions of absolute truth received via divine revelation, and they reject it as a result (2006, p. 37). Drawing on the work of Professor of Pastoral Theology Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger on the divinity and humanity of Christ as being 'asymmetrically related', Swinton and Mowat concur with her view that theology and social science are similarly related (2006, p. 86). They use van Deusen Hunsinger's understanding that there is an 'indestructible order' between theology and social science: 'While both theology and the social sciences are united but separate, the voice of theology has logical precedence within the conversation' (2006, p. 86) because 'theology talks of ultimate issues, of life, death, God and the meaning of life. The social sciences do not have the capacity to deal with these issues' (2006, p. 86). Thus Swinton and Mowat conclude that theology must take priority over other conversation partners: 'While there remains much scope for critical dialogue and mutual reflection, the conversation is always inherently asymmetrical with theology having necessary logical priority' (2006, p. 88).

Whilst acknowledging this view, it seems incongruent with the unique importance of human experience within practical theology. As I stated in Paper Three, in suggesting that the role of research in practical theology is limited to affirming and clarifying existing theological understandings, Swinton and Mowat do not fully allow for 'human experience as a legitimate means of divine revelation' (Bucke, 2017, p. 175).

In contrast, I return to the work of Methodist theologian Professor Clive Marsh, who provides an alternative perspective on the role of human experience in theology. For Marsh, it is Christ himself who is made present in human experience through relationship: 'Christ is embodied in particular kinds of human relationships - those in which people seek and find justice, worth and dignity... Christ is a spiritual presence within people who seek such relationships' (2006, p. 2). In identifying Christ as present in these forms, Marsh states explicitly that contemporary human experience is a legitimate source of theological understanding: 'We can and must interpret who, what and where Christ is today in the context of ordinary, complex human relationships. It is therefore also possible to work back from certain forms of human relationships to what can be said of Christ today' (2006, p. 2). From this perspective, theology is legitimately dialogical and experience is not intrinsically

subordinate to the claim of any kind of objective revelation; theology may be shaped by experiences in the here and now, contemporary experience can be a location for divine revelation.

As I explored in Papers One and Two, in my own practice experience and particularly the experience of embodied encounter have been significant both as a beginning point for building relationships and as an ongoing expression of incarnational ministry itself. Because of this, my interest in the experiences of pioneer ministers, and the ways in which I understand experience as having the potential to shape practice, I have used a social constructivist epistemology in this research. Such an approach legitimises the place of experience in offering new insights into theology and allows for the possibility that the transformation of practice might follow.

Research Methods

In light of my chosen methodology - the qualitative paradigm underpinned by a social constructivist epistemology - I have selected interviews as my primary means of data collection. The interview method is congruent with the task of ascertaining attitudes and beliefs. It is also a commonly-used and appropriate method of qualitative research in the social sciences (Robson, 2011, p. 279-80). Within the discipline of theology, Cameron and Duce identify interviews as particularly suited to a social constructivist and interpretivist epistemology as 'they capture the specific values and meanings an interviewee attaches to a given topic or set of practices.' (2013, p. 82).

Robson identifies the three kinds of commonly used interviews as structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (2011, p. 279), and of the three, I have chosen semi-structured interviews. I am keen to allow for conversation to develop freely and naturally within the interview whilst also ensuring that all the key topics for data collection are covered. Cameron and Duce highlight the effectiveness and appropriateness of this type of interview within practical theology research because it is 'open-ended' (2013, p. 83). Further, Robson identifies this method as particularly suited to being a practitioner-researcher, stating that 'it is most appropriate when the interviewer is closely involved with the research process e.g. in a small scale project when the researcher is also the interviewer' (2011, p. 285). The semi-structured interview also allows for a full exploration of meaning. Creswell highlights the importance of discerning meaning within qualitative research: 'In the entire qualitative research process, the researcher keeps a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about a problem or issue' (2009, p. 175). The flexibility to explore in depth what it means to minister word and sacrament as a pioneer whilst also exploring participants' experiences of ministry more widely makes the semi-structured interview an appropriate method.

Following my decision to adopt the qualitative research paradigm and use the semi-structured interview method, I have chosen purposive sampling to select participants. This method is compatible with qualitative research because 'the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants... that will best help the researcher' (Creswell, 2009, p. 178). It had

originally been my intention to interview 10 presbyters for this research, five pioneers and five presbyters in secular employment. However, I decided to limit this to four participants, two from each category. This was because further enquiry into the semi-structured interview method led me to realise that 10 interviews may generate significantly more data than I could realistically manage within the time constraints. I ensured that across the interviewees there was a mix of gender, age and time in ministry. In addition, the selection was equally split between those in appointments that are officially recognised as pioneering within the MCGB and those exercising their ministry within secular workplaces. This offers some breadth of experience and context, and a potential point of comparison between pioneers and secularly employed presbyters. Whilst I identified that presbyters ministering as chaplains are also exercising a word and sacrament ministry in largely secular environments, I decided to omit them from this research. This was because chaplaincy is a well-established and well-researched form of ministry in its own right and including it would not contribute to the gap in knowledge I am addressing. It would also dilute the voices of those whose collective voice remains small with the church, an important task for this project: 'Practical Theology often seeks to research issues... whose significance is poorly recognised' (Cameron and Duce, 2013, p. 99).

Reflexivity

An important consideration for this research is my own role as an insider-researcher. I am an insider to the MCGB, ordained and licensed for ministry by the organisation, and sponsored by them to follow the Professional Doctorate programme. Further, as an ordained presbyter, I hold in common with other presbyters a particular vocation. Finally, as a pioneer presbyter, I am part of a small group of people with whom I share very similar experiences and outlook.

The above circumstances require a reflexive approach in order to maximise the validity of this research. David Coghlan and Teresa Brannick, writing in *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization* (2001), identify some important factors relating to being a researcher within one's own organisation: 'There are issues around how to attain some sense of objectivity and move beyond personal perspective by testing assumptions and interpretations' (2001, p. xii). They go on to highlight the importance of rigour through constant reflection during the research in order to show 'how you challenged and tested your own assumptions and interpretations of what is happening continuously throughout the project... so that your familiarity with and closeness to the issues are exposed to critique' (2001, p. 23). The emotional impact of researching what I am close to is also worthy of reflection. I have already highlighted the importance of embodiment and bodily responses within my own experiences of ministry in Chapter Two, and I have been alert to the possibility of such emotional and bodily responses as part of the research process: 'at times you may feel excited, angry, frustrated, sad, lonely, and so on... Other experiences may be experienced in the body - excited energy, embarrassed blushing, tightness in the stomach' (Coghlan and Brannick, 2001, p. 23).

I acknowledge that my own experiences as a pioneer presbyter have significantly influenced this research. As an insider researcher, I have already recognised and identified my own 'vested interest' in the outcome of the research as a pioneer practitioner (Bucke, 2017, p.166), and the possible bias towards my participants because of the sympathy I may have with their experiences. There is also the issue of like-mindedness between myself and the participants. Rather than seek to eliminate the factors that are an inevitable part of being an insider-researcher in order to try to achieve an objectivity that is not possible, I have chosen instead to deliberately include reflexive and autoethnographic elements in my data.

Practical theologian Heather Walton offers a perspective on reflexivity and its place within theology: she describes reflexivity as an approach that 'challenges views of reasoning as a process of rational and unbiased observation' and as 'the interrogative process that enables us to understand all our meaning-making, even in the most abstract spheres, as relational, provisional, embodied and located' (2015, p. xvi); these resonate strongly with the concepts I have already discussed in relation to pioneer ministry. Walton argues that knowing and understanding are whole-body phenomena in which experiential knowledge is significant, particularly within the area of theology. Reflexivity is an essential acknowledgment of this: 'its affirmation of bodily and emotional knowledge, are all important aspects of a pastorally astute and theologically aware approach' (2015, p. xvii). Walton's work points not just to the inevitability of the self entering the research dynamic but to the self as a vital component of research, certainly within the discipline of practical theology where experience is central.

For Walton, one key method which connects the need for an explicitly reflexive methodology with the central place of experience within practical theology is autoethnography, the process of 'Writing the living human document' in which 'records of journaling, autobiography and therapeutic accounts of the self become vehicles for theological discovery' (2015, p. xx). Adopting an autoethnographical approach, in which I have written myself into the research, uses my own personal experience as a data source. Including such an approach in my research reflects not only its appropriateness within practical theology, but the increasing importance of personal experience in the 'postmodern reflexive turn in epistemology' (Walton, 2015, p. 3).

In order to ensure that reflexive and autoethnographic approaches are embedded in my research I have included my own experiences and perspectives in a number of ways. Experiences from and reflections upon my own ministry are included throughout the thesis, particularly where there are significant points of similarity or difference from the experiences of research participants. I have kept a research journal, which provides a record of developments in my thinking and practice. I also documented my responses to the interview questions before commencing the interview process in order to identify my perspectives and conceptualisations of pioneer presbyteral ministry before hearing those of participants. I have included my interview as part of the data set.

Limitations

In common with many qualitative enquiries, the small number of participants involved in my research mean that the transferability of my findings is limited, and the very small number of pioneer presbyters in the MCGB mean that random sampling was not possible. Further, in relation to those in official pioneering appointments, this is a relatively new initiative within the MCGB and those involved may have limited experience. However, this may be mitigated by the inclusion of presbyters in secular employment, which has a longer history within the church, and provides opportunities to hear from those with more experience and a longer term view.

The nature and character of those engaged in pioneering and secular ministry, myself included, is another factor for consideration as we are often those who 'do not fit' within church structures; we may be considered anomalies in relation to other ministers. As such, our views may not reflect those of the wider church and we may be atypical in our thinking about mission and presbyteral ministry. I have therefore been alert to the potential dangers of an echo-chamber effect and of confirmation bias when interpreting and analysing the data.

Ethical Considerations

Returning to the work of Coghlan and Brannick on the particular nature of insider research, they state that it is important for the researcher to address 'the possible effects of the inquiry on the participants' and 'the self of the researcher' (2001, p. 72). In addition, drawing on the work of Krystyna Weinstein, they identify the 'political' and potentially 'subversive' nature of insider research, which may be 'threatening to existing organizational norms' (2001, p. 63). I therefore identified a number of ethical issues related to my participants, and the potential for the interviews to touch upon sensitive issues; to myself as an insider-researcher intimately involved in the practice of ministry I am researching; and to the MCGB as the organisation in which my research was taking place.

A key ethical consideration in relation to participants in qualitative research is that of anonymity. Robson states that 'Giving anonymity to participants when reporting on research is the norm' (2011, p. 207). I therefore ensured that all participants were anonymised in the presentation of the data and informed them of this before they participated in the research using the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix Four), given to all participants before the interviews. However, whilst in research such as this the anonymity of all participants is considered best practice, the very small pool of pioneers within the church and the depth at which they were interviewed about their work, meant that there was a risk that individuals may still be identifiable from their data. I informed all participants of this risk and all have seen a transcript of their interview as part of the process, allowing them to name any concerns they may have had about anonymity.

A further significant consideration was that of potential harm to participants through the interview process, particularly given that the interviews were intended to be conducted in great depth. In reflecting upon the ethical issues relating to the depth of the interviews, my own experience of pioneering within the MCGB was pertinent: I have at times felt marginalised and experienced difficulties which have caused some personal distress; anecdotally this is something that I am aware has affected others too. In order to mitigate against this I first made it clear in the Participant Information Sheet that there was the potential for difficult feelings to surface during the interview. Further, I stated that the interviews could be tiring for participants and that a discussion about the challenges of ministry may cause distress. Because of the risk of harm, I made it clear that participants could choose to stop the interview if necessary, and withdraw from the process at any time. Recognising the potential for longer term harmful consequences, participants were given a named person they could speak to in confidence should they need to after the interviews.

Informing participants of the issues around anonymity in my research and about the potential for sensitive issues to emerge during the interviews were essential if participants were to give informed consent. Robson identifies the importance of informed consent from participants where possible in research: 'Do they know what they are letting themselves in for? Is their consent fully informed?' (2011, p. 199). Alongside the Participant Information Sheet, participants were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix Five), acknowledging that they had been made aware of any risks.

Alongside the ethical issues relating to participants, my role as an insider researcher required particular attention in relation to ethical issues. Coghlan and Brannick highlight the potential effects on the researcher surrounding this new level of involvement with one's own organisation: 'Augmenting your normal membership role with the research enterprise can be difficult and awkward, and can be confusing and overwhelming' (2001, p. 49). They also point out the consequences of discovering more about the 'private life' of one's own organisation: 'In their informal lives, organizations are centres of love, hate, envy, jealousy, goodwill and ill will, politics, infighting, cliques and political factions' (2001, p. 54).

This exposure to the potentially difficult aspects of the MCGB is compounded by the use of my own data, committing my own experiences within the organisation to paper. Walton identifies the exposing nature of autoethnographic research: 'in displaying themselves "on the page", they will be opening up areas of their lives that are usually, and appropriately, regarded as private' (2014, p. xxviii). Walton goes on to identify one important aspect of self-care within autoethnographic research: 'The first duty of ethical responsibility is self-care, and this involves self-control' (2014, p. xxix). I have thus taken great care in what I have chosen to include and what I have left out when using my own data. Further, the need for self-care throughout this process has been addressed through the use of journaling, which has been helpful in terms of processing some of the more difficult experiences that have surfaced during my research, through supervisions, and particularly

through sharing the ups and downs of the research journey with others on the Professional Doctorate programme during workshops.

Finally I acknowledge that as this research falls within the discipline of practical theology, changed practice is a potential outcome. My research aims to offer new understandings of presbyteral ministry and its place in the mission of the MCGB, which may point to the need for changes within the organisation. At a time when the MCGB is struggling with limited financial and human resources, including in relation to presbyters, my research may prove challenging and I remain alert to the potential sensitivities it provokes. I have therefore been aware of the need for careful handling and presentation of the data within the thesis, and of the potential sensitivities when this research is eventually disseminated.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have set out the case for using qualitative research, an inductive approach, and a social constructivist epistemology, both within the discipline of practical theology generally and within the specific professional context I explore. I have justified the use of semi-structured interviews for data collection and explored issues of reflexivity. I have also considered the limitations and ethics relating to this research. In the following chapter I will set out the data collection and handling process.

Chapter Four: Data Collection and Handling

Introduction

In the previous chapter I set out the methodology for the data collection and handling phase of my research, and gave a rationale for my selected methodology and research methods. In this chapter I will describe how I implemented these and reflect on the process of collecting and coding the data. My initial findings will be explored in Chapter Five.

Interview Questions

The interview questions can be found at Appendix Six.

As stated in Chapter Three, I selected semi-structured interviews as my primary method of data collection and, while there would be scope for conversation to develop organically, I wanted a printed sheet that would ensure I covered all the relevant points and enabled me to take notes during the process.

I was seeking to collect data relevant to my research question: What are the experiences and conceptualisations of pioneer presbyters and what are the implications of these for the life and mission of the MCGB? I therefore devised questions that encouraged participants to talk freely about their Christian life and vocation, their experiences of being a presbyter in a pioneering appointment within the MCGB, and how they expressed their calling to a ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral oversight. The interview started with questions about the participants' age, date of ordination and previous career. These allowed me to acquire background information about participants, and to reflect on whether the length of time in ministry and previous career could be a factor in their experiences as a pioneer presbyter.

The main body of the interview was designed to elicit deep reflection on ministry and related experiences, and had three broad sections: In the first, participants were asked about their current ministry and were invited to explore how they came to be engaged in pioneer ministry. This included questions about their Christian journey, their calling to ordination and subsequent training, and their current pioneering work. In the second section, participants were asked about the positive and negative aspects of their experience as pioneer presbyters. This was intended to open up opportunities for participants to reflect on 'how it has been' to inhabit their role within the MCGB. In the third section, the questions focused on the ministry of presbyters as one of word, sacrament and pastoral oversight and how they thought they expressed this in their pioneer context. This reflected my interest in how pioneer presbyters understood themselves as exercising a ministry of word, sacrament, and later pastoral oversight. The interview ended with questions about how pioneer ministry fits within the wider church and whether the MCGB could improve its practice in relation to pioneer ministry, reflecting my intention to capture data relevant to the second part of my research question about implications for the MCGB.

Whilst the nature of presbyteral ministry in pioneering contexts was the focus of the interview, I also wanted to explore with participants something of their background and journey to this kind of ministry, as well as how they were trained and the effectiveness of this for their pioneering role. Finally I wanted to explore both the joys and sorrows of their ministry within the MCGB, a question particularly prompted by my own mixed experiences of ministry.

The interview sheet took several rewrites. In my first draft I started with an open question about the participant - 'tell me a little about yourself'. However, on reflection this felt too general and answers could have gone in wildly different directions, leaving to chance whether any useful data could be collected here. I changed the opening question to one about the participant's current ministry, asking them to talk freely about this and rooting the interview firmly in the participant's ministry

from the start. In practice this worked well and facilitated participants speaking at length about their pioneer ministry, something all four spoke passionately about. This made for a positive start to the interview. It was also a topic that each of the participants were confident speaking about in depth, putting them at ease and building trust before probing deeper and asking more difficult questions later in the interview.

One consequence of asking the question about their current ministry at the start was that all participants covered material I had planned to cover in later questions, such as about their faith journey, their understanding of ministering word and sacrament, or their positive and negative experiences with the church. It was as if they were trying to tell the whole story of their life and ministry in answering question one. In the first interview this was particularly the case: the participant answered at great length, covering many of the issues I wished to raise later. I therefore had to assess during the interview whether we needed to revisit a particular subject or if it had already been covered sufficiently. In later interviews I defaulted to using all my prepared questions and, if participants had already commented on the subject of a later question, I asked if there was anything else they wished to add in order to ensure the fullest possible responses.

The second significant change I made was deciding to ask a specific question about the concepts of incarnational ministry and embodiment, and whether these resonated with the participants. I had been concerned that a direct question about this would have been too leading, however these concepts were central to my research in the initial stages and I felt they needed to be covered in each interview. I decided to ask a question about these concepts late in the interview, after participants had been invited to comment on the important aspects of being a presbyter, thus giving them the opportunity to respond freely before introducing these ideas. This proved to be helpful: one participant explicitly mentioned incarnational ministry earlier in the interview and we were able to revisit this in more detail through the specific question. Two others gave examples of their model of ministry that implied an incarnational and embodied approach, and we were able to reflect on it more fully later in the interview. Interestingly the final participant was more sceptical about these concepts but in response to the question, offered his preferred model of ministry, which was not unrelated to an incarnational, embodied approach.

Overall the questions elicited significant amounts of relevant data and all four interviews were longer than my expected one hour, lasting between 80 and 90 minutes. This experience affirmed my decision to limit the number of interviews to four.

Autoethnography

In Chapter Three I identified the issues that arise from being an insider researcher and took the decision to include data from my own experiences as an additional data source to that collected from participants. In order to facilitate this in terms of the interviews, before commencing I wrote

my own answers to the interview questions. This process provided a useful 'check and balance' in terms of my own thinking before and after the data collection and analysis process, and I have used some of my own data alongside that of my participants in the following chapters.

It is however important to recognise that it was a different experience for me to answer questions I had devised myself, and to do this by writing them up over a period of time, as opposed to answering unknown questions in the moment. I acknowledge that my answers may be more considered when compared with the spontaneous answers of participants.

Selecting Participants

I carried out purposive sampling for the four participants, as had been my intention, selecting two pioneer presbyters and two ministers working in secular employment. I was also able to include two female and two male participants, and with a range of time in ministry, from ordination in 2001 to ordination in 2016. I had met one of the participants a few years before at a retreat and we had had a significant conversation at the time. I also knew about the work of one other. I was fortunate that the four people I initially contacted were willing to participate, although it took some time to arrange the fourth interview and consequently this occurred months later than the others. I was also fortunate that no other permissions were required, making this part of the process straightforward.

In contacting participants and speaking to them before and after the interviews, I was struck by their positive response to my research. At least one participant commented that this was 'important' research in the life of the church and another offered to help ensure the findings were widely disseminated. This points not simply to the gap in knowledge within the MCGB about the experiences of pioneer presbyters but may suggest a desire on the part of the participants for their experiences to be more widely known. It may also suggest a sense of disenfranchisement amongst those who minister outside established 'norms' and find themselves on the margins of the church.

Data Collection

The interviews took place in person, and with three of the participants, in the primary location of their ministry; I met one participant in the church to which they are attached. This gave me a sense of the geographical context and environment in which participants ministered. Conducting the interviews in their contexts may also have contributed to the participants feeling more comfortable before embarking on an intense conversation: there was something of the unknown both for myself and the participants in these interviews but it was more important that they felt as relaxed as possible.

One important reflection was that the first time I tried the interview questions out was on my first participant, which I accept was risky. Whilst it was successful in terms of the useful data generated, it was a steep learning curve and it may have been better to have organised a practice interview with someone not participating in the research in order to try out the questions and gain experience of interview techniques.

Face to face interviews enabled me to build a relationship and develop a rapport with each participant, as well as to witness body language and facial expression, something I highlighted in Chapter Two, and which turned out to be a very significant part of the data. Recording each interview facilitated a full transcript at a later date, and gave the opportunity to refer back to sections of the interview for tone of voice or to check words and phrases. Before presenting the research data I will begin with a brief summary of each interview to give a sense of the tone and themes, as well as my personal experience of each one. This reflects the particularity of qualitative data and the significance of the interview experience from which the data was generated.

Interview 1

This took place in a room at the church in Brighton to which the participant is attached. The participant arrived wearing a rainbow clerical top and explained that after our interview, she would be attending 'Lunch Positive' upstairs, a monthly lunch club for those living with or affected by HIV/AIDS. On explaining the context of my research, the participant expressed interest in the topic and her hope to read the finished thesis.

From the beginning of our interview, the participant spoke very openly and passionately about her ministry as an HIV chaplain and pharmacist; she also spoke uninterrupted and at great length in response to the first question about her current ministry. This meant that she covered a number of my later questions within the first question. What was overwhelmingly clear from the interview was her passion for the HIV community and her strong sense that she had a dual vocation, as a pharmacist and as a chaplain to this community. A key feature of this interview was the participant's body language in communicating her responses. For example, when talking about Circuit-based ministry as opposed to her chaplaincy work, she made less eye contact and I noted a more perfunctory tone of voice; her voice and body language communicated frustration when talking about the ways she had struggled to fit into the MCGB's structures and systems; and she closed her eyes and clutched her hands to her chest when asked about the significance of incarnational ministry and embodiment to her own ministry. Of particular significance was her hand gesture indicating 'gathering in' when talking about 'my people' - the HIV and gay community of Brighton.

I developed a good rapport with this participant and we had a number of things in common: we both worked in seaside towns and with marginalised people, and understood the particular issues

associated with such locations; we both had a ministry amongst LGBT people; and we both had a ministry focused on pastoral care.

I felt challenged by this interview in relation to my attitude towards chaplaincy. I had deliberately excluded chaplains working in established contexts from this research as I felt there was significant research already relating to chaplaincy. However, this participant had clearly developed a much-needed 'pioneering' chaplaincy of value in her context. My own experience was one of deliberately rejecting the chaplaincy model when I began my pioneering work but ultimately finding that the people in my context needed pastoral care, and subsequently developing two new chaplaincy projects myself.

After this first interview I was struck by how much material it had generated. It was also the first time in the research process that I saw my own experiences and hunches in the light of others doing similar work; it was a revelation to recognise my conceptualisations of presbyteral ministry and experiences within the MCGB were part of a wider picture and not entirely individual and personal.

Interview 2

This interview took place at the participant's home and location of her ministry, a house on a rather bleak council estate in Sheffield. Inside, however, the house was comfortable, well decorated and well furnished. Of the four interviews, this was the most formal: whereas all the other interviewees had spoken at length, often unprompted, about their work and understanding of their vocation, this interview had more of a 'question and answer' feel, though the participant did answer at length. This may have been in part because the pioneer work was in its early stages and there had been fewer experiences for the participant to reflect upon at this stage.

One other key feature of this interview was that, unlike the other participants, this individual said almost nothing positive about the MCGB. She had clearly had a number of negative experiences, and though able to identify some inspirational individuals, was by far the most critical of the church. There had been past conflict between the kind of ministry she felt called to and the ministries she had been assigned to, and there was significant pain associated with this.

Body language was also notable in this interview. The participant was most animated when talking about the theologians and religious groups that had inspired her, significantly these were mostly from outside Methodism. There were also expressions of pain and despair as she talked about difficult experiences: holding her face when talking about breakdown and pulling faces when identifying negative aspects of the church.

Whilst I would not identify such a strong rapport as with the other three, I did feel considerable empathy with this participant because there were similarities with my own negative experiences of the church. We had both met with challenges, and had difficult and painful experiences when seeking to express a ministry to which we felt called but which was not considered 'normal' within the MCGB.

Interview 3

This interview took place in the location of the participant's ministry: in a gallery space in the centre of Sheffield. The space was between exhibitions and I described it in my notes as a 'barren space'. During the interview, a number of people were coming and going, discussing the next show; at one point the participant had to ask his colleagues to keep the noise down. Despite the inauspicious setting however, I felt we had an excellent rapport and there was a genuine affinity between us. This may have been because his approach to ministry resonated most strongly with my own and we had much in common in terms of our understanding of both pioneering and presbyteral ministry. He was also very passionate about his particular expression of presbyteral ministry, in such a way as to make him infectious and stimulating company. There were times during the interview where I deviated from my interview script in order to explore more fully an idea or train of thought that really interested me. I also felt able to press him on a matter upon which we did not agree.

In common with the other participants, there were painful experiences that had influenced the course of his life and ministry, but these were not exclusive to the church. He was open about an experience of breakdown involving his sexual identity and here his body language was again significant. The two times in the interview where he talked about this, he found it difficult to maintain eye contact and looked away. However when talking about his ministry, expressed through his work as an artist, he became extremely animated and communicated his passion and enthusiasm. Identity was important in this interview and it raised questions about the link between those whose lifestyle does not conform to traditional norms and those who chose or feel called to pioneering and other unconventional forms of ministry.

One surprising aspect was his relationship with the church. Although he was critical of some aspects of the MCGB, particularly the institutional aspects of church governance, he was also positive about it, both as a place where he had found acceptance as a gay man and as a place in which pioneering was possible. He was more generous to the church than I was expecting.

Of the four interviews, this was the one I enjoyed the most - it was a fizzy, sparky conversation and I left buzzing.

Interview 4

I had met this participant a few years before at a retreat for student ministers and we had chatted over dinner. This turned out to be a profound conversation in which we had shared with each other about difficult family circumstances. We both remembered our previous meeting well. The interview took place at the participant's workplace in a glass-walled meeting room at the offices of DEFRA in Westminster. This gave the interview the most formal setting of the four.

Before the interview began I asked about his current working life because, as a senior civil servant, he had a significant role in Brexit negotiations. It was clearly a very stressful and demanding time. However he commented that the interview was a positive intervention at a difficult time, which was enabling him to refocus on his ministry. We spent considerable time chatting about the current political climate before the interview began. This meant that we overran and were disturbed a couple of times towards the end by people waiting for the room and waiting for the participant to return to work.

This participant was the most considered and reflective of the four and had clearly engaged in significant theological reflection on his role as a presbyter in a secular workplace. He was also very intelligent and articulate, reflected in his status in the organisation for which he worked. In common with two of the other participants, he spoke a great length without the need for many prompts.

Perhaps because of the location and context of the interview, this participant was much more measured in his use of body language - significantly we were sitting on office chairs on two sides of a desk in a glass-walled office. One aspect of the interview was particularly pertinent: his first answer covered much of his journey to ordained ministry in his current context and comprised an extended period of speech in which the key theme was pain. The participant had had a difficult journey to ordination with several obstacles to overcome in relation to his calling to a non-standard ministry; he perceived the difficulties to be the fault of the church. While this was delivered without extravagant gesture, the level of pain it was still causing was evident in his voice and facial expression, and at times I wondered if the emotion of it might spill over. This undoubtedly had an effect on me. I recognised and empathised with the participant's overall experience of the church and at times felt very emotional myself during the interview; it had touched a nerve.

Whilst there was a level of formality to this interview, there was also a deep sense of connection between myself and the participant, in part because of the similar experiences we had had in the early stages of formation and ministry, and in part because of similarities in our on-going family situations, which we had discussed when we first met several years earlier. This participant expressed great interest in my research, which he regarded as important, and was keen to see it disseminated as widely as possible within the MCGB.

This was the most intense of the interviews, I think because of the depth and range of the conversation, and the emotion which at times threatened to break through the veneer of

professionalism on both our parts. This highlights a feature of being an insider researcher conducting qualitative research: in seeking depth rather than breadth in data collection, it is inevitable that deep emotions may be exposed, and in identifying so strongly with those whom I am researching, some of those emotions were my own. Coghlan and Brannick identify this as a feature of researching your own organisation: 'In membership role methodology, your whole self is engaged in the research. You will be changed through the process' (Coghlan and Brannick, 2001, p. 41).

Data Handling

Once three of the interviews had been completed I began the process of transcription (I had been unable to contact the fourth participant to arrange the interview at this stage). Initially I transcribed a section of the first interview by listening to the recording and typing it out. However this proved to be very laborious as each interview lasted approximately 1 hour 30 minutes and was approximately 14,000 words long. Through some internet research I discovered a programme called 'Descript' that provided a transcript of a recording with around 80% accuracy in just a few minutes. Once Descript had generated each of the transcripts, I undertook the process of reading them along with the recording to check for accuracy. This process was important, not just to correct the text but to ensure that I knew the content of the raw data in detail. Colin Robson states that when using a transcript you have not generated yourself, 'is it important that you still have to spend time familiarising yourself with the data' (2011, p. 478).

On completing this checking process, I re-read each transcription for the purpose of highlighting with coloured pens any pertinent data. In Chapter Three I stated that I am seeking to describe the 'experiences and conceptualisations' of presbyters in pioneering and secular appointments, and that I am particularly interested in their 'experiences, attitudes, beliefs and ideas'. Any data relevant to these descriptors was highlighted, with particular attention given to selecting data relating to Methodist presbyteral ministry - word, sacrament and pastoral oversight - which were a focus of the early stages of the research.

Here it is important to note the subjective nature of this process. Selecting the data was a 'gut' process: as I read and re-read the transcripts it simply became obvious when participants were saying something of significance. All four were intelligent and articulate individuals who were able to speak thoughtfully and expressively about their ministry. The vivid and vibrant ways in which they did this are reflected in the In Vivo codes detailed in the next section of this chapter.

My notes from the interviews and my memories of the conversations pointed to the importance of body language and facial expression in qualitative data collection. There were words, phrases and sections of speech which were accompanied and emphasised by particular gestures or by pulling particular faces, and this assisted with the selection process. This was particularly the case when

participants expressed difficult or painful experiences, highlighting the value of face to face interviews in the selection of qualitative data: in part I chose what had been memorable in the interviews themselves as well as what emerged from generating, reading and rereading the transcripts.

Coding

Photographs of the coding process can be found at Appendix Seven.

Once I had highlighted all the relevant data, I began the coding process. Having considered using software to assist with this I ultimately decided to undertake this process by hand. With only four interviews to work with, albeit long, in-depth interviews, I felt it was possible to handle this amount of data without the use of software. Whilst software would have reduced the time, I would not have continued to immerse myself in the data and deepen my knowledge of it, an important factor in my ability to analyse and synthesise it. Here I acknowledge that coding qualitative data is also a subjective process where 'what you feel is interesting and may be important' (Robson, 2011, p. 478) was significant to the way data was selected, grouped and coded. Getting a 'feel' for it was imperative.

Once each interview had been read, re-read and highlighted for significant data, I cut out all the highlighted text in preparation for sorting it into groups ready for coding. In selecting an appropriate coding method, I reflected that, as I have already identified, there are currently very few presbyters working in pioneering and secular appointments, and that consequently their voices are small and often marginalised within the wider church, something borne out by a comment from one of the participants. For this reason I chose to code the interviews using In Vivo Coding. Professor Jonny Saldaña, an authoritative voice in qualitative research and data analysis, defines In Vivo coding as using 'words or short phrases from the participant's own language in the data record as codes' (2016, p. 294). Saldaña goes on to identify the appropriateness of this method of coding in 'studies that prioritise and honour the participant's voice', as well as for those learning the process of coding for the first time (2016, p. 295). Both of these factors made In Vivo coding a suitable choice for my research.

I undertook the process of In Vivo coding by laying out slips of paper containing the selected data from each interview in turn on a large table, looking for patterns in the language and themes, and grouping related data together in piles. Either after or during this process, I began to assign codes by identifying a phrase from data that best encapsulated that particular group.

The following codes were assigned to the interviews. I have included a brief summary of the context for each code and what it refers to within the interview:

Interview 1:

- **Square peg round hole:** The participant described her experience of ministerial probation saying 'I felt like a square peg in a round hole' and reflected on not fitting the mould at various points in the interview.
- **It's no skin off their nose:** This was followed by the comment 'they're not paying for it' and relates to the negligible cost to the Circuit of this participant's ministry. The issue of the greater offering to the Circuit from ministers in other appointments verses what they receive from the Circuit was a recurring theme.
- **I feel valued:** In contrast to the frustrations associated with exercising a different form of ministry within the MCGB, the participant also identified the Chair of District and others who valued her and her ministry.
- **My ministerial role:** This phrase was used in the context of a public role at a World Aids Day event and the participant made several references to the public representative aspects of her ministry.
- **So difficult to disentangle:** The participant found it hard to disentangle her role as an HIV pharmacist and her role as a presbyter ministering amongst the HIV community. She also used the phrase 'two vocations' at another point in the interview; this was a strong theme in the interview.
- **You don't have to have learned everything in the church:** This participant was keen to highlight life experience as important to ministerial formation, and therefore the value of part-time training.

Interview 2:

- **I was disembodied:** This was how the participant described feeling when she was involved in church-based ministry and looking after five churches. There was further mention of her struggling with church ministry whilst feeling called to pioneering.
- **Fringe activity:** The participant spoke of the need for pioneers to have a greater profile within the church, rather than be a 'fringe activity', and to have a role in reshaping the church for the future. This sense of marginalisation recurred in the interview.
- **Do our own thing:** The model for this participant's ministry was the Beguines, whom she described as wanting to 'do our own thing before the men got wind of this'. It was clear that free thinking and doing things differently was important to her.
- **Umbilical cord:** When asked what was important about being a presbyter, the participant spoke of having 'that umbilical cord connection to church', being in a covenant relationship and a relationship of trust, despite the frustrations this relationship sometimes brought.

- **My baby:** A painful experience was described whereby the participant was 'rudely' told she would be leaving a pioneering initiative she has set up. She described the initiative as 'my baby' and stated firmly 'it was taken'.
- **Not hacking it:** Twice the participant described traditional forms of church as inadequate, as 'not hacking it' and in need of new forms. Disdain for traditional/inherited forms of church was expressed several times.
- **Engage in human ways.** This was an important model for the participant, whose focus was 'living alongside' rather than 'doing to' in her ministry.
- **Word and sacrament:** The participant described alternative ways in which these were expressed in her context, including her presence in the community as sacramental, eating meals with people, and being happy to 'bend the rules a bit' in a request for Baptism.

Interview 3:

- **Nearly destroyed me:** This was the participant's response to an unfulfilling job before being called into ministry. Crises relating to identity was a recurring theme for this participant.
- **I don't like doing what I'm told:** This was the response to a question about what made the participant particularly suited to pioneer ministry. The participant also mentioned his skepticism towards authority and his frustration at the risk-averse nature of the church in contrast to his openness to risk.
- **Gently holding whatever comes:** This participant spoke of St Kevin gently holding the bird's nest in his hands and waiting for the eggs to hatch as his model for ministry. He was keen that he did not control or direct the project, but rather held it.
- **Clear I was a Methodist minister:** The participant was keen to avoid the 'bait and switch' approach that is not always honest about the church's involvement in a project. He spoke about being up front about who he was and what he represented.
- **Theology embodied in the action:** This related to an art installation and embodied theology through art was a recurring theme of the interview. For this participant, his actions as an artist were bound up with his presbyteral vocation.
- **Hold the space for pioneers:** This referred to those who supported and enabled pioneers through holding the space for them to explore their context fully and not forcing early outcomes.
- **They haven't learnt anything:** This participant expressed frustration that the church did not seem to be learning anything from the experiences of pioneers, particularly in terms of effective evangelism.
- **I felt at home:** In spite of some criticisms, this participant had found a place of welcome and acceptance within the MCGB, and was positive about these aspects of his experience.
- **A pioneer movement:** This participant identified the pioneering spirit within the DNA of the MCGB and identified that it was an enabling and positive feature of the church. He articulated that he felt Methodist because of this pioneering characteristic.

Interview 4:

- **They're not going to engage:** This referred to a particular congregation but also elements of the MCGB more widely that were complacent and content with their model of church and unwilling to engage in the pioneer conversation.
- **Excited about trinitarian:** This was in response to a question about incarnational ministry and embodiment as a model for ministry. The participant rejected this in favour of a trinitarian model that was focused on relationships.
- **We weren't making it very visible:** The participant saw as a weakness within the MCGB the lack of visibility for different kinds of presbyteral ministry and expressed surprise that more was not being done to raise the profile of such ministries.
- **You're always the Other:** This was in response to a question about the challenges the participant faced exercising a different kind of ministry. He had had several bad experiences with the systems and processes that related to his offering for a non-standard presbyteral appointment.
- **Authorised public ministry:** The participant understood as very important the public and authorised nature of his ministry in the context of a secular workplace, and related this to his calling to ordination.
- **Floods of tears:** This participant described in detail two very painful experiences relating to how his probation had been handled. More broadly, he had had a number of difficulties with the church which were emotionally distressing.
- **I've tried to reflect this back:** In the light of these difficult experiences, the participant expressed how important it was for the MCGB to learn from his experience so that others in non-standard ministries might have an easier time during formation.
- **You're not doing the breaking and moulding right:** This is a telling phrase that uses violent imagery to reflect the nature of formation and training within the MCGB as this participant has experienced it.
- **Resurrection kind of story:** In spite of the difficulties this participant experienced, he found redemption in his ministerial journey amongst those who valued his ministry in the workplace.

Once all the data from each interview was grouped together under the assigned codes, I was left with a small amount of data not assigned to any code. As this consisted of background information and was not of further use, I removed this data from the process.

Following the initial coding stage, in which I was working with each interview separately, I began the process of drawing data together across the interviews by sorting the data from each interview according to codes assigned to the other interviews, a kind of 'cross-coding'. It was through this process that patterns across all the interviews began to emerge. Each time this process was undertaken, I noted using either a number or letter on the back of the slip of paper, which code from the other interviews was the closest fit. This secondary coding process also proved invaluable

in familiarising myself further with the data and with the emerging patterns that would allow me to identify categories.

I then brought the data together and began sorting and grouping it as a whole. My first attempt at this was using the number and letter codes I had assigned to each piece of data using the codes from all of the interviews. I created piles of data which had matching numbers and letters or at least 'best fit', with the large piles indicating areas of commonality and small piles or single pieces of data highlighting the outliers. In broad terms, data relating to both positive and negative experiences of church, the nature of pioneers as those who are not good at conforming, and common conceptualisations of presbyteral ministry emerged at this point. The outliers were mostly particular approaches to pioneer work, which were unique to each participant. However, while this 'coding by numbers' approach was of some use, it felt somewhat artificial. I ultimately abandoned it in favour of returning to the data and using my much-increased knowledge of it to group the data 'by feel'.

Laying all the data out again, grouped according to their In Vivo codes from the individual interviews, I was able to connect similar codes from across the four interviews and begin to re-group the data into categories. There were some obvious starting points by this stage. For example, there were close links between the data in 'I don't like doing what I'm told' and 'Do my own thing', relating to the nature of those who enter pioneer ministry. There was a clear connection between 'Square peg round hole', 'You're always the Other' and 'Piggy in the middle', and the experience of not fitting into existing structures. There were shared experiences within the 'That nearly did it for me', 'Floods of tears' and 'Nearly destroyed me' coded data that related to breakdown and painful events within the participants' lives. Also of significance at this stage were comments relating to the body and embodiment in relation to the participant's work and vocation, for example 'Umbilical cord', 'My baby', 'Theology embodied in the action' and 'Gently holding'.

It was only at this point in the coding process that I was ready to add the data from Interview 4, and although it had not been my intention to leave one interview until so late in the process, circumstances meant that this was the case. In fact this accident of scheduling provides an interesting comparison in that I was already some way into the data handling process when I conducted Interview 4. Even during the interview itself I was alert to the areas of similarity and difference between the data from Participant 4 and the other participants. I was also aware of a different emphasis in this interview, on the area of training and probation. This was unsurprising as this participant was the most recently ordained and therefore closest to the formation experience.

My familiarity with the techniques of transcription and coding, along with my familiarity with the rest of the data, meant that processing Interview 4 was a much more streamlined experience, taking significantly less time than the previous three. I was however aware of the danger of trying to make this interview fit neatly into the categories that were already emerging and I therefore needed to be careful not to discard any data that suggested new or contradictory ideas. One example of this was

that unlike all the other participants, Participant 4 rejected the incarnational and embodied models of ministry in favour of a trinitarian model, and it was important that this was added as a counterpoint to the other views.

Following completion of the coding process categories and themes were beginning to emerge from the data. These will be explored and analysed in the following two chapters. It was also at this point in the process that I conducted brief follow-up telephone interviews with the participants.

Follow-up Interviews

It had not initially been my intention to conduct follow-up interviews with participants but to rely wholly on the data from the face-to-face interviews. However, in conversation with others from the Professional Doctorate programme who were using the interview method and who had collected useful additional data from follow-up interviews, I was persuaded that I should undertake these.

Once I had completed all the face-to-face interviews I was unsure whether I had made the correct choice in committing to another layer of interviewing: the initial phase had generated so much data that I was reluctant to add to this and could not at that point see how follow-up interviews were going to help the process. However having committed to undertaking them, and having told participants that they would have the opportunity to read their transcript and have the final say on whether they were happy for all their data to be used, it was necessary to honour this. Here I note that I was not able to conduct the follow-up interview with Participant 4 because of his work commitments, although he was sent a copy of the interview transcript and invited to express any concerns.

In fact, it turned out to be a valuable additional stage in the process. I was already a considerable way through the data analysis phase when I contacted participants and had a good sense of both the categories and overarching themes emerging from the data. I decided to use the follow-up interviews to focus on two areas: The first was whether they had any reflections on reading their transcripts, enabling participants to comment on anything that had particularly struck them about the answers they gave. The second was to send them the In Vivo codes I had generated from their interview and to go through each one with them, explaining why I had grouped their data into these codes and how I was interpreting what they had said, then asking if this reflected accurately what they had meant. This effectively became a checking process whereby I was able to review and verify with participants how I had interpreted what they had said. Rather than generating any new data as I had anticipated, the follow-up interviews provided an important means by which I could check my interpretation of the data.

Here I acknowledge the risk in leaving the follow-up interviews until after I had done substantial work sorting, coding and categorising the data. Had there been significant discrepancies between

my interpretations and the meanings intended by the participants, I may have needed to revisit the data and completed another round of coding and categorising. However, conducting them at this point meant I had an intimate knowledge of the data and could have meaningful conversations about how I had interpreted it. It also meant that my initial interpretations, if not completely fully-formed, were un-negotiated at this point; should modifications to my interpretations be necessary in the light of the follow-up interviews, this could form a discrete stage of the process.

Fortunately all participants were in agreement with the ways in which I had interpreted what they said and it was not necessary to revisit any of the data as a result. I was particularly struck by the usefulness of this process for the participants themselves: one commented 'actually it is really helpful for me to revisit my words at this point in my ministry as a lot is changing at the moment.' Another participant, whose pioneer ministry was in the early stages when the face-to-face interview was conducted, commented that it was interesting to see how far her ministry had moved on since we had last spoken. This highlights how the research process can be of benefit to those participating in it and how in-depth qualitative interviews can provide an opportunity for deep reflection for both parties.

The follow-up interviews completed the data collection and handling process, endorsed the effectiveness of the methods used, and affirmed my initial interpretations of the data.

Reflections on the process

Reflecting on the data collection and handling process as a whole, I have been surprised at how affecting it has been and the extent to which I empathised and connected with participants. There were times when I found the process very emotional and I have developed a deep affinity both with the participants and with their words. I am reminded of Heather Walton's work, which I drew on in Chapter Three, relating to reflexivity as a critical tool: 'its affirmation of bodily and emotional knowledge, are all important aspects of a pastorally astute and theologically aware approach' (2015, p. xvii).

I am also reminded of two of the concepts I explored earlier in my doctoral journey which are particularly relevant to reflexivity and the experience of conducting interviews in this research. Firstly, In Paper Two I explored the work of Hans Gadamer in relation to narrative interpretation and the role this has in expanding our understanding. Gadamer's 'fusion of horizons' concept, explores how our limited and particular human perspective can be enlarged through encounter with another 'rising to a higher universality that overcomes not only our own particularity but also that of the other.' (Gadamer, 1989, p. 305). This seems pertinent to a process in which I have been changed by deeply significant encounters with others offering new insights and perspectives on the experience of pioneer ministry, which both resonate with and challenge my own.

The second concept comes from Paul Ricoeur's work on life and narrative, which again I drew on in Paper Two and informed my conceptual framework as detailed in Chapter Two. Ricoeur explores human life as story, understanding human existence as living embodied stories (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 20). Such living stories depend upon other living stories to interpret them and it is this act of interpretation that moves human life beyond 'biological function' (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 26). The interview process and the analysis that follows might be understood as creating a uniquely human connection between participant and researcher. We have been affirming our humanity in this process, connecting with and interpreting life stories. This may help to explain why participants were willing to open up to the extent to which they did. Whilst much of this process has been one way: primarily I am seeking to interpret and understand their stories, the vignettes of the interviews earlier in this chapter highlight that the conversations expanded beyond this at times as I shared something of my own experiences. Further, the follow-up interviews gave participants some agency in how their stories were interpreted.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have offered a description of the data collection and handling process and critically reflected upon it. I have highlighted where there were discrepancies between my original intentions and the reality of implementation, for example in the timing of Interview 4, and reflected on the outcomes of this. I have explored the rationale behind the methods used and identified strengths, weakness and risks, as well as the issues of reflexivity pertinent to being an insider researcher.

In Chapter Five I will summarise my findings, identify the categories that emerged from the coded data, and justify the themes I selected to take forward for further analysis.

Chapter Five: Initial Findings

In the previous chapter I gave a detailed description of the data collection and handling process, from devising the interview questions to selecting the In Vivo codes. In this chapter I will identify the categories that emerged from the coding process, making connections between the data from the four participants and my own.

During the interviews, participants offered a range of conceptualisations of their ministry and a range of experiences relating to their role as pioneer presbyters within the MCGB; there were significant similarities between these conceptualisations and experiences. There were also some key differences, which will be included within the discussion of the relevant category.

I now offer an overview of each of the six categories with detailed reference to the data drawn from participants and myself. In presenting the findings and beginning the analysis process, I have used the model 'theology in four voices' (Cameron et al, 2010, p. 51) as outlined in Chapter Three. I have found this approach useful as a 'way in', an heuristic device that provides a framework for beginning the data analysis. It has been particularly helpful because the relationship between pioneers, their practice, and the MCGB forms a significant part of my findings and is highly complex; this model takes into account the richness of the relationships between the different voices:

Recognising the four voices as a working tool, rather than any kind of complete description of theology, is important. We must be clear that these four voices are not discrete, separate from one another; each voice is never simple. We can never hear one voice without there being echoes of the other three (2010, p. 54).

Because the data reflects the interconnection between these voices, as well as the complex nature of the relationship between pioneer practitioner, tradition and theology, I have used the four voices to help present and begin to interpret my findings. It is also important to note here that the complexities of the data extend to the ways in which participants reference 'the church', at times referring to the MCGB as an institution; at times to the local churches, Circuits and Districts in which they have been involved; at times to processes and structures; at times to inherited church practices and norms.

Selecting the categories

As described in detail in Chapter Four, I coded the data by hand. During this process I made notes on the similarities and differences between data from the different participants. At the end of the sorting and grouping process, I had piles of data that related to similar ideas and experiences, and notes recording my thoughts about areas of similarity and difference between data. It was this process that enabled categories to emerge. I began to name each category with a phrase of my own that best summed up that group of data.

It is important to note that the process itself was not clear-cut: the categories I ultimately decided upon are not definitive, but rather part of my interpretation of the data. For example I wrestled for some time with data about the ways pioneers describe themselves, their experiences of not fitting in, and their painful experiences. At one point in the process I grouped these together. However, on

revisiting the data, I decided to separate these areas into three discrete categories because there was enough distinctive data to warrant separate analysis, although there remains significant interconnection between them. As only four interviews were conducted, albeit of considerable length, I selected the emerging categories 'by feel' rather than seeking statistical significance. Through the process of coding, cross-coding and revisiting the data several times, I decided the following six categories could be justified from the data:

1. The Nature of Pioneers
2. Not Fitting In
3. 'Becoming' a Presbyter
4. Painful Experiences
5. 'Being' a Presbyter (Sub-categories: intrinsic and embodied, public and authorised)
6. Methodism - the good stuff

These categories, and the In Vivo codes from which they emerged, are represented in the diagram on p. 53.

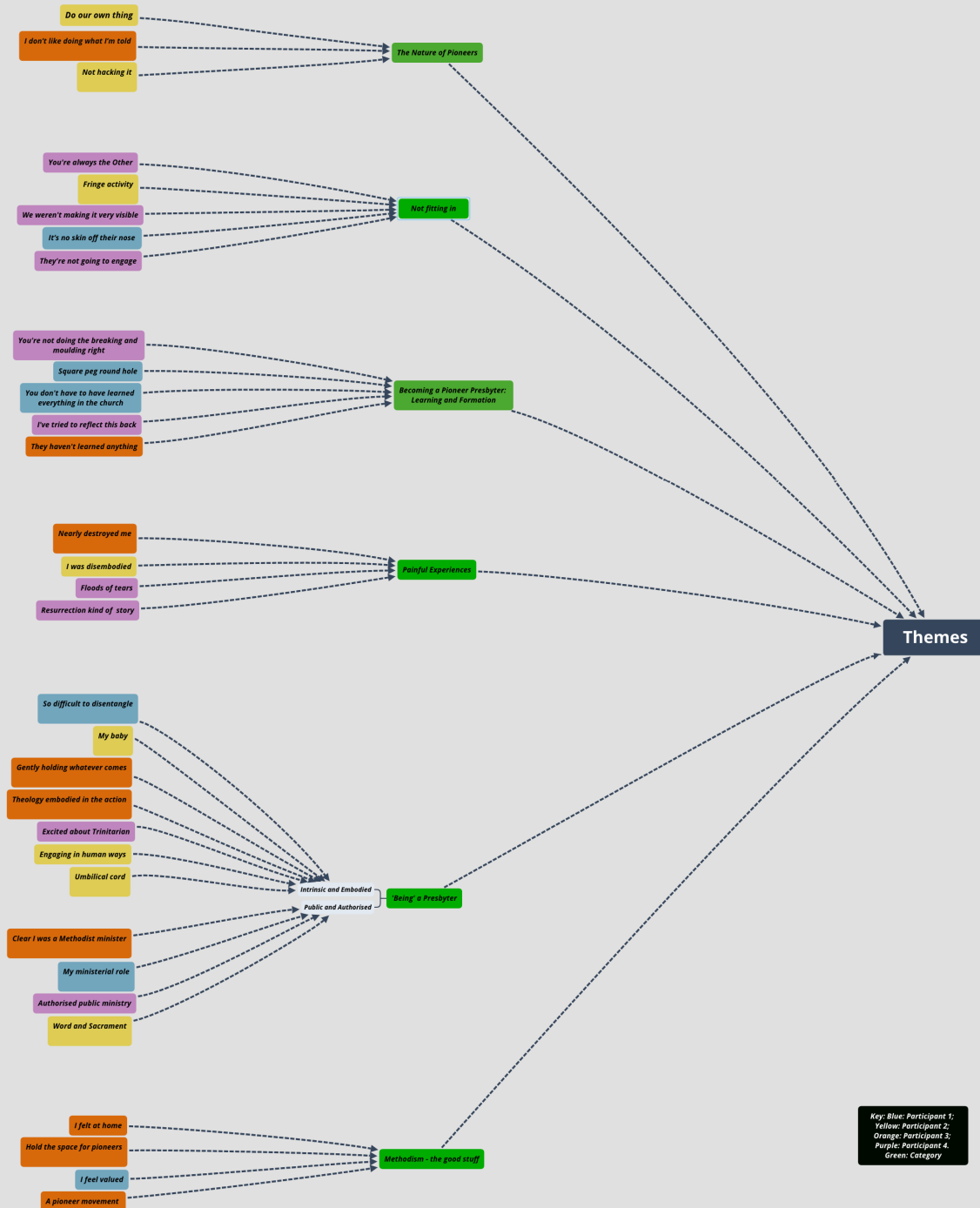
Category One: The Nature of Pioneers

This category is comprised of three codes: 'I don't like doing what I'm told', 'Do my own thing', and 'Not hacking it'. What emerged from them was the participants' rejection of some of the normative theology and practice of the MCGB in favour of their own espoused theology and practice. Participants see themselves as somehow different from presbyters who 'do as they are told', who 'don't do their own thing', but conform to established norms. Participants even sought to distance themselves from official pioneering initiatives, perceiving them as being too controlled by the church, not allowing enough creative freedom. In contrast, they have all been through the selection procedures of the MCGB in order to minister, the fact of which suggest that their operant theology is not entirely aligned with their espoused theology: whilst claiming a scepticism about officially sanctioned schemes, they are part of them. It is also important to note the influences on pioneer ministry from formal theology within the wider historical church: one participant identifies the Beguines as a key influence, another St Kevin. This is interesting because whilst these role models reference formal theology, they are not normative within the Methodist tradition but rather reflect the pioneer's own espoused theology.

Participant 3 (P3) stated that 'I don't like doing what I'm told' and expressed a scepticism in relation to authority figures: 'Do I still have authority figures? Maybe...not so much now (laughs)'.

P2 described the Beguines as a key influence on her ministry: women who wanted to 'do our own thing'. She was keen to describe herself as someone who thinks for herself: 'I'm quite at ease being a free thinker', and in describing her theological training said: 'So we didn't want a

Coding diagram



theology... to be told what you have to believe', 'it meant that I suppose we were made to think for ourselves.'

This idea of doing one's own thing was also expressed by P1 when talking about her dual vocation: 'It was just the opportunity to work in a speciality and to be... to be just kind of... quietly doing my thing'.

Taking 'doing my thing' a step further, P1 expressed being 'in a bit of a bubble' when it came to her unique expression of ministry, outside of which her ministry may not be possible. This points to the sometimes highly individual nature of pioneer ministry, which does not always translate into other contexts and may not be sustainable when individuals move on.

There is evidence of the distance perceived by participants between themselves as pioneers and the MCGB when official initiatives are discussed:

None of this has come out of any theology book I've read or any training course I've been on or any Fresh Expressions DVD I've watched. Please don't let my contemptible voice translate. (P3)

I mean some of the Pioneer Pathways stuff is ok, but I'm questioning some of that now. (P2)

In addition there were comments relating to a desire for freedom and a rejection of the perceived restrictions and constraints of the institution:

I try to respond to any kind of creative adventure with 'yes'.... Whereas I think very often my experience in the church as an institution, which by its nature is cautious, that's what institutions are... that the answer is 'no'. (P3)

I think the Pioneer Pathway is a good thing you know, I think one of the problems that will arise is this kind of domestication of something wild and organic and I think it happened to Fresh Expressions.... Institutions need to have a way of making something safe that is wild and free but then the instinct of the pioneer is... even the word 'pioneer' is becoming problematic. (P3)

It (Pioneer Pathways) seems to be overly facilitated by the DMLN⁴ who were the ones who've been asked to oversee this but DMLN are agents of the church (laughs) and it makes a difference if you are facilitated by say the Venture FX pioneers because you feel they know what they're talking about and they've got a perspective, which somebody from DLMN, however lovely they are, hasn't got.' (P2)

⁴ The Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network (DMLN) had oversight of pioneers at the time of the interviews.

P2's use of the phrase 'agents of the church' is a telling one, suggesting the participant perceives interference from people who have not earned credibility in relation to pioneers and perhaps even points to sections of the MCGB as enemies of pioneer ministry. The lack of credibility is something I can identify with. Unlike other presbyters in my Circuit, I was given a management group, later retitled a support group, made up of other presbyters and members of the Circuit. As I noted:

It quickly became apparent that I was doing more managing of them than they were capable of doing for me. It was also clear that the Circuit leadership team and management group had done no preparation whatsoever for my return. No reading, no visits to other pioneer projects, no conversations with other pioneers. However well-meaning the group were they had no credibility.

In terms of outlying data, P2 stood out amongst the participants as having a particularly negative attitude towards inherited forms of church, and saw them as inadequate:

Really traditional church wasn't hacking it in a place like this.

The church is just too focused on the church.

In identifying the shortcomings of the church as it is, P2 then makes it clear that she does not wish to participate in it, and that her role is to explore new forms both for herself and for others:

When I was gathering the people together who were feeling a bit detached from the church and so on I wasn't doing this for them, I was doing it with them because I'm one of them. So having been released from being in local church myself and say going to church on a Sunday, I'm not rushing to go to church on a Sunday.

My connection as a presbyter is with the connexional Church. I don't have to be part of a local church.

This is interesting because at other points in the interview P2 was negative about the connexional church but here, it is preferable to the local church. Whilst the views of this individual are the most negative towards church, there are echoes of this from others in terms of their relationship with particularly the institutional aspects of Methodism:

I think I probably just metaphorically go around going 'blah blah blah I can't hear you anymore' (has hands placed over ears). (P1)

And like the paper I wrote has been distributed and people responded positively to it. Whether it fits with statements of Conference, or the Faith and Order Committee, I don't really care to be honest. I don't know and I don't care. (P3)

Here I recognise the similarities between the data from P2 and my own: my interview contains a significant amount of data that is negative about the MCGB in relation to my experiences as a pioneer. There is a strong thread within it about the shortcomings of current models of ministry and of a vocation to pioneering as in part born out of frustration with the lack of alternative approaches:

I became frustrated by what I saw as the amount of time the church spent talking about the need to do things differently, verses the time actually putting this into practice. I sometimes think it was this frustration that fuelled my determination to pioneer. We didn't need more people talking the talk, we needed people to walk the walk.

Summary

The data grouped in this category suggests that participants have a strong sense of identity and vocation that is significantly defined against the normative and operant theology of the MCGB, variously at the connexional and local levels. Participants, including myself, see themselves as different from others serving as presbyters and are sceptical about connexionally-driven initiatives. Some of the comments can be interpreted as pioneers wearing their difference as a 'badge of honour' but there is also some underlying hurt and pain, which I will explore in depth in a later category. There are also suggestions of an uneasy relationship with the MCGB, which again features in the next two categories. Questions for further exploration relate to what is driving the rejection of the normative and operant theologies of the MCGB in favour of asserting a pioneer espoused theology. Participants' experience of the inadequacy of the MCGB and their frustration with decline are apparent as factors in this phenomenon.

The data shows that as well as seeing themselves differently, participants see church and ministry in a particular way. Implied in the pursuit of pioneering forms of ministry is a view that current forms are indeed 'not hacking it' for at least some people. Whilst this is unlikely to be exclusive to pioneers, they are clearly motivated to try different forms of ministry in response.

Reflecting on this category in terms of the 'four voices of theology' and the complexity thereof, it seems that sometimes participants are dismissive of the normative processes and approaches of the MCGB, and sometimes they are frustrated with the espoused and operant theologies of the local church, whose norms they are rejecting.

Category Two: Not Fitting In

Five codes comprise this category: 'You're always the Other', 'Fringe activity', 'We weren't making it very visible', 'It's no skin off their nose', and 'They're not going to engage'. Together these build the evidence that pioneer presbyters feel they do not fit in. This is partly because their day to day practice differs from that of other presbyters; partly it is a matter of not being treated as exercising ministries of equal value to those of other presbyters, something expressed through funding decisions; partly it arises from the experience of failing to interest other Methodists in their pioneering work. This category exposes the gap between the espoused theology of the MCGB in setting up pioneer appointments and an operant theology that mean pioneers are, in practice, left to carry the vision for pioneer ministry on their own. There is also a rejection of the operant theology of the MCGB as pioneers identify how their own operant theology differs from that of Circuit ministers (Circuit ministry might be described as the default model of ministry within the MCGB).

Their role as ordained presbyters means that these pioneers sometimes participate in traditional Circuit ministry (leading worship or study groups, charring meetings), though not always through choice, and there is an implied conflict between the operant theology of the MCGB and that of the pioneers. This manifests itself in some cases as pioneers' reluctance to engage in normative and operant theology as perceived in the work of circuit ministers, such as meetings and preaching. This may be because of their desire to focus outwards and their perceptions of local church practice, supported by connexional norms, as focusing inwards. It is also possible to identify an implied critique the MCGB's espoused theology relating to pioneer ministry in the light of its operant rejection of pioneer ministers themselves: all the participants have been accepted for some kind of alternative, pioneering work through official processes yet all identify some feelings of marginalisation or even rejection for carrying out this work.

Three participants identified strongly with the idea that they and/or their ministry did not fit in with existing conventional forms of ministry within the MCGB and felt to some extent outsiders. One participant described this experience as: 'You're always The Other. So you don't fit the category.' (P4)

This is in part a result of the very small number of pioneers, and pioneer presbyters in particular, which has led to a sense of marginalisation for some:

At the moment we're a sort of fringe activity. (P2)

There are very very few people who explicitly seek to be what Anglicans call 'ministers in secular employment'. Very very few. And what I hope...lots of people say this to me: 'this is the way ministry should be in the future'. Huh? Really? But what I hope is that it will at least

offer that option to people, that people can see that ministry isn't always about the person at the front of the church doing classic Circuit ministry.' (P4)

P4 went on to identify that the effect of this minority status was a lack of visibility, which in turn perpetuated the idea of pioneers as a tiny marginalised group within the wider church: 'We don't actively show that there is that option...we weren't making it very visible that there are a range of different types and styles of ministry'.

This resonates strongly with one of my own criticisms:

When I was going through the candidating process I read CPD carefully, looking for what it said about other forms of ministry. Whilst there was reference to fact that it was possible to offer for something different, there was little else. I remember thinking 'I can't see myself here'. CPD is dominated by what Circuit ministry looks like. I was always completely honest about what I felt called to and was assured that it was at least technically possible. But it all felt very unsafe. Like a huge gamble with my future.

This perceived status as marginalised may help to explain the frustration and occasional resentment expressed by participants when discussing their perceptions of and relationship to their local Circuits. One area of concern related to the funding of pioneer ministry: 'But I always wonder when the chips are down is it going to be a case of "we can't afford you to be a pioneer, we need somebody to be in churches?"' (P2)

P2 also described herself as 'a drain on the Circuit' and talked about her own financial situation in relation to the Circuit's perceived lack of support for pioneer ministry:

Then I became a full-time pioneer minister but the funding was an issue because they're having to get somebody else in there to cover the churches and I said a while ago that as a bit of a carrot for them to take on pioneer ministry that I would go down to 75% stipend. So I just said 'look pay me 75% but I'm accountable for 100% because I'll be working all the time'.

P1 pointed out how little financial impact she has on the Circuit by not taking a stipend: 'The chaplaincy is literally me, an email address and a mobile phone. And the Churches Together pay for the mobile phone bill, so that's how it's kind of funded, and the rest of my expenses are paid for by the Circuit'. The same participant identified a link between the lack of interest in her ministry from some, though not the majority of people, and the lack of funding: 'It's no skin off their nose and they're not paying for it'.

In addition to these comments, which highlight a lack of support through a lack of funding, participants expressed how useful they were to their Circuit, specifically because they provide extra ministry at no cost:

But I'm kind of an extra pair of hands and free, so apart from expenses, from the church's point of view, I shouldn't be too much of a problem on one level. (P4)

And actually in an area where there aren't enough ministers and you know, they have somebody available who is a presbyter, who can help out with stuff, who they're not going to pay a manse for or a stipend or pension or any of those things'. (P1)

This suggests that Circuits are not yet fully embracing pioneer ministry, nor are they supporting pioneer ministers financially, such that there is a perception that Circuit ministry is more highly valued. Three of the participants identify that participating in church-based ministry within their local Circuit is a trade off they need to make in order to exercise their pioneer ministry.

The data also points to the vulnerability of pioneers and pioneer ministry in the light of funding issues, and individuals are taking on personal risk in order to pursue this work: 'It was Ministry in Local Appointment that I was going to do... out in the community. But I only got to do that for a couple of years because my marriage broke up as I started my work as a minister and then I had to go into ordinary Circuit ministry in order to have some money' (P2).

Here again there are strong resonances with my own experience:

Because there was so little information available about other forms of ministry at the time when I candidated, I was under the impression that I had to offer for non-stipendiary ministry; no one told me otherwise at any point in the process. It was not until I was preparing to go into Circuit that the Circuit got in touch to say that they would be paying me... but only 0.25 of a stipend. A local Baptist Church heard about my work soon after I started and offered a significant contribution. And eventually other funding was applied for. But at no point in my ministry did the Circuit fully fund my work, despite the significant interest in it at District and Connexion, as well as from other denominations. There were times when I felt like a performing monkey and what I got was peanuts!

Within the category of 'not fitting in', much of the data relates to pioneers feeling that they are outside the norm and struggle with their place, particularly within the Circuits in which they operate. Alongside this, there was also criticism levelled at churches and individuals who have thus far failed to understand pioneer ministry and grasp its importance:

They come to church principally because it's a club they go to on Sunday. They like to sing a few nice hymns and so forth. And so they're not going to engage in that conversation. (P4)

I don't think a lot of folk get pioneer ministry full stop. When you explain it they can sort of understand but then revert to type: 'Oh that's what ministry is'. (P2)

I'm sure there are some people who don't really understand what I do, probably don't care, you know'. (P1)

Summary

This category incorporates feelings of otherness and marginalisation on the part of pioneers and the data suggests that there are consequences to pursuing a vocation on the margins. It is also clear that the ways in which pioneer ministry is funded - or not - is contributing to pioneers feeling that they are of less value than those ministering within local churches. There is a perception that the value of pioneers is seen in terms of what they are offering the local church, such as preaching appointments, rather than what they are offering to the people amongst whom they minister. There are hints of a 'Faustian pact' with the local Circuit in some of the comments and it appears that some pioneers are bearing risks, particularly financial risks, that the wider church is not yet willing to take. This points to a strong sense of vocation in relation to pioneering forms of presbyteral ministry, that people will pursue it in spite of the difficulties.

Reflecting on Categories One and Two together, Category One includes elements of the pioneer identity as special, and of participants wanting to be different and apart from the normative and operant theology of the MCGB. Category Two includes feelings of being pushed to the edge, particularly in relation to local churches and Circuits, and there is a clear identification of the pioneer identity as that of Other. This prompts questions about the coherence of this situation and whether the scheme was set up to fail because it has allowed collusion between the MCGB, that is unwilling to embrace fundamental changes to its practice, and pioneers who want to go out and 'do their own thing'. This in turn prompts the question: how can the MCGB better include those working at the edge and help them shape the MCGB's normative practice and theology, and how can pioneers form more positive relationships with the Church at all levels?

Category Three: Becoming a Minister: Learning and Training

Category Three combines five codes: 'You're not doing the breaking and moulding right', 'Square peg in a round hole', 'You don't have to have learned everything in the Church', 'I've tried to reflect this back', and 'They haven't learnt anything'. They all concern the process of becoming an ordained minister and the ways in which the Connexion was or was not benefitting from their experience of pioneering.

Participants' experience of candidating, formation and probation is mixed. A key area of concern was the processes relating to becoming a presbyter, particularly in terms of training and probation for pioneer presbyters. Here again, the idea of not fitting in is pertinent, this time in relation to

existing models and structures for formation. This can be seen in the gap between the espoused theology of the MCGB, which endorses and accepts people as pioneers, and an operant theology which does not always effectively prepare them for their ministry. There is however a question as to how well more appropriate formation might be received given the preference for non-normative theology amongst these pioneers.

Interestingly there is little reference to formal theology in the data: only one participant actually spoke about what they learnt in college and how effective it was. This may reflect participants' sense that they are creating something new themselves; it may also reflect the need to develop and articulate theology relating to pioneering in formation for ministry.

In terms of the MCGB learning from its pioneers, all participants identified that this was important and described ways in which this either was or was not happening. Participants felt pioneers should have a stake in shaping the normative theology and practice of the MCGB and gave examples of how they had tried to do this.

In recent years, the MCGB has undertaken a major overhaul of training, which has led to the closure of all but one training institution and the end of localised part-time training pathways. Two participants highlighted the potentially negative impact of these changes to pioneering forms of ordained ministry:

I personally think that the changes that they made to training are potentially quite detrimental to people who would want to go into an appointment perhaps more like this. I would not have been able to do that if it had been going away to residential training for example, and I think that side of it, I felt that the church has rather narrowed its focus in thinking about what people bring to ministry and how you become a presbyter. (P1)

So I was quite critical earlier about training and I'm not sure that 'Fruitful Field'⁵ as it has emerged, and particularly Queen's, you know it's not Queen's that's at fault here, it's actually that the centralised distributed model of training means that at local level, it isn't going to be possible for people to do what we do in an easy way, because the people to whom they relate are people who can teach standard stuff. (P4)

As well as concerns about the MCGB's changes to training, there was also concern about whether current patterns of training and formation work well for pioneers:

I think the time when I felt like a square peg in a round hole (body language showing tension and frustration) was probation within the Methodist Church... in the grand scheme of things it

⁵ The Fruitful Field report into formation and training in the MCGB resulted in the 2012 Conference vote that closed all but one of the ministerial training colleges.

was a period when I recognised that what I was doing was different and therefore, you know, they can't tailor everything to fit each person. (P1)

The theological college system is there to break you and remake you, and so I was not doing it right because I was resisting, and I wasn't resisting, I was trying to say 'you're not doing the breaking and moulding right.' (P4)

In common with P1's comment above, probation was also a difficult time for me in terms of feeling the system was too rigid, and I and my ministry did not fit into it well:

I was in this slightly ridiculous situation where I was doing all this really exciting stuff, finding new ways to engage with people outside the church, thinking about word and sacrament in different ways, finding that people were really responding to that, but the church was interested in whether I could chair a church council meeting and conduct a funeral. Not that those things don't matter, but they were missing the point and fell back on a tick box exercise, I think out of fear.

Two participants minister in their workplace, and so a model of training which enabled them to continue working was essential. One of these participants also highlighted the importance of part-time training in relation to wider life experience: 'You don't have to have learned everything in the church to make it valid' (P1).

P4 had a particularly difficult time during training, reflected in his comment 'You're not doing the breaking and moulding right', a troubling and violent metaphor for formation. He goes on to express genuine anger with the part time, ecumenical model of training he experienced:

So I think the reason I get cross about it was because I was told I was being sent there to be amongst a Methodist cohort. And I was neither in a cohort, not really, it was sort of a multi-year cohort... And I didn't experience some of those things that I think would have been valuable, so I've turned into into a high Methodist, which is a bit of a weird thing'.

Methodism, that didn't get taught in any creative way. I'm fortunate I've grown up in Methodism but if you hadn't you'd be (with emphasis) completely at sea. I really would, it would be quite destructive. And then the other thing that was missing was anything specific about the intended contextual direction of my ministry.

P4 also experienced problems when trying to raise the above issues: 'But the biggest challenge I had was that my trying to put forward two things: one was the lack of Methodist input and my intended workplace context were always seen as me challenging the status quo'.

Whilst participants had much to say about their experience of the training and formation they received, there was also a strong sense that the MCGB should be learning from their experiences. Participants identified that they had a particular responsibility to educate the church, though with mixed results.

I do have a responsibility to speak back to the church about what is my experience of pioneering and evangelism. You know - what does evangelism look like? And some of the ways evangelism seems to be being talked about at the moment don't resonate and I think are actually problematic. And it seems that they haven't learnt anything from what we've been doing as pioneers or haven't listened to what's been going on as pioneers, which is sad. (P3)

What's the point of having me as a pioneer? And particularly as our Circuit has in its mission statement that it's a learning Circuit, I've said 'does the Circuit wish to learn from what I'm encountering?' Having me as a pioneer should actually be a learning experience for the Circuit as well as for me. (P2)

Whilst there was much concern about the church's lack of learning from pioneers, one participant did identify some positive examples of the MCGB being genuinely resourced by pioneers:

I mean as an example, thinking about that *Connexion* magazine... there've been a number of articles in there, not just one with me, but there've been a number of articles in there with ministers or people in different appointments. And I think having that kind of information out there does help people to see that there is a difference. (P1)

P4, who had experienced a particularly difficult time in training and probation, identified the importance of feeding back to his District and felt his experience had changed processes:

It was terrible and if there's a big lesson, I've tried to reflect this back to the Church in helpful ways.

A couple of years ago there was another example where they were putting conditions on a probationer at the end of the first year, and I immediately stood up and very very nicely said 'I wonder if the probation secretary could just explain how the District is putting in place the arrangements to ensure that the conditions are fulfilled.' And X, to give her credit, was so lovely in her response because she said 'forgive me Synod for having a knowing smile and nod to Y for that question. He knows why he asked it, I know why he asked it and I'm really grateful for the opportunity to explain, and this is what we're doing.' And they had learned because there was a support mentoring being put in place... and I thought well ok if I haven't done anything but achieved that kind of reform.

My own experience of reflecting back to the church at a variety of levels has been mixed. On the one hand, there was a great deal of interest in my ministry as it developed at Circuit, District and Connexion. I was invited to write articles, I spoke at meetings and conferences, and led workshops on several occasions. However, I remain unconvinced that my engagement in these ways resulted in the kind of learning that effects real change.

The church seems to want to put pioneering in its shop window - sort of 'look at all the exciting things we're doing'. But then there's nothing in the shop. It's a front created by individuals who are doing exciting things, often almost in spite of the church, not because of it.

I came to the conclusion that, however much I spoke about or wrote about my ministry, about what I was learning and what the church might have to learn from it, there simply wasn't the will for people to change what they were doing or how they were thinking. Going out to be with people where they were for the long term was just too scary, too risky. Polite enthusiasm was never going to translate into action.

Summary

Interestingly, much of the focus of this category is experiences rather than the content of training: how participants' experienced learning within the MCGB in relation to their pioneer ministry rather than what they learnt. That there is little about what was learned may point to both some inadequacies with training in relation to pioneers, as well as their reluctance to credit the MCGB with the fruits of their ministries. Again, there is a desire to distance from the MCGB's operational norms and highlight its inadequacies.

This category also includes pioneers' concerns about the new direction of training and formation, and frustrations that the church is not always open and willing to learn from them. This latter point raises questions about the barriers that may be preventing this and how they may be overcome.

Category Four: Painful Experiences

This category comprises four codes: 'Nearly destroyed me', 'I was disembodied', 'Floods of tears', and 'Resurrection story'. These relate to difficult and painful experiences, and for one participant, redemption. Whilst painful and difficult experiences in life and ministry run through the data and cut across several categories, I felt it was important to give voice to some particular examples in a discrete category where pain is front and centre. Much of the data relates to difficult experiences within the church. This is suggestive of a gap between the espoused theology of the MCGB, in which compassion, sensitivity and pastoral care may be expected in the light of the covenant

relationship between ordained ministers and the MCGB as represented by the Conference, and its operant theology through which participants perceive they have received a lack of care and poor treatment. This gap is significant as it raises questions about the nature and ethos of the MCGB itself, and about relationships within it.

However, there is data relating to the redemptive role of church within the lives of participants, where espoused and operant theology are in harmony. There is also data relating to difficult life experiences not directly related to the church but which were related to vocation and identity.

P3 described experiences, including more than one crisis of identity, which changed his relationship to the church and point to the significance of Christian vocation in relation to identity:

He led me through the Ignatian exercises, which blew my mind and utterly transformed my life but led to a deepening understanding of my sexuality and my identity... which then led to me having a nervous breakdown and that's when I left the church.

I did a post-university office job for a year, which nearly destroyed me and I felt called into the Methodist ministry.

I'd been a Circuit minister for six years, I came out of ministry for various reasons: I had a nervous breakdown and got divorced, retrained as an art therapist and then felt called back into the Methodist Church.

These experiences suggest that identity can be found within the church as a place of acceptance and healing. However, another participant experienced a loss of identity, and significantly this was expressed in bodily terms: 'One of the things that used to really bug me about being a Methodist minister in the local church was that when I had a lot, a huge portfolio, I was just running around keeping plates spinning and I just felt I was disembodied' (P2).

For P4, the threat of not being able to express his vocational identity as a Methodist presbyter was the cause of significant pain during the probation process:

But the biggest most awful experience was that in my last year I did a placement... it was just disastrous. I did this placement that says more about the Methodist minister in question than it does about me but it was awful and as a result she wrote a very poor write up, which also wasn't mediated, so I mean how that has any standing? But of course what that meant was that when SEITE⁶ got this report they basically said 'you can't leave college, we can't recommend you for ordination.'

⁶ South East Institute of Theological Education

For this participant, the situation was compounded by the way in which he perceives he was treated by a colleague in the aftermath of this decision:

He published a draft plan without me on it - it all respects. Not just not planned - they'd taken my name off the front of the plan and everything.... but I had to again stand up and tell the church what was happening, saying I'm leaving in four weeks' time. I mean they were so angry and it was just the pain that this was causing them, and I was having to cause the pain but it wasn't me that was behind it.

So he then compounded that by making me tell the church without being there. So I had to stand up at the end of the service and tell them... but I chose to do it at the end of the service to make sure it didn't disrupt worship. So I found myself in floods of tears doing that. (P4)

I can relate strongly to the painful experiences of other participants, and indeed as I reflected in the previous chapter, conducting the interviews was an emotional experience for me because I was able to empathise with them. What I found particularly difficult was the lack of pastoral care I received as I took on a very demanding pastoral load myself:

People would talk about my ministry in purely financial terms and I sat in many a meeting where 'how are we going to pay for it' was the main focus. I was even present at a meeting when the conversation was whether and what I should be paid. Meanwhile I was caring for people who had been abused, addicts, rough sleepers, the suicidal, etc. The Circuit didn't seem very interested in them - like they were glad I was doing it so they didn't have to. Those people needed Christian care - and so did I - but the church wasn't able to provide it. It was literally un-bearable at times.

P4 in particular said much about the pain he had experienced on his journey to becoming a Methodist presbyter, and as I reflected in the previous chapter, his interview contained moments where that pain threatened to spill over. However, there was also a redemptive element to these experiences in which a broader perspective became possible, underpinned by his theological understanding:

So it's quite a good lenten Easter resurrection kind of story actually now I can think of it, because this was the moment when it all took off. I was in a church that actually wanted to engage with workplace ministry, was willing to, a congregation that wanted to talk about it. I did lots of talks about being someone of faith in the workplace and what that's all about and that helped me refine my view and keep developing it.

Another participant had mixed experiences of being able to fulfil her calling as a pioneer minister, but ultimately found her ministry affirmed and resourced by her Circuit and the Connexion:

So I lived with the Circuit for longer and got ground down to burnout and all sorts. And it took a long time, well it was then that one of the co-supers had been to a superintendents' conference and he came back and he said they've been talking about pioneers - it's the Pioneer Pathways. He said 'this might be good for you'. So three months later I was in London talking to X and before we knew it we'd got an unofficial pilot project in Sheffield. (P2)

This highlights a key feature of the data: the ambiguous relationship, born out of these mixed experiences, that these pioneers have with the MCGB. One participant sums this up:

I think the times that I go back into church institutional space, into church meetings and so on, however kind of accepting individuals might be - and there are a lot of very supportive people in the District here who've been brilliant. I mean District Chair, treasurer, all kinds of people - really supportive, brilliant. But when the church kind of starts to be an institution, so in some of the big meetings, which I don't go to very often, that's when I think (despairing voice) 'Oh God yeah, this is what the church actually is, this is what the church's actually like'. And I think amazing individuals coalesce into this institution and it feels life-sucking to me. (P3)

This is a particularly interesting comment as it begins to tease out the relationship this pioneer has with what he perceives to be different aspects of church. The institutional aspects are represented by meetings and processes, and are seen negatively, yet the people themselves are viewed as supportive and positive about pioneer ministry.

Summary

The data in this category points to some very difficult experiences for participants in which identity, particularly being able to fulfil vocational identity, is key to the pain involved. Words and phrases like 'breakdown', 'burnout', 'disembodied' and 'floods of tears' suggest a strong bodily dimension to these experiences.

For one participant, discovering sexual identity was a significant part of his Christian journey, and led to him leaving and then rejoining both church and ministry, and finding acceptance within them. This highlights that ambiguity is also an important concept within this category, that amongst the painful experiences are ideas about resurrection, redemption, and finding vocation and identity.

It is important to note that one participant has no data in this category. Whilst she was not entirely positive about her experiences in the church, unlike other participants, she had not experienced any real resistance to expressing the ministry to which she felt called. In addition, she had been ordained for a long time and was therefore further away from the processes of candidating, training and probation, which may account for the lack of data in this area.

Data in this category poses questions about oversight and the way in which pioneer ministry has been held by the MCGB at all levels. There are also questions about how effectively the MCGB ministers care and compassion to its pioneer presbyters. However, there is acceptance and hope to be found within the Christian community and the Christian story.

Category Five: 'Being' a Presbyterian - Intrinsic and Embodied

I have broken this category down into two sub-categories, which reflect the different aspects of being a presbyter identified by participants: the intrinsic and embodied nature of the role and its public and authorised aspects.

The data in the 'Intrinsic and embodied' sub-category comprises seven codes: 'So difficult to disentangle', 'My baby', 'Gently holding', 'Theology embodied in the action', 'Excited about trinitarian', 'Engage in human ways', and 'Umbilical cord'. These contain the threads of identity and vocation found in previous categories, and relate particularly to the way in which participants embody their ministry and understand it as part of their identity; body vocabulary is a feature of the data here.

In terms of the 'four voices', the idea of presbyteral ministry as an intrinsic and embodied phenomenon can be seen as the ultimate alignment of espoused and operant theology on the part of participants, something that comes through strongly within the data as participants describe how they embody their sense of vocation.

The nature of pioneer ministry often involves immersing oneself in a particular culture and participants spoke of how their identity has become bound up with their ministerial context so that at times it is difficult to 'disentangle' the two:

I find it so difficult to disentangle. I often say you know I'm like a stick of Brighton rock but with HIV going through it. But I think actually a better analogy is like a strand of wool or something where you've got all the different strands and it's because they're all intertwined and you can't... in one sense everything that you do is driven by your faith. (P1)

People are interested in my story of - well you're an artist, you're a Methodist minister, you're gay - all these intersections make for a really rich kind of creative space. (P3)

P1 had been rooted in her location and professional context for many years and felt a strong sense of vocation from a young age. The city in which she worked, and her vocation as an HIV pharmacist and as a Methodist presbyter were strongly bound up in her identity:

I've actually kind of taken root really.

I feel absolutely passionately that I have two vocations, you know, as a pharmacist and as a presbyter, but they are now so deeply intertwined with everything that I... that is who I am.

This highlights a potential issue with presbyters in pioneering appointments. The MCGB currently expects its presbyters to be itinerant yet this may not be a good fit for pioneering ministries, some of which are very closely tied to the individual who has initiated them, their gifts and skills, and their knowledge of a particular place or context. It may therefore be inappropriate to impose a system of itinerancy on such ministries, effectively meaning that some ministers may only be suited to one particular station and it would be difficult to either move them on or replace them with someone else.

A further consequence of this is found in the very intense relationship that may develop between a pioneer, their context and their community, such that boundaries are blurred:

This was actually my baby, you know, if it wasn't for me it wouldn't have been. I also understand that it'd probably got to the stage where I did needed to leave but it was the way it was done. It was *taken*. I mean the counsellor would say that she could hear me talk as though it was like my baby that had been snatched away from me... And within that very painful experience I sort of knew that I had to give it up. (P2)

I feel that my parish (arms gesture gathering in) is you know, the community... so when I go upstairs later to Lunch Positive and chat to people, that feels to me like my... (quietly) they are my people. (P1)

However P3 articulated a different understanding of his relationship with the pioneer project he initiated, in which he did not see it as something he possessed or controlled but 'gently held', inspired by a story about St. Kevin:

Anyway, one of the stories about him is that he was there out in the forest and he was praying with his hands outstretched and the blackbird came and laid her eggs in his hand and then he held that pose of prayer for the days until the eggs hatched. And that for me is my model for pioneering really - just gently holding whatever comes. Not controlling it, not clinging to it, not dropping it, and then just allowing whatever life is there to emerge. And I don't own it, it's all gift, it's all grace.

From my own experience of pioneering, incarnational ministry and the sense that my embodied self was key to the connection I had with people was vital: 'My experience of "being" a minister of

word and sacrament in Southend-on-Sea, with nothing more than my embodied self as a point of connection with others, is worthy of significant exploration and reflection' (Bucke, 2015, p.9).

I also reflected on the way in which I used my own body in the context of my ministry and how significant this sometimes felt:

The questions 'where is my body?' and 'what is my body doing?' are a constant as I reflect upon my role in the town centre. I recognise, though not entirely comfortably, the sacramental nature of myself-as-minister, in which simply 'being' in the town is a deliberate representation of Christ's ministry in the world... By, for example, choosing to sit on the pavement with rough sleepers I understand myself to be engaged in an act in which the representative role I embody enables me to become a potential place of encounter with the divine. (Bucke, 2015, p.12)

This was also true to some extent for all of the participants and there was a rich seam of data relating to the ways in which they felt that they embodied their ministry:

And then a small group of us made this mosaic on the wall, which is made out of broken stained glass and broken crockery. And if you can't do the theology of broken pieces of glass making something beautiful then we're not we're not worth calling ourselves presbyters!... But the theology is just embodied in the action. (P3)

My art is an expression of embodied spirituality... this is about physical things, this is about if I'm doing a painting this is about how I'm moving my arm. It's about how I'm standing in this space. It's about the quality of this material that I'm using. You know, how is this paint going to run? It's about physical stuff... that duality of body and spirit, it breaks down. (P3)

And suddenly he said... he actually affirmed me, which was 'I came into the ward and saw that you just naturally... you just knelt down because you hadn't got a seat. The patient wanted to talk to you, you just knelt down by the side of them while I talked to this other patient.' He said 'I don't think I've ever seen a chaplain do that before let alone a student.' (P4)

I'm relating to people who had dropped out of church, hanging on in church, want to explore faith in various ways. So I connect with them... and then I'm also living, I suppose to use the buzzwords, incarnationally here, council estate, one of the one of the two major council estates in Sheffield. (P2)

When asked whether incarnational models of ministry resonated, P1 expressed bodily how much this was the case:

Oh yes (eyes close, face turns upwards), yes... (laughs) and I think that was the big thing for me that helped me to start to answer those questions about 'Why do you need to be ordained and what is it that you do?' kind of thing, was that understanding about the functional and ontological elements of ministry, and I kind of came to a realisation that (sigh) as humans we find it a lot easier to tick off functional things because they're objective and measurable or observable or whatever... I think the vast majority of them have no clue actually what it means to be a minister (clutches hands to chest).

However, P4 rejected the idea of incarnational ministry in favour of a trinitarian model:

One of my friends who I trained with at SEITE was very fond of incarnational ministry conceptually, and I don't know why and it may just be that I never read around it sufficiently to get excited about it... I got more excited about trinitarian... being in relation, you know, God in relation.

Interestingly, despite this rejection of incarnational ministry, P4's preferred model is still a relational one and there is significant cross-over here with data relating to relationship-building from other participants, who understood incarnational ministry as itself relational:

I just want to be human and engage in human ways. (P2)

I'm not one to go out evangelising on the street but I was talking about Jesus all the time with people outside the church and people were really interested. And I was interested in them as well, and their journeys and their experiences, you know, because dialogue's important. (P3)

While much of the data relating to embodiment and body language was about how participants related in their ministerial context, it was also a feature of how they understood their relationship to the wider church, particularly because they were ordained rather than lay ministers:

I still do have that umbilical cord connection to the church and it is stronger. I sense it is stronger for me than maybe it is if I were a lay person. (smiling) The way I describe it sometimes is that I sold my soul to the church (laughs). So it's sort of part of me but hopefully that also means that in that sense of covenant between church and minister that the church is able to trust me more to go off and do things because I've got this underlying connection through my ordination. (P2)

We have a different relationship with the church, and whilst if you're a lay... lay pioneers it's kind of a job and that's not denigrating it and denigrating the calling. And so that when they finish doing this maybe they'll work for the Baptists or you know, whereas it's not that straightforward for me. I'm more deeply embedded in the church whether I like it or not. And that works both ways. Actually I feel more held by the church, very much so. But I also feel I have more responsibility to the church. (P3)

Summary

The data in this sub-category points to the intersection of body, identity and vocation for these participants, and for myself. This was often reflected in the interview process where participants expressed passion for their work and communities through their bodies, through facial expression and body language. One of my original questions when embarking on this research related to how I used my body in my ministry and wondering whether this was the same for other pioneer presbyters. It is clear that the body is a key way of 'being' a presbyter for those working in secular contexts.

It is also clear that the gifts, skills and passions of these presbyters are particularly bound up with the ways in which they express their ministries, and in two cases in particular, it would be difficult to imagine the individuals exercising a ministry different from the one they currently have. It would also be difficult to replace them with another presbyter with similar gifts and experience, posing a challenge to the system of itinerancy. This points to the need for further exploration of the individuality of such ministries in relation to the collegiality of presbyters.

Participants used bodily metaphors when talking about their relationship to the church and communicating the idea of being deeply connected through ordination. Seen in the light of the Painful Experiences category, it is possible to understand why those who have these deep connections to their work and to the MCGB are also deeply affected by the gap between the espoused and operant theology of the MCGB in relation to pioneer ministry and pastoral care for ministers.

Category Five: 'Being a Presbyter' - Public and Authorised

This sub-category comprises four codes: 'Clear I was a Methodist minister', 'My ministerial role', 'Authorised public ministry', and 'Word and sacrament'. These codes point to the importance of the MCGB authorising presbyters to minister within secular organisations and pioneer contexts, and suggests the significance of ordination to those engaged in such work. It is possible to interpret ordination as pioneers associating themselves here with the normative and formal theology of the MCGB. Interestingly, the data in this sub-category offers examples of the greater alignment of operant and espoused theology with normative and formal theology than has been the case in previous categories. It is clear in particular that ministering word and sacrament, albeit in different ways, and being authorised by the MCGB to minister is important to participants. It is however worth noting that they resist notions of hierarchy or power associated with professional clergy.

There is some cross-over in this category with data relating to formation and training, as participants expressed that one of the roles of presbyters is to think theologically about church and ministry, and show leadership in terms of how presbyteral ministry can be understood more broadly.

There were a variety of ways in which participants were 'public' about their ordination as Methodist presbyters, from wearing a clerical collar to talking with colleagues about their role:

I usually wear my dog collar when I come to that... that's been positively fed back that they like that. Which is quite interesting because actually there are quite a few people who come who've had (pause) difficult experiences within the church, including abuse in some cases.
(P1)

The dog collar, it can be a barrier but it also signifies so much. (P1)

Significantly, P1 was going onto a lunch with members of a group affected by HIV/AIDS, many of whom were from the LGBT community, and was wearing a rainbow clerical top. This can be seen as another example of how pioneers 'embody' their ministry. In my own context, I usually wore a clerical collar and I noted the currency this still had:

I was sometimes surprised at the comments I would get or overhear when walking the High Street in a dog collar: 'Oh look - you don't expect to see a vicar here' for example. The woman in Superdrug jokingly used to call me 'Father' and at the theme park where I was chaplain, I was Hannah the Vicar. It goes to show that as much as we might think the church has become irrelevant, a person in a dog collar still makes an impact on people, we are still set apart in some way.

P4 also wore a clerical collar but found other ways to ensure people knew he was ordained:

Because I'm known to be a minister: my signature block at work has 'Reverend' in it. Every so often people will make... I mean it's random - so there's no orchestrating - but every so often people will say something and you get an opportunity to make a quip back. Or it can be very light touch but as a result you are by definition exercising a ministry of the Word because you are reminding people that some of us believe in the Bible and some of us have something to say about it.

P3 identified that it was very important to be clear and open about being an ordained Methodist minister so that people did not feel tricked into becoming involved with his art project. He also identified that his ordination did make a difference both to him and to how others saw him:

I was building relationships with artists, the vast majority of people I was associating with were from way outside the church and wouldn't associate with the church at all. But I was always open that I was a Methodist minister 'cause at every stage I'd been quite clear that I'm not going to do this kind of 'bait and switch', you know, it looks like something normal it looks like a nice art space, but then when people are comfortable - bang! Oh no it's really a church.

It makes quite a difference in the way I am in the world and the way people are with me but I can't quite put my finger on why that is and it certainly isn't about hierarchy or priesthood or anything like that I don't think.

This latter quote is interesting in terms of the ways in which all participants to some extent rejected power and status in relation to being ordained ministers, and there was an overall sense within the data of 'ministry amongst' or 'alongside' rather than 'ministry to' in pioneer contexts.

The data also showed how participants understood their vocation in relation to the contexts in which they operate. There are descriptions of the things they actually do in their role as well as the ways in which they think about it.

I have a kind of pastoral presence here. I'm part of the community. (P3)

But actually above those practical things somebody who is able to be there and have a presence in the community and is there and is seen... you know in my ministerial role I am there, I am seen at World AIDS Day, I meet with the mayor, I'm introduced as, you know, when I was a trustee of the various organisations I go to, been on local radio, all those kind of things. (P1)

It's never been for me about the titles and about... you know, it's been about saying 'God's here and I'm able to help you with whatever you need help with. And I care because God cares' (P4)

The idea of presbyters having a particular leadership role within the life of the MCGB was also important in terms of the public and authorised nature of the role. Speaking back to the church, thinking theologically, and helping others to learn from their experiences are key:

But I think there was something about authorised public ministry that the church acknowledges and owns. So permission to minister. Something about being able to speak back to the church. (P4)

I think that is a presbyteral role - to do some thinking about the church. Again I'm enabled to see the differences - I think about my lay colleague...I wouldn't expect that of him. (P2)

Some of the data in this Public and Authorised sub-category relating to word and sacrament would also fit into the Intrinsic and Embodied sub-category, as participants interpret particular embodied actions to be an expression of their ministry of word and sacrament. Whilst these reflect the different ways pioneers express this part of their vocation to those in Circuit ministry, I have chosen to include this in the Public and Authorised sub-category because the authorisation to minister word and sacrament connects presbyters regardless of their context, and this authorisation influences the way participants think about their ministries. It is possible to see some alignment between not only espoused and operant theology, but also the normative theology of the MCGB, as presbyters enact their calling to word and sacrament beyond pulpit and table. However this is not without its complexities in terms of what participants understand as sacraments and what is recognised as such by the MCGB.

There was a common thread within the data of participants relating word and sacrament to their particular contexts, and in some cases, understanding that as embodied action. P3 described a piece of performance art for an exhibition which opened on Ash Wednesday, where a handprint was made on a white table with wine: 'That was a sacramental action. That was the thing that was needed. But it emerged out of the art. It wasn't imposed on it by saying we should have ash crosses or something.'

P1 understood the act of care as a sacrament in her context of HIV chaplaincy: 'The things I do, you know some people might describe them as a sacramental act. It's a sacrament of care.' She went on to describe the funerals of two colleagues as 'sacramental' in nature, although not necessarily understood as such within Methodism: 'people can argue about what they think is technically a sacrament or whatever. But it's that sense of being able to minister.' Here P1's espoused theology is not aligned with the MCGB's normative theology relating to the sacraments.

P2 identified various ways in which her ministry, which involved living on a council estate was related to her calling to word and sacrament:

In terms of being sacramental, it's sort of... I'm there, I'm around, I'm a person trying to live out a faithful life.

The main thing that we do... is 'Peace Meal' which is table fellowship and we're sharing and we're talking, chatting.

We gather for various activities so you could say that the Word is expressed there. It's not done in a hierarchical person at the front sort of way. It's more shared exploration.

P4 described the importance of being able to offer sacramental ministry in his workplace context as part of his calling to presbyteral ministry:

I had an existing lay ministry in the workplace that seemed perfectly adequate to me. But what I seemed to be being pushed towards by God really was the sense that I needed to be able to offer something in the name of... it was an authorised ministry, in the name of the church... There was a corollary, which was not that I needed to offer communion, not that I had to have a sacramental ministry, but that sacramental ministries could be offered in context.

In addition to the ways in which participants understood the importance of ministering word and sacrament in appropriate ways, there was a strong sense of the personal importance of this within their calling:

There was a discussion about 'should it be a deacon or should it be...' you know, and actually the ministry of word and sacrament is important to me. (P1)

There are those who say that I don't have communion every morning because there is only me here, but I do have bread and wine every morning as part of my... and for me that's a sign of commitment to the path. (P2)

So the reflections I've had about art, the sacramental ministry: if I'd been a lay pioneer, it wouldn't have even been an issue to consider. (P3)

Word and sacrament is still important to me but in very very different ways... and a sense of call to church leadership, all those kind of things. (P3)

Summary

The data shows that being ordained to presbyteral ministry and being authorised to minister word and sacrament are significant to participants. There is a perception that being ordained is also significant to those they minister amongst, although in ways that are not always easy to define. In terms of their relationship to the MCGB, participants highlighted that their responsibilities as ordained people are different to those of lay ministers. This suggests that having a publicly recognised role, and being intentional about word and sacrament, are significant to a sense of vocation as a presbyter, regardless of context.

Category Six: Methodism - The Good Stuff

This category brings together four codes: 'I felt at home', 'Holding the space', 'I feel valued', and 'A pioneer movement'. The data here is an important counterpoint to some of the more negative

experiences and views expressed by participants in relation to the MCGB at all levels. It suggests that while there are clearly difficulties in this relationship, there are also aspects that are positive and of value. As with the previous category, the data here reflects a greater alignment of normative, espoused and operant theology than has been apparent in most other categories. This is particularly the case in terms of Methodist churches as places of welcome and acceptance, and as a denomination with pioneering approaches to mission and ministry in its roots. The data here, seen in the light of other categories, is further evidence of the ambivalent relationship between pioneers and the church.

All participants identified individuals who had been supportive of them in their Christian journey, their calling to a different kind of presbyteral ministry, and who had been instrumental in them pursuing pioneer ministry.

So I arrived in Brighton on Saturday, went to church on Sunday and a family there kind of welcomed me and invited me round for lunch. (P1)

So I went to this Methodist church when I was a teenager and... the community there really gave me a place where I felt at home. (P3)

Then the superintendent minister said 'I've been looking at this leaflet and there's this thing about sector ministry and I think maybe you should consider that'. (P1)

At this point God is saying to me I want you to do this and I will find... there will be a way. I went to dinner with a couple of minister friends, X and Y, and spent a long time explaining why this wouldn't work and X saying 'we have a solution' and Y saying 'it's called sector ministry' and out of that came a conversation with my then superintendent and I then explored in the old way foundation training, and was accepted by the District for foundation training. (P4)

Along with the examples above of individuals who had guided participants in their Christian life and in their calling to pioneering, participants spoke positively about the ways in which individuals in the MCGB had enabled them and freed them to exercise their vocation to pioneer ministry:

I think that that initial period of wilderness, be it for a year, two years, however long, is essential to the experience of pioneering... And I think that the powers that be kind of stand between the pioneer and the institution really need to hold their nerve and hold the space for the pioneer to be able to go through that. (P3)

It's a joy and a privilege to have been given the opportunity to develop my ministry kind of organically, as opportunities arose and as I kind of feel led really'. (P1)

Another positive thing is that I've been released from a lot of the duties that ordinary Circuit ministers would have... and expectations. (P2)

My own experience also includes a sense of being released by my local Circuit in order to focus on pioneering ministry. As I noted 'One thing I will always be grateful for was the Circuit not interfering too much in what I was doing. They allowed me the space to develop my work without trying to control or direct it.'

It is however interesting to note that whilst these examples identify positive experiences, they also contain within them negative perceptions of standard Circuit ministry as something pioneers need protecting from and need 'freeing' from.

In addition to those who had supported participants in their vocation, two participants identified ways in which individuals and local churches valued them and their pioneer work. They also identified how people within the church had responded positively to their contributions, embracing aspects of ministry amongst marginalised people and taking the opportunity to learn from their experiences:

I feel valued by the Chair of District and I feel that he certainly knows about my ministry and he values that. I was invited by him to be involved in leading some of the District conversations on marriage and relationships. (P1)

This church has the sort of activities that go on here in terms of groups that use the building. We have a number of Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous groups that meet here, there's the HIV lunch club that I mentioned and GEMS, which is the Gay Elderly Men's Society, the Clare Project, which is a charity group established to help support people who are exploring their gender identity and who may be going to transition. They're based here and are actively supported by the church. (P1)

I think the church as a community of people are very receptive to it. And like that the paper I wrote has been distributed and people responded positively to it. (P3)

In terms of Methodism's roots, participants identified the possibilities that exist within the MCGB to pursue pioneering forms of ministry, with one identifying that there is something intrinsic about the relationship between pioneering and Methodism. Here there is an alignment of the espoused and operant theology of the MCGB in terms of its pioneering roots, and that of pioneers.

Actually I think in our DNA we are a pioneering movement and kind of accidentally a church. (P3).

You know, the more I do pioneering ministry, the more I feel like a Methodist. (P3)

Methodist initiatives and understandings of ministry which are permissive and freeing, and which go beyond presbyteral ministry as exercised in church congregations, were also identified by participants:

Itinerant ministry or stipendiary ministry was important and some people were going for that but it wasn't the only way of being a minister. (P1)

I think there was a District mailing. It was advertising for the first batch of Venture FX ministers and I'd never heard of this thing and I read it and I was like well that's exactly what I feel called to do, you know, that's exactly what I want to do. (P3)

What is pioneering? When you look at the Anglicans all of it is about church planting and that sort of thing, which the Methodists... it's not necessarily saying that'. (P2)

I have a kind of fondness for the bumbling friendliness of Methodism... and that hands dirty pragmatism and all those things that characterise Methodism'. (P3)

That the MCGB understands presbyteral ministry as more than 'leading churches' was something I also recognised as a strength:

To give the Methodist Church its due, it does allow for different expressions of presbyteral ministry beyond church congregations. I was challenged when I candidated for ministry about why not Circuit ministry, but ultimately it was recognised and affirmed that other callings did exist and were valid.

Summary

The data in this category reveals that there is both real affection for and valuing of the MCGB and its people amongst participants, and an acknowledgement that it has been a place that has nurtured their Christian life and pioneering vocation. Participants identified individuals who had been instrumental in their vocational formation and there was evidence that some had experienced Methodist churches as places of welcome and acceptance. There was also data relating to the support given to pioneers and their work by the Methodist people, and the freedom the MCGB offers to those pursuing forms of presbyteral ministry beyond Circuit contexts.

Interestingly, in the light of some data from previous categories in which participants were distancing themselves from MCGB initiatives, there is evidence here that it is precisely these initiatives that have enabled pioneer vocations for participants. This is further evidence for the complex and ambivalent pioneer/church relationship.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have described the six categories I drew out of the coding process using evidence from the data. My use of this data, including my own, allowed the voices of participants to be heard, an important aim of my research as detailed in Chapter Three. In addition, I have begun the analysis process through summaries of the data and through the application of the 'theology in four voices' model. Using this model as the 'working tool' it was designed to be (Cameron et al, 2010, p. 54), I have begun the meaning-making process. In particular, this model has enabled me to identify gaps between espoused and operant theology of the MCGB, such as in the pastoral care of pioneers and in the authorising of pioneer initiatives that are then not well supported. It has also highlighted where greater alignment between pioneers and the MCGB occurs: in seeking authorisation to minister on the part of pioneers and their recognition of Methodism as rooted in pioneering (as I noted in Chapter Two). This pattern of gaps and alignment suggests a complex and nuanced relationship between the MCGB and its pioneer presbyters.

In light of the meaning I have begun to make in this chapter, I have identified four key themes to take forward for further analysis. Two of these, identity and vocation, have been clear threads within the data relating to the way in which participants conceptualise their ministries. A further theme, that of the body, is significant both in the light of the body language and body vocabulary used in the interviews, as well as the way in which participants understood their ministries to be embodied and authorised. The final theme I intend to take forward is that of narrative. Following this first-level analysis, I am interested in the way in which participants framed their experiences as stories in which they and the church have particular roles. Significantly, both body and narrative were key concepts that I identified in the early stages of this research.

In the following chapter I will continue analysing the data using relevant literature, focusing on the themes of identity, vocation, body and narrative.

Chapter Six: Interpretative Findings

In the previous chapter I offered a detailed summary and first-level analysis of the data using the 'theology in four voices' model. Through this initial analysis I identified four themes to take forward

for further analysis: identity, vocation, body, narrative. As my analysis will show, these themes are closely related. In order to further analyse the data in light of these themes, I will be using literature from the discipline of theology, and, in line with the approach of practical theology, from other disciplines including sociology and philosophy.

Theme One: Identity

This theme emerged largely from data grouped in the codes 'The Nature of Pioneers', 'Not Fitting In' and some of the data from 'Being a Presbyterian'. I had structured the interviews so that the first part related to participants' ministerial context and the journey they had been on in order to exercise that ministry. This elicited data about how participants saw themselves in relation to their ministry; a specific question about why they felt they were suited to pioneer ministry drew out their sense of identity in relation to their vocation. However, it was significant that participants' sense of identity clearly emerged in the interviews before this question was asked.

A pioneer identity

The data showed that thinking differently and not conforming to existing models of ministry was a key way in which participants understood themselves, with one participant stating 'I don't like doing what I'm told' (P3), another describing herself as 'quietly doing my thing' (P1), and another identifying herself with those who say 'we've got to think differently' (P2). This setting apart from perceived norms suggests that participants understand their identity as different from others in more conventional church-based ministry, and this 'being different' is a thread that runs through the data.

In analysing data relating to identity, I first looked to the social sciences and to Madan Sarup, whose work includes a focus on identity in relation to the postmodern world. In *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World* (Sarup, 1996), Sarup argues that concern with identity is a contemporary phenomenon, stating that 'the widespread, pervasive fascination with identity is a symptom of postmodernity' (1996, p. 28). This hints at an important feature of the analysis of identity that follows: that identity can be seen as not fixed but a subjective and reflexive exercise on the part of the individual. It also locates the interest in identity in the postmodern context in which pioneers minister. In Paper One, drawing on the work of Zygmunt Bauman, I identified the postmodern context as 'a fast-moving, shape-shifting society of "continuous change", an "individualized, privatized version of modernity"' (Bauman, 2000 cited in Bucke, 2015, p. 8). Sarup suggests that in the contemporary context, identity can be seen as 'fabricated, constructed, in process, and that we have to consider both psychological and sociological factors' (1996, p. 14). Crucially, Sarup also asks the questions 'Is an objective perception of identity possible? Is any observer about to create something of what s/he observes?' (1996, p.15). These ideas suggest that both the participants

and myself as researcher will play a part in the construction of identities that form part of this research, and it is important to be aware of this during the analysis phase of the research.

Ideas about the social construction of identity are also found in the work of influential twentieth century sociologist Anthony Giddens. Writing in *Modernity and Self Identity*, Giddens describes the 'reflexive project of the self' (1991, p. 5), further developed in terms of the 'reflexive awareness' of our behaviour within a social context:

All human beings continuously monitor the circumstances of their activities as a feature of doing what they do, and such monitoring always has discursive features. In other words, agents are normally able, if asked, to provide discursive interpretations of the nature of, and the reasons for the behaviour in which they engage. (1991, p. 35)

Participants had a high level of reflexive capability, perhaps because of the importance of reflexivity in ministry and the particular focus on this in formation. Because of this, the interviews were likely to elicit deep reflections upon participants' identity in relation to their ministry.

In identifying themselves as 'thinking differently' from others in the church, participants also, explicitly or implicitly, identified themselves as creative thinkers: P3 said 'I try to respond to any kind of creative adventure with "yes"'. P1 identified how she saw her pioneer work in relation to other tasks within the Circuit: 'if I went to every Circuit meeting and local preachers' meeting, this, that and the other, I would actually spend all my hours just attending meetings and not actually doing anything more creative!'

Giddens identifies creativity as an important part of identity: 'A creative involvement with others and with the object-world is almost certainly a fundamental component of psychological satisfaction' (1991, p. 41). For participants, the freedom to be creative in their ministry is a vital part of expressing their identity, something most powerfully highlighted when they felt prevented from doing so. P2 shared her experience of being a very busy Circuit minister, describing it thus: 'I was just running around keeping plates spinning'. This was in contrast to her current pioneering work: 'it does actually feel good to me to be here... just relating as a normal person.' Giddens claims that our freedom to live creatively is bound up with our sense of trust: 'Creativity, which means the capacity to act or think innovatively in relation to pre-established modes of activity, is closely tied to trust. Trust itself, by its very nature, is in a certain sense creative, because it entails a commitment that is a 'leap into the unknown' (1991, p. 42).

It is possible to see where trust between participants and the church has broken down because of the perceived desire of the church to tame creativity. P3 described his approach to ministry as one of distancing himself from the MCGB's pioneering initiatives: 'None of this has come out of any theology book I've read, or any training course I've been on, or any Fresh Expressions DVD I've watched.' P2 criticised the MCGB's approach to pioneering as lacking creativity: 'It seems to be

overly facilitated by the DMLN, who were the ones who've been asked to oversee this, but the DMLN are agents of the church'. There is distrust of church initiatives and a skepticism about anything organised by the MCGB because of a perceived lack of creativity.

Giddens goes on to discuss the effects of restricting creativity as leading to 'chronic melancholic tendencies' (1991, p. 41). P3, whose ministry centred around his skills as an artist, described doing an office job before offering for the Methodist ministry as an experience 'which nearly destroyed me'. The data suggests that pioneer presbyters have a strong sense of identity as pioneers specifically, as creative, unboundaried by what is 'normal' within the church, and which participants felt they should be free to express. From the literature, this sense of identity can be understood as constructed with reference to the context in which individuals operate, contexts which were expressed as sometimes freeing, sometimes restrictive. This idea of identity as formed, not in isolation but in the light of context points to another feature of the data, that of the Other, as participants identify themselves against existing norms and against others in ministry. In turn participants also experience feelings of 'otherness' themselves in relation to the church.

Identity and the Other

Along with notions of identity as constructed and shaped by individuals in context are explicit ideas about the ways in which identity is shaped by those around us. Anglican priest and theologian Frances Ward, in common with the sociological literature already explored in this chapter, highlights the importance of reflexivity in relation to constructions of identity in the contemporary context. However, Ward does not understand this reflexivity as 'solipsistic or narcissistic' (2005, p. 130), but suggests 'Identity is understood here as always in dialogue with others' (2005, p. 130). Returning to the theme of Boisen's 'living human document', Ward states:

To study the self as and through a living human document is to focus upon one's own behaviour, patterns of non-verbal forms of communication and attitudes so that personal and professional growth can occur in response to the challenge of the difference of others. The word 'reflexivity' is often understood as a turn to the dialogical self so that awareness may develop of one's cultural embeddedness...' (2005, p130).

These ideas of the 'dialogical self' and 'the challenge of the difference of others' are significant to the way participants define themselves and their ministry, often in opposition to others in the church. Participants conceptualise themselves as not doing as they are told and thinking differently, implying that norms within the church lie with those who do conform and those who cannot or do not think differently. Participants define their identity in the light of others, a process Ward describes as 'words and thoughts going between self and others in an ongoing conversation which is both internal and external' (2005, p. 133). Whilst this process may be neutral, there can be negative consequences to such a construction of identity, highlighted in the work of Sarup: he

states that 'identity is always related to what one is not - the Other' (1996, p. 47), and that 'to maintain a separate identity, one has to define oneself against the Other' (1996, p. 47).

The idea of 'defining against' is strongly identifiable in the data. P4 described a congregation who he felt did not have the capacity to understand his pioneering work: 'They like to sing a few nice hymns and so forth. And so they're not going to engage in that conversation.' P1 described similar attitudes towards people in congregations: 'there are some people who don't really understand what I do, probably don't care, you know'. P3 spoke about individuals being supportive but the MCGB as an institution being something more negative: 'when the church kind of starts to be an institution, so in some of the big meetings, which I don't go to very often, that's when I think (despairing voice) "Oh God yeah, this is what the church actually is, this is what the church is actually like". And I think amazing individuals coalesce into this institution and it feels life-sucking to me.' There is evidence here of participants' othering the people within the organisation into which they are ordained.

However, as well as evidence of othering, there is also data which reflects participants feeling like the Other themselves. P4 explicitly described this feeling: 'You're always the Other. So you don't fit the category.' P2 pointed out that pioneers are so few in number and that 'at the moment we're a sort of fringe activity'. This feeling of otherness and marginalisation was particularly evident in relation to the funding of pioneer work. P2 stated 'I always wonder when the chips are down is it going to be a case of "we can't afford you to be a pioneer, we need somebody to be in churches?"' and identified that she sometimes felt herself to be a financial burden. P1 said of her ministry in relation to the local Circuit 'It's no skin of their nose and they're not paying for it.' Returning to Ward's theme of the 'dialogical self', the data shows that participants' identity as 'different' is expressed both in defining themselves against perceived 'norms', and against unsatisfactory practice and thinking within the church. It is also expressed in their feelings of marginalisation. This suggests that both othering and otherness are factors in pioneer identity.

Identity and Dasein

In Paper One I explored how my own early understandings of pioneer ministry found significance in the idea that 'I am here' in a particular place and time (Bucke, 2015, p. 8), referring to Heidegger's concept of *dasein*, being-in-the-world, as a key way of understanding how we are intimately bound up with place and context. This theme of placedness is particularly pertinent to pioneer ministry because of its highly contextual nature, and participants referred to the importance of place and context in relation to their identity: P1 described herself as 'like a stick of Brighton rock but with HIV going through it'. P1 also highlighted that her ministry, intrinsically linked to her professional work in a healthcare setting, meant that itineracy was not a relevant model for her: 'I've actually kind of taken root'.

Whilst P1 had the most rooted ministry, other participants also noted the importance of place and context in their ministerial practice: P2 said 'It does actually feel good to me to be here and to be going to the local Asda and just relating as a normal person with folks around.' P4 described his ministry in his workplace as 'it's been about saying God's here, and I'm able to help you with whatever you need'.

It is possible to see the intersection of identity and context in these comments: participants' identity is not constructed in a vacuum but created through the interaction with particular contexts and places. As Sarup describes it: 'we apprehend identity not in the abstract but always in relation to a given time and place' (1996, p. 15). We might understand the practice of pioneer ministry as in part helping to *form* the identities of practitioners. This sense of identity as formed in context leads to the next theme I wish to explore: that of vocation.

Theme Two: Vocation

This theme emerged from data across many of the codes, particularly 'So difficult to disentangle', 'Being a Methodist minister', and 'My ministerial role'. What was apparent was that participants understood their vocation, both to pioneering, and to presbyteral ministry, as part of their identity. However, participants also expressed concern about how their vocation was formed, held, and supported by the MCGB at all levels, and identified examples of both good and bad practice.

Vocation and identity

I have given significant consideration to whether 'vocation' belongs within the first theme of 'identity' or whether it should be explored separately. Both approaches could be justified from the data and there is much cross-over between notions of identity and vocation from participants, particularly in relation to place and context of ministry: P1 described her presbyteral identity thus: 'I find it so difficult to disentangle... like a strand of wool or something where you've got all the different strands and it's because they're all intertwined'. However, I have decided to explore vocation as a discrete theme, reflecting participants' own understandings that their identity and vocation as presbyters are closely linked but not always one in the same: P1 also described herself as having a dual vocation: 'I feel absolutely passionately that I have two vocations, you know, as a pharmacist and as a presbyter, but they are now so deeply intertwined with everything... that is who I am.' P3 commented on his identity as a Methodist minister in relation to other aspects of his life: 'People are interested in my story of - well you're an artist, you're a Methodist minister, you're gay - all these intersections make for a really rich kind of creative space'. Where participants experienced challenge to vocation and identity, the response was one of crisis, pain and fragmentation. However, a more secure sense of identity was expressed when they were able to fulfil their calling. Phrases such as 'intertwined', 'difficult to disentangle' and identity as a 'rich

creative space' are far more indicative of a wholeness and oneness experienced by participants in relation to vocational identity once expressed.

In seeking theological approaches to the formation of vocational identity within the MCGB, I turn to the work pastoral theologian and theological college principal Jane Leach. Writing about what it is to be a Methodist presbyter, Leach states that: 'The identity of the presbyter must then be worked out in dialogue both across time in conversation with the Christian tradition and personal biography and, in this place and time together with all whom I would like to recognize me as a presbyter in the contemporary church and beyond it' (2002, p. 22).

This offers an alternative to Giddens' perspective on identity as closely bound up with institutions, and as fragile and without foundations: while church and tradition form part of the matrix in which vocational identity is formed, there is a place for those outside them to help form it, those within the contexts in which participants minister. P1 expressed this in language that is both priestly and Methodist when talking about her ministry with people with HIV/AIDS: 'I feel that my parish (arms gesture gathering in) is the community, so when I go upstairs later to Lunch Positive and chat to people, that feels to me like they are my people.'

Returning to the work of Anglican priests Christopher Cocksworth and Rosalind Brown, they state that 'The presbyter needs the people to be a presbyter. The people need a presbyter in order to be the people of God' (2006, p. 19). Whilst they are writing for the context of the presbyter and established Christian community, it is possible to understand the role of pioneer presbyters as anticipating and foreshadowing this relationship. Participants all identified the importance of being ordained as opposed to being lay ministers in their community, and had found different ways of expressing this, whether through wearing traditional clerical clothing, or explicitly naming it in order to avoid 'bait and switch' (P3). This suggests the continued importance of traditional understandings of priesthood, ministry and church, even when such things may be residual amongst the pioneer's community.

However, while ideas about ordained ministry remain important for participants, this did not necessarily mean looking to their own tradition for inspiration, and here I return to the role of church and tradition in the formation of vocational identity. As I have already suggested, all participants expressed the sometimes-difficult relationship they have with the church. What is interesting is that church and tradition do form a key part of their vocational identity, but not necessarily the MCGB: P2 described the influence of the Beguines on her ways of thinking about ministry, P3 spoke about St Kevin as the inspiration for his ministry of 'gently holding whatever comes', and P4 quoted a line from the Anglican communion liturgy: 'We have this bread and wine to offer, the work of human hands', as something he identified with 'more and more' in his workplace ministry. These examples suggest that pioneers may look outside their own tradition, and that alternative sources of inspiration are considered valid dialogue partners in the dialogical formation of vocational identity.

Vocation and institution

A further feature of the data was the very individualised understandings participants have of themselves as pioneer presbyters. Three participants had built pioneer projects relating to their secular work or skillset, and the fourth from a strong personal rejection of existing forms of church. Alongside these very individual ministries what is *not* in the data is significant: there is little evidence that participants understand their vocation as pioneers as being formed by or within the MCGB. Indeed formation caused particular problems for all participants and they spoke of the ways in which they did not fit within the formational pathways they experienced.

Both the individualised ministries and the problems encountered during formation suggest a rejection of institutional models in favour of models apparently devised by the individual: when asked about his pioneer ministry in relation to Methodist understandings of presbyteral ministry, P3 replied 'Whether it fits with statements of Conference or the Faith and Order Committee, I don't really care to be honest. I don't know and I don't care'. P2 described herself as 'doing church for those who don't do church'. This idea of the church as inadequate and the pioneer as able to do what others cannot is common to all participants to some extent, and all expressed that their ministry was reaching those excluded by traditional forms of church. There is however a danger that this disassociation with the institution and focus on personal skills and preferences leads to a self-reliance that places pioneers at odds with their role as ordained ministers. This is something that has been recognised by the MCGB in the recent Conference report *Changing Patterns of Ministry* (2020):

'Experiences from fresh expression and pioneering contexts and from work with particular language and cultural communities have highlighted that, for contextual mission and ministry, the practice of itinerancy can sometimes be viewed as threatening. On the other hand, it is sometimes seen as helpful in ensuring that a particular community or project is not reliant on, or identified with, one individual, but that oversight and ministry are shared within that particular community and within the Methodist Church. (The Methodist Church, 2020, para. 5.1.3. g).

On the matter of church practices as potentially threatening, perspectives on narcissism, postmodernism and institutions offer some useful insights. Giddens, writing about narcissism, describes the effect of institutions on identity: 'A self-identity has to be created and more or less continually reordered against the backdrop of shifting experiences of day-to-day life and the fragmenting tendencies of modern institutions' (1991, p. 186). He goes on to contrast these fragmenting effects with 'pure relationships' formed through the 'strong connections between basic trust and the reliability of caretaking figures' (1991, p. 186). Data relating to the lack of trust between participants and the MCGB suggests their identity relates more closely to Giddens' ideas

of the self as 'frail, brittle, fractured, fragmented' (1991, p. 169). P2 shared what she described as a 'very painful experience': 'I was rather rudely and brusquely told that I was leaving X initiative... This was actually my baby,.... but it was the way it was done. It was *taken*.' This traumatic and fragmenting experience reflects some of the more difficult experiences for pioneers, when they felt threatened by the church and in which the breakdown of trust was a factor. P4 described a difficult time during his probation: 'the church bits were horrible because... I was refused permission to be ordained'. P3 described his relationship with authority figures: 'there's that shift from kind of hanging on to these authority figures to.... do I still have authority figures? Maybe.... not so much now.'

Participants' vocational identity can be seen as sometimes at odds with the authority of the MCGB and linked to experiences of frustration, pain and rejection. The understandable response of participants is to further reject what they have identified as inadequate and failing. The work of Professor of Christian Theology, Anthony C. Thiselton, whose work engages theology, hermeneutics and philosophy, provides an insight into the potentially destructive consequences for individuals of relationships characterised by difficulty and a lack of trust. Drawing on Ricoeur's analysis of Freud and the self, Thiselton argues for 'the capacity of the self to fall victim to its own deceptive, self-protective and manipulative devices' (1995, p. 127). Such responses are a symptom of the postmodern phenomena of 'fragmentation, indeterminacy and intense distrust of all universal or "totalising" discourse' (1995, p. 130). Thiselton goes on to identify the resulting insecurity, which 'invites defensiveness, a letting down of shutters, and an increasing preoccupation with self-protection, self-interest, and desire for power and the recovery of control' (1995, p. 130).

Whilst the data does not support participants explicitly seeking control or power, there is evidence of defensiveness and 'letting down of shutters' in how participants spoke about their relationship to the MCGB. It is also possible to interpret the individualised nature of pioneer projects as a form of control exercised by those who have initiated them: in all cases it would be challenging for another presbyter to replace the participants because their ministries have become so closely linked to their particular gifts, skills and contextual knowledge. These factors could point to further consequences for the pioneer/church relationship, involving the use of power and control where a breakdown of trust remains unhealed.

Whilst participants at times strongly rejected the MCGB's inherited practices and norms in favour of either what they perceive as their own initiatives, or inspiration from other traditions, there were several examples of how individuals within the MCGB were instrumental in participants becoming pioneer presbyters, and MCGB initiatives clearly enabled participants' sense of vocation. P2 described how she came to be involved in pioneer ministry through a suggestion from one of her superintendents; P3 explained how he was inspired by discovering the Venture FX scheme; after struggling to understand how his calling fitted within the MCGB, P4 described two colleagues helping him understand that his vocation might be in sector ministry. These experiences

demonstrate something of a disconnect with other aspects of participants' relationship with the MCGB. Methodist initiatives and Methodist understandings of presbyteral ministry beyond Circuit ministry have actually enabled participants to express their calling. Of further significance, all have taken the decision put themselves through candidating, the established selection process for those wishing to be ordained in the MCGB. While relationships were sometimes difficult and while participants found much to criticise, the MCGB's theology and practice was essential to participants' fulfilling in their vocation.

Giddens' ideas about the self as shaped in dialogue with others, and the self as fragmented and fractured are useful in understanding this phenomenon. Where participants experience challenge and difficulty, and feel threatened, the response is one of distancing and closing off. However, where there is affirmation and opportunity, participants are able to embrace what is offered. This suggests that there may be a cognitive dissonance involved in pioneering, particularly on the part of the ordained: individuals feel drawn to alternative forms of ministry and mission because they see the failings of existing models, yet are still motivated to seek the acceptance and approval of the institution, and to engage in pioneering initiatives sanctioned by the MCGB.

A further layer of complexity within this cognitive dissonance is the explicit rejection of the very initiatives that enabled participants to fulfil their vocation: P2 said 'I mean some of the Pioneer Pathways stuff is okay, but I'm questioning some of that now'. P3 expressed similar concerns: 'I think the Pioneer Pathway is a good thing you know, I think one of the problems that will arise is that this kind of domestication of something that is wild and organic and I think it happened Fresh Expressions. So I think you know Fresh Expressions is now this kind of institution which kind of tamed all this kind of wildlife, wild growth.'

'Other' vocations in the MCGB

I have already explored the theme of the Other in relation to pioneer identity and I now return to this, with an emphasis on the place of pioneer vocations in the MCGB as a whole, rather than individual experiences of othering and otherness. Participants spoke negatively at times of feeling outside of church norms, of being people who do not fit institutional models and processes, and expressed frustration at the low profile of pioneer ministry. P1 said 'the time when I felt like a square peg in a round hole was probation...I recognised that what I was doing was different'. P4 commented 'lots of people say this to me: "this is the way the ministry should be in the future". Huh? Really?...we don't actively show that there is that option.'

A significant factor in the sense of pioneer ministry as the Other within the MCGB was the lack of secure funding and the perceived prioritisation of Circuit ministry when difficult financial choices have to be made. There were also phrases that hinted at exploitation on the part of the church: P4 described himself as 'an extra pair of hands and free' in relation to the Circuit to which he is

attached. These experiences raise questions about the levels of support for pioneer ministry and ministers themselves, and about how successfully the church 'holds' pioneers and their work.

Here I want to explore a piece of research carried out by Methodist sector minister Clifford Bellamy. It takes the form of a survey of 55 sector ministers (37 responded) and 33 District Chairs (24 responded) in 2000, the findings of which were published as part of a chapter on sector ministry in the MCGB in *What is a minister?* (Bellamy, 2002). Bellamy sets out to explore whether sector ministry 'remains a matter of controversy and resentment today or whether it is now accepted as a valid form of ordained ministry' (2002, p. 48). This premise is itself interesting in the light of my own questions about pioneer presbyteral ministry at the start of this research: whether it is a full expression of a ministry of word and sacrament, and whether the MCGB is doing enough to support and promote such ministries. Bellamy identifies, as I have done with pioneer ministry, that sector ministry has been a response to the gap between church and society. Quoting from the 1968 Conference agenda, the year in which sector ministry was conceived, Bellamy states 'the Methodist Church itself began to realize that "the church is becoming increasingly remote from wide areas of life as it is lived in the sectors"' (2002, p. 49). I would suggest that this rationale for sector ministry and its practice of ministry amongst those beyond church congregations, make sector ministry a precursor to pioneer ministry. Although the focus of sector ministry has been organisations such as workplaces, rather than the more varied and organic contexts in which pioneers often work, there were sector ministers in unique contexts: 'a bus driver, a poet, a storyteller' (2002, p. 58), which further suggest its connectedness to contemporary pioneering.

Bellamy's research provides an interesting comparison with my own and there were significant similarities with some of my findings, particularly in relation to support from the church. Whilst there was support for sector ministry from many of the Chairs of District (2002, p. 57), Bellamy identifies that 'responses to the questionnaires disclose some concern about the support available to sector ministers' (2002, p. 59), and quotes one respondent who said 'The Connexion has paid no attention to me', and another who said 'The whole question of the extent to which Methodism "owns" our work seems to me to be one of the major questions' (2002, p. 60). This resonates strongly with P2's comment that 'a few chaplains once upon a time used to say "nobody gives a fig what I'm doing apart from they're very grateful when I offer appointments on the plan, that's what they value" and it's something of that you know'.

A further issue relating to support from Bellamy's survey was that from the Circuits: One respondent stated 'I was never included in any staff meetings', and another commented that her superintendent said she was 'not one of the working staff' (2002, p. 60). Experiences from my participants varied in terms of their local Circuit but some issues were identified: P4 said 'a new superintendent conceptualised me as a part-time minister and I've had to spend some time disabusing him of that notion. I am not part-time. I'm just different.' P2 expressed frustration at the relationship with her Circuit: 'the Circuit's not verbalised this but it seems that the Circuit is, as it were, in charge and is sending me on mission, and they only want to hear back when I've got

some success stories to share.' P2 also felt she had to 'appease the Circuit because I would like to remain funded please'.

Bellamy's research highlighted some issues with sector ministers feeling connected to the MCGB, stating that 'A sense of belonging is crucial to the theme of connexion' (2002, p. 61). Whereas some of the District Chairs expressed concerns that sector ministers had in practice 'left the church' (2002, p. 61), sector ministers themselves shared experiences of exclusion 'I have no role in the local Circuit...I am largely ignored by the Circuit' (2002, p. 60). There were contradictory responses from my participants in relation to this idea of being connected. P2 identified that not being connected to a local congregation was part of the point of her ministry. Yet she also described a strong sense of being a part of a connexional church: 'I still do have that umbilical cord connection to church'. P4 expressed some difficult experiences with the MCGB's processes and with key individuals, describing distressing treatment that had left him 'in tears'. However, he also expressed the importance of the MCGB authorising his ministry: 'I think there was something about authorised public ministry that the church acknowledges and owns.' Both Bellamy's and my research demonstrate the importance of being connexional as well as the difficulties associated with this; all the participants in my research spoke about both aspects of this to some degree.

One final insight from Bellamy's research that resonates with my own is that of validity. Bellamy highlights the lack of understanding, particularly from lay people, in relation to sector ministry in terms of whether such ministries were a 'cop-out' (2002, p. 62). One of Bellamy's respondents shared a comment they had received about sector ministry: 'Oh you're not a proper minister then?', and another offered the perception of their work 'That it is not proper ministry and is therefore a waste of resources'. P1 used almost the same phrase when sharing what she felt was a question hanging over her decision to pursue a calling to pioneer work: 'It was almost that sense of (whispers very quietly) "will you be a real minister?"'. P2 also commented, sarcastically, about her validity as a Methodist minister: 'I have to do three services a quarter on the plan because how else am I validated (laughs) as Methodist minister?' This suggests that there remains misunderstandings and suspicion about the validity of pioneer work and that pioneers can feel their calling is undervalued.

A key conclusion of Bellamy's survey was that, while sector ministry was less controversial in 2000 than it was in 1968, there remained very little understanding or appreciation of it, and 'as a result, it has become marginalised' (2002, p. 64). His findings relating to feelings of marginalisation and alienation on the part of sector ministers resonate strongly with those from my participants. In addition, the theoretical importance of connexionalism verses the lack of sector ministers actually experiencing this can be closely linked to views found in my data.

A second piece of research that has proved relevant to my findings is the 2011 Venture FX report (Cosstick, 2011), which I referred to in Chapter One. Whilst the review was not designed to explore the experiences of Venture FX pioneers but to review the whole scheme through interviews with

pioneers, District Chairs, members of the connexional team and local stakeholders (2011, p. 7), it did include findings pertinent to the relationship between the MCGB and its Venture FX pioneers.

Cosstick's review found that some pioneers spoke of 'the "jealousy" of the inherited church towards the pioneer' (2011, p. 42), and identified a 'tacit antagonism' from some in standard ministerial appointments (2011, p. 42). In common with comments from my participants about the challenges of pursuing a vocation to pioneering within the MCGB, Cosstick quoted one pioneer who suggested that it was "'too difficult" for probationer presbyters to become pioneers' (2011, p. 43). One particularly resonant statement related to the way in which pioneers and those within conventional congregations may see each other:

One image that recurs for me is that the pioneer has one foot in the context and constituency in which he is ministering, and another in the institutional church. But the weight is on the foot that stands in the context, and the span or stretch between the one foot and the other is quite uncomfortable. Those who inhabit the context of the pioneer project would have virtually no perception or view of the Methodist Church institution. And my guess is that many of those whose primary location is the institutional church, for whom the weight is on that foot, or whose two feet are firmly planted there, would have almost as much difficulty understanding the world in which the pioneers are living. (Cosstick, 2011, p. 44)

The findings of these pieces of research, along with my own, suggest that between 1968 and 2020 the MCGB has not yet learned to successfully support those it authorises to serve in non-standard appointments, and that the issues that surround this are broadly similar: A lack of understanding and investment, both in money and people, have resulted in the continued marginalisation of these ministries and a sense of disconnection for those who practice them. Bellamy concludes with the statement: 'There is an urgent need today for the Church to consider creatively and imaginatively how the whole body of presbyteral ministers can best be used to enable the Church "to be a sign, a foretaste and instrument of the Kingdom" in the twenty-first century' (2002, p. 64). This idea of revisiting presbyteral ministry creatively and imaginatively so that the church might be a sign of the Kingdom is one I will return to in the next chapter when considering ways forward for the MCGB.

Theme Three: Body

This theme emerged particularly from data in the codes 'Theology embodied in the action', and 'Painful experiences'. The data contained several interesting uses of language relating to the body, something that was unexpected. Also unexpected was the extent to which body language and facial expression during the interviews provided insights into participants' experiences. I had anticipated that face to face interviews would generate some body language related data but not to the extent I found, and I have drawn on examples of this as part of the text of the 'living human document'.

Embodying presbyteral ministry

In Chapter Two I identified that embodiment and incarnational ministry were important to my understanding of pioneer presbyteral ministry. I therefore wanted to ask participants whether these ideas resonated with them; three participants identified with the incarnational model of ministry. These participants also described ways in which they embodied their ministry: P1 described *herself* at the reading of names during the World Aids Day vigil as: 'the sort of safe space that holds those securely'. I also noted that P1 was wearing a rainbow-coloured clerical top on the day of the interview and she explained she was attending a lunch for those with HIV that day. P2 described her ministry as one in which living alongside people on a council estate was significant: 'I'm also living - I suppose to use the buzzword - "incarnationally" here'. P3 spoke at length about how his art-making was a way in which he embodied his ministry: 'actually my ministry of word and sacrament is embodied in my art-making... the paintings are sacramental objects. So they embody my experience of prayer, my experience of Christ, and then as a physical object, it goes out into the world and is a means of grace'. P3 also described the importance of bodily action in art as an expression of theology: 'then a small group of us made this mosaic on the wall, which is made out of broken stained glass and broken crockery. And if you can't do the theology of broken pieces of glass making something beautiful then we're not worth calling ourselves presbyters.... but the theology is just embodied in the action'.

Sociological perspectives about the relationship between the body and identity are helpful here. Professor of Sociology, Bryan S. Turner, writing in *The Body and Society* (1984), identifies 'the importance of embodiment for our sense of self'. He states that 'We have bodies, but we are also, in a specific sense, bodies; our embodiment is a necessary requirement of our social identification' (1984, p. 7). Discussing G.H. Mead's theory about the relationship between the body and the self as separate, Turner explores the body as an expression of the self: 'the self is realized through performance. Crucial to self-performance is the presentation of the body in everyday life' (1984, p. 40). This suggests that in sociological terms, a vocation as deeply personal as Christian ministry might be understood as practiced through the body-as-self, and that such things as clothes and appearance, physical actions, and even living spaces, take on particular significance.

Giddens explores the consequences for the body when 'self-identity' does not match 'performance': 'A person feels he is continually acting out most or all routines, rather than following them for valid reasons... such a situation characteristically leads to an "unembodied" self' (1991, p. 59). Participants communicated their frustration, difficulty, and occasionally pain when describing situations where they had not been able to minister as they felt called, and there were clear differences in tone of voice and body language when participants were talking about these times, such as lack of eye contact, pained facial expressions, a quieter voice, and fewer hand gestures.

P2 described her frustration at a busy Circuit appointment: 'I was just running round keeping plates spinning and I just felt I had... I was disembodied'. This can be understood in light of Giddens' idea of the body expressing the self, where what is felt in and by the body, or indeed the loss of a sense of being in one's body, is a 'barometer' for the inner experience.

The relationship between body and self are particularly significant in Christian theology. Returning to Frances Ward, drawing on the work of philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, she states that 'If Levinas wrote about how the face relays the encounter with others, then, by extension, bodies can be seen to convey meaning. How they are used, dressed, presented are important elements in communication' (2005, p. 140). Ward goes on to discuss the 'dialogical, embodied, public self' in which 'the dialogue of the voice, the otherness of face, the crafting of body' are all significant elements of the self (2005, p. 141). P4 described a comment from a placement supervisor relating to an encounter the supervisor had witnessed: 'and suddenly he said... he actually affirmed me, which was "I came into the ward and saw that you just naturally" he said, "you just knelt down because you hadn't got a seat. The patient wanted to talk to you, you just knelt down by the side of them while I talked to this other patient"'. P2 identified the significance of being and living amongst others in an ordinary community as a part of her sacramental ministry: 'I would like to think eventually as people get to know me the fact that I'm here, and the prayer stuff, that in itself is a sign... in terms of being sacramental, I'm there, I'm around, I'm a person (laughs) living... trying to live out a faithful life'. In these examples pioneer presbyteral ministry can be seen in terms of a 'dialogical, embodied, public self', where the body is both medium and message, and where actions, gestures and daily life itself can be understood in terms of a sacramental ministry. Anglican priests Christopher Cocksworth and Rosalind Brown say of being a presbyter 'It is a calling to *indicate* the identity of the Church by embodying the characteristics of the Church' (2006, p. 24).

Body vocabulary and body language

Participants identified that they embodied and enacted their presbyteral ministry, and spoke explicitly about how this was manifested in their particular contexts. However, an interesting feature of the data was the way in which participants also used words and phrases about the body, and how they used their body language, expressing the significance of the body in relation to their experiences and vocational understanding. Here the work of pastoral theologian Donald Capps writing on the poetry of Denise Levertov, which I referred to in Chapter Two, is once again useful. Capps identifies that pastoral conversations are more than mere 'wordplay' (1993, p. 40) or 'disembodied speech' (1993, p. 44). Rather, such encounters are embodied: 'Levertov's poems on various ways the body speaks on the soul's behalf suggest that the pastor's role, as empathic listener, is to leave the realm of the abstract and disembodied spirits to others, and to enter the body's world' (1993, p. 64). I suggest that this idea of pastoral encounters involving the whole body is relevant to my research interviews, even though they were not designed to be pastoral encounters. In Chapter Four, reflecting on the follow-up interviews, I noted how the interview

process had been an opportunity for deep reflection on the part of participants. I also noted how quickly it was possible to build a rapport with participants, eliciting profound and very personal experiences from them, as well as how deeply connected I felt to my participants. As the interviews consisted of a presbyter talking at length with another presbyter working in a similar way, it was perhaps inevitable that there was a pastoral dimension to these conversations. As such, being attentive to the various dimensions of pastoral encounter, including body language and vocabulary, is a valid part of the analysis.

Significantly, much of the body language and vocabulary used by participants related to negative experiences. When talking about Circuit responsibilities in relation to pioneer work, I noted on my interview sheet that P1 'spoke in a more perfunctory tone and made less eye contact'. This participant also 'mimed boxes with her hands' when talking about those who understand ministry as a largely functional, tick-box exercise. Drawing on an example I have already explored in terms of identity, P3 spoke viscerally about the experience of being moved on from a pioneer project: 'This was actually my baby,.... but it was the way it was done. It was *taken*.' P4 spoke of two very emotional occasions when he felt he had been badly treated by the church and had found himself 'in tears'. I noted that this interview in particular had left me feeling emotional and that emotions had felt close to the surface for much of the time we spoke.

These experiences express how indifference, alienation, bereavement and distress are felt and known in the body. Exploring the ministry of Paul in Ephesus, Cocksworth and Brown identify that his ministry was 'rooted in an incarnational identification with the people' (2006, p. 13). A consequential feature of this incarnational ministry was pain: 'Paul had ministered with tears. It had been painful to build the Church in Ephesus' (2006, p. 13). They go on to identify the characteristics and experience of Jesus as the 'backdrop' to Paul's servant ministry:

His self-depiction as a servant of others was a conscious adoption of the suffering servant motif in the Isaianic prophecies. Jesus knew that to serve the people in the messianic ministry of God's new order carried with it the mantle of suffering. Servanthood and suffering were yoked together as surely as motherhood and the pain of labour in the birth of God's kingdom' (2006, p. 13).

Particularly significant here is the idea of ministry as a sacrificial enterprise which inevitably involves the suffering of those who partake in it, and the idea of 'the pain of labour'. Participants are attempting to birth something new and distinctive. In doing so, they experience the birth pains that go with attempting to create something from nothing.

However, not all the examples of body language and vocabulary were negative. As Leach states 'We know pain and disorientation in our bodies, and we will know salvation in our bodies too' (2020, p.31). P1 responded with her body when asked whether the idea of incarnational ministry resonated with her: from my notes, 'closing her eyes and turning her face upwards'. When

talking about the lack of understanding within the laity about what ordained ministry means, she also responded bodily by clutching her hands to her chest. As previously discussed, P2 described being ‘umbilically’ connected to the church through ordination, something similarly expressed by P3: ‘Actually, I feel more held by the church, very much so.’ Again, Capps writing on Levertov, reflects on the ‘total organismic context in which feeling or emotion is expressed, and how it is ‘not just the voice but the total organism that expresses itself’ (1993, p. 56). The experiences of feeling ‘held’ and ‘connected’, and the sense of one’s ministry as utterly who one is, are felt and demonstrated in the body.

Interestingly, whilst the idea of feeling held by or connected to the church is explicitly identified by two participants, and whilst the body is a key way in which participants both express their experiences and relate to their vocation as presbyters, no participant mentioned being part of the Body of Christ. This is possibly because overall, negative experiences with the church outweighed positive ones in the data and, as previously discussed, distancing and marginalisation are common experiences. However, this omission is significant and may point to the need for a renewed way of being within the MCGB, which I will explore in the next chapter.

Theme Four: Narrative

This theme emerged from identifying that the interview process was a means through which participants told their stories. It also emerged from identifying similarities between the ways in which participants told these stories, and my analysis of the data suggesting that there were common stories amongst participants. There are clear resonances in what follows between this theme of narrative and those of identity and vocation.

Narrative, identity, and methodology

I identified in Chapter Three that my qualitative approach to this research was designed to access the ‘attitudes, beliefs and ideas’ of participants. I also intended human experience to form the data source. Further, I selected the semi-structured interview as my research method in order to ensure certain topics were covered but allow participants to speak freely about their ministry. At the time I selected my methodology and methods, I had not considered the pastoral dimension of the interviews as discussed previously in this chapter, however, this facet of the interview experience has given rise to the importance of narrative within the data.

In Paper Two I reflected upon the experience of a pastoral encounter from my own pioneer ministry in the light of narrative. Drawing on the work of Ricoeur, I wrote that ‘stories are important to us: they are how we seem to make sense of our lives and the lives of others, and human life is often thought about in terms of a “life story”’ (Bucke, 2016, p. 152). Further, I explored how Ricoeur

argues for the importance of interpretation of our life stories as giving a sense of completion: 'For Ricoeur it is in the act of interpretation by another that life and narrative fuse, the interpretive process ensuring that human life is more than "a biological function" *because* it may be understood and interpreted' (2016, p. 5). From a theological perspective, Anthony Thiselton, drawing on the work of Charles Gerkin, also explores the idea of life as story, with particular reference to the pastoral relationship: 'the story in terms of which another self perceives its one uniqueness as a human agent, character, and self "is itself, of course, an interpretation of experience". In this sense we might say that the task of understanding the Other in pastoral counselling entails interpreting interpretation' (1995, p. 53).

These ideas about life, story and interpretation are pertinent to the ways in which participants recounted their lives within the interviews. One surprising feature of the interviews was the length of time they took to complete - between 80 and 90 minutes. I was also surprised how little prompting was required for participants to speak at length about their work and their lives. After the first interview I noted that the participant had spoken for approximately 20 minutes giving an answer to just the first of the main interview questions about current ministerial context. P3, when asked the same question said 'it is hard to talk about the current context without talking about how I got to this point. Can I go that way?' What followed was an answer to a question about ministerial context that incorporated a nervous breakdown, divorce, and discovering sexual identity. P2 spoke about marital breakup and financial difficulty in relation to her ministry. These examples, seen in the light of perspectives from philosophy and theology, reveal how the telling of a 'life story' is an inevitable way in which participants interpret their experiences.

However, it is not only participants who are interpreting themselves as they tell their stories, but myself, who in this context could be seen in place of the pastoral counsellor as the one who is 'interpreting interpretation', and as a researcher, as creating a new research story from the stories of my participants. A further dimension to this is the inclusion of my own story as part of the data set.

Narrative tropes

A recurring theme from the data is that of participants seeking to distance themselves from the MCGB and expressing criticism of its processes and initiatives. This manifests itself in part in the way in which participants describe their experiences with individuals and with church structures and bodies. P2, following her description of the DMLN as 'agents of the church', described how she used her mentor to keep perceived interference at bay: 'it means you could say to the Circuit 'back off - I've got my mentor and I've got the pathway... sometimes you feel like you're piggy in the middle, sometimes you can just play one off against the other.' P4 described the experience of challenging the training model:

'X decided that I wasn't willing to... he just on paper thought I didn't accept the rules the church because I was off studying at Y even though I wasn't... the theological college system is there to break you and remake remake you, and so I was not doing it right because I was resisting and I wasn't resisting, I was trying to say but you're not doing the breaking and moulding right.'

This is striking both in terms of the way in which the participant felt positioned in relation to the church and in terms of the violent imagery used to describe the formation process.

In their work on pastoral supervision, Jane Leach and Michael Paterson explore the value of Stephen Karpman's drama triangle in understanding the way in which roles are sometimes unconsciously assigned in our forming and recounting of narratives:

...unable to bear our own anger in a stressful situation we may project that anger onto a colleague, parishioner or supervisor; while the other person is then experienced as a persecutor, we are left as a powerless victim, believing there is nothing we can do for ourselves. Unable to bear our own vulnerability in the face of the persecution we are experiencing, we may then look for a rescuer to come to our aid (2015, p. 99).

This set of relationships between victim, persecutor and rescuer can be applied to the way in which participants spoke about their difficult experiences within the MCGB, particularly in relation to feelings of marginalisation and otherness, which led to identifying themselves as victims. The perpetrators can be broadly understood as those within the MCGB who do not support or understand pioneer ministry, and the rescuers those who have 'held the space' (P3) for pioneers, enabling and protecting their ministries. This is a seductive way of understanding experiences because it reduces the 'victim's' responsibility for changing the difficult situation, and the blame can be assigned to the apparently more powerful 'perpetrator', in the form of the church and those who do not appear to value or understand pioneer ministry.

A further and equally seductive role I identified in the data is that of the 'hero'. Frances Ward draws on the work of literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, who describes the hero as 'a fully finished and completed being...hopelessly ready-made' (1996 cited in Ward, 2005, p. 131). Ward identifies that whilst this is an extreme description in which there is no room for growth or development, 'no nuance of appearance or action, no subtlety of voice or layer of meaning' (2005, p. 131), it is one recognisable within the church: 'I think it is possible to detect traces of this heroic type, sometimes when the word "formation" is used, and in particular understandings of ministry that rely upon a clericalized paradigm' (2005, p. 134).

It is indeed 'traces' of this trope that can be found in the data: whilst participants were not perhaps deliberately constructing themselves to be the hero of their story, there were some elements of this. P1 described her approach in relation to a predecessor: 'my predecessor had been a bit

homophobic and you know, basically not interested at all and it was very (awkward laugh) you know, it was one of those situations where you could just go into the ward and smile and say “hello how can I help you?” and you’d immediately be a million per cent improvement’. In relation to a ‘clericalized paradigm’, P3 commented on his role as a pioneer presbyter rather than a lay pioneer: ‘I think one of the differences that presbyters find... that we have a different relationship with the church, and whilst so if you’re a lay... lay pioneers, it’s kind of a job and that’s not denigrating it and denigrating the calling, you know. And so that when they finish doing this maybe they’ll work for the Baptists or you know, whereas it’s not that straightforward for me.’ The importance of being ordained was also identified by P2: ‘the church is able to trust me more to go off and do things because I’ve got this underlying innate connection through my ordination to church, and however frustrating that may be sometimes that’s still there.’

I identified a further dimension to this ‘hero’ trope when taking an overview of the data: because participants’ identities are so closely bound up with their sense of vocation, the story of their pioneer work is in significant part the story of themselves. Further, because each has a unique ministry grown from personal interests, skills and contexts, they are inevitably the hero of their story - participants cannot tell the story of their ministry without making themselves the protagonist.

A particular feature of pioneer ministry which may make both the ‘victim’ and ‘hero’ tropes a predictable part of the story is that pioneers often work alone. Three of the four participants worked entirely alone and one had grown a small team only after a significant period of working alone. This makes it more likely that they become isolated from the church, and indeed current models of pioneering seem to actively encourage this. Combining experiences of marginalisation, understanding ministry differently from others, and frustration at the perceived rigidity of the institution, it is possible to understand how strained and distant relationships with the church occur. From here, the pioneer can easily begin to see themselves as the victim in the relationship. There is also a danger that they come to see themselves as lone saviours of a dying church, or as the hero within their pioneering community, succeeding where others have been perceived to fail.

Narrative and the Christian story

In this final section I am drawing on data from only one of the participants. However, I believe it is worthy of inclusion because it points to a new paradigm, one that moves us beyond binary thinking, othering, and victim/hero tropes by centring on the Christian story.

As discussed, all participants were able to describe difficulties they had had in living out their vocation within the MCGB, and some of these were clearly very painful. In the interview with P4 in particular, I noted the very raw emotions caused by his distressing experiences. Despite this, he was able to locate his story within the Christian story of redemption and resurrection when describing a different phase of ministry where he felt valued as a workplace minister: ‘So it’s quite a

good lenten Easter Resurrection kind of story actually now I can think of it, because this was the moment when it all took off. I was in a church that actually wanted to engage with workplace ministry, was willing to, a congregation that wanted to talk about it'. This reflection is unique in the data in explicitly placing the participant's story within the Christian story, yet it is highly significant.

In Chapter Two I explored the relationship between narrative and Christianity through the work of pastoral theologian David Lyall. Returning to the idea of the research interview as having dimensions of pastoral encounter, Lyall, drawing on the work of psychologist Donald Spence, describes how such encounters can help people find a 'narrative home' for their experiences (2001, p. 46). In the process of the research interview, participants were given the opportunity to reflect at length on themselves and their ministries, and to do this with someone highly empathetic to their experiences. For P4, this process enabled him to identify that there had been redemption in the story of his ministry and that this redemption was rooted in the story of Christ's suffering, death and resurrection.

Noting the absence of references to being part of the Body of Christ, and the significance of this single reference to the resurrection story, it seems possible that the often negative experiences of pioneers in relation to the MCGB need to be contextualised within healthy, life-giving relationships in which pioneers feel themselves connected to the church and to the Christian story. It is important both pastorally and theologically that the MCGB, including its pioneer ministers, seek ways in which this may be brought about.

Chapter summary

In this chapter I have explored four themes that emerged from the data: identity, vocation, body and narrative, and I have analysed these in the light of literature from the disciplines of theology, sociology, psychology and philosophy. Whilst treating the themes as discrete, my analysis has shown that they are interconnected. In identifying this interconnectedness, I have become aware of a recurring thread running through the data.

At several points I have highlighted the complex and ambivalent relationship between pioneers and the MCGB, something I also identified through my initial analysis of the data using the 'theology in four voices' model in Chapter Five. It is clear that pioneers sometimes distance themselves from the church and its inadequacies. Participants identified with the idea of feeling othered and marginalised within the MCGB, whilst also othering those within it. There was both pain and difficulty associated with the MCGB, alongside a sense of being held and connected to it; feelings of frustration, despair, redemption, and affection are all reflected in the data. It is this complex, ambivalent relationship, common to all participants, that has become for me the most significant finding of this research.

In the light of these observations, I have concluded that a meta-theme of 'relationship' can be justified from the data analysis and I understand that this meta-theme may have significant consequences for pioneer presbyteral practice within the MCGB. For this reason I have decided to take this meta-theme forward for further analysis in the next chapter. In addition, the following chapter will include a discussion of the implications of this research for the MCGB and some suggestions for renewed practice.

Chapter Seven: Meta-theme Analysis and Implications of the Research

Introduction

In the previous chapter I explored and analysed the themes of identity, vocation, body and narrative using perspectives from a number of disciplines. Through this process, I arrived at the meta-theme of 'relationship', which is key to seeking a way forward for the MCGB in relation to pioneer ministry. In this chapter I explore three concepts - intentional dialogue, embracing otherness, and reimagining church - that might support the strengthening of relationships between pioneers and the wider MCGB and result in some practical steps that can be taken. In identifying the implications for the MCGB I draw on the traditions of the Methodist Church and through these, offer some suggestions for renewed practice.

Meta-theme: Relationship

At the beginning of this research, it was my intention to explore the experiences and conceptualisations of pioneer presbyters as a way of discovering if and how pioneer presbyteral ministry is a valid expression of a ministry of word and sacrament. Further, I sought to understand how this may be relevant for mission, and particularly the sacramental in mission, within the MCGB at a time of sharp decline and where experimentation with new ideas has become necessary.

Earlier in the research process I named my own vested interest in this research as a pioneer presbyter myself, including my desire to see more presbyters deployed by the MCGB to this kind of work. Whilst this formed part of my early thinking, a recurring theme has emerged from the data that calls this into question: that of the ambivalent relationship between the participant pioneer presbyters and the church. While the nature of relationships more broadly within the MCGB is

beyond the scope of this research, my findings may also point to broader relational issues within the church.

I now offer an analysis of the meta-theme of the pioneer/church relationship using relevant literature from theology, ecclesiology, philosophy, and sociology, through which I identify the implications of this research for the MCGB.

Being in relationship - deepening the meaning of connexionalism?

An important concept underpinning the earlier stages of this research was Heidegger's *dasein*. This was particularly relevant to my exploration of the incarnational model of ministry and to the sacramental aspect of presbyteral ministry. Being-in-the-world gave significance to the presbyter being embodied alongside other embodied selves, to being in a particular geographical place, and to the presence and actions of the presbyter in that place as potentially sacramental. In the light of my research findings, Heidegger's concept of *mitsein*: being-with, provides an important second pole to *dasein*: 'Being-in-the-world, the world is always the one that I share with Others. The world of Dasein is a *with-world*. Being-in is *Being-with* Others' (1962, p. 155). This concept locates us not simply in a place, within the material world, but amongst others. Our being is therefore not only geographical and material, but relational: we might say that our being is being-in-relationship as well as being-in-the-world. This idea of the relational as essential to our humanity suggests that the nature of our relationships, of our being-with, is also essential to our flourishing.

As well as having implications for all our relationships, *mitsein* provides an important corrective to the idea of the lone pioneer away from the community, a danger I now recognise from my use of *dasein* earlier in this research: *being-in* the world of the pioneer context, a world that is usually 'secular' and often far removed from a local church context, makes it possible for the pioneer to see themselves as operating largely as an individual, shaped by place and context rather than by the Christian community of which they remain a part. This is particularly pertinent to Methodist presbyters, who are ordained to a ministry that is representative of the whole Methodist people. *Mitsein* helps redress this, highlighting the importance of our relatedness to others as well as our situatedness in the material world.

Moving to theological concepts, there is much resonance to be found with *mitsein* in theological ideas about being-in-relationship rooted first and foremost in the nature of God. Here I return to the work of Baptist theologian, Paul Fiddes, whose work I referred to in Chapter Two in relation to the sacramental in all of life. Fiddes argues that we should move away from conceptualisations of God as fixed in nature, 'a shift in thought from substance language which is static, to dynamic ideas of movement and relationship. God *happens*, in an interweaving flow of relationships like those between a father and a son, opened up and deepened by the currents of the Spirit' (2000, p. 281).

Roman Catholic theologians Stephan Bevans and Roger Shroeder build on this idea of God as relation with the idea that this is both a centrifugal and centripetal force, moving outwards into the world in order to draw the world into relation with God: 'God in God's deepest identity is a relationship, a communion... This life in communion spills out into creation... calling all of creation, according to its capacity, into that communion, sending that creation forth to gather still more of it into communion' (2011, p.10). This points to something significant about what should underpin Christian mission. Not only should we understand that to be like God is to be relational, we should recognise that our relationality is the *means* by which we draw others into relation with God: 'What is real is going beyond oneself, being in relation, calling others to relation' (2011, p. 10).

This is a particularly important concept for pioneers. They have an instinctive understanding that building quality relationships is key to reaching new people and often relationships are all there is without the trappings of church structures. Yet there are significant questions about the 'being in relation' before 'calling others to relation'. The first precedes the second and the nature of the first has consequences for the second.

Here I return to the work of Methodist theologian Clive Marsh, and his book *Christ in Practice* (2006), which explores the ways in which Christ is made present in the world today, including through relationships. Marsh writes about the dangers of individualism: 'Doesn't such an approach fragment the body of Christ in the world and mean that identification of the presence of Christ is subject to the interpretative skills of individuals?' (2006, p. 43). Marsh goes on to identify that whilst God in Christ is found beyond the church, the church nevertheless remains an important locus for God's presence and action if we are not to give way to individualism (2006, p. 44). His idea of the church as a 'social form of Christ' resonates with the Methodist understanding of social holiness, a defining characteristic of Methodism (The Methodist Church website, *Living a Holy Life*). As John Wesley wrote: "'Holy Solitaires" is a phrase no more consistent with the Gospel than Holy Adulterers. The Gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social, no holiness but social holiness' (Wesley, 1739, p. viii).

To summarise, we in the church need to understand ourselves in terms of relation: because God is relational, Christianity (and Methodism) is relational, and further, our relationships are a significant part of who we are created to be. They are the foundations of our personhood as Christians and must underpin our mission. If we are to build and sustain quality relationships with those in the wider community, we must be grounded in quality relationships within the Christian community. Where our relationships with those outside are built on ambivalent or damaged relationships within, strain is put on those, such as pioneers, who must hold that tension, sometimes an unbearable strain. There is also a danger that without strong connectedness to the church, pioneers and their ministries will be destined to remain Other in relation to it.

The perspectives of Fiddes, Bevans and Shroeder, and Marsh on God as relational being our model for Christian community, offer a way of thinking in which answers may be sought for the

problem of unhealthy relationships within the church. Firstly, they suggest the primacy of relationship, and of right relationships within the Christian community, drawing on the Trinity as the Christian archetype for such relationships. Relationships that are not reflective of this model are not merely unsatisfactory, they are damaging to both the individuals involved and to the church as a whole. Any missional activity grounded in unhealthy or broken relationships will struggle to be truly reflective of a God who calls Christians to community and who reveals Godself in part through such community.

This exploration of the importance of relationships within the church points to the need for the MCGB to address relational issues, and to rediscover its sense of being the Body of Christ. The body has been an important concept within this research from its inception. Initially this was in terms of the individual pioneer's embodied ministry as a means through which connections are made with those outside the church, and through which word and sacrament (or at least the sacramental) may be ministered. In light of my findings, the body remains a central focus but now in terms of the need for embodiedness, connectedness, and a return to connexionalism, focusing as it does on the corporate and connected nature of church which guards against individualism. As *Called to Love and Praise* states, the 'societal and connexional character of early Methodism helped to prevent the idea that any Christian could be 'an island entire unto itself' (The Methodist Church, 1999, para. 4.3.9).

Two strands of thinking from contemporary Methodist ecclesiology are particularly relevant to the MCGB's need to address relationships within it, and rediscover a sense of connexionalism and being the Body of Christ: 'Communion Ecclesiology' and 'Sacramental Ecclesiology'. Communion ecclesiology is a model of church drawn from the Roman Catholic Church and explored by theologian Dennis Doyle in seeking a vision for the Church that 'enlightens and inspires', fosters hope and encouragement' (2000, p. 1). Doyle identifies communion ecclesiology as 'the one basic ecclesiology' though able to accommodate difference, and he suggests that it is a model that can be found in 'Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant versions' (2000, p. 1). Key to communion ecclesiology according to Doyle is its relational dimensions: 'It focuses on relationships, whether among persons of the Trinity, among human beings and God, among members of the Communion of Saints, among members of the parish' (2000, p. 12). Underpinned by the Eucharist, Doyle's vision of the church as 'a web of interconnecting relationships' (2000, p. 13) offers an alternative to institutionalism (rather than the essential institutional aspects of the church) where 'Personal being and interconnectedness lie at the heart of what the Church is. Love, acceptance, forgiveness, commitment, and intimacy constitute the Church's very fabric' (2000, p.13). Such a model points to the connection between the sacramental and relational aspects of the church, and at the potential of these to act as a corrective for what Doyle describes as the 'reductive distortion' of 'a narrowly institutional view of the Church' (2000, p. 14).

Drawing on Doyle's sacramental relational model of communion ecclesiology, American Methodist theologian Justus H. Hunter identifies the benefit of such an ecclesiology to the Methodist Church.

Hunter is particularly interested in the role of communion ecclesiology in relation to Albert Outler's question 'Do Methodists Have a Doctrine of the Church?' (2013, p. 12), related to the complex development of Methodism from a movement of societies to a denominational church, explored earlier in this thesis. Hunter identifies the importance of 'connectionalism' as our gift to ecumenism (2013, p. 14) and its potential to enable a communion ecclesiology (2013, p. 17). This communion ecclesiology draws on the visible structures of the church largely inherited from Anglicanism as a foundation for the intentionally missional focus of evangelicalism, thus reconciling 'the unitive and missional poles of Methodism by casting a vision of the church under the *schema* of communion' (2013, p. 16). There is transformational potential for the church in mission here: 'The visible structures of the church, necessary for communion with God through the means of grace (among which the Eucharist/Communion is central), feed the mission of the church in communion with the missions of the Son and the Spirit' (2013, p.16). Such a perspective has clear implications for Methodist self-understanding as the Body of Christ and as a connexional church, with church structures rooted in the 'spiritual fellowship' and relationships found in the Eucharist, enabling the church's calling to mission.

Hunter's communion ecclesiology, drawn from Doyle, has strong resonances with fellow American theologian Robert K. Martin's work on Wesleyan sacramental ecclesiology, particularly in terms of the relational aspects of the Eucharist and of mission. Martin also proposes a Eucharistic pattern for the Christian community which 'emphasizes a dynamic movement of ever greater participation in God by gathering together, offering all that we have and all that we are, sharing our lives fully in trinitarian communion, and extending the communion we have become to little altars everywhere, especially to the "least of these"' (2013, p. 19). This idea of 'little altars everywhere' has great relevance to the work of pioneer presbyters, who seek ways of making the sacramental character of life visible to those outside the church.

In common with Hunter's ideas about resolving tensions between the institutional and missional dimensions of the church, Martin argues for the potential harmony of sacrament and mission: 'To reframe Wesleyan ecclesiology in terms of a dynamic, relational sacramentality, patterned after the Eucharist, overcomes conventional oppositions of communion and mission by integrating them fully in the effort to follow Jesus Christ' (2013, p. 19). Martin recognises the 'centrality of the sacraments in early Methodist understandings and practices' (2013, p. 26) but states that 'a sacramental perspective is not only grounded in historical retrieval' but is 'the means of following and embodying Christ' (2013, p. 20). Martin cites Roman Catholic theologian Judith Marie Kubicki on an important development in sacramental thinking in the latter half of the twentieth century which has implications for rethinking contemporary ecclesiology along sacramental lines: 'the shift from thinking about the sacraments as objects that dispense grace to perceiving them as relational events of encounters between God and humankind' (2013, p. 27). Such a sacramental theology feeds an ecclesiology 'reconceived from a static state of being to an incarnational, dynamic, relationally-constituted, and effectual reality' (2013, p. 33). Because of its focus on the material and relational, sacramental ecclesiology offers a model of church much more relevant to the

incarnational, dynamic, and relational nature of pioneer ministry, and more broadly, to mission. Of particular significance to the pioneer initiative and the mission of the church is Martin's understanding of the Christian vocation as being 'a living, active, dynamic, relational sacrament through which the image of Christ manifests itself more and more' (2013, p. 37), and of the church as 'best understood as a relational and incarnational verb' (2013, p. 38).

Perspectives from contemporary Methodist ecclesiology envision structures that could better underpin healthy relationships within the church. In doing so, they highlight the connection between ecclesiology and relationships within the church. A common thread running through these perspectives is the Methodist Church's inadequate understanding of its own ecclesiology, hinting at a possible cause for the relational issues that may result. British Methodist ecclesiologist David Chapman highlights that 'the strong teleological orientation of Methodist ecclesiology tends to overemphasize the freedom of the Spirit in such a way that it undermines ecclesiastical order as a received means of giving stable, visible shape to the church' (2018, p. 3). He also states that 'Methodist ecclesiology remains a work in progress' (2018, p. 15). Similarly, Hunter argues that Methodism's transition from society to church 'created something like an ecclesiological vacuum which Methodism never slowed down to fill' (2013, p. 13). Some of the effects of this situation are found in the data, particularly in terms of the difficulties participants cite with structures and processes unsuited to their ministries, the lack of adequate support, accountability and resourcing for their ministries, and a lack of understanding of pioneer ministry from the wider church. Addressing issues of ecclesiology with the purpose of enabling the kind of structures in which relationships, and therefore mission, may flourish offers a safer, supportive, and more robust environment for pioneers and others in the church to undertake the demands of missional engagement with the wider world.

These ideas about the potential relationship between the Eucharist and ecclesiology draw together many of the concepts in this section: the centrality of relationships in the Christian life; the role of relationships as the grounding for and the means of mission; Christianity as a social religion; the relationship between the sacramental and mission. All have implications for a renewed sense of being in Connexion and being the Body of Christ. They also have implications for pioneering ministries and church mission because of the potential to address the relational shortcomings of the MCGB, and harmonise the structural and missional poles of the church.

However, while they offer much transformational potential, it is important to recognise that absolute perfection is not possible nor should the missional activity of the MCGB cease until an arbitrary measure of healthy relationships has been met, as this is unrealistic. In reconciling the tension between current reality and the ideal, I first turn to Methodist perspectives. Perfection has particular importance within Methodism because of Wesley's doctrine of perfection, set out in his sermon 'Christian Perfection' (1944, Sermon XXXV). Whilst Wesley argues for the possibility that 'Christians are saved in this world from all sin, from all unrighteousness; that they are now in such a sense perfect, as not to commit sin' (1944, p. 476), he states that it 'does not imply an exemption

either from ignorance, or mistake, or infirmities, or temptations' (1944. p. 461). As well as setting out the kind of perfection that was and was not possible, Wesley understood that the kind of perfection attainable in this life remained an ongoing process, and was a life's work: 'how much soever any man has attained, or in how high a degree soever he is perfect, he hath still need to "grow in grace", and daily to advance in the knowledge and love of God his Saviour' (1944, p. 462). Perfection may be understood as a journey rather than a destination.

Robert K. Martin, whose work was cited above, explores Wesley's ideas about perfection. Martin considers these ideas particularly in relation to the word 'church' as 'both an institution and the true reality' (2013, p. 25), identifying that conflating 'church' as an institution and as the body of Christ is problematic because 'Christian institutions are inherently sites of sacredness and profanity' (2013, p. 25). He goes on to state that, 'All persons and all institutions and all of our Christian activities fall short of the glory of God. We are not yet what we shall become' (2013, p. 26).

This perspective is firstly helpful in understanding the varied ways in which participants used 'church' in the data and why ambivalent relationships with the church emerged as a key theme. It is also helpful in recognising that the church is 'becoming' what it is called to be and must therefore exercise its calling in the world and its mission in this state of becoming rather than in a state of absolute perfection.

Further theological perspectives on the sacramental are fruitful here: Paul Fiddes, who has been an important conversation partner in relation to the sacramental, identifies a significant feature of sacrament as imperfection. Writing on the role of the minister as sacrament, Fiddes states: 'The whole point of a sacrament is that it is a piece of weak, created and fallible stuff in itself, but is a doorway into the life of the triune God... It can *embody* an ideal without *being* an ideal' (2000, p. 295).

Returning now to Avery Dulles' models of the church, whilst his Sacrament model did not particularly resonate with the data (unlike his servant and herald models), inflected by the work of Martin and Hunter on sacramental and communion ecclesiologies, it may offer a helpful way for pioneers and others to think about the church as it is because it acknowledges the church's imperfect nature whilst also recognising the need for constant reform. Dulles states that the church 'must signify in a historically tangible form the redeeming grace of Christ... The Church does not always signify this equally well' (1987, p. 68). Further, Dulles argues that 'The Church never fully achieves itself as Church, at least not in the conditions of this world' (1987, p. 71) and suggests that 'The Church is continually called to become a better sign of Christ than it has been' (1987, p. 74).

These perspectives on perfection from Martin, Fiddes and Dulles suggest that both the relational and visible matter in church life, but acknowledge that pursuit of perfect relationships within a perfect church is fruitless: we must not only accept imperfection but understand it as part of the

very nature of the Christian life, the church, and the sacramental. However, the church must be at least recognisable as a 'visible, social embodiment of God's grace' (Dulles, 1987, p. 72), it must embody something of the ideal, in order to be a sign and sacrament in the wider world, and it must always seek to improve. Here I return to the Methodist understanding of the church from the Preface to the *Deed of Union* as 'always in need of reform' (The Methodist Church, 1932, p.iii), cited in Chapter Two.

Relationship and dialogue - relearning the skills of Christian conferring?

Bevans and Shroeder's concept of God as relation is developed in their ideas about God as dialogue: 'God's very *nature* is to be in dialogue... an eternal movement or flow of openness and receiving' (2011, p. 26). The emphasis on dialogue here can be seen as the outworking of what it means to be in relationship and in communion. In defining 'dialogue', Bevans and Shroeder identify three meanings which should characterise Christian dialogue: 'good communication between friends', 'an attitude of respect and friendship', and 'the practice of openness to, fairness and frankness with, respect for, sincerity toward and appreciation of people of other Christian churches or other religious ways...' (2011, p. 21). Whilst these principles are intended as the foundation for mission and for ecumenical dialogue, they are also relevant to relationships within the church because practices which reflect right relation are important for mission.

Ideas about dialogue are worthy of reflection in the light of what might be described as a 'breakdown in communication' and a lack of genuine dialogue between participants and the MCGB. A significant factor may be the lack of opportunity for such dialogue as pioneer ministers often work in isolation and can have infrequent contact with the church.

Participants' rejection of existing church models may also prevent them from feeling part of a local church community or local collegiate meeting, meaning that any contact may take the form of required formal processes, ensuring funding continues, or keeping the church updated about project 'progress'. This leaves few opportunities for the kind of dialogue that makes it possible to be vulnerable and honest about the struggles and joys of ministry. This is reflected in my own experience, in which I have reflected upon my own vulnerability in 'putting my work out there' in terms of reports, articles and speaking engagements, and the lack of vulnerability on the part of those on the receiving end. This vulnerability imbalance was a barrier to genuine dialogue in which I and my Circuit could learn from one another, and led to a feeling that I was defending my ministry rather than sharing experiences. This defensiveness was apparent in the data from participants, suggesting a lack of dialogue was a factor for them also.

In developing this idea of dialogue further and looking to what can be offered where genuine dialogue is possible, I now turn to the work of another pastoral theologian, Elaine Graham and her

book *Transforming Practice* (2002). In it she identifies the importance of culturally relevant practice within the Christian community and seeks to offer a model of practice for the postmodern age. Writing on community and communication, Graham draws on the work of philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas, and particularly his work on communication and language, stating that 'Habermas understands identity and selfhood as constructed by language and mediated in "speech-acts"' (2002, p. 146). This location of identity within the means of communication offers an additional perspective on notions of the self discussed in Chapter Six, in which identity was found in relation to context, society, and others. Locating selfhood in the communicative process has implications for the outcome of such a process: Graham states that for Habermas, 'the very existence and use of language guarantees some kind of faith in the possibility of the creation of rational discourse and human community' (2002, p. 146). This idea of human community as the goal of the 'speech-act' is significant and Graham goes on to say that 'Language entails and ensures sociability: any speech-act implies a desire to communicate and a commitment to the possibility of the creation of mutual understanding and shared meaning' (2002, p. 146).

It is possible to see from these descriptions that current forms of communication and conversation within the MCGB are not always conducive to 'mutual understanding and shared meaning'. Nor do they always result in the kind of 'intersubjective communication' that is free from distortion by 'hegemonic institutions and belief-systems' (2002, p. 147). However, Graham argues for the continuation of communication despite the ever-present challenges of the imperfect as 'the communicative possibilities themselves maintain our commitment to continuing such discourse' (2002, p. 148), something that resonates with the work of Fiddes and Dulles on the imperfect nature of the sacramental.

Graham goes on to argue that the 'different' voices serve an important purpose in challenging what has become 'normal': 'The ruptures of dissonance and non-identity serve to break the coercive power of totalizing and knowledge' (2002, p. 149). Here we might say that the MCGB needs its alternative, dissenting voices, but that those voices are most effectively heard in conversation, in dialogue, rather than being asked to 'speak to' the church as represented by institutional processes. From this inclusive and mutual form of engagement where 'other' voices are not just heard but essential to the dialogue, Graham makes the case for 'communicative ethics': 'the open-ended procedure of an "enlarged mentality", which emphasizes the situatedness of participants in mutual dialogue, the necessity of reaching beyond the boundaries of finitude and contingency towards the horizons of hermeneutical and dialogical encounter' (2002, p. 154).

In beginning a process of transformation, we need to become a more intentionally dialogical church. Here the idea of conferring is helpful, a concept rooted in early Methodism. The Conference report *The Nature of Oversight* understands "Christian Conferring" as the bedrock of the Methodist movement' (2005, para. 13) and describes it as:

a process of intentional, prayerful and thoughtful dialogue to which there are two important, complementary strands. As they confer, people intentionally, prayerfully and thoughtfully seek to describe and analyse their experience and to listen to others doing the same, and they give and receive guidance, advice, challenge and support (2005, para. 15).

Returning to the work of David Chapman, he highlights the role of conferring within the Methodist tradition, linking it to Methodism's historical and ecclesiological context, and its reforming nature: 'Lacking a long historical perspective, Methodism exhibits the impatience for reform characteristic of a renewal movement, relying on the process of Christian Conference, within their inbuilt checks and balances, in order to discern the guidance of the Holy Spirit' (2018, p. 11). However, whilst conferring plays a significant part in Methodist governance in our collective consciousness, and has strong roots in Methodism's early practices, in contemporary practice it is not always done well. Meetings are often about information exchange rather than genuine discernment through conferring, and decisions are de facto sometimes already taken beforehand. This means that meetings often act as ratifying rather than conferring bodies. Rediscovering and relearning the practice of effective Christian conferring would hopefully enable the proper discernment of the Holy Spirit, and make possible the openness and vulnerability needed to transform relationships within the MCGB. It may also enable the speaking and hearing of pain caused by the MCGB, an important first step in the transformational process.

Relationship, dialogue, and the Other - towards a more catholic spirit?

Developing this idea of dialogue and the Other, I return to the work of theologian Anthony C. Thiselton. An important feature of the data was the way in which participants both othered the MCGB and felt like the Other within it. Writing on the nature of the postmodern self as facing 'life and society with suspicion rather than trust' (1995, p. 12), Thiselton, drawing on the work of key theologians and philosophers such as Schleiermacher, Gadamer and Ricoeur, emphasises the need for a hermeneutic that crosses boundaries, where we can 'step out of our own frame' (Schleiermacher, 1977 cited in Thiselton, 1995, p. 13) in order to achieve 'genuine understanding... of another human person' (1995, p. 13). Regarding the Other, Thiselton argues that 'we do not seek to manipulate someone whom we genuinely respect and love as an Other in their own right. Yet respect for the other as "*Other*", as a unique agent or active personal subject, stands at the heart of the Christian gospel' (1995, p. 13). Hinting at the way in which hermeneutics, in terms of interpreting other selves, might transform the way in which we understand the Other, Thiselton argues that 'Hermeneutics demands patience, tolerance, and a willingness to understand the other as something more than a projection of one's own prior assumptions. The Other is not an object to be manipulated in accordance with one's own stereotypes and interest' (1995, p. 53).

There are resonances with these ideas about embracing the Other and John Wesley's understanding of the catholic spirit:

his heart is enlarged toward all mankind, those he knows and those he does not; he embraces with strong and cordial affection neighbours and strangers, friends and enemies. This is catholic or universal love. And he that has this is of a catholic spirit. For love alone gives the title to this character — catholic love is a catholic spirit (Wesley, 1944, p. 454).

Whilst this catholic spirit does not point to the validity of all viewpoints - Wesley describes this as 'latitudinarianism' (1944, p. 452) - it is a spirit in which otherness and difference are met with an 'enlarged heart' and a disposition towards the other/Other which is grounded in Christ's love (1944, p. 452).

In applying this to relationships within the MCGB, in which the approach to others should be 'patience, tolerance, and a willingness to understand' it must be preceded by an acknowledgement that othering, resulting in unhealthy relationships characterised by suspicion, breakdown of trust, and feelings of exclusion and marginalisation, does occur within the Christian community; it is important to face the truth of the present situation before seeking renewed ways of being. However, through the conscious adoption of a different approach to the Other, a different hermeneutic becomes possible. From this foundation, Thiselton goes on to explore the place of dialogue in relationship to the Other. Summarising the work of Gadamer on dialogue, Thiselton states that 'dialectic or conversation constitutes the only non-manipulatory mode of apprehending truth which does not pre-determine what counts as true in advance' (1995, p. 70). Thiselton also argues that dialogue has a unique place in the transformation of relationships: 'only in "conversation" can something genuinely "new" emerge which does not reflect the prior manipulative interests of one or more of the speakers' (1995, p. 71).

Further exploring ideas about the Other in a Christian context, a perspective on otherness that sees God as Other is found in the work of Methodist presbyter and theologian Frances Young. Young acknowledges that 'Human creatures are not naturally inclined to welcome difference' (2007, p. 92). However, in seeking an alternative understanding of the Other which enables a spirit of welcome and openness, Young draws on the story of Israel and Exodus, and of the experience of the prophets. For Young, not only can Israel and its prophets be identified with the Other, God is identified with otherness: 'The person who is different, the literal stranger, the "other", is a sign of what Israel truly is, and as the prophet steps into that place, he is also a sign of God's otherness, God's strangeness' (2007, p. 90). Young goes on to identify 'God who is "the Other", utterly different, yet revealed as one with us in Jesus Christ' (2007, p. 92). This idea of God's otherness and simultaneous oneness with us offers a transformed understanding of what it might mean to identify the otherness in people, and to identify how we too are Other to someone else. God is found in otherness, an intrinsic part of both divine and human nature. Rather than fearing and excluding the Other, such a perspective allows us to embrace the Other without and within, and to recognise that, as with God, we are also one with the Other.

Only one participant explicitly named the feeling of otherness in his own experience, and none identified themselves as othering people in the church; instead it seemed to be a subconscious phenomenon. This may reflect our understanding that othering is 'unchristian' behaviour in which we should not consciously partake. However, Young argues that acknowledging difference is key to welcoming difference: 'It is no good pretending there is no difference. If we are to welcome difference, to affirm the "other" and embrace the stranger, we have to acknowledge first that there *is* a difference' (2007, p. 94). This idea of acknowledging the reality of our relationship to others may then be an important first step in reimagining our relationship with the Other.

Experiences of othering and otherness were a common feature within the data and suggest the need for specific practices to address this. Through the process of improved dialogue, the concepts of 'non-manipulatory conversation', identified in the literature, may provide new models of dialogue within the MCGB which encourage understanding of the Other and an openness to being changed by other perspectives. In addition, notions of the otherness of God are a humbling reminder that the experience of otherness is an important part of the Christian experience and that God is to be found in the Other.

Relationship and institutions - conceiving the church as a means of grace?

As I reflect on relational issues an important concept is what the MCGB means by 'church' – in normative, espoused and operant terms.

Returning to the work of Avery Dulles and his book *Models of the Church* (1987), which I explored in relation to Methodist ecclesiology in Chapter Two, explicitly and implicitly participants often used the word 'church' in terms of institutional church, and were critical of this aspect. Dulles argues for the need for institutional aspects of the church, suggesting that its mission and ministry would not be effective 'unless it had responsible officers and properly approved procedures' (1987, p. 34). However Dulles points out the difference between the essential elements of the church as institution verses institutionalism, 'in which the institutional element is treated as primary' (1987, p. 35). It is perhaps this tendency towards institutionalism that is seen as the enemy of pioneering forms of ministry and has become conflated with the church as institution. Indeed Dulles highlights the 'deformation' of the church in this way 'remains in every age a real danger to the institutional Church' (1987, p. 35).

Dulles critiques the Institution model in a way that suggests how it may be problematic for pioneers and at odds with their thinking and practice. He identifies the ecclesiocentric tendencies of this model, stating that it benefits 'its own members' (1987, p. 41) and seeks to save souls 'precisely by bringing them into the institution' (1987, p. 42). Dulles also acknowledges that the Institution model can be a barrier to innovation and experimentation, describing it as raising 'obstacles to a creative and fruitful theology' (1987, p. 44). Finally, in an argument particularly pertinent to the postmodern context of pioneer ministry, Dulles suggests it is out of step with a context of dialogue, ecumenism

and interfaith working: 'the monopolising tendencies of this model are unacceptable' (1987, p. 44). There are strong resonances with these criticisms within the data, with one description of the institutional church as 'life-sucking', and another of it being too inwardly focused.

However, two other models offered by Dulles resonate more positively with the data, those of Mystical Communion and Servant. The Mystical Communion model contrasts the 'structured society' of institutions with the 'informal or interpersonal community' (1987, p. 47), and emphasises the 'personal relationships' that characterise it. There are clear resonances here with Hunter's 'communion ecclesiology' and Martin's 'sacramental ecclesiology', both of which focus on the relational and dynamic nature of the Eucharist as a model for the church. As such, being the Body of Christ is rooted in sharing the Body of Christ in the Eucharist, and is the foundation for spiritual communion with God and with one another. The preference for relational ways of understanding organisational structure, as described by Dulles and advocated by Hunter and Martin as a way forward for Methodist ecclesiology, can be identified in the data. Participants used phrases such as 'Christ-like community' and 'my people' when talking about those amongst whom they minister, and all participants spoke about the importance of relationship-building within their contexts.

Dulles' 'Servant' model stand out from his other models because all the other models 'give a primary or privileged position to the Church' (1987, p. 89) whereas the Servant model is a 'secular-dialogic' between church and world (1987, p. 92). This 'secular-dialogic' can be identified in the overarching model of pioneering itself as located in the secular world and in dialogue with those outside the church. The concept of service in the world is also significant here as pioneering often involves ministry amongst marginalised people. Within the data, participants' rejection of clerical power or status, their understanding that God is present and active in the world beyond the church, and their common understanding of ministry 'alongside' as opposed to 'to' people resonate strongly with the Servant model.

Dulles' work offers a helpful lens through which to understand pioneers' conceptualisations of the church because it shows that the church can be conceptualised in different ways, the range of which I observed within Methodist normative thinking as exemplified by *Called to Love and Praise* in Chapter Two. My analysis of the meanings behind references to 'the church', in light of the models offered by Dulles, suggests that once again there is complexity in the pioneer/church relationship. Whilst participants have a largely negative view of the church as institution, they also need its recognition and authorisation, and all participants have benefitted from its structures and procedures in relation to pioneer ministry. There is however, a preference for models of church that offer more contextual, relational and incarnational approaches appropriate in pioneering contexts. Perhaps the experiences of pioneers point to the ways in which further attention needs to be paid by the MCGB as a whole to the way in which the church is being conceptualised and embodied at all levels of the organisation.

Given the difficulties the data demonstrates between pioneers and the MCGB, it is tempting to lay blame at the door of the institutional aspects of the church, which stifle and constrain, and to consider whether those experimenting with new forms of ministry could thrive without the institution. However, the data also points to the importance of some institutional aspects of the MCGB, particularly in relation to its authorising and public role. Institutional aspects of the MCGB might also be relevant to the experiences of being held and connected – something pioneers (myself included) noticed the lack of.

Theological and philosophical perspectives further illuminate the potentially positive role of institutions. In identifying the value of institutions, particularly in relation to practice, a key dialogue partner is philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre. Writing in *After Virtue* (2011), MacIntyre argues that there is a close relationship between practice and practitioners: 'Every practice requires a certain kind of relationship between those who participate in it' (2011, p. 223). Further, 'To enter into a practice is to enter into a relationship not only with its contemporary practitioners, but also with those who have preceded us in the practice' (2011, p. 226). MacIntyre states the importance of not confusing practice with institutions (2011, p. 226) but acknowledging that practices need institutions if they are to survive:

Institutions... are involved in acquiring money and other material goods; they are structured in terms of power and status, and they distribute money, power and status as rewards. Nor could they do otherwise if they are to sustain not only themselves, but also the practices of which they are bearers. For no practices can survive any length of time unsustained by institutions (2011, p. 226).

This is significant in terms of the often negative connotations of institutional church. There is a lack of acknowledgment, particularly from those who have rejected institutional models, that the institution remains vital. As discussed in Chapter Two, within the Methodist tradition there may be specific issues with notions of institution because Methodism's transition from pioneering movement to institution is not always regarded positively. However, pioneering mission has remained a part of our tradition and can be seen in contemporary pioneer initiatives, through which people are authorised and resourced by the institution.

It may be that as a church we need to rethink our understanding of what it means to be an institution in order to embrace what it offers, whilst seeking to renew what has become damaging. MacIntyre acknowledges the dangers and the potential 'corrupting power of institutions' (2011, p. 226) in relation to practice, stating that 'the ideal and creativity of the practice are always vulnerable to the competitiveness of the institution' (2011, p. 226). This recognition of the negative aspects of institutions is particularly pertinent to the church, where a focus on power, money, and status may not sit comfortably with Christian ideals.

In rethinking institutions in explicitly Christian ways, the work of Roman Catholic eco-feminist theologian Mary C. Grey is helpful. In common with MacIntyre, Grey proposes that Christians should not reject an institutional model of church. Acknowledging that the church has 'lost its way' and is failing to respond adequately to the issues of contemporary society (1997a, p. 48), Grey also argues that it cannot abandon the idea of being an institution: 'I am convinced that to pretend that we could do without institutions and the structures and practices which maintain them, in favour of loosely prophetic groups on the margins, is not only an illusory hope, but it would be élitist in the extreme' (1997a, p. 47). Grey recognises the 'deep tensions between charism and institution' (1997b, p. 8) whilst proposing a new way of framing institutional structures through theology:

The activity of theologizing is a deeply meaningful human activity which discloses God's presence within the life of faith, and makes claims on human beings continually, challenging us to explore and celebrate structures of grace - not structures of sin, nor structures which stifle human freedom to grow in harmony with the rhythms of the cosmos' (1997b, p. 8).

In common with Grey's work, that of other feminist theologians offer alternative models of church whose inclusivity and 'off-centredness' is of potential benefit to pioneer ministries. Natalie Watson's work on feminist ecclesiology identifies the ways in which the patriarchal institution is 'oppressive' for women (2002, p. 101) and argues for 'the reclaiming and re-reading of traditional structures and concepts as well as the creative and constructive development of new communities and their practices of faith and spirituality' (2002, p. 101). For Watson, the goal of feminist ecclesiology is the transformation of the church 'as a site of meaning into a body of those whose shared lives embody and proclaim the values of the reign of God' (2002, p. 101). Similarly to Grey, Watson's feminist ecclesiology does not reject the institutional aspect of the church: 'it embraces existing institutional structures as well as the discourses of faith of those who reject those structures for a variety of reasons' (2002, p. 102). Key to this inclusivity are the 'open spaces' that feminist ecclesiology seeks (2002, p. 105). However, whilst not rejecting church as institution, Watson states that the starting point for feminist ecclesiology is not the institution 'but the world in which women (and men) who are church live' (2002, p. 105). This conceptualisation of the church is supremely relevant to those whose ministry is located primarily in the world rather than the church, and may enable the church to be reshaped for and by those on and beyond its margins 'by a dynamic process of transformation and change' (2002, p. 105).

Elaine Graham, drawing on the work of second wave feminist theologians such as Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Rosemary Radford Ruether, also asks questions about the ways in which feminist ecclesiology might change the church. In common with Watson, Graham highlights the need to seek alternatives to 'patterns of hierarchy and exclusion' associated with patriarchal institutions but is more sceptical about the role institutional church might have in this: Graham contrasts the success of the 'Women-Church' movement as one in which 'women have sought new ways to name their everyday experience as sacred and to exercise new patterns of ministry and leadership' with the 'mixed success' of 'Institutionally-led initiatives, such as the World Council of

Churches' programme on *The Community of Women and Men in the Church* (2018, p. 1). Also in common with Watson, Graham recognises the transformative role of feminist ecclesiologies, describing Women-Church as having the potential to be 'a sacrament of inclusion and transformation' (2018, p. 22). A significant contribution of feminist ecclesiology is what Graham describes as its 'more performative quality, in which the liturgical, missional, and symbolic practices of the faithful are held to embody new models of what it means to be the Body of Christ in the world' (2018, p. 21). There are resonances here with the contemporary Methodist ecclesiology explored earlier in this chapter, particularly in terms of the synergy between what happens within the worshipping community and its mission in the world, and in terms of the central focus on embodied nature of the Christian community.

'Structures of grace', the creation of 'open spaces', and a 'performative' ecclesiology may be significant goals for the MCGB in rethinking its institutional characteristics, and reshaping its structures and practices for the flourishing of relationships within it and for its missional endeavours. The MCGB might be reimagined as a church built on 'structures of grace' discovered through the work of theology done in 'open spaces', modelled on the community initiated by Jesus' ministry of embodied relationship, and in which the lived experiences of ordinary people permeate the church's practices. These offer an alternative to notions of the impersonal and controlling models on to which we fall back, particularly when threatened. There may be some resonance here with the Methodist notion of the means of grace, described in John Wesley's sermon 'On visiting the sick' as more than simply dominical sacraments or works of piety like prayer (Wesley, 1872, para. 1). This might help us focus on the way in which not only worship and fellowship amongst Christians might be means of grace, but decision-making meetings and missional encounters too. It may be possible to conceive of the church itself as a means of grace, perhaps in ways that again connect with Dulles' notion of the church as a sacrament that is both an experience of grace and pointer towards it.

Being God's mission - towards us all becoming more vile?

One key shortcoming that must be addressed in the reimagining of the church is the MCGB's relationship to pioneer work. It was clear that individual pioneers, not the MCGB, were taking the majority of the risk, both in terms of the personal and emotional vulnerability involved in working on the margins, and more practically, in financial terms. Whilst there were mixed responses in terms of levels of support, there was a lack of evidence for significant institutional engagement with the work being done by participants, and a lack of investment on the part of the MCGB.

Missiologist David Bosch's influential work *Transforming Mission* (Bosch, 1991) offers an effective model for the institution's relationship with missional work. Bosch argues that the church itself is missional: 'the church is not the sender but the one sent. Its mission (its "being sent") is not secondary to its being; the church exists in being sent and building up itself for the sake of its

mission' (1991, p. 372). This perspective does not allow for mission to be a fringe activity but rather the work of the whole church (1991, p. 372). Bosch, drawing on the work of Lesslie Newbigin, acknowledges that this does not mean the church does nothing else but missionary projects but that all the work of the church has a 'missionary dimension' (1991, p. 373). This is significant for the way in which we understand the purpose of the institutional church. It also places a greater burden of responsibility on the institution, represented by the local church through to the Connexion as a whole, for the missional work of individuals within it.

Drawing on the New Testament model of mission found in the writings of Paul, Bosch identifies that individuals were sent from their churches to assist Paul in his missionary endeavours but that they did so as representatives of their churches:

Through them the churches themselves are represented in the Pauline mission and become co-responsible for the work. As a matter of fact, not being represented in this venture constitutes a shortcoming in a local church; such a church has excluded itself from participating in the Pauline missionary enterprise' (1991, p. 132).

Bosch goes on to highlight that this places significant emphasis on the relationship between the individual and their church: 'The role of the co-workers only becomes transparent if seen in relation to the churches... The foundational relationship between the co-workers and the local churches has to be taken into account at all times' (1991, p. 132).

Perhaps as an inevitable result of the small numbers engaged in exclusively pioneering ministries within the MCGB, there has become too much focus on pioneering as an individual rather than a corporate endeavour, a position intensified by the difficulties that currently exist within the pioneer/church relationship.

Related to the reimagining of institutions is the role of institutions in the mission of the MCGB. There has been an unintended separation of missional projects from the wider life of the church, through which the initiators of such projects have become disconnected from the church and the MCGB has not always fulfilled its responsibilities towards them. In some cases, pioneer ministry has become an 'add on' for the MCGB, practiced by a small and exclusive group of individuals. Bosch's ideas, rooted in the mission of Paul, of mission as the purpose and responsibility of the *whole* church are a helpful corrective to current practices.

The rediscovery and valuing of the pioneering practices of the early Methodist movement may be important here. In rebalancing responsibility for pioneer ministry, the notion of risk-taking on the part of the whole church is important. Here the concept of becoming 'vile' in the manner of John Wesley is helpful: recognising the missional need, he set aside his concern for respectability and preached the Gospel outdoors: 'I submitted to be more vile and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation, speaking from a little eminence in a ground adjoining to the city, to about

three thousand people' (Wesley, 1951, ch. 3, April 2nd). In our corporate missional endeavours, there is then a need for *all* Methodists, not just pioneers, to embrace risk, to become vile, to abandon concerns of respectability - and safety - in order to act missionally.

Summary of implications for the MCGB

At the start of this research my focus was on pioneer presbyteral ministry as one valid outworking of the mission of the MCGB in its contemporary context. It was also focused on the particular calling of the pioneer presbyter to minister word and sacrament in ways different from those in Circuit but relevant for the varying contexts in which they ministered. In other words, the focus was outward facing: relating to the interface between church and world as embodied by the pioneer presbyter, and as conceptualised by those within this community of practice.

Over the course of the research, this focus has moved inwards to the relationship between people within the MCGB and between various aspects of the church's work. Despite this move inwards, the focus remains upon mission. The data, as I have explored it in relation to relevant literature points to the importance of being-with, of being in relationship, as key to our very being as humans and as Christians. Further, it has highlighted that relationships within the Christian community are how we draw others to God and into Christian community. Earlier in this research I described the incarnational model of ministry, of 'being here', embodied in a particular place, as both medium and message in Christian mission. In the light of my findings, I now add to this our 'being-in-relationship'. I therefore suggest that relationships within the MCGB need to reflect more closely the nature of the Triune God in order for us to become a truer reflection of Christian community, and so to draw others in more effectively. To be a truly missional church we must also be a truly relational church.

As I have reflected on what pioneers are saying and upon the themes that emerged from the data I have begun to see connections between what is needed in the MCGB and some of the core themes that might describe Methodist DNA: the need to deepen our sense of connexionalism, to relearn the skills of Christian conferring, to rediscover the catholic spirit, to understand the church as a means of grace, and to become vile for the sake of mission. It is ironic that the pioneers I interviewed seemed disconnected from this heritage at a conscious level and yet were embodying some of it (catholic spirit and becoming more vile) and, as I interpret the data, were crying out for the transformation of the MCGB in the light of the rest.

I am aware in presenting these implications, I have presented an ideal for the MCGB that may be aspirational. However, in the final section of this chapter, I will suggest some practical means by which the MCGB may move and is perhaps already moving towards a new way of being in which pioneer spirits might be better supported. Here I want to return to the concept of Methodism as practical theology, discussed in Chapter Two, and to contemporary perspectives on Methodist ecclesiology. David Chapman describes Methodist ecclesiology as 'an exercise in practical

theology' (2018, p. 15) and, whilst identifying its 'systematic inconsistencies' (2018, p. 16), acknowledges some of the potential advantages this offers the MCGB, particularly in relation to mission, as 'flexible and adaptable in response to changing circumstances, culture, and missionary needs as it seeks to articulate an authentically Methodist way of being the church in a particular time and place' (2018, p. 5). This echoes the view of American Methodist theologian Russell Richey. Writing in the United Methodist context, Richey argues for 'practical theology as the Methodist and Wesleyan mode' (2009, p. xi). He identifies itinerancy, superintendency, and structural features of connexionalism and conferring as ways of living out the New Testament, suggesting that these 'embody practices and implicit understandings that stand up to the best in the Christian tradition's notion of "church"' (2009, p. xi). Drawing on Richey's work, Justus H. Hunter concludes that 'Methodism's practised ecclesiology is *apropos* the contemporary situation' (2013, p. 15). This 'practised ecclesiology' has the potential to enable an adaptive approach to the 'contemporary situation' of the MCGB and to its cultural context. Thus the MCGB has within its DNA an ecclesiology that should allow the church to reshape itself for the current missional context, with practice at its heart.

Renewed practice in the MCGB

The first two suggestions in this final section are pieces of work already being undertaken by the MCGB. This suggests that, whilst this research has focused on the experiences of pioneer presbyters, some of the issues raised by it are common across the MCGB, and are being addressed.

A Methodist Way of Life

Recently, the MCGB has been engaged in a process of devising a 'Methodist Way of Life'. Similar to but more loose than a Rule of Life, this Way of Life is based around the principles of *Our Calling*: worship, learning and caring, service, evangelism, (The Methodist Church, 2000) and offers a suggested structure for regular action under these headings. These include daily prayer and regular worship, practising hospitality and generosity, serving people in our communities, and living so that others may be drawn to Jesus. Chair of the project, the Revd. Dr. Roger Walton describes its purpose as 'to set out, in simple terms, what being a Methodist is all about' and 'to explore our Methodist way of living out our Christian commitment' (2020, p. 20).

The initiation of such a project at this time suggests that the Methodist people need to rediscover denominational identity and find new (or old) ways of feeling connected to other Methodists in a common purpose. The idea of rules for living have their roots in early Methodism, and 'have deep resonance and reconnection with our tradition' (Walton, 2020, p. 21). This initiative may therefore

enable Methodists to see afresh the traditions and practices of our past and reinterpret them for the contemporary context.

One possible consequence of this Way of Life particularly pertinent to this research is the rediscovery of classes and bands. The Methodist Church website states that:

These groups, called 'classes and 'bands' met regularly, and the idea was to be accountable to each other about how each person was living the Christian life. So people had to be very open and willing to be changed by the experience.

In the twentieth century it became less common for classes to meet in this way, but recently many Methodists have been trying to reclaim this tradition (The Methodist Church website, *Small Groups*).

The rediscovery of such small group meetings offers a way for the MCGB to become more relational, at their best providing space for embodied encounter, theological conversation, and vulnerability before one another, deepening discipleship and relationships in the process.

They may also provide a way of keeping pioneers connected to the church. The experience of participants, myself included, and anecdotally the experience of others in pioneering ministries, is one of feeling disconnected from the church, and particularly from regular Sunday worship, which can feel very distant from the contexts in which we minister during the week. In addition, attendance at 'business' meetings, which can be regarded by pioneers as irrelevant, or may involve the vulnerability of presenting (justifying) their work in front of the gathering, are not always opportunities for positive interactions. The small group meeting could therefore provide a safer space for pioneers to be 'real' about the joys and sorrows of their ministries, and importantly in turn to hear the joys and sorrows of the Christian life for others within in the Christian community.

Supervision

Another recent initiative on the part of the MCGB is that of compulsory supervision for all its ordained ministers by September 2020. The Methodist Church website states that 'Every ordained minister is required to meet 1:1 for an hour and a half with a trained, resourced and approved supervisor to reflect on their vocation and practice at least 6 times per year'. Its purpose is 'to support effective mission and ministry as part of a culture of prayer, accountability, support and safety for all who minister and for those amongst whom they work' (The Methodist Church website, *About Supervision*). Supervision is in part a response to the isolated nature of ordained ministry in the MCGB and the need to ensure appropriate support and accountability in a culture in which safeguarding has become central. (The Methodist Church website, *Supervision FAQs*).

Writing about the theological underpinnings of supervision, Director of Supervision for the MCGB Jane Leach highlights the calling of the ordained to be part of a connected body, drawing on Paul's theology in Colossians:

...it is clear that the calling is not only *my* calling, but *our* calling and that God's blessing will come to us as we join our hearts and hands. As we share the life of vocation together in intentional ways, so we will be nourished for the work that God is calling us to do. The pattern is given in Paul's use of body imagery. Nourished and held together by its ligaments and sinews, the body holds fast to the head and grows with a growth that is from God (Colossians 2.19) (2020, p. 1).

The idea that ministerial vocation is a collegiate as well as an individual calling is particularly pertinent in the light of my research findings, and the practice of supervision offers a meaningful way in which pioneer presbyters may share in their corporate responsibility within the wider college of presbyters and within the Body of Christ. It is a practice through which pioneers may receive support and experience accountability for their work, again particularly relevant given the often detached, isolated, and immersive nature of their ministries. Supervision also provides a space in which the experiences of pioneers may be heard regularly and in which they can reflect on their practice in a way that is not always possible through other interactions with the church. Supervision is now being taught within the MCGB as 'a means of grace by which the whole church might be recalled to life' (Leach, 2020. p. 15).

Pioneer communities

A further suggestion for renewed practice is that of the setting up of pioneer communities. The Methodist Church website states that those on Pioneering Pathways should seek out 'communities of practice': 'It encourages pioneers to meet with others who are engaged in similar ministries so that they can share together, learn together and grow together' (The Methodist Church website, *Methodist Pioneering Pathways*). Whilst this suggests the importance of pioneers meeting together, it lacks rigour - it is encouraged rather than required, perhaps in part a reflection of the nature of pioneer ministers. Whilst the suggestion is to meet together, anecdotally the reality is of informal, ad hoc groups rather than a coordinated approach, meaning pioneers may slip through the net, either by accident or design. It also remains the case that whilst pioneers may be encouraged to participate in these communities of practice, the primary model of pioneering within the MCGB remains individuals initiating and developing new projects.

As my research has shown, this raises a number of issues: the isolation and marginalisation of pioneers, the development of ministries entirely reliant on the gifts and skills of one individual, and the lack of responsibility taken by the wider church for such ministries. The setting up of pioneer communities, in which a small group rather than single individuals becomes the primary way the MCGB pioneers new ministries offers one way of mitigating against such issues. This model could

include a small number of pioneers working together with representatives from the local churches, or a single pioneer with a robust supporting group, all working within and familiar with the context of ministry. Such communities might themselves be considered 'in band', in which the groups would covenant to share their joys and sorrows and offer support and accountability to one another.

The setting up of these communities would hopefully ensure that the MCGB, whether at local, Circuit, District or Connexion is much more rigorous in both its preparations for a new pioneer ministry and its support for the pioneer, avoiding the situation where pioneers are simply given permission to 'go and do their thing' on behalf of the church.

Conferring Church

A return to the practice of conferring would require an intentional refocusing of the MCGB's meetings at every level. In order to 'intentionally, prayerfully and thoughtfully' speak and listen (The Methodist Church, 2005, para. 15), it will be necessary to give this proper time, and possibly training in, for example, listening skills, within the MCGB, for the development of a more dialogical approach within meetings. It may also require the reimagining of meeting spaces so that they invite conferring and dialogue rather than reinforce either the power or vulnerability of individual speakers. A conferring church would present opportunities for pioneer presbyters to play a full part in their oversight responsibilities within the MCGB and to ensure that the perspectives of pioneers are properly fed into the life of the church.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have explored the meta-theme of relationship in the light of the concepts intentional dialogue, embracing otherness, and reimagining church in order to point some ways forward for the MCGB in its thinking and practice. I have analysed the meta-theme in the light of relevant literature and teased out some of the implications of this for the MCGB by drawing on its own heritage as a resource for future practice. Finally I have identified how a Methodist Way of Life, supervision, pioneer communities, and a conferring church may form part of a renewed practice in relation to pioneer ministry, and potentially more broadly for the renewal of relationships within the MCGB.

In the following and final chapter I will identify the contribution to knowledge and practice made by this research and offer possible areas for further research. I will identify the limitations of this research, and reflect on my research journey and the ways in which it has informed my own practice.

Chapter Eight: Concluding Reflections

Introduction

In this final chapter, I give an overview of the research process. I return to the gap in knowledge I originally identified and set out the contribution to knowledge and practice. I will reflect on the limitations of this research and suggest areas for further related research. Finally I will offer some personal reflections on my research journey.

Overview of the research

This research started with my professional interest in the role of pioneer presbyters in the MCGB, particularly the ways in which they minister word and sacrament. In my Stage One papers I focused on the ways in which word and sacrament could be understood in broad terms, relevant to those ministering beyond the current reach of the church. In the light of the data and subsequent analysis, this research has become focused upon the relationships between pioneers and the MCGB. Overall, the research has been a journey from the outward-facing dimensions of the pioneer presbyter's ministry in the wider world to the inward-facing dimensions of the pioneer's relationship with the MCGB. There has also been a shift from a concern with the practice of individual pioneers towards the corporate practice of the MCGB, particularly in terms of its relationships.

Contribution to knowledge and practice

This research fills a gap in knowledge about the experiences and conceptualisations of pioneer presbyters in relation to their ministry. Having set out to discover these, my initial interest in word and sacrament in pioneering has been overshadowed by the key finding of this research, namely the ambivalent nature of the relationship between pioneers and the MCGB. There are however, a number of other important findings to report.

Participants had a strong sense of identity as pioneers and as presbyters. This was rooted in their understanding of being different from other presbyters and recognising the shortcomings of the MCGB; the concept of the Other was closely linked to these aspects of identity. Yet their identity was also rooted in a clear sense of calling to presbyteral ministry within the MCGB and to their identification with word, sacrament and pastoral oversight. The data showed that identity was bound up with vocation, and this was powerfully highlighted when participants experienced a threat to their vocational identity, the cause of significant pain and a loss of identity.

Embodiment has been a central concept in this research, initially in terms of ministering word and sacrament in pioneer contexts. The data showed that this was indeed the case and participants gave many examples of the ways in which they embodied their ministry and resonated with incarnational and relational models of ministry. However, the data also revealed how both body language and body vocabulary played a significant part in the way in which participants expressed their experiences of and relationship to the MCGB. The body, physically and conceptually, was the locus for the joys and sorrows of pioneer presbyteral ministry.

Drawing these findings together, this research has shown that the MCGB has work to do in relation to pioneer ministry if it is not to remain a marginalised add-on to other aspects of church life. There is evidence that pioneer ministry is not always valued and properly funded, often meaning that the burden of risk and vulnerability lies disproportionately with individual pioneers. The current model of individuals being sent out to work largely in isolation contributes both to this vulnerability and to the lack of responsibility for pioneer ministries by the MCGB. This in turn contributes to a sense of disconnection from the church felt by pioneers, with negative consequences for the ways in which they think about and relate to the MCGB, particularly as an institution. Opportunities for the MCGB to learn from its pioneers are being missed and current formation practices do not always prepare pioneers adequately for their distinctive ministries.

In terms of renewed practice, initiatives which enable dialogue and the deepening of relationships, such as ministerial supervision, and initiatives which encourage connectedness to one another and to our roots as an evangelical movement, such as the Methodist Way of Life, offer significant opportunities for becoming a more relational church and for the MCGB learning more effectively from those engaged in pioneering. In addition, pioneer communities which include both pioneers and supporters from the within MCGB may also contribute to our becoming a more relational church where mutual learning takes place, as well as rebalancing the responsibility for pioneer ministry towards the whole church and away from individual pioneers.

My findings were unexpected and have led to a change in focus. However, that there are clear resonances with other pieces of research relating to sector and pioneer ministry, and that the MCGB is already beginning to address aspects of its relationships suggests my research makes a contribution to current thinking in these areas from the distinct perspective of pioneer presbyters.

Finally, as well as challenging some of the practices of the MCGB in relation to pioneer ministry, this research may also challenge some of the ways in which the MCGB thinks about mission. There has been a strong narrative in recent years that the MCGB has become too inward looking and that it must turn its attentions outwards towards wider society if it is to engage others in the Christian faith. I believe my findings challenge the simplicity of this assumption. The idea of a relational church modelled on a relational God, and of that as a means of mission in the world, of 'being in relation, calling others to relation' (Bevans and Shroeder, 2011, p. 10), suggest that

relationships within the church are central to our missional endeavours and worthy of significant attention.

It is interesting to reflect that my research started out rooted in assumptions about the need to be outward facing in order to be missional, focused as it was on the interface between the church and the world through the pioneer minister. The change of direction in light of the findings has led me to a rebalancing of the contextual and the relational, of *dasein* and *mitsein* (Heidegger, 1962), which in turn suggests some inner work and soul-searching on the part of the MCGB is a proper response to the current missional context.

Limitations and areas for further research

Reflecting on the limitations already identified in Chapter Three, this research is limited by the exclusive use of the qualitative research paradigm, contributing to its relative lack of transferability. However, my findings reveal some strong resonances with other pieces of research and with initiatives already being undertaken by the MCGB, which suggest it has some relevance beyond the scope of this study.

I have been cognisant of both the small pool of participants I have had to draw upon and of being part of that pool myself. This is undoubtedly significant in terms of one of my key findings, that of feelings of marginalisation and being the Other, something I may have been keen to draw out of the data from participants because of its resonances with my own experiences. The decision to draw data from only those exercising pioneer presbyteral ministry has also limited the experiences and conceptualisations I have accessed, and here I acknowledge a sacrifice of breadth in this research.

A further related limitation is that of the number of participants interviewed. I recognise that four is a small number, again affecting transferability and breadth, although I included some mitigations through purposefully selecting participants with differing amounts of time in ministry, including a balance of men and women, and a balance of officially recognised pioneers and those in secular appointments. However, I also recognise the richness of the data, something made possible through extended interviews with a small number of participants.

Other areas for research have become apparent during the research process. Firstly, and most obviously, my original intentions to focus on the ways in which pioneer presbyters minister word and sacrament in secular contexts have been diverted by the data, and while I have included some analysis of this, there is much more to be discovered about these aspects of presbyteral ministry as exercised beyond pulpit and table.

Secondly, the experiences explored have been exclusively of pioneers and of presbyters. Some comparative studies that include the experiences of Circuit ministers, deacons and lay ministers, particularly focused on relationships within the MCGB, would be of value at a time when it is beginning to address issues of relationality. Also of merit may be research into the conceptualisations of word and sacrament amongst Circuit ministers compared with pioneer ministers as a way of better defining the role of the presbyter in relation to church and world.

Finally, whilst hearing the voices of pioneers has been an important driver for this research, I have been acutely aware of the key voices who have been missing: those of the people amongst whom pioneers minister. Although I took the decision not to explore the meanings made by those within the pioneer's community early on in the research process, I have not forgotten their importance in helping the MCGB to understand what it means to be a pioneer and a presbyter, and what difference pioneer ministry makes in the wider world. Research within this group would undoubtedly be of great value.

Personal reflections on the doctoral journey

Studying for the Professional Doctorate has had a profound impact on me, both personally and professionally, and I am reminded of the quote from Coghlan and Brannick I used in Chapter Four: 'In membership role methodology, your whole self is engaged in the research. You will be changed through the process' (2001, p. 41). When I began it was my hope that this research might persuade the MCGB to deploy more presbyters to pioneering appointments. I recognised the need for more ministers to be released to serve exclusively in secular contexts, given the context of drastic decline, and recognised the potential value of presbyters in mission. My findings have caused me to reevaluate this view and I have concluded that whilst the pioneer initiative should continue, I am at the very least cautious about the extent to which this should be the case until the MCGB has addressed issues of relationally and responsibility.

Of great personal and professional significance during the course of this research was my decision to leave my own pioneer ministry and take up an appointment as a chaplain in the British Army. My reasons for moving on from pioneering are closely related to many of the findings of this research and have undoubtedly had an impact on the way in which I have interpreted and analysed the data. My own relationship with the MCGB during my time as a pioneer was not an easy one and I experienced a number of serious flaws in the way in which my ministry was held and supported by the church. These included a lack of financial and pastoral support, and little desire to understand the theology and practice of pioneering amongst some of those designated to oversee my ministry. Added to the particular demands of working with very vulnerable and marginalised people in my pioneer context, these issues had a significant impact on my well-being.

The process of answering my own interview questions in order to use my own data in this research resulted in responses that were largely negative in relation to the MCGB, something I had in common with one of my participants. I have therefore been very careful in the use of my own data within this research to ensure that it is more than autoethnography. However, I must also acknowledge that my selection of relationships as the meta-theme from the data, and my focus on the painful and difficult aspects of the pioneer/church relationship may well have been influenced by my own experiences.

Despite the personal and professional difficulties I encountered during my research journey, it is probably not too strong to suggest that the research process has been a healing one in that it has changed my attitudes towards the church, and particularly towards the institutional aspects of the MCGB. I became aware of my own cynicism towards the church in the earlier stages of the research journey. My analysis of the literature relating to the essential and positive aspects of institutional church, in particular Mary C. Grey's idea of 'structures of grace' (1997b, p. 8) have caused me to reflect deeply upon and to reevaluate these attitudes. I now understand that, while there are issues to address, the institution should be an instrument of mission rather than a hindrance to it. This has been one area in which my own practice has been transformed: from the beginnings of my pioneer ministry I kept my contact with the church to a minimum, both in terms of meetings and worship. I have since realised the dangers of this and recognised the need to rebuild this relationship. I am now more connected and engaged with the life of the MCGB, recognising the importance of this in a chaplaincy as much as in a pioneering role. I have also come to recognise the importance of the Methodist tradition as a resource for renewed practice in the contemporary MCGB.

One further way in which the research has changed my own professional practice has been in the area of body language and body vocabulary. I had been aware of the embodied encounter as a key way in which I expressed my own ministry and identified embodiment as an important concept at the start of this research. However, though the process of face to face interviews and detailed data analysis, I have become aware of the importance not just of the ways in which we use our bodies, but of the ways in which we speak about our bodies as an expression of what we think and feel. This is now something I have become much more attuned to in my practice as a chaplain.

Conclusion

This research makes a contribution to the knowledge and practice of pioneer presbyteral ministry within the MCGB. Placing the experiences of pioneer presbyters in dialogue with theological and other theoretical perspectives has offered new understandings of these ministries, including the importance of embodiment, the interconnection of identity and vocation, and the central place of relationships within the church to the effectiveness of mission.

The findings of this research have been unexpected and its trajectory has shifted significantly from my original intentions. However I am confident that it offers an authentic reflection of the experiences of participants, whose voices have a significant role in calling (or recalling) the church to its role of 'participation in God's purpose for the world' (The Methodist Church, 1999, para. 2.1.12). It is my hope that the MCGB, the Connexion, will continue to rediscover its sense of connectedness, and to recognise that effective mission is found in the interdependence of our corporate character and our missional activities.

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Hannah Mary Bucke

SID: 1433928

Professional Doctorate Paper 1

**Moving into the Neighbourhood:
Embodiment, Sacrament and Ritual
in Urban Mission**

July 2015

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Abstract

Hannah Mary Bucke

Paper 1

Moving into the Neighbourhood: Embodiment, Sacrament and Ritual in Urban Mission

July 2015

This paper aims to explore the significance of embodiment, sacrament and ritual in urban pioneer ministry. Stemming from early experiences working within this context and from a particular experience of using installation art to help engage those outside the Church with its rituals and stories, I argue for the importance of the embodied experience within a particular place as a means of engagement. The literature surveyed makes the case for a broad understanding of the sacramental in which all material things have sacramental potential. The differing influences of theology and social anthropology upon the literature offer distinct perspectives on the drawing of boundaries in relation to sacrament and ritual, and on how meaning is made from experience in the light of prior knowledge and understanding of the Christian tradition.

Moving into the Neighbourhood: Embodiment, Sacrament and Ritual in Urban Mission

Beginnings

What have I done? Will anybody come? The first hour is a very lonely hour, plenty of time to think about what I have done and about how I got here, because nobody does come. It is 10 a.m. on Palm Sunday and I am sitting alone in a unit of The Royals Shopping Centre, Southend-on-Sea. Yesterday morning the unit was empty, one of several empty shops in town, a sign of the economic climate. Today it contains seven installations themed around the Easter story, a sign of something very different. They would be called 'prayer stations' if this was a church but 'installations' is far less threatening for a shopping centre.

'Easter Icons: a Pop-Up Installation' is an ecumenical project, a creative collaboration between Baptists and Methodists, others from various other local churches who are helping to staff it, but the rest of the team will be in their respective churches this morning. In a sense I am in mine. I am the town centre minister, 'for all of us' a Baptist colleague says. I am the project leader for 'Easter Icons', the one who built the relationships, made the connections in the town, and brought Christian story to shopping centre for Holy Week. So I am the one sitting here, alone, feeling vulnerable, waiting for someone to come.

If they do come, what will they make of this attempt to tell the Easter story for today? Will it mean anything to them? Will they post a prayer in the Temple wall installation and reflect upon the fickle nature of celebrity at the Palm Sunday installation? Will they write down a beautiful act they would like to be remembered for and use the scented hand lotion at the anointing installation? Will they take bread and grape juice from the Last Supper installation, remember a betrayal at '30 Pieces of Silver'? And will the experience be anything more than a ten minute distraction from their shopping trip?

People do come. A trickle on the first day but it seems to gain momentum over the course of the week and over 650 people have come by the time we close on Holy Saturday. Nearly 300 prayers have been posted in the wall. A second book has been bought to accommodate the beautiful acts people wanted to record. Around 70 glasses of grape juice are consumed.

Of course the numbers do not say much. I do not really know what people thought, what people experienced, whether it helped unchurched people connect with the Easter story, at least for the most part. But there are some glimpses as I sit and watch people come and go during the week. The church-going Christians are easy to spot. Some have come especially to see this new initiative. They walk in confidently, follow the numbered stations confidently, write their prayers,

their beautiful acts, and take the bread and grape juice confidently. They know what to do. Other people are less confident. They hang around the door looking in - this is not a normal shop, not what they are expecting in their shopping centre. Some never make it inside, some walk past several times before venturing in. They ask 'what it is?' 'what do I do?'

The lady from the coffee shop comes to bring me coffee. I encourage her to have a look around but she is already visibly moved by the atmosphere created by the music, lighting and the more striking sculptural installations. She is not religious, she has told me. One of the Street Rangers who patrols the High Street comes in to have a look. She writes a prayer. She is not religious. An elderly gentleman takes his time at all the stations and then comes back to me on his way out, one of the few who offers feedback: he enjoyed it very much, very interesting, very thought-provoking. He tells me he is an atheist. I am glad these people have come - this is for them.

By the end of the week I have become very attuned to body language. I am particularly intrigued by the response to the sacrament-like⁷ installation, which invites people to eat bread and drink grape juice. Three of the seven installations ask people to actively participate and many do. Yet it appears that people feel more comfortable writing a prayer, adding to the book of beautiful acts and using the hand lotion, than taking bread and wine. Even though the instruction for the installation explicitly invites people to eat and drink from the table as a symbol of Jesus' last meal with his friends, most do not and some of those who do ask permission first from one of the staff. There are undoubtedly various reasons for this but it appears to me that this particular act of eating and drinking has some kind of special significance, whether positive or negative, such that most people do not perceive this act in the same way as the other acts, and so do not participate. For some the act of taking something into their bodies may be too intimate, for others there may be hang-ups about food or questions about the consequences of where this act might lead, for others still a sense that they might not be 'allowed' and a few seek further permission from me or one of the volunteers to partake, from another perceived to be 'in authority' perhaps.

We have created these installations, making space for prayer and something sacrament-like, for encounter with the Christian story in a shopping centre, because most people do not come to church. Mainstream denominations in the UK have experienced a significant decline in attendance since the beginning of the Twentieth Century (Brierley Consultancy, 2014). The 2011 Census reported a decline in those who identify themselves as Christian, down from 71.1% in 2001 to 59.3% in 2011 (Office for National Statistics, 2011). Church membership is much lower at only 11.2% in 2010 (Brierley Consultancy, 2014). This issue is particularly pertinent for the Methodist Church, which has thus far failed to stem a period of significant decline, losing 32% of its members in the past 10 years (The Methodist Church, 2014).

⁷ Whilst the bread and grape juice used for the installation were not consecrated, they were used as a deliberate reference to the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Perhaps none of this is surprising. These are times characterized by a distrust of institutions and authority, of meta-narratives and claims to universal truth, times in which the individual takes precedence over the corporate. Professor of sociology, Zygmunt Bauman describes what is often named 'postmodernity' as 'liquid modernity' in his book of the same title (2000, p. 10). This liquid modernity is a fast-moving, shape-shifting society of 'continuous change' (p.1), an 'individualized, privatized version of modernity' (p.7). These are not the characteristics of the Church. There is a disconnect between Church and society, a loss of shared language that runs deeper than people not knowing their Bible stories. The need to rediscover a common language seems a vital endeavour if Church and society are to reconnect.

This need for Church and Society to reconnect is where I perceive the focus of my ministry to be. I am a Methodist presbyter pioneering a ministry of Word and Sacrament in the town centre. The Methodist Church has been absent from the town for over 20 years: the circuit closed its last town centre church in the 1990s, leaving the area of densest population and highest deprivation in favour of a largely suburban presence. As I begin my ministry there is no Methodist congregation who gathers to worship here, no building to invite people to. I am stripped of conventional ministerial or ecclesial context. There is only one way for me to be 'in the neighbourhood'⁸: incarnationally, in the flesh. Sitting in the shop on the first morning of 'Easter Icons' was not the first time I have felt vulnerable.

On my first day as the town centre minister I sit on a bench at the top of the High Street. I have put on my clerical collar with jeans and a parka - the uniform of my vocation worn with the uniform of the street, of everyone from rough sleeper to student to shopper. I wonder what I have done, what I am doing here, but mostly I wonder what I should do now. How on earth do I build a ministry here? Where do I start? What is my common ground with these people, who do not necessarily share my faith commitments? The answer seemed to be small and insignificant: I am *here*.

Interpretations

'Being here' is perhaps an obvious starting point for a Methodist minister. The Methodist Church has its roots in the Evangelical Revival of the Eighteenth Century and in reaching unchurched people by finding new ways of communicating with them effectively, John Wesley himself preaching in the open air (Wesley, 1967, p. 139). However I understand my 'being here' to be more than an outreach tool, used to encounter people so that they might be persuaded into church. It has become a defining principle as I seek to offer sustained presbyteral ministry in the world. Being here in the flesh, walking, listening, talking, praying on the street means that face to face encounters happen, conversations occur, relationships are built. It is how 'Easter Icons' came to be. This incarnational ministry of 'being here' has brought exciting possibilities and feels

⁸ 'The Message' paraphrase of the Bible renders the description of the Incarnation in John 1.14 as 'The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood.'

instinctively counter-cultural not just in the Church here in Southend, in its mainly attractational form, but in society too.

Philosopher Martin Heidegger suggests that technology has made global travel and communication faster than ever so that 'time and space are shrinking' (Heidegger, 1975, cited in Inge, p.13). The result of this 'unsettles and terrifies' because we are no longer 'earthed', our ability to be anywhere effectively meaning that we connect with nowhere (p. 13). Anglican bishop, John Inge cites Heidegger's concept of *dasein* in *A Christian Theology of Place* (2003), in which a person being in a particular place is significant: 'throughout Heidegger's characterisation of person-in-world is a sense of immersion and inextricable togetherness rooted in time and space.' (Inge, 2003, p. 18). *Dasein* therefore has both an ontological and geographical dimension. In recognising the importance of our placed-ness in the world to our sense of self and our experience of the world, Heidegger rejects the Aristotelian notion of place as an 'inert container' in which any geographical location can be the location for bodies and things; rather our surroundings resonate with ourselves and are intrinsic to the embodied experience (p.5).

The importance of the embodied experience provides the initial focus for this literature review. My experience of 'being' a minister of Word and Sacrament in Southend-on-Sea, with nothing more than my embodied self as a point of connection with others, is worthy of significant exploration and reflection. From my own experience of *dasein* I have encountered and related to the grieving woman who cries in front of me, the heroin addict whose broken body sleeps where I park my car, the woman who smiles and serves me coffee through her untreated depression. They are all here too, experiencing this place as embodied selves. The literature I have selected focuses upon the common experience of being embodied and its central place in the Christian faith. The texts oppose notions of spirituality divorced from the body and the material world, notions rooted in the dualism of Platonic thought. They also challenge the contemporary phenomenon of 'excarntation' (Frost, 2014, p. 11), in which technology in particular appears to make the virtual experience a substitute for embodied experience.

All the literature selected may also be regarded as congruent with Boisen's 'living human document' (cited in Pattison and Lynch, 1997, p. 441), key to the discipline of practical theology in which human *experience* is valued and placed alongside other sources of theological knowledge such as scripture, tradition and academic theology.

In recognising the value of the 'living human document' it is appropriate that I consider my own faith journey as a text worthy of reflection and influential to my ministerial practice. Significant to my understanding of God and of the human/divine relationship is a particular experience of my own, a personal divine encounter with both physical and emotional dimensions. I trace from this moment, which I would identify as an experience of the Holy Spirit, a dramatic shift in the way in which I relate to God. Prior to this event, my understating of God was grounded largely in an intellectual appreciation of the teachings of Jesus as those most conducive to a just society and of Jesus' life

as a model for right living. The shift was from a commitment of the mind outworked through behaviour in the world to a sense of relationship with God in which my whole self could know God intimately. As significant as the moment of encounter itself, which I can pinpoint in time and place, has been its ongoing effects within daily life: I am now conscious of the potential to encounter God in every moment and of the divine presence in the everyday.

Seeking to understand my experience further, the concept of *poesis* offers a useful insight. Academic practical theologian Heather Walton, drawing on the work of Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre and Jesuit theologian Michel de Certeau, describes *poesis* as ‘the supreme, restless, transformative capacity of human beings to reshape their world and create meaning out of the mundane’ (Walton, 2014, p. 13). As well as making the ordinary and everyday the location for the extraordinary, this meaning-making on the part of the individual implies an active, participatory role in interpreting experience. We are not ‘passive consumers’ (p. 15) indoctrinated into understanding lived experience in particular ways. Rather we are the makers of meaning in our own lives : ‘our world making is not a dreary matter of programmed instrumental action in pursuit of clear goals. It is integral to our being in the world and involves “love, sensuality and the body”’ (p. 13). This latter point gives validity to the richness of embodied experience over the narrowness of an exclusively intellectual approach to the meaning-making process.

In the light of my experience of faith and of my context for ministry, the remainder of this paper will explore embodiment, the material and the sacramental as a means for encountering the divine. Significantly, much of the literature reviewed here takes a broad view of the sacramental, regarding the whole universe as a potentially sacramental place.

Reviewing the literature

Baptist professor of systematic theology, Paul Fiddes, offers a useful overview of issues relating to embodiment, the material and sacramentality in his seeking to create a pastoral doctrine of the Trinity (Fiddes, 2000). Through dialogue between the doctrine of the Trinity and pastoral theology, Fiddes argues that all encounter must be bodily encounter, even in a world of virtual communication and relationships, because experiences in the mind cannot be separated from the reality of living an embodied existence (p. 278-9). This leads Fiddes to the premise that if ‘encounter’ and ‘body’ are indivisible, and personal encounter with God is possible, then we must be able to speak of God as having a body. Such a view ensures that we avoid imagining the God in whose image we are created and with whom we may enter relationship, as something entirely ‘other’ than ourselves. Reinforcing this understanding of God as in intimate relationship with humanity is the Incarnation, the divine and human made inseparable in the person of Jesus, through which human bodies may become part of the body of Christ. It is the Christian understanding of God as having assumed human form that provides the mechanism for other

embodied selves to participate in the divine, and as Fiddes states 'Christianity is a religion of the body' (p. 280).

Citing professor of theology and eco-feminist Sallie McFague's argument that the universe itself may be regarded as the 'body of God' (p.280), Fiddes explores the idea of the world as a sacramental place in which all creation is a potential meeting place between God and humanity. Fiddes is clear that this concept of the sacramental is not centred on the nature or substance of any one thing but rather on the dynamic relationship which flows between them: the 'earthly stuff' becomes 'doors into the dance of perichoresis in God' (p. 281). This view avoids associating God with actually being or becoming any particular matter because, as Fiddes points out 'there *is* no such God-substance' (p. 282). Instead Fiddes favours an emphasis on the encounter and relationship that can occur through the material world, in which God's work as creator and sustainer may be revealed to those open to perceive it.

Fiddes explores McFague's argument for a sacramental theology that begins in the universal presence of God in the whole created order and moves to an understanding of the particular presence of God in Christ. This understanding reflects McFague's eco-feminist theology in which the denigration of non-male and non-human bodies in both historical and contemporary Christianity is problematic. However, whilst acknowledging the validity of this, Fiddes favours a view of the Incarnation as the paradigm for a sacramental world because of the 'unique depth of participation' of the Father and the Son in which the 'divine and human "yes" to the Father were one voice' (p. 289). According to Fiddes it is only from the direction of the particular of Christ to the universal of the whole created order that all matter holds the potential to become sacramental.

Ultimately, in spite of the differing directions from which they approach the sacramental, Fiddes and McFague concur that God must be understood as being in some way embodied and that this opens up possibilities for the sacramental in all of life. It is from this context that Fiddes moves to explore the intriguing possibility, put forward by Austin Farrer, that the Christian minister might be regarded as 'a walking sacrament' (p. 294). Emphasising the particular nature of ministry as a blurring of 'person and function,...being and doing' (p. 294), ministers embody a way of living and a set of values, and so can be understood as 'living symbols' of the ministry and person of Christ (p. 295). Fiddes recognizes the associated concerns, pointing out resistance to such an understanding because of the risk of elevating of the status of the minister, leading him to emphasize the very ordinariness in which sacrament is rooted: 'It can *embody* an ideal without *being* an ideal.' (p. 295). Here Fiddes begins to tease out the distinction between the embodiment of something other than the self, and the nature of the self, reminding us again of the importance of the dynamic and relational aspects of the divine: the meeting rather than the place of meeting is significant.

Fiddes' linking of the embodied, the material, and the sacramental offers a fruitful starting point as I explore a ministry with a sacramental dimension, focused in my 'being here'. The questions 'where is my body?' and 'what is my body doing?' are a constant as I reflect upon my role in the town

centre. I recognize, though not entirely comfortably, the sacramental nature of myself-as-minister, in which simply 'being' in the town is a deliberate representation of Christ's ministry in the world. The wearing of a dog collar in this context has the potential to act as a reminder and a sign of the divine. By, for example, choosing to sit on the pavement with rough sleepers I understand myself to be engaged in an act in which the representative role I embody enables me to become a potential place of encounter with the divine.

Taking Fiddes' argument that it is the particular person of Christ from whom all things may derive their sacramentality, it follows that some understanding of the Christian story, particularly of the Incarnation and the Passion narrative, are an essential precursor to any perception of the world as a sacramental place and any experience of the divine through it. This question of how God is perceived and who may perceive God is explored further by Anglican bishop John Inge.

Writing in *A Christian Theology of Place* (2003), Inge explores many of the same concepts as Fiddes in relation to the world as a potentially sacramental place and places the person of Christ as the locus for this, drawing on the work of Roman Catholic theologian, Edward Schillibeeckx and his assertion that the Incarnation is the foundation for any understanding of the sacramental (p.60). Inge identifies *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (Schillibeeckx, 1963, cited in Inge, 2003, p. 60) as a key text in the twentieth century development of sacramental thinking, from which stem ideas of extending the sacramental out from particular sacramental rites to a much wider understanding. He also cites the work of another Roman Catholic, Hans Urs von Balthasar, in the development of the idea of Christ as sacrament enabling the potential of others to be regarded as sacraments (p.61). Inge quotes professor of divinity and feminist theologian, Ann Loades on the nature of the sacrament as about the 'saving union' rather than the substance of the elements themselves (p. 60), an interpretation that resonates with Fiddes' relational and participatory understanding of sacrament. On the subject of Christ's presence in the sacrament, Inge argues later in his book that 'the relationship the believer has with Christ is as important as that presence' (p. 79); thus for Inge, relationship can be understood as key to the sacramental.

In common with Fiddes, Inge points to the world, particularly the natural world, as a place of revelation with sacramental potential. Here Inge also highlights the concept of the world as God's body, though through a much earlier example than McFague's work: that of seventeenth century Anglican theologian Thomas Traherne (p.63). Having laid the ground-work for a broad understanding of what is potentially sacramental, Inge goes on to ask a fundamental question: 'how are we to decide which things are behaving sacramentally, and when?' (p. 67). Whilst Inge regards the world as full of possibilities for the sacramental, he argues for defining qualities that limit this to particular 'events', events which are 'rents in the opacity of history where God's concrete engagement to change the world becomes visible.' (Gorringe, 1989, cited in Inge, 2003, p. 67). This means that sacramentality can be seen as having not only a material dimension but spatial and temporal dimensions also; it is an event in time and space.

In conceiving of sacrament as 'event', Inge then goes on to cite a number of pieces of research into such possible sacramental events which suggest that they are not unusual, tracing the work of William James in the late nineteenth century, through Alister Hardy in the mid-twentieth century and up to the work of David Hay, whose national survey in Britain in the 1990s found over a half of adults believed they had experienced a sacramental encounter of some kind (p. 70-71). Significant in this research is not simply the numbers of people reporting such encounters but the importance of their locating such encounters in time and place, and not necessarily in 'holy places' such as churches: one of the descriptions Inge quotes is of an experience at Sea World, Florida (p. 72).

However, despite this concession to the 'artificial' as opposed to the 'natural' world as a possible meeting place with God, it would be fair to conclude that Inge, along with other writers with a broad understanding of the sacramental, places particular emphasis on the 'natural' and the 'holy' locations as most conducive to divine encounter. This is particularly clear in the writing of Roman Catholic eco-feminist theologian Mary C. Grey in *Beyond the Dark Night* (1997). Grey expresses her concern at the 'sinister' way in which the shopping centres of the Western world are 'mimicking the architecture of the emptying cathedrals in a kind of demonic parody.' (Grey, p. 24). Here nothing is authentic or profound but all is hollow and shallow, including what she describes in terms of a parody of the sacrament: the encounter at the cash till (p. 25). While Grey has a point about the potential emotional emptiness of such places, there is a danger that such places are written off as irredeemably worldly, places where it would be unlikely if not impossible to encounter God.

Reinforcing this bias towards the natural, Grey's position as an eco-theologian becomes particularly evident in her discussion of the sacramental, being for her located for her in encounters of the earthy Jesus amongst fishermen and in stories about sparrows, vineyards and bread-making (p. 66). In her list of sacramental substances she names 'bread, wine, oil, salt, water, soil, trees, flowers, fruits of the earth' (p. 65). Grey does go on to discuss the urban origins of Christianity and contemporary urban contexts as places for mission (p. 74/5). However, such contexts are for Grey intrinsically problematic, speaking most loudly of injustice, ecological exploitation and poverty, places which threaten to separate us further from rather than draw us closer to God. Yes, God may be found here Grey argues, but in the guise of the Christ of social justice and suffering, not in possibilities for beauty and transcendence.

Whilst my own love of nature makes me sympathetic towards the idea of the divine encountered through the natural world, I find Grey's view of the city troubling, as one who walks amongst the concrete, steel and glass of a post-war High Street, amongst high instances of addiction, rough sleeping and poverty. According to Grey, such a context could well demand a ministry dedicated only to social justice. While there are Christians engaged in such work in Southend, the focus of my ministry is less upon the transformation of people's material circumstances and more about enabling moments of transcendence, resourcing *poesis*, and pointing to God *in* urban places rather than in spite of them. My identity as a presbyter, a Minister of Word and Sacrament, is significant to

the way in which my ministry has developed and is distinct from that of a deacon or Christian outreach worker.

Setting boundaries

What is clear from the work of Fiddes, Inge and Grey is that while understanding of the sacramental may be broad, there is a need to set some boundaries. Inge in particular recognizes the potential problems that may follow from identifying all things as potentially sacramental, quoting Keenan Osborne on the problem of meaninglessness: 'If one says that a cloud is a sacrament of God, every tree is a sacrament of God or every river is a sacrament of God, these phrases have no meaning whatsoever...' (Osborne, 1999, cited in Inge, 2003, p. 80). Thus Inge returns to the importance of relationship in order to offer a further criterion for sacrament: along with God, person and place, the need for a response is added to the equation (p.81). Quoting Macquarrie: 'For anything to become sacrament, something has to be contributed from both sides' (Macquarrie, 1997, cited in Inge, 2003, p. 80), Inge conceives sacrament as an action that must be initiated by God's grace and completed by the acceptance of that grace in the believer (p. 81). In particular Inge highlights the importance of 'the tradition of believers' as the only context in which such encounters might be meaningful.

However, taking the research of Hay and Morisy already cited, in which over half the respondents claim some kind of 'religious experience', it seems to me that Inge is limiting sacramental experience which leads somewhere to those with an understanding of the Christian tradition. He argues that Christians who go to church may experience a sacramental encounter with God both inside and outside the church and its building; people outside the church community, who do not have such a background or understanding, cannot experience such sacramental encounter. Although he argues for 'a two-way interaction between what is experienced in church and what is experienced in the world', this is reserved for Christians with an understanding of scripture and tradition (p.80). Thus for Inge, experience is important and helps us understand the ways God reveals God-self to humanity. In addition, human response to God's initiating action is central to sacrament. However, it appears in his account that the experience of the individual in such encounters is secondary to the received wisdom of the church.

On this crucial issue of the relationship between experience, meaning and revelation, the influence of post-liberal Lutheran theologian George Lindbeck is worthy of exploration. Of particular interest are two of the models of belief Lindbeck examines in *The Nature of Doctrine* (1984). The experiential-expressivist model places a 'common core experience' (p.31) at the heart of religion, and regardless of whether such experience is fully understood, all humans experience it. In this model, experience is the source of faith. However, Lindbeck ultimately argues in favour of a cultural-linguistic model, in which 'religions are seen as comprehensive schemes...which structure human experience' (p.32). The narratives and rituals of religion therefore provide the framework for

religious experience and are the only means through which such experience can be expressed: 'In short, it is necessary to have the means for expressing an experience in order to have it' (p.37). Without the context of the Christian story, provided by the Church through its scriptures and traditions, people cannot experience God because they cannot *know* that they have experienced God. Such arguments must prompt serious soul-searching for the Church in the light of a largely unchurched and dechurched population. The cultural-linguistic model gives the Church a unique mediating position in the relationship between God and humanity and places a significant burden of responsibility upon it to communicate effectively.

For an alternative view, which emphasizes the value of bodily experience, I turn to Anglican professor of religious studies, Douglas Davies, who draws on social anthropology in his work. In common with Fiddes, Inge and Grey, Davies cites the doctrine of the Incarnation as the foundation of a world-view in which all earthy matter is 'a potential vehicle for the divine' (Davies, 2002, p. 11). Understanding this as rooted in Catholic rather than Protestant theology, Davies argues that such sacramental understanding 'relates the sacred and the profane' such that nothing lies beyond the reach of the sacred (p.11). This he contrasts with the Protestant Lutheran understanding of Two Kingdoms divided and the consequent concept of conversion as the transition from the worldly kingdom to the heavenly (p. 10). It is possible to see already that the exclusivist understandings of sacrament can be considered a construct of a particular way of thinking about God's relationship with the material world, dividing those who can and cannot experience the sacramental along the lines of those who are inside and outside the church.

Davies goes on to explore the writing of influential Protestant theologian Paul Tillich, who he regards as dismissing ideas of two separate realms of existence in the ideal but accepting that religion often sets itself apart, creating notions of the sacred and secular (p.13). Davies describes Tillich's theology as 'existential', focused on human experience and being, from which stems a 'method of theology' that engages with 'life and experience...in a way that sees involvement as a participation in God' (p.14). Thus it is possible to see something of the roots of Davies' central tenet in the work of Tillich, namely the importance of embodiment to both anthropology and theology (p. 19). For Davies 'embodiment' is not simply another aspect of humanity which must be 'theologized'. In taking seriously the everyday embodied experiences of life, Davis is seeking to validate what he calls 'non-systematic faith', which he argues should not be considered subsidiary to systematic theology and which he understands as normal for most: 'ordinary believers are seldom guided and informed by systematic doctrines...because ordinary life does not work in that way' (p. 21).

Davies also argues for an understanding of the body not as separate from 'mind' or 'spirit' but as intrinsically connected to them. Davies considers some of the reasons behind the 'partition of the self', such as the human understanding of life after death common to many cultures, the influence of the platonic ideal of the soul over the corrupt nature of matter, the Christian understanding of body, soul and spirit found in Scripture, and the concept of 'inner-otherness' in which our need to

understand ourselves in relation to 'the other' can result in us also conceiving of 'otherness' within ourselves (p. 29). However, on the latter point, Davies goes on to argue that this experience of inner-otherness, rather than being evidence for a divided self is actually a phenomena that reinforces the idea that all conceptualisation of the self is embodied; there is nothing of human experience that can be separated from our embodied existence (p.34).

A central theme of Davies' book is the relationship between embodiment and religion, and the way in which behaviour both expresses and consolidates our beliefs and values. 'Embodiment theory', he argues, prevents the 'over-systematizing' approach of traditional theology to religious belief (p. 41). This is significant not only because it means that what we think and believe is intrinsically linked to what we do, but also because it suggests we do not simply decide with our minds and perform with our bodies. Rather the flow is two-way: behaviour has the power to both 'enshrine and express belief at one and the same time' (p.41). Returning to Inge's assertion that only those with prior knowledge of Christian tradition will further their relationship with God through a divine encounter (Inge, p. 81), Davies' thought potentially challenges this: 'embodiment questions the primacy of profile for formal doctrine when considering Christian spirituality and practice. In reality, spirituality is a behavioural endeavour, and people "become" Christian by behaving Christianly' (Davies, p.42). While it may be going too far to suggest that those with no formal religious understanding can experience something explicitly sacramental through a religious experience, it is also going too far to suggest that a clear line can be drawn between those who will and those who will not be able to experience God.

Davies' ideas about ritual impact not only upon the question of who may experience the sacramental but also on the question of what form this experience may take. Ritual is of particular importance to the Christian religion, argues Davies, because it has a particular ritual at its heart: the Eucharist. However Davies goes on to express doubts about the role of the church and its representatives in effectively mediating and controlling what is understood by Christians engaging in religious ritual. He acknowledges the theological tradition in which ritual is viewed 'as but a formal expression of doctrine' (p.112) yet he favours recent developments in ritual theory which regard it as a discrete phenomenon (p. 112). In exploring the notion of ritual as either a language to be decoded or a 'non-language phenomena' (p. 112), Davies opts for the latter, regarding ritual as 'an end in itself' rather than a language (p.113). This has implications for the relationship between ritual and meaning, with a distinction being made between propositional meaning - relating ritual to language and the expression of ideas, and meaning as emotion - satisfaction from actions as meaning. Quoting Rodney Needham 'Ritual can be self-sufficient, self-sustaining, and self-satisfying' (p.116), Davies thus expresses caution at the over-intellectualising of ritual in favour of its ordinariness. His conclusion is important in relation to those who experienced and participated in the 'Easter Icons' installation as it becomes possible to understand their participation in a ritual act as a possible means to experiencing the divine for those with no prior knowledge of the rite itself.

Ewan Kelly, a pastoral theologian who also draws upon social anthropology, concurs with this view that part of the power and importance of ritual, for people of faith and no faith, is found both in its rootedness in the ordinary and its enabling of a whole-body experience as an end in itself (Kelly, 2002). Writing about constructing funeral rites for new-born babies in the context of hospital chaplaincy, Kelly understands ritual as a way of relating to self, others and God that engages every part of us: 'there may be physical action, stimulation of our imagination and feelings, a stirring of our spirit, senses and sexuality as well as intellectual engagement' (p. 4). In common with Davies, Kelly understands ritual as more than an outward expression of intellectual understanding, beliefs and values; he conceives human existence as a complex intertwining of the physical and the intellectual, the material and the abstract. Also in common with Davies, Kelly regards ritual as both expressing and creating meaning, exploring the way in which ritual is a part of and gives meaning to everyday experiences from the deliberately ordered rituals of religion to the ordinary rituals of a family meal (p.5). It is possible to draw parallels between this understanding of ritual and Fiddes' understanding of sacrament in what might be described as a paradox of the ordinary and the extraordinary in both phenomena. Indeed, just as the question is asked 'when does something potentially sacramental become sacrament?' Kelly asks 'when does ritual-like activity actually become ritual?', going on to quote sociologist Catherine Bell's answer: when performing the act is given 'special or privileged status' (p. 6).

Conclusions - embodiment, sacrament, ritual

This conceptualization of ritual as relating to the ordinary and mundane aspects of life is significant to my sense of needing to 'demystify' the ritual of the Eucharist amongst the people for whom I am a minister Word and Sacrament. Here I return to the installation with which I began. The invitation to all to share in bread and grape juice at the shopping centre was a means of enabling people to participate in a sacrament-like ritual and to share in the story of Jesus. Reflecting on the last meal Jesus shared with his friends, it is the locus for much of what has been explored in this paper: the sacramental, the importance of embodiment, the material and the everyday as a means of experiencing the divine, and the role of ritual in faith and life. The literature selected and explored here has set out some of the key issues that flowed from the experience of hosting this installation, itself an attempt at responding to the 'language barrier' between the traditions of my faith and those people amongst whom I minister.

Taking the shared experience of embodiment as a starting point, this review has explored approaches which value the sacramental and do not confine it to Christians attending Eucharistic services. Rather they allow for sacramental encounters in all of life and in all places, with the Incarnation providing the paradigm for most, though not all, the writers. However, even within this broad understanding of what is sacramental there remains a desire to set boundaries and limitations amongst those writing from a primarily theological perspective. These boundaries are formed by the prioritization of Church tradition over human experience and based upon

assumptions about the relationship between understanding and behaviour. Alternative interpretations from a social anthropology perspective do not subordinate experience to understanding but rather recognize the dynamic flow between the two and thus do not seek to limit experience of God to prior knowledge.

The tensions between these two differing perspectives on the nature of religious experience will require further exploration as I seek to understand meaning-making amongst the people of the town. What meaning is made from my presence and activities by those who encounter them, and crucially, how may I most effectively access this information? Questions also arise about what, if any, limits I will place upon sacrament and the sacramental as I, in common with many of the writers, ask at what point something potentially sacramental *becomes* sacramental. A related issue is that of the apparent bias against the contemporary urban landscape as a place of divine encounter and I must give further consideration to the location in which I seek to enable people to encounter God, given the importance of particular place within the concept of *dasein*.

Finally, though the scope of this paper has been to explore embodied experience as a means of relating to the divine I acknowledge the importance not only of Sacrament but also of Word in the ministry to which I am called, and therefore of story both as a medium through which faith may be communicated and as a method by which people understand their experiences.⁹ Relating the Christian story to the story of people's lives was another significant feature of 'Easter Icons' and whilst there has not been sufficient space here to explore narrative theology, this may provide a logical topic for subsequent exploration in paper 2 as I seek to broaden and deepen my understanding of communication and meaning in urban mission.

⁹ It is important to note that sacrament in the Methodist tradition involves not only ritual actions and the material elements of bread and wine, and of water. It also involves retelling the narrative of God's mighty acts through the events of Christ's baptism and the Last Supper. This remembering through narrative is integral to both Protestant and Catholic understandings of these sacraments as means of grace.

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Hannah Mary Bucke

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Professional Doctorate Paper 2

**Embodied Stories, Storied Places:
Ministering the Word in Mission**

September 2016

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Abstract

Hannah Mary Bucke

Paper 2

Embodied Stories, Storied Places: Ministering the Word in Mission

September 2016

Through detailed analysis of a single pastoral encounter in a chaplaincy context, this paper explores the relationship between embodiment, story and place in pastoral ministry. Using insights from the disciplines of philosophy and theology, the literature I have drawn upon suggests a central place for narrative within both human life and the Christian tradition. In addition, insights from theology underpin my argument that pastoral ministry in a pioneering context is an expression of a ministry of Word but one that goes beyond words. Such a ministry may be interpreted much more broadly through the linking of the narrative elements of life and faith to the embodied experience and the place of encounter.

Embodied Stories, Storied Places: Ministering the Word in Mission

Chloe's¹⁰ story

The room we are shown into is not promising: windowless, featureless, beige walls, occupied only by tatty mismatched brown chairs and an old office desk; Chloe and I take to the two brown chairs. Her manager has called me in. She is worried about Chloe and suggests to her that she talks to the chaplain. It is a good judgment. Chloe's distress is palpable and she is struggling to hold it together in front of the customers. But this isn't the ideal place for a pastoral conversation. This ugly claustrophobic office makes for an intense encounter: no distractions, sitting too close together for strangers. I go to find some tissues. On my return Chloe tells me her story. Her dad left her family 18 months ago and left her family, especially her mum, broken. She cannot bear what has happened but is trying her best to support her mum and hold her family together. It isn't working and she is at breaking point.

As she talks, her eyes dart around but there is nothing to focus on; the tissue disintegrates as she wrings her hands, she tries to cover her eyes with fingers that worry at her forehead. Someone else has let her down too, her boyfriend, arrested for a nasty crime she is choosing to gloss over. Nothing serious, she says. People are good at letting us down. Between us we discern that dealing with all that is going on is not compatible with working seven days a week, holding down two jobs and a college course. 'Could you take tomorrow off work?' I ask. 'I don't want to cause any trouble' she replies. I suggest she thinks about it.

Work for Chloe is selling tickets at a theme park. This 'back stage' office and the story it has just witnessed is a world away from what is outside. Rollercoasters and fairground rides, arcades and dodgems, fast food outlets and souvenir shops, bright colours, bright lights, incessant cartoon music. It is a place that sells happiness and fun, a place where families come for a day out and to be the centre of attention for staff who must smile as enthusiastically at 10pm as at 10am. All this is very different from Chloe's story. The theme park tells a story of happy families and care-free childhood, the stuff of fairy tales and comic books. Or at least, that is the story it tries to tell. Staff dressed as superheroes walk the park - have your photo taken with the hero of your choice. The nearest you get to dystopia here is a crooked house and a ghost train.

Chloe's isn't the only story here that seems at odds with the story this place has constructed. The staff here have told me many stories of their own: stories of child abuse, dysfunctional families, abusive relationships, bereavement and depression. I am their chaplain because the directors of the park recognised they simply could not cope with the behind-the-scenes brokenness of their staff. 'All we can do is listen' one of them says to me. 'That's a pretty good start' I reply. It doesn't take me long to understand why they asked for my help. The nature of the pastoral encounters I

¹⁰ Not her real name.

have had here make me wonder - why does this place attract so many young people with troubled lives? I begin to speculate: Perhaps it is because this place is a world away. Perhaps there is something appealing about putting on a show, that when they put on their uniform and their smile it helps them forget 'real life' for a few hours. Perhaps they can enter, temporarily at least, the idealised stories of heroes, childhood innocence and happy families that are lacking from real life. Perhaps, out of the difficulties they face in their home and family lives and the long hours they spend together, they have made each other 'family'. Could it be that the place and the people are a surrogate?

Chloe and I have been talking in this space for too long. I feel as if I am running out of ideas and we are going around in circles, the physical ticks continuing to indicate her distress. I think to myself that I have not really helped yet. 'Let's go for a walk' I suggest. We leave the park and walk along the seafront. The tide is in and the water, calm. 'I love being in nature', Chloe says, 'this is one of my favourite places.' 'Me too' I reply and we begin to share our love of the natural world. But this November seafront walk could hardly be described in terms of natural beauty to those not familiar with it. The kiss-me-quick kitsch of a British seaside town is alive and well here, the smell of salt water mingles with the smell of candy floss. The sea isn't really sea at all - just estuary, the water making one of its fleeting appearances over the mud. We look out at the view: beyond the calm water is an oil refinery. I wonder why we both find something beautiful in this place. Perhaps simply because, for both of us, it is home: part of the landscape of our lives and so familiar, a place of belonging. Perhaps because it seems more real than the environment we have just left. Perhaps because there are fewer expectations of us here. Our respective roles are less important and we are simply two people going for a walk together.

As we walk, Chloe tells me about her dog, how much she loves spending time walking at the local park, away from the tensions of home. She works at a local rescue kennel. She loves it there. I am a dog-lover too, I tell her, and we share stories of our dogs, how we came to own them, their character traits and bad habits. We walk and talk for some time and I realise that the physical ticks have stopped, the tension has gone from her face. She is smiling and laughing for the first time. 'The thing about dogs', I say as we are about to reenter the park, 'is that whatever is going on in your life they treat you just the same and they need the same things from you. Make the most of those walks.' We say our goodbyes and she returns to work. She has found comfort in this place and found and a different story to tell.

Introduction - ministering the Word through stories

Underpinning this paper, with its detailed exploration of a single encounter, is pastoral theologian Donald Capps' concept of pastoral care as 'meaningful pastoral action', itself based upon French philosopher Paul Ricoeur's work on the close relationship between action and text, both of which are worthy of interpretation. (Capps, 1984, p. 33). Capps identifies that a pastoral encounter can be considered meaningful action because, as Ricoeur identifies, it is not 'random or

inconsequential action' but has significance beyond itself, can open up new possibilities and can be interpreted in different ways. (Capps, 1984, pp. 33-36). My encounter with Chloe can be deemed meaningful for these reasons and may thus be considered a 'text' warranting careful analysis (Capps, 1984 p. 33).

Story was a key element of this pastoral encounter, as it has been with others from the theme park as I offer chaplaincy there, and more widely, as I minister amongst the people of the town centre. A person in a clerical collar seems to be an invitation to some to tell their stories, stories that are often difficult to hear, and I assume, difficult to tell. Pastoral encounter, however transient and random, is an outlet for stories, where they may be told and held safely, interpreted and reinterpreted. This pastoral ministry is part of my calling as a Methodist presbyter, a minister of Word and Sacrament, yet while stories are often told in words, they are more than words, more than an articulation of embodied experience, they *are* embodied experience. How might this affect my understanding of what it means to be a minister of Word?

Why stories?

Stories are important to us as a way to make sense of our own and others' lives. In addition, the relationship between story and pastoral care has been a rich area of exploration within the discipline of pastoral theology. Pastoral theologian David Lyall focuses on the importance of stories within the Christian faith, and especially within pastoral counselling, in his book *The Integrity of Pastoral Care* (Lyall, 2001). In examining the relationship between narrative and pastoral care, Lyall highlights recent thinking within the discipline of psychotherapy about the importance of narrative, which has led to a greater interest in narrative within pastoral counselling (Lyall, 2001, p. 44). However, Arguing for the unique relationship between theology and narrative, Lyall offers as evidence the narrative at the heart of the Christian faith: the story of Israel in the Old Testament and the four different stories of the life of Jesus in the New Testament (Lyall, 2001, p.45). Thus the revelation of God through scripture is made up of many narratives within one overarching narrative. Lyall also cites the work of feminist theologian Sallie Teselle on the relationship between Christianity and narrative as pointing to the very nature of God and humanity: Teselle describes our love of story as stemming from 'the narrative quality of human experience' (Teselle in Lyall, 2001, p. 45), itself rooted in the God who comes to us in Jesus, 'in a story of a human life', something Teselle regards as the model for our self-understanding as living stories (Lyall, 2001, p. 45). It is the nature of God to reveal Godself both through stories-within-a-story that are recounted and a story that is lived, an embodied story.

This unique relationship between story and the Christian faith identified by Lyall has important implications for the way in which we understand ourselves and the nature of human existence. The idea that human experience has narrative qualities, rooted in our createdness by the God who comes to us in the story of scripture and the embodied narrative of Jesus, suggests that, in theological terms, the relationship between people and narrative is intrinsic because God created us this way. This has particular significance for me as a minister of the Word: Lyall cites pastoral

theologian Charles Gerkin's idea that pastoral counsellors hear and hold the stories of others, as well as bear their own story and the Christian story (Lyll, 2001, p.55). Perhaps then, there is a human need for those who hear, hold and bear stories.

In identifying the significance of this relationship between narrative and human experience, we can begin to identify the significance of stories in the work of pastoral care, not just in the telling and listening to stories but in the interpretation of stories. Lyall argues that part of the role of the psychoanalyst is to enable people to find a 'new narrative home for his or her experience' (Lyll, 2001, p. 46). Thus part of the role of the pastoral counsellor is to enable others to experience transformation through the reinterpreting of their stories. In identifying interpretation as a key element within the pastoral encounter, I turn to some of the philosophical concepts that underpin Lyall's thought.

Transforming stories

French philosopher Paul Ricoeur observes that stories are important to us: they are how we seem to make sense of our lives and the lives of others, and human life is often thought about in terms of a 'life story' (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 20). He also asserts that human life is more 'intelligible' when interpreted through story (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 18). Thinking critically about this concept of 'life story' in his essay 'Life in quest of narrative' (Ricoeur, 1991), Ricoeur seeks to show that some thinking around the subject of life and narrative is necessary in order to understand why such a link is made. Ricoeur is critical of ideas from the past few decades that have separated life from narrative along the lines of 'real' and 'fictional', with narrative relating to the fictional only; he cites an example from one commentator that 'stories are recounted and not lived; life is lived and not recounted.' (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 20). Ricoeur bridges this divide using Aristotle's ideas about plot, not as a 'static structure' (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 21) but as a dynamic process that occurs through the act of telling. Ricoeur regards this concept as key to his linking of life and narrative through the role of the reader (or hearer) of a story completing the work of narration. (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 26). For Ricoeur it is in the act of interpretation by another that life and narrative fuse, the interpretive process ensuring that human life is more than 'a biological function' *because* it may be understood and interpreted (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 27). It is also Ricoeur's understanding of narrative as a dynamic process, and of lived, embodied experience interpreted as written text, which makes Ricoeur's thought on narrative significant to the work of pastoral care and ministering the Word.

In my encounter with Chloe there was an unspoken sense that our time together needed to make a difference. Her manager had called me in in part because of her concern for Chloe but in part because she needed Chloe to be fit for work, to restore her place in the company's narrative of economic production. Yet I was conscious throughout the encounter that I wanted Chloe to 'feel better', to move on from her state of distress and to restore some perspective. My concern for Chloe was shaped by the narrative I bear as a minister of Word, in this case a narrative of salvation, well-being and wholeness. Either way, something needed to change through this

encounter. As I reflect upon the transformation that did occur in Chloe, Ricoeur's use of the German philosopher Hans Gadamer provides some helpful insights.

Ricoeur draws specifically on Gadamer's work in relation to the interpretive process and the open-ended nature of narrative interpretation. Ricoeur suggests that hearing and interpreting a story is a process that must involve a world of new possibilities (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 26). Ricoeur cites Gadamer's concept of the 'fusion of horizons' as the potentially transformative process through which these new possibilities may be discovered (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 26). Gadamer, writing in *Truth and Method* about the relationship between past and present (Gadamer, 1989), explores the limitations of human perspective through the concept of horizon: 'the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point.' (Gadamer, 1989, p. 302). This limitation may not be overcome simply by attempting to understand a situation from another's point of view as this leads to a further distancing of these differing perspectives (Gadamer, 1989, p. 304). Instead, Gadamer argues for the 'fusion of horizons' in which existing and potential horizons are not subordinate to nor separate from one another, but involve 'rising to a higher universality that overcomes not only our own particularity but also that of the other.' (Gadamer, 1989, p. 305).

This concept of the 'fusion of horizons' may be applied to some extent to my encounter with Chloe. The beginning of our meeting was awkward - two people attempting to forge a relationship for the purposes of Chloe's return to a more stable emotional state and to work, but doing so 'out of nothing' and in a space in which neither of us felt comfortable. The gear change in this encounter, which I acknowledge occurred in both of us, occurred as the conversation turned to our shared love of nature and dogs. It was through this that the relationship moved beyond 'counsellor' and 'counselee' to one that was more mutual and connected, focused on human relationships and 'creatureliness' and this reflected something of Gadamer's 'higher particularity' and the overcoming of limited perspective. For Chloe, this potentially enabled her to see herself less as the isolated victim of a set of difficult circumstances and more as a person connected to other persons by passions, interests, and by her groundedness in the world in which she was a being alongside other beings. In this encounter, though not explicitly named, there was a change in perspective for Chloe. Her personal circumstances, which had overwhelmed and distressed her, had been subject to a recalibration in which she was able to remember things that gave her joy in the midst of what was painful and difficult, through conversation with another.

This encounter involved a process of reinterpretation and relocation in which Chloe became more agent than victim. Using Ricoeur's ideas about life as related to narrative through interpretation, and the transformative potential of story, particularly through Gadamer's fusion of horizons, it is possible to see how their work is of value to the work of pastoral care and in particular can offer interpretive tools for my encounter with Chloe. However, while the work of Ricoeur and Gadamer on narrative and interpretation are of value as I reflect upon this encounter, they are not unproblematic. Ricoeur's linking of lived experience and narrative, leading to his assertion that interpretation lies with the one who reads or hears the narrative, could be regarded as

disempowering for the one whose life experience is being shared because people are no longer the 'owners' of their story or how it is interpreted but are at the mercy of the interpreter.

This imbalance of interpretive power towards the hearer of a story is reflected in traditional understandings of the pastoral care relationship, which positions the counsellor as one who enables transformation, and the counsellee as one who receives help. There are also further implications about ownership and access to the truth of a situation being held by the counsellor, particularly in a Christian context where the pastor may be perceived to have greater knowledge and understanding of the Christian story. In my encounter with Chloe I would acknowledge an imbalance at the start of our relationship, with Chloe as the one in need of help and myself as the one who had been asked to provide it. However, this was the least effective part of the encounter: with little or no change in Chloe's state of mind and my own growing sense of panic that I was not helping, the conversation was going nowhere. It was only when the conversation became more mutual that transformation was possible and it is important to highlight that it was Chloe who identified her passion for natural places, unprompted.

In the case of Gadamer's 'fusion of horizons', the perspective of another can enable a widening of our own limited perspective, as was the case with Chloe. There is also a lasting legacy from each encounter, however fleeting and chance that encounter - both people will be different because they have absorbed that particular experience into their wider life experience. However, I acknowledge that there is a formality and a permanence in the concept of 'fusion of horizons' that is not perhaps entirely appropriate for the more haphazard nature of the pastoral care dimensions within my particular ministry.

Story and Identity

In seeking a more fluid approach to the relationship between pastoral care and narrative, I turn to the work of contemporary practical theologian Clive Marsh. Ideas about narrative and self-understanding, and the way in which God reveals Godself to humanity are explored in his book *Christ in Practice* (Marsh, 2006). Marsh identifies the very nature of humanity with 'the stories we live by' (Marsh, 2006, p. xii). This telling phrase hints at life as an experienced, embodied story and suggests not only that human life and narrative are intrinsically linked but that we are dependent upon stories for our sense of self. This is an intriguing concept as I listen to stories in the context of mission rather than as pastor of a church.

In his exploration of life and story, Marsh offers a number of potential ways in which human experience may be explicitly connected to the person of Christ, with the aim of identifying 'Christological patterns in human life' (Marsh, 2006, p. 22). Marsh suggests that in seeking Christ, the ways in which Christianity has been communicated throughout its history offer a significant starting point: 'Narratives (gospels), icons, creeds, confessions, plays, sculptures, paintings, and much else besides create a working image, as a result of which it becomes possible to say "there is Christ".' (Marsh, 2006, p. 22) It is significant that although narrative is only one of those listed

here, each of the media Marsh cites can be seen as narrative in quality, from the Christian story retold through the creeds through to significant moments of it captured in paintings and sculpture.

Central to Marsh's exploration of the human/divine relationship is the Incarnation: we may know God and may connect our stories with God's story *because* Christ lived among us. In common with Teselle, Marsh identifies the God who comes to us 'in the form of the story of a human life' (Marsh, 2006, p. 23). Marsh also offers an 'overarching motif' which helps us to identify Christ's presence in the world here and now: 'loving relationships which enable people to flourish as human beings' (Marsh, 2006, p. 24). In the work of Ricoeur and Gadamer, although referring to narrative as something that is lived and experienced, their work is perhaps more theoretical than practical. Writing as a practical theologian, Marsh puts 'flesh on the bones' of how we might understand our relationships, specifically with the Christian story. Marsh also suggests a variety of ways in which our lived experience may relate to the Christian narrative; these include human suffering, solidarity with the oppressed, transformation, and the discovery of true identity. (Marsh 2006, pp. 25-43).

Marsh acknowledges that while the Christian story offers an interpretive account of human experience, it is one of several possible accounts and must take its place in contemporary society alongside other faith and belief narratives (Marsh, 2006, p. 45). Marsh's awareness of and rejection of what he describes as 'Christian imperialism' (Marsh 2006, p.44) makes his work particularly pertinent to my own context, ministering to people with little or no church background and seeking to open up possibilities for them to engage with the Christian story in a way that is non-threatening. Marsh's writing from the perspective of human life, not just church or Christian life, is also pertinent to my work exercising a pastoral care ministry in a secular context because Marsh understands the missional potential of the Christian narrative within a postmodern society. For Marsh, the very point of theology is that the Christian story is of benefit to both those within and those beyond the Church (Marsh, 2006, p. 46).

Here another important dimension of the relationship between life and story, story and faith must be added to the discussion, that of postmodernism, widely understood as a defining characteristic of contemporary Western society. A thorough exploration of postmodernism and its relationship to theology is beyond the scope of this paper but it is important to at least outline some of the issues that arise from it, specifically in relation to narrative. Pastoral theologian Elaine Graham describes the context of contemporary Western society as an uncertain one 'in which there is no longer a consensus of values' (Graham, 1996, p. 1). This lack of consensus was identified by, amongst others, the philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard, who defined postmodernism's 'incredulity towards metanarratives' (Lyotard in Graham, 1996, p. 20). Graham goes on to describe Lyotard's understanding that metanarratives are potentially abusive in that they negate difference: 'absorbing and smothering variety and pluralism into a global universal homogeneity' (Graham, 1996, p. 21). Such a view suggests that the demise of meta-narrative is not the neutral consequence of a shift in human understanding but a positive and liberating outcome of the postmodern age, which has released humanity from imposed ideas, including the Christian metanarrative. In light of the case

that narrative is both central to the interpretation of human experience and to the Christian faith, postmodernity presents a significant challenge to my own mission and ministry context. However, in acknowledging the postmodern context, Marsh argues that in offering a Christian reading of life experience there must be an acceptance that other readings are possible, and he recognises that Christological motifs may be found outside the Christian tradition.

Returning to my encounter with Chloe and reflecting upon it through the lens of Marsh's work, it is possible to do so aware that Marsh offers an interpretation of Christological patterns in human life that is open enough to include non-Christians. Of the patterns Marsh identifies, the discovery of true identity is perhaps the most appropriate for this encounter (Marsh, 2006, pp 33-35). Here Marsh is concerned with being authentically oneself: 'the discovery of a true identity, must entail genuine choosing of relationships in and through which we are who we are.' (Marsh, 2006, p. 34); it is worth noting however, that not all relationships can be chosen as Marsh implies. Chloe had disclosed in our conversation a number of relationships in which it was clear that she was not able to be authentically herself at present, relationships in which she had been hurt and betrayed, and in which she was carrying an unequal burden of responsibility. The subsuming of her identity into her present circumstances was reflected both by the physical signs of distress she demonstrated and by her inability to prioritise her own need for time and space over the need to please her employer and maintain her other work and educational commitments. Chloe regained something of her true identity when she was able to speak about what gave her life and when we were able to converse more equally, discovering things that connected us. Marsh states that 'To be "in Christ" is to be human and to be human is to be connected to others.' (Marsh 2006, p. 35). It would be going too far to suggest that in my encounter with Chloe she found her identity in Christ because she was able to make a connection with me - a Christian minister wearing a clerical collar - and was able to remember her connection with other created beings. However, it is possible to use this model to explore the potential that this encounter and others like it have in creating opportunities for those beyond the Christian community to link their story and the Christian story, however tentative. For a short time at least, Chloe and I built a relationship and were reminded of our relationship with other living beings and creation itself.

Marsh's creative linking of the Christian story to contemporary human experience addresses some of the issues for Christian pastoral care in a context with both postmodern and missional dimensions. It also bridges the gap between philosophical concepts around narrative and the practice of pastoral ministry by addressing ordinary living. Marsh's work on the connection between theology and patterns of human living also provide a point of contact between narrative and another significant dimension in my encounter with Chloe: that of embodiment.

Embodied stories, embodied Word

Encounters with others are not simply a matter of thoughts and words but include our whole bodies. Capps, writing in *The Poet's Gift* (Capps, 1993) identifies the importance of embodiment in pastoral encounter. Critiquing the way in which psychologist Carl Roger's work has been oversimplified, particularly in the use of verbatim, Capps identifies that pastoral counselling has been in danger of becoming 'a kind of wordplay' between counsellor and counsellee (Capps, 1993, p. 40), the consequence of which 'leads to a view of pastoral conversation as disembodied speech' (Capps, 1993, p. 44). In seeking to redress this, Capps draws on the poetic form through the work of twentieth century poet Denise Levertov to explore the importance of body language in expressing empathy with others: 'Her poetry is deeply attuned to the language of the body, and her own body as a source and means of understanding' (Capps, 1993, p. 56). From here, Capps makes links between Levertov's immersion in the embodied experience as a means of identifying the emotions of another and expressing empathy for them, and the role of the pastoral counsellor: 'Levertov's poems on various ways the body speaks on the soul's behalf suggest that the pastor's role, as empathic listener, is to leave the realm of the abstract and disembodied spirits to others, and to enter the body's world' (Capps, 1993, p. 64). Words and concepts are not sufficient when listening to and interpreting the story of another, and Capps suggests that a kind of transformation occurs through the attention given to the body in pastoral encounter (Capps, 1993, p. 64).

In my encounter with Chloe, the physical, embodied dimensions of our time together were very significant to the development of the encounter. Firstly, there were Chloe's physical signs of distress: crying, rubbing her forehead with her fingers, shredding the tissue. My instinctive response was also embodied - to speak softly, calmly and in low vocal register. Secondly, there was the change in what our bodies were doing during the encounter, from sitting too close together face to face in a confined space, to walking along the seafront side by side. The former created an intensity to the dynamics of our encounter that was unhelpful, the latter enabled a more relaxed relationship in which we had the space 'be ourselves'. It was in this part of the encounter, journeying together for a short time, that Chloe's body language began to tell a different story, smiling, laughing and speaking freely, rather than simply answering the questions I asked her.

To minister pastoral care is to be alert to the story of the body as well as the spoken story and in relating these two elements I now explore the work of contemporary Anglican theologian, Rowan Williams. In his essay *A theology of health for today* (Williams in Baxter, ed., 2007, pp. 3-14) Williams makes the case for theology as the story of the material world, and specifically human bodies, being inhabited by God (Williams, 2007, p. 3). Using Paul's letter to the Galatians, Williams examines the way in which Paul uses the term 'flesh' negatively, concluding that for Paul, flesh is 'human life minus relationship...human life that is not inhabited' (Williams, 2007, p. 4). It is only through God's intentional inhabiting of human flesh with spirit that we become truly ourselves, in relationship with God and with others (Williams, 2007, p. 4). This links to Ricoeur's idea about uninterpreted human life being no more than biological function: there must be recognised intentionality to human life for it to be fully human. Williams makes the distinction between flesh

with and without spirit: flesh uninhabited by God's spirit is 'alienated' and isolated, such that salvation may be seen as flesh that is united with spirit (Williams, 2007, p.4).

In the work of Williams, just as in the work of Ricoeur, it is the intersection of human lives with other human lives that is crucial to our humanity. For Ricoeur, it is the hearing of a life story by another that somehow validates that life. However for Williams, it is something more mutual: relationship is key to what it is to be fully human, with inhabited flesh as 'a language, a system, a means of connection' (Williams, 2007, p. 4). Reflecting on this point from the context of my ministry, I identified early on that my incarnational way of working was significant to the relationships I made. As I explored in more detail in Paper 1, it was the fact of being bodily present to people in the town centre that was my primary means of connection with people I did not know. In a sense, the medium of my ministry is the message and Williams explores the way in which the Incarnation is the model for this and all human connections, understanding the Incarnation as a means of connection and relationship, and as the archetype for what is most fully human: God inhabiting flesh 'with the divine communication' (Williams, 2007, p. 5).

Significantly, Williams' brings together ideas about the body and story in the concept of inhabited flesh as modelled by the Incarnation. He suggests that our ability to understand ourselves through story is a result of our flesh becoming inhabited by spirit. According to Williams, we do not tell life stories about what happened to us as if we were passive receivers of external actions. Rather we tell stories about our relationships with others and the world around us: 'the story of how your life, how your flesh, became inhabited' (Williams, 2007, p. 5). Thus story and body come together in the creation of meaning, the act of interpretation and in relationships with others.

There are elements of Williams' work that offer some interesting insights into Chloe's story. As with Marsh's work, it would overstate the case to suggest that Chloe had formed a relationship with God because of our encounter. However, Williams' concept of uninhabited flesh as alienated may help explain the ways in which our bodies manifest signs of distress that are in some way destructive, such as in the repeated rubbing of skin or the shredding of a tissue. Williams also offers his broad definition of salvation as unity of flesh and spirit in body (Williams, 2007, p. 4), a definition that points to wholeness in a similar way to Marsh's Christological pattern of identity discovered. For Chloe, the story that she told through her words and through her body reflected someone who was alienated from others and herself by difficult relationships. Her identity as a uniquely created being, able to relate to others, and with passions and interests of her own, had been overwhelmed by her circumstances. Through an albeit transient relationship with another, Chloe was able to experience something of a return to wholeness, and from the language of the body, which played such a significant part in signalling this, we might say that human life is embodied story.

Storied places

Following this exploration of the relationship between life and story, story and embodiment, I want to briefly draw out one final related element of this encounter that seems significant: that of place. Here I wish to return to the theme of *dasein* from Paper 1. Philosopher Martin Heidegger's concept of *dasein*, from his book *Being and Time* (Heidegger, 1962) proposes that our placedness in the world is always a factor in our being. We are always 'being-in-the-world' and our human existence cannot be divided along the lines of body and place, rather 'where we are' and 'who we are' are inseparable (Heidegger, 1962, p. 79). This concept is significant in terms of a rejection of the mind/body dualism that underpins much of the work I have drawn on in this paper and indeed Heidegger goes on to reject the metaphysical notion that we are 'a spiritual Thing which subsequently gets misplaced "into" a space' (Heidegger, 1962, p. 83). What follows from this is Heidegger's assertion that we are always 'in relationship' with the world - this is not something we choose but a perpetual state that flows from *dasein* (Heidegger, 1962, p. 83).

Using *dasein* as a way of reflecting on my time with Chloe, it is possible to see how the places in which the encounter took place and the places that were significant in our lives were more than incidental locations but rather players within our stories. The cramped, windowless office in which our encounter began, when seen through the lens of *dasein*, is significant for two reasons in particular. Firstly, the space itself was a hindrance to a transformative pastoral encounter in part because it was a trapping rather than freeing space, confined and with no view of the outside world. This was intensified by the close face-to-face position our bodies were forced into and our choices were either to look awkwardly straight at one another or awkwardly away from one another. In such a space, imagining something beyond, both physically and in terms of the story Chloe was telling, was difficult. Secondly, this pokey beige and brown office with its broken furniture was a stark reminder to both of us that this was a backstage space; the bright colours, lights and music of the theme park world did not extend as far as here. That world was for the customers, this world was for the staff. Both worlds have their own story, an implied narrative: the theme park story is a highly constructed one of family fun, childhood fantasy, the making of memories. The back stage story told by the restrictive, drab and broken office implied the relative unimportance of staff to customers - no one had spent much time constructing this space. It also acted as a reminder of just how paper-thin the fantasy world just outside was. It was little surprise that we could not find anything transformative there.

My decision to suggest we leave the office and the theme park and walk together along the seafront enabled another place with a role in both our stories to intersect with us. The open space seemed to allow greater freedom of thought and conversation, acting as a reminder of our createdness, our place within a much bigger story than that of productivity and usefulness. It was a part of our shared landscape too, a place we both knew and that had positive associations for us, a way of connecting us, enabling a relationship to develop. In addition, whilst not entirely wild and natural, it was at least less constructed than the spaces we had just left. It was here, walking together side by side, that our encounter became both a literal and metaphorical journey in which our embodied selves in that particular place experienced transformation.

Conclusions: embodiment, story, place

Beginning with the 'meaningful pastoral action' of my encounter with Chloe, this paper has focused upon the importance of story within such encounters. Through an exploration of particular theological and philosophical perspectives, it has been possible to identify the case for story as intrinsic to humanity. Both the theologians and philosophers whose work I have drawn upon recognize our need for stories, connecting life and story together as a key way in which we make sense of our experiences. Both disciplines also highlight the importance of the interpretation of stories to the potential for transformation within our lives, enabling stories to be seen as open to reinterpretation rather than fixed in nature. In addition, the theological perspectives examined here offer reasons why we need stories by identifying God's relationship to humanity as one told through the stories of scripture and the story of Jesus' life, suggesting that story is part of God's intention for us and part of our createdness. From these foundations, it is possible to identify the significance of story within the exercise of Christian pastoral care as an action that involves the telling, hearing, and interpretation of stories in new ways in order to enable transformation.

Further, this paper has argued for the conception of story not simply as communicated through words but as lived and experienced in the body. In making the case for stories as embodied, it is the work of theologians who have made this link most explicit, drawing particularly upon the Incarnation as the model for all human life. The body and its language are part of the story and its telling, and those who exercise pastoral care must be attentive to it. More than this, recognising ourselves and all people as embodied stories is one very significant way in which we are in relationship with one another, and may be in relationship with God: our 'inhabited flesh' is where true identity is to be found. Finally, an exploration of place in relation to story and body has shown both that our own embodied stories can be understood as intrinsically linked to our placedness in the world, and that places themselves construct stories with which our embodied selves interact. Thus our life stories are neither disembodied nor placeless.

All of this has implications as I minister the Word in a missional context. In Paper 1 I argued for a broad understanding of the sacramental and sacramental ministry; here I suggest the same in relation to a ministry of Word. By analyzing a particular pastoral encounter in detail and bringing to bear upon it theological and philosophical perspectives that move the understanding of story beyond words as its only expression, this paper has argued that a ministry of Word may too be understood broadly, not confined to the reading and preaching of the Word, nor even to the living out of biblical principles, important though this is. Rather, ministering the Word, particularly in a missional context, is to recognise that the shared experience of being embodied stories in storied places are key ways in which we may relate to one another and to God in order to find our true identity. It is also to recognise and point to our being and our environment as imbued with stories because God created us to be living stories within a material world.

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Hannah Mary Bucke

SID: 1433928

Professional Doctorate Paper 3

**Beyond Pulpit and Table:
Ministering Word and Sacrament in
Mission**

January 2017

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Abstract

Hannah Mary Bucke

Paper 3

Beyond Pulpit and Table: Ministering Word and Sacrament in Mission

January 2017

In this paper, drawing on concepts and ideas from Papers 1 and 2, I will be outlining the proposal for my research project. The central focus of this research will be the ways in which those called to presbyteral ministry in the Methodist Church exercise their ministry in pioneering contexts, and the implications this has for the Church in mission. I will summarise my own professional context as a Methodist pioneer presbyter, give an overview of the context for mission in the UK, and define presbyteral ministry within the Methodist Church. The theological and philosophical perspectives that will underpin my research, including monism, embodied experience, and broad understandings of word and sacrament, will be explored. I will also discuss my chosen methodology and research methods, the limitations of the research, and the related ethical considerations.

Introduction

In broad terms, my research aims to explore the role of presbyteral ministry within the Methodist Church in relation to missional contexts in the UK. I am seeking to research this presbyteral role as it is experienced by those engaged in pioneering ministries, outside of conventional church-based appointments. I am also interested in how this may affect the Church's understanding of presbyteral ministry and its place in mission. The Methodist Church defines presbyteral ministry in its ordinal as a ministry of word and sacrament (*Methodist Worship Book*, p. 302); a pioneer is defined as 'someone who, through innovative and contextual mission, is working among non-churched people to form new ecclesial communities' (www.methodist.org.uk). It is important to note that, while I would agree with some aspects of this latter definition, I believe it is not unproblematic, focussing narrowly on new ecclesial community without reference to other important tasks such as listening to and learning from people outside the Church, and building relationships between church and society. Here Anglican priest Alan Billings offers a useful and overarching definition of the role of the Church and the task of ordained ministry within it: 'The Church is there to make God possible. Since the ordained person serves the purposes of the Church, we may say that the fundamental task of ordained ministry is to help make God possible' (Billings, 2010, p. 8). It is this task of 'making God possible' that I am seeking to explore through my own ministry, and through my research question: *What do presbyters in pioneering appointments contribute to the Church's understanding of pioneer ministry and what are the implications of this for our missional context?* My focus will be the experience of others in similar contexts and how a ministry of word and sacrament might 'make God possible' for those outside the church in contemporary British society.

My Context - Church and Mission in 21st Century Britain

In 2013 I was stationed as the Town Centre Minister to a large seaside town. This was my first appointment in the Methodist Church and the first ministry of its kind within the circuit to which I am stationed; it is a relatively unusual appointment within the Methodist Church. This ministry came out of my own sense of calling to 'something different' and my calling to a particular place, rather than from the initiative of the local circuit and stationing via the usual Methodist itinerant system. My ministry is currently something of an anomaly, even within Methodist pioneer ministries. While I am recognised by the Methodist Church as a presbyter in pioneering appointment and considered to be on the 'Pioneering Pathways'¹¹ programme, my own ministry does not sit neatly within its definition of a pioneer as I am not currently engaged in the formation of new ecclesial community.

Here I must acknowledge my own 'vested interest' in such non-standard posts, which enable greater freedom for ministry to develop in context and without the preset outcomes that often come

¹¹ More information about Methodist Pioneering Pathways can be found at www.methodist.org.uk/learning/methodist-pioneering-pathways)

with official church initiatives. However, I also acknowledge the similarities between aspects of my ministry and those of presbyters who are in more structured pioneering appointments, such as Venture FX pioneers, or engaged in Fresh Expressions work. These similarities have anecdotally included similar approaches to mission and similar experiences of being a pioneer minister within Methodism. It is the experiences of some of these ministers which I will be seeking to draw upon in my research.

The very existence of pioneer ministries such as my own and those of the Venture FX scheme point to a context in which they are now necessary. One very obvious reason for this is the decline in church attendance, particularly in during the 20th Century. Professor Emeritus of the Sociology of Religion, Grace Davie, posed the following question in 1994: 'Why is it...that the majority of British people - in common with many other Europeans - persist in believing, but see no reason to participate with even minimal regularity in their religious institutions?' (Davie, 1994, p. 2). This points to an interesting phenomenon within British society, and one I have experienced first hand within my own ministry: that many people have some kind of belief in God but have little or no engagement with organised religion and little desire to change this. The 2011 census reaffirmed the situation, with 59.3% of respondents identifying as Christian ([ons.gov.uk](https://www.ons.gov.uk)). However, this marked a significant decline from the 2001 census (Ibid.), in which 71.7% identified as Christian, and the current trend is clearly one of decline. This trend is also clear from church attendance figures, which have seen a reduction from 11.8% in 1980 to 5% in 2015 ([faithsurvey.co.uk](https://www.faithsurvey.co.uk)). Writing 20 years after her original examination of religion in Britain, Davie points out the effects of such an on-going decline in people's contact with the church: 'fewer believe in a credal sense. As a result, the idea of a common narrative (of Christian liturgy or of Christian language and metaphor) becomes more tenuous almost by the day' (Davie, 2015, p. 5). Pioneer ministry, ministering to those who have little or no contact with organised Christian religion in places outside of church buildings, is one response to this context.

Further to this picture of overall decline in Christian affiliation, the Methodist Church as a denomination has specific reasons for experimenting with pioneer ministry at this time. Davie singles out the non-conformist churches as having a notably acute pattern of decline during the latter half of the 20th century, and describes the decline within the United Reformed and Methodist Churches as 'dramatic' (Davie, 2015, p. 57). The Methodist Church's own statistics point to the seriousness of this, with a loss of 32% of its membership in the 10 years to 2014 (The Methodist Church, 2014). It is unsurprising then that the Methodist Church was a partner with the Anglican Church in initiating the 'Fresh Expressions' concept in 2004 (Anglican-Methodist Working Party report, 2012, p.1), followed by the Venture FX Pioneer scheme in 2008 (Venture FX Review, 2011).

It was into this missional and institutional context that I began my pioneer ministry: my calling was affirmed by the Methodist Church and I was sent to minister in the context of a seaside town without the structures, both literal and metaphorical, that accompany ministry focused on a Christian congregation in a church building. Here, I was faced with the particular dynamics and

demographics of a British seaside town centre, with its tourist attractions and chain store high street, its poverty and rough sleeping alongside consumerism and leisure, its transient population of shoppers and tourists, retail staff and seasonal workers. It is in this place that I seek to exercise a ministry of word and sacrament and to work out how that might be done here and now.

I spent the first few months in the town centre simply 'being there' and building relationships with a wide variety of people. From this foundation of relationship building, a number of different strands of ministry have emerged. The first, 'Icons-on-Sea' is a creative project in which I and three Baptist colleagues seek to use art and performance as a way of relating the Gospel to the lives people in the town centre. My first paper drew links between the experience of a particular piece of work we devised and the sacramental and ritual aspects of ministry (Bucke, 2016). The second strand is a chaplaincy at the town's popular theme park, ministering amongst mostly student-aged young people, many of whom have little or no Christian background or experience. Paper 2 explored how this chaplaincy might be understood as a ministry of the Word (Bucke, 2015). While these two projects have dominated the first three years of my ministry, it is important to acknowledge that it continues to change and develop in context and is likely do so throughout the research process, an important feature of pioneer ministry: at the time of writing, I am beginning a new aspect of ministry amongst former rough sleepers with complex needs.

My Context - Presbyteral Ministry in the Methodist Church

A further context for my ministry is that of being a presbyter within the Methodist Church. Here I wish to begin by expanding on the definition of presbyteral ministry as one of word and sacrament as stated in the introduction. The Deed of Union describes presbyters as those 'set apart by ordination to the ministry of the word and sacraments' (*The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*, Volume 2, p. 214). A ministry of word is not exclusive to presbyters as it is shared by local preachers. However, presiding at the sacraments is understood differently: presbyters are authorised to preside by entitlement of their ordination, while lay persons are only permitted to do so by a temporary authorisation from the Conference (*Faith and Order Statement: Ordination*, 1974, p.109). The unique importance of the sacraments within the presbyteral role is further underlined by the Methodist Church's understanding of the sacraments as one of the marks of the Apostolic Church (*Faith and Order Statement: Ordination*, 1960, p. 101), and of the eucharist as that which 'sacramentally expresses the whole Gospel', being 'the representative act of the whole church' (*Faith and Order Statement: Ordination*, 1974, p. 111). Whilst the role of the presbyter is not reducible to functions (ibid. p. 111), it is clear that ministering word and sacrament may be understood as the particular charisms of presbyteral ministry, with presiding at the sacraments having a special place within the order of presbyters.

One additional dimension to the presbyteral role is that of oversight. The 2002 report to the Methodist Conference '*What is a Presbyter?*', defines presbyteral ministry under three headings:

word, sacrament and pastoral responsibility. This latter defining characteristic includes ‘oversight, direction, discipline, order and pastoral care.’ (*What is a presbyter?*, 2002). Through this aspect of the role, presbyters exercise a particular kind of leadership within the Church: ‘a collegial responsibility for embodying, exercising and sharing with others... the Conference’s oversight of the church’s engaging in worship and mission’ (Ibid., para. 10). Whilst the church governance aspect of presbyteral ministry will not be a particular focus of this research, it does have implications for my research question: pioneering presbyters need to be able to participate fully in church governance so that the Church might benefit from their experience in mission and from their understandings of presbyteral ministry.

The presbyter as representative person, expressed in their presiding role at the sacraments, is another key way in which presbyteral ministry is understood, both by the Church and wider society. The Methodist Church regards presbyters as both ‘ambassadors of God and representatives of his people’ (*Faith and Order Statement: Ordination*, 1960, p. 102). Implied in this statement is the presbyter’s role in the world outside the church and indeed the 1974 statement on ordination makes this explicit: ‘through the authority given to him [sic] by the church he represents the church in a way no one else can’ (*Faith and Order Statement: Ordination*, 1974, p. 116). Through this aspect of presbyteral ministry it is possible to see the development of Methodist Church’s understanding of the need to deploy such ministers in settings outside the church. Where once some of those who felt called to ministry in the ‘sectors’¹² were forced to consider resigning from ministry in order to follow their calling (Ibid., p.115), sector ministry became an increasingly recognized expression of presbyteral ministry, and can be seen as providing the theological and ecclesiological foundations that led to the development of pioneer ministry. The need to experiment through such ministries was recognised in the 1974 statement:

‘there may be situations which demand that some pioneer, whether Minister or layman, should be very much ‘on his own’, to some extent cut off from the normal collegiate ministry of Ministers and laymen in partnership. All Christians are called to show initiative in new situations and circumstances, and the church needs to be generous and sensitive in recognizing the divine call of the pioneers’ (Ibid., p. 116).

The concept of experimentation is significant and leads to a further understanding within the Methodist Church in which Methodism itself might be described as ‘practical theology’. It could be argued that Methodism is inherently experimental, beginning as it did as a movement within the Church of England that sought to reach those who were no longer engaged with the church as it was (Davies, 1963, ch. 2). John Wesley’s pragmatism led him to break with Church of England custom and regard the world as his parish (*Faith and Order Statement: Ordination*, 1960, p. 103). What he understood to be significant ‘pastoral and sacramental needs’ in North America led to his breaking with the rules of the Anglican Church and ordaining two men to be sent out to minister

¹² Sector ministry was the term used by The Methodist Church to mean ministry to the world outside the Church (*Faith and Order Statement: Ordination*, 1974, p. 115).

there (Ibid. p. 104). This practical approach to spiritual needs has characterised the Methodist Church from its inception and, to a greater or lesser extent, throughout its history: 'It has been said that with ordination, as with much else in Methodism, we do not have a considered theology which we then put into practice; rather we find theological reasons for what we are already doing because what we are doing works well' (*Faith and Order Statement: Ordination*, 1974, p. 110). This pragmatic approach in which 'mission was seen as prior to church order' (*Called to Love and Praise*, 1999, para. 4.5.6) has meant that Methodism and its theology has often developed through practice, 'largely as the result of a series of ad hoc experiments' (Ibid., para. 4.7.9).

The Methodist Church understands that there are significant dimensions to theology and ecclesiology that are fluid, and that the Church is 'always in need of reform' (Preface to the *Deed of Union*, p.iii); it is here that the role of pioneer minister finds its place. My own sense of calling to pioneering presbyteral ministry, the experiences of ministry in my particular context, and the practices I have developed out of them have already prompted some exploration of the way in which pioneering presbyteral ministry may be understood as a ministry of word and sacrament with wider implications for the Methodist Church. These facets, which can be summed up as 'identity and tradition in dialogue with context and experience', are shaping the direction of this research and have prompted the questions I now seek to answer.

Research Question and Related Issues

What do presbyters in pioneering appointments contribute to the Church's understanding of pioneer ministry and what are the implications of this for our missional context?

This question seeks to bridge a gap in knowledge about the nature of presbyteral ministry as exercised in pioneering contexts. While the Methodist Church has long recognised the need to experiment with new ways of engaging in mission and with different expressions of presbyteral ministry, I would identify a lack of developed thinking about the particular nature of presbyteral ministry where pulpit and table are not the primary loci of word and sacrament. One reason for this is what has become normative in Methodism in terms of where and how presbyteral ministry is exercised. As the majority of presbyters in the UK are deployed in circuits and with pastoral charge of churches,¹³ ministering word and sacrament is primarily understood as being equivalent to preaching and presiding in churches. The number of pioneer and other types of presbyter have been and remain relatively small, and their experiences have had little opportunity to flavour the Church's thinking on presbyteral ministry and the sacramental in mission.

¹³ The Revd Ian Bell, Pioneer Ministries Co-Ordinator for the Methodist Church, estimates that there are currently around 24 presbyters in pioneering appointments across the Connexion.

The 1974 statement on ordination sets out three strands of thinking relating to sector ministry. These point to a lack of engagement with sacramental theology in relation to presbyters working in other contexts. One strand is that ‘the ordained Minister in the sectors fulfils as far as possible the same functions as his [sic] colleague in the neighbourhood ministry. Nevertheless “he may be less conscious of his sacramental role”’ (*Faith and Order Statement: Ordination*, 1974, p 115). The second strand is focused on the representative rather than sacramental aspect of the role, and the third with the need for experimentation amongst both the lay and ordained (Ibid., p116). Reference to the sacramental aspects of the presbyteral role expressed in the sectors included a view held amongst some church members who ‘approve of a Minister’s working in the sectors so long as on Sundays he [sic] preaches and administers the sacraments in a church; it is this function on Sundays which, in their view, justifies his position as an ordained Minister’ (Ibid., p.116).

In more recent times, there is evidence that thinking within the Church has developed. In the Conference statement ‘Called to Love and Praise’ (1999) there is an explicit reference to what might be described as ‘the sacramental beyond the sacraments’. The statement identifies the Church’s role in making visible ‘the sacramental character of everyday life as the natural context of Christian faith and practice’ (*Called to Love and Praise*, 1999, para. 1.4.3). In addition, the Fresh Expressions initiative has generated questions about the need for the sacraments to be celebrated in such communities and about the most appropriate people to preside (*Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*, p. 3). Yet the unique role of the presbyter in relation to the sacramental does not appear to extend to a fully developed sacramental theology of pioneer presbyteral ministry. Instead, the focus for the Methodist Church has tended to be on the issue of whether increased lay presidency at the sacraments is necessary (*Venture FX Review*, 2011, p. 42 and *Faith and Order Report*, 2012, Section B3).

From my own experiences as a pioneer presbyter, I have become aware that being trained and authorised to preside at the sacraments has given me a unique sense of the sacramental in everyday life and that this has missional potential within my context of ministry. From the early days of Methodism there was an understanding of this missional potential: John Wesley himself regarded the eucharist as both a ‘confirming and converting ordinance’ (*Called to Love and Praise*, para. 4.4.8). In today’s missional context I believe that there is the need to explore further the place of the sacraments and the sacramental in mission, and to develop a sacramental theology of pioneering through research amongst missionally deployed presbyters.

Theological and Conceptual Frameworks

In Papers 1 and 2 I explored the ways in which my own experience of presbyteral ministry had led me to engage with some theological and philosophical perspectives that underpin a broad understanding of word and sacrament, beyond pulpit and table. These perspectives will provide the framework for this research.

An important connection point I noticed when building relationships in my context was that of embodiment - sharing the embodied experience of being in the town centre with others. The idea of embodiment as it relates to human self-understanding, and to how we might relate to God and others thus provides an important foundation for my research. Philosopher Martin Heidegger's concept of *dasein* is helpful in understanding the significance of embodiment, consisting as it does of the constituent yet inseparable parts of 'being' and 'in the world' (Heidegger, 1962, p. 78). Our human existence and experience is thus only conceivable as self-in-the-world. This has consequences in terms of our relationship to place and the material world: *where* we are is in part *who* we are. We cannot separate ourselves into body and spirit, and *dasein* is a rejection of this dualism in favour of a monistic understanding of human beings. It is also significant in terms of our relationship to our environment. Our being is made up of our embodied selves located in the world. From this perspective, it is possible to see how human experience, including its spiritual dimensions, should not be compartmentalised or contained within particular constructed boundaries as we are at all times in a dialogue between self and that which we encounter.

A further philosophical concept in which embodiment is key, and in which a monistic interpretation of human existence is reinforced, is found in the work of French philosopher Paul Ricoeur. He suggests that human life may be understood as embodied story (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 20). These embodied stories are themselves in need of interpretation by others - other embodied stories (Ibid., p. 21). This provides another useful strand of thinking in relation to the importance of the embodied, material dimensions of human life. Life cannot be understood in terms of abstract concepts alone but rather is rooted in embodied experience, and in the dialogue between embodied selves and other embodied selves. Further, Ricoeur's work has possible implications for the convergence of word and the sacramental: a ministry of word may in part be exercised through the pastoral encounter where the sharing of stories and their relationship to the Christian story are key; the embodied encounter with another in such conversations is itself potentially sacramental.¹⁴

In both Heidegger's *dasein* and Ricoeur's 'life as embodied story' there is a dialogue between experience and understanding in which our bodies play a crucial part. There is also the important element of encounter, both with the material world and with others, which has the potential to shape us and transform us. The theological perspectives I will be drawing upon in this research are similarly concerned with embodiment, encounter and the material, especially in relation to word and sacrament.

A rejection of dualism is found in explicitly theological perspectives and has significant implications for the way in which God might be experienced and known, particularly in relation to word and sacrament. Catholic theologian Avery Dulles, in his book *Models of the Church* (Dulles, 1978) offers a model of 'Church as Sacrament'. In his exposition of this model, Dulles points to the

¹⁴ Paper 2 contains a fuller discussion of the relationship between word, embodiment and the sacramental.

philosophical and theological concept of humanity as 'unity of spirit and flesh' (Ibid., p. 57). This leads to an understanding of the importance of encounter in the world as a spiritual necessity: 'Without contact with the world through the body, the spirit would simply not actuate itself' (Ibid., p. 57). Such interaction with the world and with others makes the Church itself a potential sacrament for those outside it, who may see it as 'a numinous sign' (Ibid., p. 65). Dulles is also explicit about the implications of this model of Church as Sacrament reflecting 'the workings of divine grace beyond the limits of the institutional church' (Ibid., p. 65).

In seeking a perspective on the particular ministry of word and sacrament interpreted beyond pulpit and table, I turn to Anglican priests Christopher Cocksworth and Rosalind Brown. They point to the meeting of the divine and the material in the Incarnation as an important model for our understanding of how God may be experienced in the world. For them, this has implications for a priest 'being for the Word' (Cocksworth and Brown, 2002, ch. 5). They identify our experience of the material world as key to ministering the word: 'Being for the Word means living with holy wonder in a world in which the Word of God took humans flesh, a world in which the Word speaks, whispers, shouts and serenades today' (Ibid, p. 82). In addition to this embodied experience of the world, they highlight the importance of encounter as means by which God communicates with us (Ibid., p. 94). Their description of ordinary life during the week as 'just as much of a sermon as the brief time we spend in the pulpit on a Sunday' (Ibid., p. 101) gives voice to the sense that a ministry of the word may take place beyond the pulpit. Equally, their description of sacramental ministry as 'far wider than what is done in the church building' but including 'every opportunity for the opening of eyes and ears and hearts to the activity of God in the world' (Ibid., p. 64), opens up this ministry to being understood in terms of the sacramental potential of every encounter with another and with the world.

A further perspective with implications for a sacramental ministry is found in the Methodist pastoral theologian Jane Leach's essay 'On visiting the sick: the art of pastoral conversation' (Leach, 2017), in which she reflects upon a sermon on this topic by John Wesley for the contemporary context. Leach recognises such conversations as 'means of grace' (Ibid., p. 118) and as encounters with the potential to become meeting places with God (Ibid., p. 118). The embodied experience is again important here and becomes the means by which God may be encountered: 'As one puts themselves at the disposal of another for their deep good, God becomes tangible. God is revealed. God visits' (Ibid., p. 118). Leach stresses the importance of seeing pastoral care not as 'an internal church practice, nor a practice that attends only to material or emotional needs' (Ibid., p. 126). This has clear implications for the potential of the spiritual and divine to be made present in all of life, in encounter with another, wherever it may take place.

Thus a monistic understanding of human nature, the importance of the embodied experience to self-understanding and meaning-making, the possibility of divine encounters in all of life, and broad perspectives of a ministry of word and sacrament, provide the conceptual framework for this research.

Methodology

In seeking to address my research question relating to the nature of pioneering presbyteral ministry within the Methodist Church, I am interested in the experiences of those engaged in such ministry, the ways in which they conceptualise their vocation, and the ways in which these conceptualisations are put into practice. In addition, I am interested in what the experience of such ministers has to contribute to Methodism's understanding of presbyteral ministry in the mission of the Church. As it is beliefs and attitudes, and the ways in which they shape practice and are shaped by practice, that I wish to access, I will be using an inductive approach: I will not be testing theory but generating theory from the analysis of qualitative data. Trafford and Lesham describe the inductive approach as one that 'uses various forms of interpretive analysis of meaning-making' (Trafford and Lesham, 2008, p.98). Such inductive research is to be carried out using qualitative research, the research paradigm most suited to the exploration and interpretation of human experience. Swinton and Mowat describe qualitative research as 'a variety of methods and approaches which enable to the researcher to explore the social world in an attempt to access and understand the unique ways that individuals and communities inhabit it.' (Swinton and Mowat, 2006, p. 29). Qualitative research reflects the significance of humans as 'interpretative creatures' and of our placedness in the world as 'the locus of complex interpretative processes' (Swinton and Mowat, 2006, p. 29). The qualitative paradigm may be summarised as a research method which places emphasis on meaning and interpretation, in which context is significant, and out of which concepts and theories emerge (Robson, 2011, p. 19).

The use of qualitative research raises questions about both the value and validity of human experience in research and particularly in theological research. Robson identifies the qualitative paradigm with social constructivist research, in which meaning is understood as a human construct developed through social interaction; objective meaning does not therefore exist (Robson, 2011, p. 24). Cameron and Duce define this social constructivist approach as one which 'embraces relativism' and in which 'all value systems are equivalent and need to be tolerated' (2013, p. 32). Such an approach would allow faith no privileged position (Ibid., 2013, p. 32). It is important to note that this perspective is not without its critics in terms of suitability for practical theology research. Swinton and Mowat concur with the view that human experience is of great significance in relation to faith: 'Human experience is presumed to be an important locus for the work of the Spirit. As such it holds much relevance for the continuing task of interpreting scripture and tradition' (2006, p. 6). However, they suggest a cautionary approach to the interpretation of such experience from a constructivist paradigm, ultimately rejecting a relativist approach in theological research in favour of the truth of revelation (Ibid., p. 37). They argue for the 'logical priority' of theology over any other conversation partner (Ibid., p. 86 and 88), and for the conceptual independence of theology from

research into practical theology, meaning that research may go only as far as clarifying our understanding of theology.

However, I am not fully accepting of Swinton and Mowat's perspective, which I believe mistakenly limits the scope of human experience as a legitimate means of divine revelation. In seeking an alternative view, I have found the perspective of Methodist theologian Clive Marsh helpful. Drawing on the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Marsh points to the dialogical nature of revelation that can be found in human relationships. He describes Christ as 'embodied in particular kinds of human relationships' (Marsh, 2006, p. 2) and as needing to be understood 'as a fundamentally relational concept' (Ibid., p. 2). Thus for Marsh, Christian revelation is in part found in contemporary experience, 'in the context of human life' (Ibid., p. 2), making our encounters with others a potential means by which we may encounter the divine.

Because of my interest in the experiences of particular ministers working in particular contexts, and the ways in which these experiences might shape understanding of presbyteral ministry, I remain drawn to a social constructivist epistemology. This approach places value on the experiences and interpretations of participants in relation to their ministry, and offers the potential for transformed understanding and practice within the Methodist Church.

One final issue relating to the qualitative research paradigm as it is used in practical theology is that of reflexivity. Cameron and Duce point out the importance of 'remaining critically reflective' when carrying out practical theology research because of the likely position of being insider researchers (2013, p. 91). Because of my own role as researcher in this project and as a pioneer presbyter within the Methodist Church, it is likely that my experiences will have the potential to affect all aspects of the research process. My research question is posed from the perspective of an 'insider' to the context and I have already identified the vested interest I have in the research and its outcomes. I will need to be aware of my own biases as I interview those with whom I may well assume a natural affinity. I will also need to be alert to confirmation bias as I interpret the interview data. Robson suggests a number of ways of ensuring reflexivity that may prove useful during the research process: he suggests 'negative case analysis' - actively looking for examples which disconfirm any theories we may be seeking to build (2011, p. 159). In addition, Robson advocates keeping a documented trail of all research activities, including transcripts, notes and observations, as well as a research journal, in order to minimise any threats to the validity of the research and maintain self-awareness (Ibid., p. 159).

Research Methods

I have chosen interview as my primary research method as this is particularly appropriate to the task of finding out people's attitudes and beliefs. Robson identifies interviews as a commonly-used method in social science research and particularly appropriate for the qualitative paradigm (2011,

p. 279-80). Cameron and Duce recognise interviews as a particularly appropriate method for an interpretivist methodology and social constructivist epistemology (2013, p.30), suggesting that 'they capture the specific values and meanings an interviewee attaches to a given topic or set of practices.' (Ibid., p. 82).

Within the interview method, three types of interview style are commonly identified: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Robson, 2011, p. 279). I have selected the semi-structured interview as most useful for my research because it will enable me to cover a fixed set of topics, ensuring as far as possible that I access the data needed, whilst also allowing for greater flexibility and a more conversational style. Cameron and Duce highlight the appropriateness of this style of interview as the most used method in practical theology as it allows for a certain 'open-endedness' (2013, p. 30). The semi-structured interview may even be seen as an interpretative process in itself as the interview is able to develop organically according to the responses of the interviewee.

It is my intention at this stage to interview ten people, all of whom will be presbyters in the Methodist Church. Of these, 5 will be selected from those on the Methodist 'Pioneering Pathways' or Venture FX schemes, which identify and support both lay and ordained ministers working in pioneering appointments within the church. A further 5 will be selected from presbyters who work in 'other appointment', i.e., those who express their presbyteral ministry not primarily in a church setting but in secular employment or other occupation. This acknowledges that the appointment of officially recognised pioneers is a relatively recent development within the Methodist Church and there have been presbyters working in non-church contexts for much longer. I will not be seeking to interview those presbyters appointed as chaplains as this may be regarded as a discrete model of ministry with distinctive features that are familiar and established within the Christian tradition.

In choosing to interview only those who are ordained presbyters in pioneering and other appointments, I recognise that I will not be including in my research the potentially differing perspectives on pioneer ministry from those not called to ordination to word and sacrament. I will also not be able to explore and compare the ways in which the sacramental is understood by those called to preside at the sacraments and those who are not. However, given the very limited number of pioneer presbyters and presbyters in other appointments, and the lack of research into the area of sacramentality in the wider world within Methodism, I am keen to maximise data from presbyters in settings other than circuit ministry. The differing emphasis of those in specifically pioneering appointments and those in other appointments may offer some breath of perspective upon which to draw. I have chosen purposive sampling as a way of selecting participants in order to best ensure as representative a sample as possible are interviewed in the light of the small numbers of pioneer presbyters within the Church.

Data from the interviews will be transcribed in full. My intention will be to interview participants in person, recognising the importance of the face-to-face encounter in the semi-structured interview,

which allows for the reading of and response to body language and facial expression (Robson, 2011, p. 280). However, while notes will be taken during the interview, a full transcript will be necessary to ensure all possible data is recorded before analysis can take place.

I am intending to use the thematic coding method of data analysis, a commonly used method suitable for analysing qualitative data (Robson, 2011, p. 477). This will enable me to draw out key themes from the data in relation to the theological and conceptual perspectives I have chosen. It will involve coding meanings and interpretations from these concepts as well as the practices and activities that flow into and out of them. From the thematic coding analysis, I will then seek to draw conclusions relating to my research question and with reference to my literature review (Cameron and Duce, 2013, p. 107). In addition to the suitability of such a method to qualitative research, I also acknowledge that thematic coding is particularly suited to first-time researchers and is an accessible way of both handling and disseminating data (Robson, 2011, p. 477).

In seeking a further dimension to my research, I am intending to include some data triangulation by using some observations from my own context of ministry. This will be a secondary research method but will enable me to bring into dialogue some of my own experiences of pioneer ministry with those of others, and will be complementary to the interview method of data collection. I have been keen from the inception of this research to make some use of my own context of ministry but acknowledge the difficulties of gaining reliable data from the people amongst whom I minister. Taking an auto-ethnographic approach, rather than one that seeks the views and interpretations of the people in my context, will mitigate the difficulties of gaining usable data from those with whom I have an ongoing ministerial relationship. However, it will allow some of my encounters with those people to contribute to my research. Such an approach will have advantages and disadvantages. Robson identifies that triangulation can go some way to enhancing the rigour of the research and 'can help to counter all of the threats to validity of the research' (2011, p. 158). This is a common criticism of qualitative research: that it has low reliability and is therefore non-generalisable (Trafford and Lesham, 2008, p. 98). While observations from real life are particularly appropriate within the discipline of practical theology as they may enable first hand access to how theology is lived in the real world, I will need to be aware of the particular limitations of such observations. In particular I will need to be aware of my own subjectivity in relation to the context in which I am already immersed, as well as any related bias I may show in the selection and interpretation of data from observation.

Limitations

Limitations include the lack of transferability of qualitative research methods and my own bias and subjectivity in real life observations. In addition, the very low numbers of presbyters working in pioneering and other related contexts will mean that it will not be possible to undertake random sampling. The experience of those in pioneering appointments will itself be limited as this is a

relatively new initiative within Methodism. It is also important to note here something of the nature and character of those involved in pioneering ministry, myself included. Given that those in pioneering and 'other appointment' are very much a minority within Methodism, all the individuals involved may be considered to some extent 'anomalies' within the Methodist Church and may be characteristic of those who choose not to conform to dominant structures and norms. Thus the participants might be described as those who do not fit so easily with existing theological and ecclesiological ways of thinking, and I will need to remain aware of these potential characteristics throughout the interview and data analysis process.

Ethical Considerations

There are a number of ethical considerations related to this research project. Anonymity of all participants is considered good practice in any research project (Robson, 2011, p. 207), as is confidentiality and ensuring nothing is revealed within the research that would enable participants to be identified. This will provide a particular challenge for me because, as already stated, the pool of participants will be very small and the work of individual presbyters may already be known and therefore identifiable within the Methodist Church. I will need to take great care in, as far as possible, ensuring individuals cannot be identified from the data. With regard to my own observations, there are ethical considerations here because those whom I encounter in the course of my ministry will not be aware that such encounters and conversations may be used in my research. However, here again individuals will be anonymised and as this element of the research will have an auto-ethnographic focus, it will primarily be my own experience and interpretations that will be recorded and used for analysis.

One final and overarching ethical consideration is the purpose of research in the field of practical theology. It is my hope that this research will both contribute to the Methodist Church's understanding of presbyteral ministry and bring about changes in the way presbyters are deployed and work within the Church. Throughout the research process I will need to be aware of the sensitivities this provokes, particularly within a church with limited presbyteral resources at a time of decline.

Conclusion

Experimental approaches to mission have been part of the Methodist Church since its beginnings and the Church has long understood the need for 'pioneers'. However, whilst the Church's statements about itself reflect this strongly, in practice, pioneer ministry is exercised by a tiny minority of its trained and ordained leaders, who currently have very limited opportunity to shape and inform the direction of the Church through their part in its oversight; this in a context of drastic decline. The particular calling of presbyters to word and sacrament has shaped my own approach

to pioneer ministry and I seek to explore how others in similar contexts approach such a ministry in varied missional contexts. My hope is that this research will provide new insights into the place of word and sacrament, and the place of presbyters, in the mission of the Church.

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Participant Information Sheet

Section A: The Research Project

1. **Title of project: Presbyterian Ministry in Missional Contexts**
2. **Brief summary of research.**
This research seeks to explore the nature of Methodist presbyteral ministry in roles in which presbyters do not have pastoral charge of churches. This will be done through the analysis of interviews with those engaged in such ministry.
3. **Purpose of the study**
DProf at Anglia Ruskin University
4. **Name of your Supervisor**
Revd Dr Jane Leach
5. **Why have I been asked to participate?**
You have been asked to participate because you are a Methodist presbyter in a pioneering appointment or with permission to serve in a non-Circuit based appointment.
6. **How many people will be asked to participate?**
4 people will be asked to participate: 2 pioneers and 2 in other appointment.
7. **What are the likely benefits of taking part?**
My hope is that this research will be of benefit to the Methodist Church and its understanding of presbyteral ministry in mission.
8. **Can I refuse to take part?**
You may refuse to take part without giving a reason.
9. **Has the study got ethical approval?**
Yes - this study has ethical approval from Anglian Ruskin University.
10. **What will happen to the results of the study?**
This research will be disseminated through the final thesis, papers presented at conferences, and in journal articles.
11. **Contact for further information**
Hannah Bucke
HMB155@student.anglia.ac.uk
07442 496843

Section B: Your Participation in the Research Project

1. What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to take part in a face-to-face interview lasting about an hour, in which you will be asked questions about your ministry and its context, and about your experiences as a presbyter. Your responses will be transcribed and sent to you in advance of a follow-up telephone interview lasting about 20 minutes.

2. Will my participation in the study be kept confidential?

Information from the interview will be made public through the various forms listed in question 10 and shared with the first and second supervisors. However, all participant contributions, and the projects and ministries they are involved with, will be anonymised in order to ensure no one can be identified from the data.

3. Use of quotes

Quotes from participants may be used in the dissemination of this research; again these will be anonymised.

4. Use of recording equipment

Interviews will be recorded in order to ensure the accurate recording of participant information. Transcripts of recordings will be kept securely and will only be shared with the individual participant and supervisors.

5. Are there any possible disadvantages or risks to taking part?

The interview itself may be tiring and there is the possibility that the discussion about your ministry, including any challenges you have faced, may cause distress. Should this occur, the interview may be paused or stopped at your request. Agreement to participate in the study does not affect your legal rights.

Should you wish to speak to someone following the interview as a result of any distress caused, arrangements have been made for you to do so with Revd Teresa Rutterford. Please email her in the first instance at teresa@rutterford.net.

6. Whether I can withdraw at any time, and how.

You can withdraw from the study at any time and without giving a reason. Also you do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to during the interview.

If you wish to withdraw completely from the process please let me know by phone or email using the contact details on this form. If you withdraw part way through the process, you have the option to choose whether the information you have already shared may be used in the research or not. Again, please contact me by phone or email about this. Please also note that once the research has been written up, submitted for assessment and findings published, it will not be possible to withdraw your data. For this reason, please let me know if you wish to withdraw by **31st October 2017**.

7. What will happen to any information that is collected from you?

All data will be securely held and will be destroyed one year after completion of the Professional Doctorate assessment process. Personal identifiable information will be kept separately from the data. You will be assigned a code number and identifying information will be separated from the data at the earliest opportunity.

8. Transcripts.

You will be sent a transcript of the face to face interview in advance of the follow-up phone interview.

9. Summary of research findings.

You will be sent a summary of the research findings via email at the end of the research process.

10. Contact details for complaints.

If you have any complaints about the study, please speak to me or my supervisor in the first instance. If you wish to pursue a complaint via Anglia Ruskin University's complaints procedure, the contact details are:

Email address: complaints@anglia.ac.uk

Postal address: Office of the Secretary and Clerk, Anglia Ruskin University, Bishop Hall Lane, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 1SQ.

PARTICIPANTS SHOULD BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS TO KEEP,
TOGETHER WITH A COPY OF THE CONSENT FORM.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:

Title of the project: Presbyterian ministry in missional contexts

Main investigator and contact details: Hannah Bucke, HMB155@student.anglia.ac.uk, 07442 496843

1. I agree to take part in the above research. I have read the Participant Information Sheet (22.3.17, Version 1.1) for the study.
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, without giving a reason.
3. I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.
4. I understand what will happen to the data collected from me for the research.
5. I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.
6. I understand that quotes from me will be used in the dissemination of the research.
7. I understand that the interview will be recorded.

Data Protection: I agree to the University¹⁵ 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*

Name of participant (print).....Signed.....Date.....

Name of person
witnessing consent (print).....Signed..... Date.....

¹⁵ "The University" includes Anglia Ruskin University and its Associate Colleges.

I WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY.

If you wish to withdraw from the research, please speak to the researcher or email them at HMB155@student.anglia.ac.uk stating the title of the research.

You do not have to give a reason for why you would like to withdraw.

Please let the researcher know whether you are/are not happy for them to use any data from you collected to date in the write up and dissemination of the research.

Date 22.3.17

V1.1

Interview Sheet for:

Date, time and location of interview:

Preliminaries:

- recording equipment
- switch off mobiles
- greetings - how was your journey? etc.,

Introduction:

- overview of research - presbyteral ministry in missional/secular contexts
- consent forms, procedures and safeguards
- any questions at this point?
- Time limit of interview

Pre-interview information:

- age:
- date of ordination:
- previous career:

Questions:

Following on from those questions and getting into the detail of the interview, I'd like to begin by asking you about your ministry and how you came to be a minister...

1. Can you tell me a little about your current ministry?

Follow up questions about:

- context
- duration

2. And going back to the beginning, would you mind sharing something of your Christian journey to this point?

3. Can you describe your calling and journey to ordained ministry?

Follow up questions:

- why presbyteral ministry?
- other people or presbyters who inspired/ encouraged you
- styles of ministry you experienced

3b. Why the Methodist Church?

4. How did you come to be engaged in this particular kind of ministry?

Follow up:

- particular events or experiences that led you to this particular expression of ministry?

5. Is there anything you think makes you particularly suited to this role?

6. How did you train for ministry?

6b. In what ways do you feel this prepared you for your current role?

I'd now like to explore something of your experiences as a minister...

7. Can you describe any things you find positive and energising about your ministry?

Can you say more about...?

8. What about any challenges or difficulties?

Follow up: Can you identify any reasons or causes for those difficulties?

9. What for you is important about being a presbyter?

9b. How do you think this fits with the Methodist Church's understanding of presbyteral ministry?

10. Can you describe any ways in which you minister the Word in your primary context?

10b. Can you give any specific examples of this?

11. What about the sacramental aspect of presbyteral ministry - do you feel you exercise this in your current role?

11b. Can you describe how?

12. Do you feel you exercise a ministry of pastoral oversight? Why/Why not?

12b. Do you have any examples?

13. I wonder if the ideas of embodiment and incarnational ministry resonate with you?

13b. If I asked how other people you work with or encounter might know you're a presbyter, what would you say?

Follow up: do you wear a dog collar? What's in your tool kit? How do people recognise you as a presbyter?

In this final section I want to reflect upon the role and contribution of pioneers and minister in secular employment in the Methodist Church...

14. How do feel your experiences and those of other presbyters working in different contexts have contributed to the Methodist Church and its understanding of presbyteral ministry?

Follow up:

- why do you think that is?
- do you feel you play a part in the collective oversight of the church? why/why not?

15. Do you think that the Church could do anything better in relation to different expressions of presbyteral ministry?

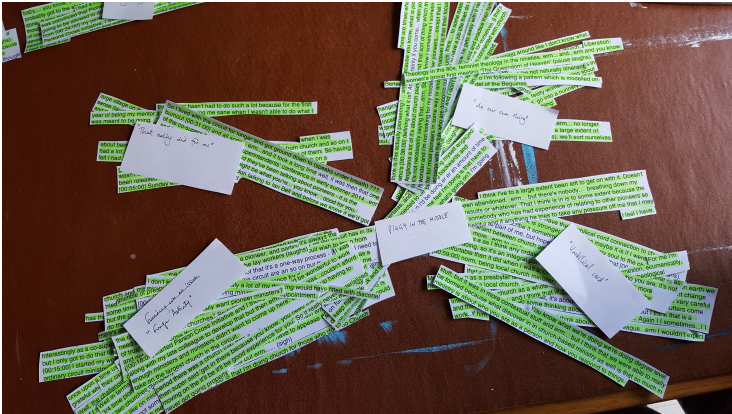
Follow up: structures, documents

16 . Before we finish, is there anything else you would like to say on the topic of Methodist presbyteral ministry in missional contexts?

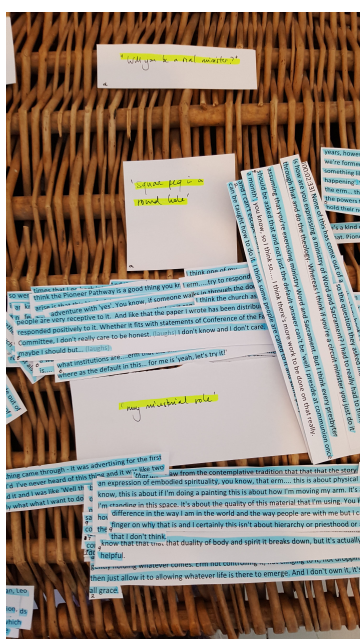
Thank you very much for your time. I will send you a transcript of the interview and arrange a time for a short follow-up phone conversation by...

Coding photographs

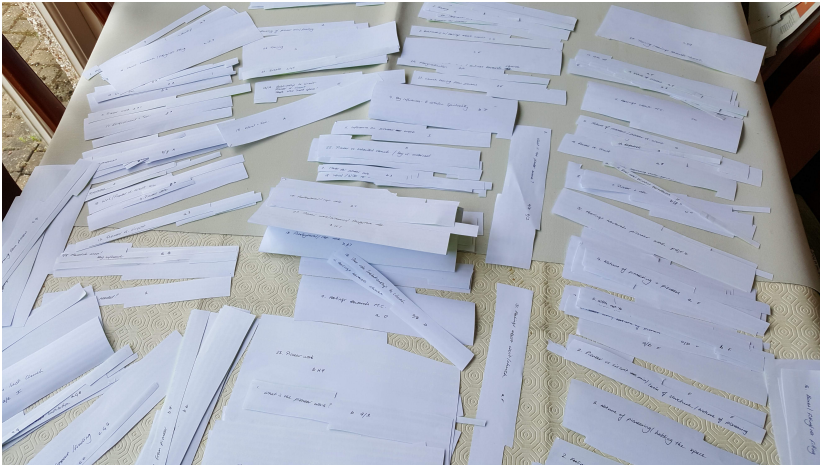
1. Grouping data from each interview into codes:



2. 'Cross-coding': coding each interview using codes from the other interviews:



3. Attempt at grouping the data into categories according to the letters and numbers allocated during the cross-coding process:



4. Grouping the data 'by feel' into categories:

